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## New Orleans Center for Creative Arts: a history in progress

Suzanne Michelle Blanchard Chambliss

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

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NEW ORLEANS CENTER FOR CREATIVE ARTS:  
A HISTORY IN PROGRESS

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Theatre

by  
Suzanne MB Chambliss  
B.F.A., Utah State University, 1994  
M.F.A., University of Southern Mississippi, 1998  
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Dedication

To my late husband, Mike,

and my parents,

Bob & Terry Blanchard,

All three were always there with love & support

## Acknowledgements

Many people have aided in this project but a few truly need to be acknowledged for their help. First, Matt Hassbrock and Jennifer Cooper at NOCCA's library - thank you for allowing me access to both the archives, your minds, and your constant enthusiasm. You've both been wonderful resources. Dr. Tom Tews, John Otis, Kyle Wedburg, Michael Indest, Sloane Signal and Shirley Trusty Corey for making time in their busy schedules to meet with me for interviews. All of the students and faculty of NOCCA over the years that have created such an amazing program. And last but far from least, my committee, especially Dr. Leigh Clemons for pushing when I was ready to give up - thank you all.

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## Abstract

In the state of Louisiana, a quality education for secondary school students can be hard to come by in any area of study much less in the areas of the arts. The New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA) provides a quality education to those talented students who audition and are accepted into the program. NOCCA has only existed since 1974 and in its relatively short life it has become a model for half-day pre-professional training programs throughout the United States and it has proven that it is possible to receive a quality education in Louisiana.

## Chapter One

### Assumption

The city of New Orleans's public schools and the state of Louisiana's public school systems are not known for their strong academic programs in either elementary or secondary education; in fact, they are recognized for consistently ranking among the lowest scoring states in the country (O'Leary Morgan and Morgan).<sup>1</sup> Despite this dismal educational reputation, the City of New Orleans is home to an arts education center that has been used as a model throughout the country.<sup>2</sup> This center was one of the founding members of the Arts Schools Network, which is an association of schools for the arts that exists "to provide the leadership and resources to inspire and maintain excellence in arts education by supporting, serving, and creating networking opportunities for leaders of specialized arts schools, arts integration schools, and complimentary arts and education organizations across the country ("History" Arts Schools Network)."

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<sup>1</sup> CQ Press is a division of Sage Press that publishes state Ranking educational programs each year based on 21 factors that include school revenue, expenditures used for instruction, percentage of population graduated, proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics, class size, and pupil-teacher ratio. The state of Louisiana consistently ranks in the lower 40s out of 50 states.

<sup>2</sup> Saronson, Paul Richard. *Specializing Urban High Schools of the Arts: A Comparative Study*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1991. Diaz, Gene Rankin. *Coordinating Discourses: An Ethnography of a Creative Arts High School*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1994. Eller, Stephanie Allison. *The Arts Magnet Center: A Successful Model for Public Arts Education*. Ann Arbor, MI University of Michigan, 1994.

Despite Louisiana's lackluster educational reputation and subsequent rankings, the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, (NOCCA), located in New Orleans proper, consistently graduates a high number of students, who move onto higher education and pre-professional training programs and many of those graduates are awarded academic scholarships.<sup>3</sup> It is my assumption that the history of NOCCA and the success of its graduates indicate that an emphasis on the arts can result in a quality comprehensive educational experience that trains and motivates students and instills in them the discipline necessary to achieve success both academically and professionally.

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<sup>3</sup> Every year since 1992 NOCCA has published a report on the graduating class that has shown at least 95% of its graduates going on to higher education or professional training and many of those go on with scholarships. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 1992*. A Study of the Graduating Class of 1993. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 1994*. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 1994*. A Study of the Graduating Class of 1995. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 1996*. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 1997*. A Study of the Graduating Class of 1998. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 1998*. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 1999*. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 2000*. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 2001*. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 2002*. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 2003*. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 2004*. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 2005*. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 2007*. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 2008*. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. *A Study of the Graduating Class of 2009*.

