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The Blinn College Fine Arts Program is committed to fostering artistic, musical, and verbal expression on our campuses and within our communities.

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# BLINN COLLEGE FINE ARTS EXPRESS

## Televised Panel on Distance Learning: "Raise Your Hand If You're Not Here!"

Local educators and students took part in a lively televised discussion on distance education, which was aired recently on public television. Two representatives of Blinn College — **Dr. Jane Haggard**, Chair of the Fine Arts Department, and **Dr. Blanche Brick**, Division Chair of Social Sciences — participated in the discussion on the uses, benefits, and unique challenges of distance education. The program, entitled, "Distance Learning: Raise Your Hand if You're Not Here," featured students and educators from both Blinn College and Texas A&M University. Panelists were interviewed in pairs, and asked questions about their experiences with distance learning. Dr. Haggard described distance education as "an expansion of the classroom walls." She said that through distance learning at Blinn College, "We are truly expanding the capabilities for stu-

dents to be embraced within the institutes of higher learning." Haggard cited geographic barriers, hectic work schedules, and family responsibilities as obstacles students face in pursuing a higher education — obstacles which distance education allows them to overcome. Panelists agreed that succeeding in a distance course requires a high level of effort and motivation on the part of the students. Dr. Brick noted that individual effort and motivation are always part of the educational process, whether in a traditional classroom or in a distance learning environment, but that "Those who do well in Distance Learning courses have to be committed to putting in a great deal of effort on their own." Dr. Haggard stated that distance learning calls for "self-disciplined and motivated students." Additionally, two



students from Texas A&M participated in the panel discussion. Both had taken multiple hours of on-line and blended courses and both spoke positively of the freedom distance learning affords.

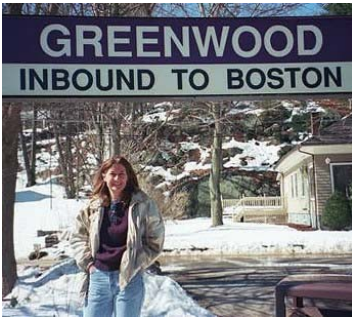
The central theme of this issue of the *Fine Arts Express* is distance education. In this edition, we feature faculty and student perspectives on distance learning, and highlight new directions in distance learning in the Fine Arts Division of Blinn College. We dedicate this issue to one of the tenets of the United States Distance Learning Association:

**"To promote equality and access to lifelong learning through distance learning."**

## Moving Forward: Current Directions in Fine Arts Distance Learning Initiatives

Among the many benefits of on-line internet courses are the flexibility they provide for students schedules; the lessening of geographic constraints for those not living in close proximity to institutions of higher learning; and the ability to maintain full-time employment while progressing in educational goals. The Blinn College Fine Arts Divisions embrace the opportunity to reach diverse student populations by expanding the classroom walls of higher learning via distance education. Offerings of internet and blended courses have been on the rise in the Blinn College Fine Arts Divisions, and will continue to expand in coming years. This expansion is based on our mission and vision of maximizing academic opportunities for the students we serve via distance learning opportunities. On-line and blended courses take students beyond the traditional "2 X 4" formula of classroom instruction — two referring to the front and back covers of the text, and four referring to the boundaries established within the walls of the traditional classroom environment. Via internet and blended courses students actively engage in cutting edge on-line communication environments that provide building blocks for academic and professional growth while equally matching the academic rigor of the traditional classroom curriculum. In the Spring 2003 semester, the Fine Arts division is participating in a blended course **pilot project**. The blended course design combines face-to-face interaction, on-line writing components, and on-line communication features (discussion board, chat, and mail). These courses offer approximately a 50/50 split between in-class and on-line course time. Currently, Dr. Jane Haggard offers Public Speaking (**Spch 1315**) in the blended course format, while Music Appreciation (**Musi 1306**) is projected to be taught by Dr. Marcello Bussiki, conductor of the Brazos Valley Orchestra, in the Spring of 2004. A portion of the internet Fine Arts courses are offered in totally on-line formats while others are on-line with some mandatory sessions (hybrid). Dr. Jane Haggard has taught Introduction to Speech (**Spch 1311**), Cathy Brockman teaches Art Appreciation (**Arts 1301**), Beatriz Arnillas teaches Art History II (**Arts 1304**) and Dean Birkes teaches Introduction to Theatre (**Dram 1310**). Interpersonal Communication (**Spch 1318**) taught by Monica Wendell will be offered in the Summer of 2003, Music Appreciation (**Musi 1306**) taught by Dr. Bussiki, will be offered in the Fall of 2003 and Public Speaking (**Spch 1315**) will be taught by Dr. Rosemary Kunesh in the Fall of 2003.