The purpose of this study is to use the history of NOCCA to show that arts education is vital and should be a major component of all elementary and secondary education curriculums. This deliberation chronicles the origins of NOCCA, how it developed, how it historically served its students, and what major milestones have helped it continue to both exist and thrive in a seemingly hostile educational environment. As with any historical document, this analysis is written from the perspective of the author, based upon archival documents and interviews of personnel involved in NOCCA's past. It is conceived with the understanding that there are a plethora of opinions and arguments that could be added to the conversation at a future date which could show both positive and negative interpretations.

### Arts Education in the United States

On September 29, 1965 President Lyndon Johnson signed the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act which created the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). On this occasion, President Johnson said: "Art is a nation's most precious heritage, for it is in our works of art that we reveal to ourselves, and to others, the inner vision which guides us as

a nation. And where there is no vision, the people perish” (Highlights in NEA History).

Due to the lack of acceptance within the traditional educational community, arts education has traditionally been dependent upon the efforts of individual teachers and local community attitudes. Arts educators have struggled to gain acceptance and acknowledgement that the arts are, in fact, an important part of a student’s education (Davis). In the United States as a whole, arts education was not legally accepted as a part of the core curriculum until 1991 (United States. Dept of Ed, 1994). Before this time, the arts were considered an extracurricular activity, something secondary to the core curriculum. In this regard, Louisiana’s educational environment was no different from the rest of the United States. New Orleans, Louisiana, for instance, has a history of being recognized for its valuation of the arts in its culture, and yet its educators have not historically upheld the arts as an area of importance in public school curricula.

#### Establishment of New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts

Luckily, not all educators subscribed to this way of thinking. Some viewed the arts as an important aspect of education. One Louisiana teacher, and administrator, Shirley

Trusty Corey,<sup>4</sup> was an exception to the rule. During the late 1960s, while Ms. Corey was the Superintendent of Cultural Resources for the Orleans Parish School Board, she envisioned a need for a training program for students who had talents in the areas of visual art, music, theatre, and dance. Although these areas are not traditionally viewed as strong career paths, Ms. Corey believed that if a curriculum could be designed to provide specialized arts education and, at the same time, provide a solid foundation in the traditional core subject areas such as math and science, then the arts could bestow a viable vocational option for talented students. Ms. Corey also felt that the need for training in the specialized arts areas was not being met. Over a period of several years, Ms. Corey fought to bring the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts, also known as NOCCA, to fruition.

Ms. Corey's program was not the first high school to put an emphasis on the arts but it was among the first. Other programs for the arts did exist before 1973 (Arts Schools Network, 2010). For example, in New York City, the High School for the Visual and Performing Arts was already actively producing professional artists, and in Michigan, Interlochen began in the 1920s as a summer camp that developed into a school ("History"

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<sup>4</sup> Shirley Trusty Corey's maiden name was Shirley Trusty. She did not marry until after NOCCA was open and operating but I have referred to her by her married name throughout this paper for the sake of continuity.

Interlochen). In 1981 NOCCA Principal Dr. Thomas Tews was invited to a meeting in Los Angeles, California where administrators from twelve of the most prestigious arts schools in the United States were invited to discuss the issues of leading an arts school. This meeting was the foundation of an organization now known as the Arts Schools Network (ASN) (Art School Network, history). Although not all of these schools are half-day programs, many of them use the half-day model where students focus on reading, writing, mathematics and history during half of the school day and the other half is used to focus on arts training.

However, along with a very few others, these schools were the exception to the rule when it came to public education. Each of the early schools was unique to its area of the United States and represented an attempt to meet some of the needs of students representing the various cultures found in those areas. Each of these schools were studied and ultimately used as models for new arts-based schools that would eventually develop in other regions. NOCCA is not the only half-day, pre-professional training program in the arts in existence today and although other schools have similarities, NOCCA, as one of the first, is unique from all others.

## Historical View of Arts Education in the United States

As previously stated, the arts have not always been an accepted, common topic of discussion among professional educators. In 1988 the United States government mandated a study, prepared by the National Endowment for the Arts, entitled *Toward Civilization: Overview from a Report on Arts Education* (United States. Department of Education, 1988). This report identified several reasons why providing arts education within a conventional secondary education system was important including: promoting a connection to civilizations, encouraging creativity, and the development of effective communication skills. This report quickly was adopted as a strong argument for Arts Education not merely as a vocational or technical skill, but as a legitimate area that should be included nationally in many public schools' curricula.

In the early 1990s, two additional legislative acts were passed dealing with arts education in the K-12 core curriculum. The *Improving America's Schools Act of 1994* endorsed Arts Education as an important part of American K-12 curricula (Title 10, Part D).

The *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (Title III, Sec. 302) was passed in 1994 and was amended in 1996 (United States, 1996). This Act which was to be implemented by the year 2000,

attempted to aid states in developing standards with the goal of improving the quality of education for every child without limiting the ability of individual states to set their own guidelines. Within the arts this act instigated the need for arts standards within each area of arts education. This led to the development of an ad hoc committee referred to as the Consortium of National Arts Education Association that created the standards that would then be used.

The Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, an ad hoc committee that included representatives from several arts education organizations, published national standards under the title, *National Standards for Arts Education: What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able to Do in the Arts*.<sup>5</sup> This publication included lists of general arts expectations of every student graduating from American schools, including:

- *They should be able to communicate at a basic level in the four arts disciplines--dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts. This includes knowledge and skills in the use of the basic vocabularies, materials, tools, techniques, and intellectual methods of each arts*

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<sup>5</sup> The Consortium of National Arts Education Associations included representatives from the National Association for Music Educators (MENC), the National Arts Education Association (NAEA), the National Dance Association (NDA), and the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE) (Mark, M. L. and Gary, C. L. 1999).

discipline.

- *They should be able to communicate proficiently in at least one art form, including the ability to define and solve artistic problems with insight, reason, and technical proficiency.*
- *They should be able to develop and present basic analyses of works of art from structural, historical, and cultural perspectives, and from combinations of those perspectives. This includes the ability to understand and evaluate work in the various arts disciplines.*
- *They should have an informed acquaintance with exemplary works of art from a variety of cultures and historical periods, and a basic understanding of historical development in the arts disciplines, across the arts as a whole, and within cultures.*

*They should be able to relate various types of arts knowledge and skills within and across the arts disciplines. This includes mixing and matching competencies and understandings in art-making, history and culture, and analysis in any arts-related project.*

(Consortium)

These standards are still voluntary and implementation is determined on a state-by-state basis. However, many school

districts currently adhere to all or part of the guidelines established within this standard.

Following the *Improving America's Schools Act*, the Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) determined that more current information on the arts was needed. The NEA, along with the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment, which operates within the United States (US) Department of Education, commissioned a survey to collect data concerning public school policies and practices vis-à-vis arts education. The results of this survey were published in 1995 under the title *Arts Education in Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Carey 1995). It provided information on how schools supported Arts Education and how such programs had changed over a five-year period. The result was that 94% of schools offered separate courses in music, 89% offered courses in visual art, 54% offered instruction in drama/theatre, 47% in creative writing and only 13% offered instruction in dance. Of these offerings each school averaged four classes in music and five in visual arts. Approximately two courses were provided in each of the following areas: drama/theatre, creative writing and dance (Carey 1995). Students who were gifted within the arts areas were not sufficiently educated within this structure. They would receive basic

information but were not allowed the proper time and attention to develop their talents with a real focus toward the future.

Victoria Mikou-Porto, the former Deputy Director for Programs at the James B. Hunt Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy, an affiliate center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, released a policy brief in 1998 specifically addressing the role of arts education in the American curriculum. Under the direction of the U.S. Department of Education, this policy brief enumerated the ways in which arts education aids in the cognitive learning and development process of children from elementary school through high school.

Ms. Mikou-Porto's findings were inconclusive in terms of how arts education improved reading and mathematics scores but it argued that the students were only receiving three hours of training per week in the arts. This study also brought forth an argument for integrating arts into the curriculum not as an extra but as a way of improving brain function that increased cognitive development that would aid in all areas of study.