## Seeds of Change: Schaefer Reflects on the Past, Present and Future of Distance Ed



"I think this internet thing is going to be big!" It was 1995. Candace Schaefer, then an English Instructor at Tyler Community College, had just approached her boss with an idea. "I think we can teach over the Internet," Schaefer proposed, "I don't know if it's going to work, but I think we can try it." Her supervisor listened patiently to Schaefer's presentation, and then responded as many of us would have at a time when the Internet was still a relatively new phenomenon. "She looked at me," Schaefer recalls, "and said, 'I have no idea what you even just said. But if you think that we should try it, let's try it.'" Schaefer (now Dean of Distance Education at Blinn) began teaching on the Internet when the majority of US homes did not yet have Internet access. She fondly recalls these meager beginnings: "There were two instructors. We started with two classes, ten students each class. Within three semesters we were teaching sixty students!" By 1997, just two years later, Schaefer was teaching all of her classes over the Internet, and offering faculty training for others who wanted to learn more about Distance Education. The explosion of Distance Education across the nation and Schaefer's early success with it led her to continue in the field. In 1998 Schaefer was hired as Blinn College's Dean of Distance Education. By then Blinn

had offered a handful of telecourses, but had not yet made a concerted effort to build a distance education program. "Credit goes to the administration," says Schaefer, recalling the time of her hiring, "They said, if we're going to do this, let's do it right — let's build a program. So [we started] in 1998, and we've been growing and filling in the pieces ever since."

**Why Distance Education?** Schaefer ascribes her decision to pursue Distance Education to three main factors: **student need, the intimacy of the Internet classroom, and the advantages of new technology.** Before she began teaching on the Internet, Schaefer noticed students missing class due to outside conflicts, particularly for those students who worked full time or had children. "It is a problem at the community college level" says Schaefer, "for people who are working and have families, it's hard for them to get the same kinds of educational experiences [as others]... You don't want to see people not be able to get an education because of these life issues." Schaefer states that distance education is also beneficial in increasing the level of student involvement in the classroom. "Internet instruction," she says, "if it's done well, can be a very intimate way of teaching students." Schaefer notes that in a traditional classroom, even when student participation is high, still only a limited number of students are able to be actively involved in the discussion. "If I really thought about it," she says, "and wrote down the names of the students who were actively participating in that discussion, on a good day it's

maybe 8 or 9 students — that's a **great** day! It's not that the rest of the students are necessarily sleeping, it's just that not every student is gregarious and able to think on their feet in a group discussion." Schaefer says distance education helps to "level the playing field" for all types of learners. Finally, she says she is drawn to the technological innovations and what they can accomplish. "I'm just intrigued by the technology — the immediacy of it, the things you can do." In the few years since Schaefer began in Distance Education, she

has seen the technological capabilities explode. "We've got all kinds of technology now that we couldn't even conceive of in 1995. It's become so user friendly, and so ubiquitous." As for the application of distance education in fine arts courses, Schaefer is enthusiastically supportive: "Fine Arts instructors don't have to sacrifice anything (now), as they would have, had they started working in distance education in the mid-nineties... With the technologies that are emerging, I think we can only make these classes richer."

### Why Distance Education? A Faculty Member Responds

*Beatriz Arnillas is a renowned artist and Blinn College faculty member. She responded to a series of frequently asked questions about distance learning;*

**Why did you decide to teach distance education courses?** "Distance Education offers educational opportunities to individuals who are working full-time, live far, have young children or other dependants at home, are home-bound for any other reasons, or need a flexible studying schedule. With this in mind, I thought that distance ed. fulfills beautifully Blinn's mission."

**What advantages and rewards does distance education offer instructors?** "Through my web class, I'm instantly connected to museums and archaeological sites of the world. I can prepare my summaries with links that my students can visit while reading. These links in turn offer them even more connections that they can browse at will. My sources are constantly being modified and contrasted. My students can get instant multiple perspectives on the interpretation of an artistic period or the work of an artist (simply by visiting two different sites.) The classroom is very flexible and it allows for a kind of interaction with the student that we don't have in real time. For example, since my students cannot see my face, I find that I'm extremely aware of the words I use and I find myself constantly encouraging them to be in touch with me. The e-mail and discussion format is a kind of "informal" venue that has its challenges, but if used well, it can create a warm and caring exchange."

**How would you respond to those who criticize distance education as a poor substitute for the traditional classroom environment?** "I would say, don't disregard the possibilities without trying it first. Discuss your course content with someone who is currently doing distance ed., find out about the different options, then make a decision. Distance education encourages professors to think very clearly about their delivery systems, about pedagogy, and about our goals for the class. Distance Education encourages students to take initiative (they will not pass the class if they don't!) to be self-reliant, self-disciplined and is certainly a fantastic medium for non-traditional students or students who live away from an urban center. I think the media has its advantages and limitations. Students find out very early on if they can handle it or not, and they leave the class if they can not. Those who stay seem to have a rich and gratifying experience."

## Student Comments About the Benefits of Blinn College Fine Arts Distance Education Courses:

"I am one of your non-traditional students. I have a family and a full-time job. Taking an internet class has helped me to be at home with my family and also be able to work."