The result of these studies and Acts show that there has been a dearth of arts education within the schools of the United States and that this is a problem. Young people are not getting the comprehensive education that they deserve and that the adult citizens of this country expect for their children.

## Efficacy of Arts Education in Gifted Education

Before the arts became an accepted practice within the standard, or general, educational arena, the topic of arts education specific to the needs of individual students identified as Gifted and Talented was investigated and applied to the curricula designed such for students that were so designated. Through these programs, arts education became accepted as a viable pedagogy for meeting the needs of many children identified as gifted in the area of art.

As with many educational issues, the definition of "Gifted and Talented" varies from state to state. Kristen R. Stephens (Support Services Coordinator for Duke University's Talent Identification Program) and Frances A. Karnes (Professor of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education, and Director of the Frances A. Karnes Center for Gifted Studies at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg) addressed the question of state definitions in their 2000 article: *State Definitions for the Gifted and Talented Revisited* (Stephens and Karnes, 219-238). In this article, Stephens and Karnes illustrated many of the ways in which each state had defined Gifted and Talented. They listed and compared those varied definitions. Being gifted and talented within the arts is part of their definition of giftedness. Each state that responded to

their study included artistic and/or creative thinking as a part of its definition for gifted. It also included a caveat that gifted students required "differentiated educational experiences" in order to realize their potential within themselves and society.

Reva Friedman-Nimz, Brenna O'Brien, and Bruce B. Frey of the University of Kansas, extended Robert Allens 1969 study of Gifted and Talented terminology in 2005. Allens terminology had largely defined the topic of Gifted Education from the early 1900s until 1969. Of import is the fact that Friedman-Nimz, O'Brien, and Frey's article, *Examining Our Foundations: Implications for Gifted Education Research (Friedman-Nimz, O'Brien and Frey, 45-52)*, highlighted the paradigm shift that included disadvantaged and disabled as primary content terms for Gifted and Talented research, between the years 1969-2000. In Louisiana, children who carry the gifted and talented label are entitled to programming that meets their specific needs.

In 1993, a number of studies were completed on existing Gifted and Talented programs. One such study, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (United States 1993), articulated several important arts education initiatives: teacher development; access to early childhood gifted education; increased opportunities for "disadvantaged and minority" talented children; broadening the definition of

giftedness; and matching world performance by making gifted students globally competitive. A follow-up study titled *A National Survey of Current Legislative and Policy Trends in Gifted Education: Life after the National Excellence Report* (Landrum, Katsiyannis and DeWaard, 352-371), continued to investigate current legislation and policy (Landrum, Katsiyannis and DeWaard)<sup>6</sup>.

In 1991, Paul Richard Saronson, Clinical Professor at New York University's Steinhardt School of Education, submitted doctoral dissertation, *Specialized Urban High Schools of the Arts: A Comparative Study* (Saronson, 1991), which focused on F. H. LaGuardia High School of Music, Art, and Performing Arts in New York City, the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts in New Orleans, Louisiana, and the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington D.C. Specifically, Saronson quantitatively addressed successful and less successful aspects of each program. His study concluded that these three programs had a positive impact for the attending students by providing educational opportunities within the arts for its students that would not be provided in a regular public school environment.

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<sup>6</sup> This study was conducted by Mary S. Landrum, Director of the Online Program of Studies in Gifted Education at the University of Virginia; Antonis Katsiyannis, Professor of Special Education and Delinquency at Clemson University. In addition, Jan DeWaard Psychologist for the Nebraska Department of Education.

In addition, Stephanie Allison Eller, of the American University, completed an M.A. Thesis, entitled *The Arts Magnet Center: A Successful Model for Public Arts Education*, on arts magnet schools in 1994, a comparative study of the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts, the Educational Center for the Arts in New Haven, CT, and the Greenville County Fine Arts Center in Greenville, SC. Eller's study focused on programs offered, the ethnic makeup of each school, and graduation rates relative to the public school systems from which the student bodies were drawn. Ms. Eller's study showed that half-day arts schools were successful in their efforts to provide the appropriate education needed for gifted students regardless of gender, ethnicity or income. According to Eller, NOCCA and the other schools studied maintained demographics appropriate to the geographic area being served. (Eller)

In 1994, Gene Rankin Diaz wrote an ethnographic study called *Coordinating Discourses: An Ethnography of a Creative Arts High School*, which focused on the use of the artist as teacher at NOCCA. Diaz examined the process of creating this school and how it evolved over the course of 35 years within a culture that appreciated the arts as an integral part of the economy and yet did not accommodate it within the regular public school curriculum. The school itself has provided training to many students who have become public figures within the arts on

a national and international level such as Harry Connick Jr, Wynton Marsalis and Terence Blanchard. These artists and their contributions are illustrative of the justification for such programming.

NOCCA has proven over the years that students exposed to the arts do better in their core subject areas. According to Michael Posner and Brenda Patoine, authors of *How Arts Training Improves Attention and Cognition*, researchers "are finding that when children find an art form that sustains their interest, the subsequent strengthening of their brains' attention networks can improve cognition more broadly." (Posner and Patoine) NOCCA is an excellent example of this theory, and it can then be extrapolated, that the reverse is also true. Students who are not "gifted" who are exposed to the arts will improve cognition in traditional areas as well. There is a symbiotic relationship between the arts and core curriculum. Even students who are not deemed "gifted & talented" enough to attend schools like NOCCA should be exposed to the arts because this exposure improves their cognition, retention and ability in core subject areas. Due to this symbiotic relationship, the arts should be included in every secondary school curriculum and it should not be just shunted off into schools like NOCCA for gifted and talented students.

## A Brief History of NOCCA

NOCCA was the brainchild of educator Shirley Trusty Corey. It was to be a school for talented students to prepare for careers in the arts and it was to be a part of the Orleans Parish School System. In January of 1974 it opened its doors to the first class of students with three areas of focus: music, theatre and visual arts. In the Fall 1974, the school added dance to its curriculum as well. In 1977, Thomas Whalen joined the faculty to begin a creative writing program and the school. At that time and for the foreseeable future, the disciplines being taught at NOCCA would be continually adjusted to strengthen the program but there were no plans to increase the number of artistic fields.

From its conception, the school known as NOCCA has had to overcome many challenges and continued to not only grow but to thrive. The school's configuration allowed it to provide a half-day program in which high school students studied traditional courses at a home school along side their arts discipline in an intensive program at NOCCA designed to prepare them for their next step as professional artists.

In the traditional NOCCA program students spent the first half of the school day at an attendance zone school, which I will refer to throughout this document as a feeder school, where

they fulfilled their academic requirements in order to meet the non-arts curricular objectives needed for graduation by Louisiana's Department of Education. After the students completed the morning classes at the feeder school they traveled to NOCCA where they participated in specialized arts training programs tailored to their individual needs during the afternoon hours. This created a symbiotic relationship between the arts and traditional core curriculum for these students.

Of the many challenges the school faced over the years, the most basic was finding an appropriate location. After losing the battle to be housed in Louis Armstrong Park, the school began with courses being offered in the University of New Orleans (UNO) Performing Arts building and in the basement of the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA) (Cuthbert, Creative arts Center to Open). After one semester, the school was moved to its "temporary" home in the dilapidated LaSalle School on Perrier Street, where it resided for 25 years. In 2000, the school moved to its current and "permanent" home at 2800 Chartres Street in the area of the city known as the Faubourg Marigny (Otis, 2009). It was at this time that NOCCA made the transition from a local public school to a state conservatory.

Locating a school for the arts in the Faubourg Marigny (also known as the Marigny) was somewhat poetic in that this area, located just downriver from the French Quarter had become

known for its artsy elements. The Marigny has been noted as the home of many jazz clubs along Frenchman Street. It also contained trendy restaurants, neighborhood galleries, and antique stores since the 1970s that compliment the schools subject matter. (Marigny)

### Administrative History

Over the course of its first twenty-six years, NOCCA has had two outstanding principals who each served for more than a decade: the first principal, Dr. Thomas Tews, served the school for eleven years, and John Otis continued the legacy beginning his tenure in 1985, serving NOCCA until 2003.