"Since I am a firefighter, my schedule is irregular. We work 24-hour-on and 48-hour-off shifts, so I am never off the same days two weeks in a row. So, even being a part-time student is difficult for me. Distance education allows me to further my education, even with my difficult schedule."

"I work full time and it is difficult to find time to take the necessary hours to expedite the completion of my degree. Being able to take an internet course allows me to work on my schedule, and that has made all the difference."

"I have taken online classes before and I enjoy the convenience of them."

"I am a single parent and I work full-time. Taking internet classes allowed me the time and flexibility to go full-time this semester."

"I did not have time to attend a class during my weekly schedule. The internet class gave me the convenience of doing my work at my own pace and according to my own schedule."

"As a non-traditional student, it gave me some additional flexibility in the timing .... This class is beneficial to a student, like myself that has a family."

"As I work full-time, I find the internet courses to be more convenient."

"I like the internet environment so much ... I decided to take two others!"

## Blinn College Players In Play Festivals



The Blinn Players, in cooperation with Delta Psi Omega, recently presented THE GREEN PASTURES by Marc Connelly. This classic retelling of the Old Testament is not only a play of great emotional depth and spiritual exaltation, it is also considered one of the great imaginative dramas of the twentieth century. The dates of the performances were February 20-22 at 7:30 p.m. and February 23 at 3:00. The play took place in the MRW Studio Theatre within the Dr. W.W. O'Donnell Performing Arts Center. The Blinn College Theatre Arts

program hosted the 2003 Texas Community College Speech and Theatre Association Play Festival on February 26-March 1, 2003. Fourteen schools performed plays before a critic-judge, enabling involved students to achieve acting and technical awards. Blinn College's play entry was Marc Connelly's THE GREEN PASTURES. The Blinn College Theatre Arts program also took THE GREEN PASTURES to the Texas Christian College Play Festival on March 4th-6th. The festival was hosted by Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene.



## Blinn Music Faculty Attend Texas Music Educator's Convention

The music department of the Fine Arts Division, Brenham campus attended the Texas Music Educator's Association Clinic/Convention in San Antonio February 12th thru 15th. Music faculty in attendance included Larry Campbell, Jill Stewart, Craig Garrett, Joel Plaag, John Dujka and Jennifer Wise along with 20 band students who earned a position in the Community College Band Director's Association All-State Band. The Community College All-State Band was conducted by Fred Allen of SFA & the Community College

Jazz Ensemble was conducted by Alan Shin of Texas Tech. Jill Stewart was the housing organizer & student selection chair for this year & is the president elect of the Community College Band Director's Assn. and Dr. Crag Garrett served as the organizer for the Community College All-State Jazz Ensemble this year. Again this year Blinn College has more representation in the all-state groups than any other single community college in the state. Many contacts were made with high school directors at the convention which relates directly to our recruitment efforts.

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— Dean Schaefer

### **Brockman Donates Time, Money and Talent to a Worthy Cause**

Relay For Life is an annual event which raises cancer awareness. This year Blinn College art faculty member, Cathy Brockman, has donated jewelry which she designed specifically for this event. The jewelry will be raffled off on the night of the Relay and all proceeds will be donated to The American Cancer Society.



### **Rearview Mirror: Looking at Where We Have Been Through the Eyes of Shirley Abraham** 👁️ 👁️

When I first started at Blinn — College Station, in the Woodstone shopping center, there were no requirements for speech. Therefore, when I started, I had two classes, tops. But the curriculum grew for definite subjects. Speech was soon required and I jumped from two to three to four to five courses. And all of Blinn's other courses were growing too. The Woodstone Shopping Center was bulging with growth. It was then that I was approached by Phil Pearson. Now Phil doesn't teach speech, but he does have unique facials and a cutting sense of humor that often threw my logic. He approached me one day on the sidewalk outside of Woodstone and asked if I had heard of the unique way Blinn was going to save space and Speech! I was curious, and concerned for my job, so I listened. "Out here," he said, "in this open parking area we are going to place used movie theater voice boxes. You will have a desk out here on the sidewalk. Each student will take a number and drive up to one of these voice boxes, identify themselves, and their class and from there proceed to give 'the Speech of the Day.' You will grade and they will drive off! That way we can save classroom space, and you can be the savior of speech!" I looked at him in disbelief! However if you know Phil (and who doesn't) — never assume! Every time I heard building noises in the parking lot I jerked! Now they've started more building on the new Bryan campus. I haven't seen Phil lately, but with all that building and shortage of space on the new campus — and the buying of a movie theater — I may become the next Cecille B. Demille of the parking lots!

### **Next Issue Highlights**

The Blinn College Fine Arts Division has a long history of mentorship by their faculty. This tradition remains a priority, as evidenced by the fact that ten Fine Arts faculty members currently serve in various advising positions and student organizations. The impact of student mentorship (on both faculty and students) will be highlighted in our next issue.

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