Under the leadership of Dr. Thomas Tews, the school established itself as what the Orleans Parish School Board referred to as the "crown jewel" of New Orleans. The school consistently graduated students who went on to college or professional training programs in the arts on scholarships and demonstrated to people throughout the country that NOCCA was a program that trained artists who became successful in their fields.

Following Dr. Tews, John Otis continued the legacy of dedicated leadership exemplified by his predecessor. Mr. Otis began his tenure in 1985 and continued to serve NOCCA until

2003. Mr. Otis' efforts not only saw to it that the reputation earned under Dr. Tews' leadership endured, but he strengthened the program and the school's standing in the educational community. He also worked to establish a "permanent" home for NOCCA. Working with the faculty and staff of the school and its supporting institute, he found a location that could be modified to produce a facility that would meet the current needs of the programs being taught and had the potential to allow for future growth and diversification.

In 1999, the new facility was almost ready for the students and faculty to move in when a bitter battle developed between the Orleans Parish School Board, the Institute, and the State of Louisiana over administrative and jurisdictional control of the facility and the program. The battle was aired in the press as well as in meeting rooms and the students were unable to move into the new facility until January of 2000 (NOCCA Institute).

When the school finally did move into the buildings on Chartres Street in the Marigny, the Orleans Parish School Board had not relinquished control, but was on course to change. In July of 2000, the school became an agency of the State of Louisiana. The Principal of the school, Thomas Tews, who returned briefly after Otis' departure to see NOCCA through the transition, would no longer be a Principal, but a Chief

Executive Officer. In addition, the school would serve multiple parishes instead of just Orleans Parish.

Today NOCCA still stands as a "crown jewel" of New Orleans but serves the entire state instead of just the city. It is still used as a model of half-day arts intensive programs throughout the country and holds a place within the arts schools network as one of the founding institutions. Most importantly, the school continues to train young artists from Louisiana to go out into the world and apply the dedication and commitment needed to succeed in their chosen fields. They develop that dedication and commitment as they fulfill the rigorous requirements demanded to achieve success at NOCCA.

### Structural Challenges

Every institution has its highs and lows, and NOCCA was no exception. In terms of lows, it has seen many political and fiscal challenges and it has also experienced structural challenges. NOCCA's classes were initially held in four rooms at UNO's performing arts center and the basement of the New Orleans Museum of Art. After its first term, the school was moved into a condemned elementary school, where it stayed until 2000. In 2000, a new facility was made available to the Orleans Parish school system but they were unable to sustain adequate budgetary

support for such a facility. The lack of adequate financing produced a condition that was no better than the condemned elementary school had been before the move.

NOCCA was then reorganized, changing its organizational structure from being part of the Orleans Parish School District to being a state conservatory. While that reorganization was initially seen as a solution to the ongoing financial problems, the students, faculty, and administrators of NOCCA struggled through four governors before they were able to obtain the funding necessary to effectively create a new facility in the Faubourg Marigny area of New Orleans.

### Chapter Overviews

I divide this study into six sections. In Chapter One, I introduce the study. The chapter provides background information on arts education in the United States followed by a brief history of the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts (NOCCA). Chapter Two presents an in-depth structural overview of the workings of NOCCA designed to ground my later historical argument. Chapter Three, looks at the history of the founder of the school and its creation process beginning with Shirley Trusty Corey, her vision for the school, and how that vision came into being with the opening of NOCCA in 1974, including

challenges to its implementation. In Chapter Four, I offer an examination of the years 1974 through the year 2000. Covering the opening of the creative arts center in temporary facilities as well as subsequent locations, and programmatic changes as well as an overview of and changes to the curriculum. Chapter Five provides an examination of the schools transformation from a Parish run school to a state conservatory from the year 2000 forward to the present day considering also the addition of new programs. In Chapter Six, I summarize the study, including a look toward the future of NOCCA and a view of where it is situated within the history of New Orleans and arts education within Louisiana proper.

## Chapter Two

In Chapter Two I provide a brief structural overview of NOCCA, its day to day functioning and its basic curricula. While this information will be considered in more depth later in this document, it is necessary for purposes of understanding to have a general picture of how NOCCA operates for those unfamiliar with the center's structure and function.

### Brief Historical Overview

Today, NOCCA is now a state conservatory that is funded by the State of Louisiana but it was not always that way. In its infancy, the school was a public school within the Orleans Parish School System. It went through twenty-seven years of growth and development before being taken over by the State in 2000. With a present operating budget of \$5.1 million dollars the current NOCCA|Riverfront serves 800 students in its traditional half-day curriculum, Saturday programs, summer conservatory and academic studio. (State of Louisiana Budget FY2011-2012)

NOCCA originally came into being through one woman's cognizance of a need that was not being met in the Orleans Parish School District; the training of students who demonstrated talent in the arts.

## Structure of NOCCA

NOCCA was founded by educator Shirley Trusty Corey (about whom more will be said later) with a small career education grant in 1974. Its purpose was to prepare students designated as gifted and talented for careers in the fine and performing arts, particularly theatre, music, and visual arts. Every student was expected to attend regular classes in the morning at the school in their designated attendant zone which I will refer to as the feeder school where they took academic courses required for graduation according to the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

NOCCA was a fine arts high school in New Orleans, Louisiana that began with a class of 120 students from the 10<sup>th</sup> grade in January of 1974. Each of these students applied, auditioned, interviewed and were accepted into the program. After acceptance each student was required to sign a contract stating that he/she would maintain his/her grades at both the feeder school and NOCCA, that they would not miss more than three days of school each term and that he/she would maintain the standards expected of them. The students' parents were also required to sign contracts that stated the parents understood the expectations and would support their child in this endeavor. (NOCCA student handbook) Due to NOCCA's unique nature the school year begins

three weeks prior to the traditional New Orleans academic calendar. This difference in timing allowed students who had been accepted into the program to change his/her minds if they found it was not what they wanted without causing them to lose classroom time at their home school. (NOCCA Student Handbook)

Every student was expected to attend regular classes in the morning at their feeder school where he/she took academic classes required for graduation according to the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). NOCCA's counselors strove to work with the feeder schools in order to ensure that each NOCCA student met all of his/her graduation requirements within the standard four years of high school. In some cases the split school day could cause difficulties in meeting all requirements and for those students Civics and Free Enterprise were offered at NOCCA. In addition to the feeder school credits, students attending NOCCA received honors weight course credit as electives for their time in their arts classes and dance students' Carnegie Units (required for graduation) were split between honors elective arts credit and physical education credit. (NOCCA "How Do NOCCA Credits Work")

When NOCCA first opened, most students auditioned in 9<sup>th</sup> grade to enter the program beginning their sophomore year but perspective students could apply any time throughout 9 - 11<sup>th</sup> grade. The school was set up to be a three-year program in most

disciplines, the exception to this rule being the dance program, added in Fall 1974, that took students in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The school maintained its primarily secondary education focus from 1974 to the year 2000.

When NOCCA became a conservatory under the purview of State of Louisiana it also began a middle school preparatory program for Classical Instrumental Music, Dance, Drama, Musical Theatre, Theatre Design and Vocal Music. Students interested in these programs could audition in 5 - 7<sup>th</sup> grade. In addition to the preparatory program NOCCA added a Summer Conservatory in which 8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> grade students could participate in the current curricula of creative writing, culinary arts, dance, media arts, music, theatre arts and visual arts. (NOCCA "Frequently")

Finally, the academic studio was established in the fall of 2011 and offered all students, regardless of county parish of residency, students an opportunity to enter NOCCA as a full time student. Unlike the existing half-day programs at NOCCA, this was done to fulfill the mandate that the school serve students from across the State of Louisiana rather than primarily serving students of Orleans Parish. They still took their academic courses in the morning and their arts classes in the afternoon but all of these classes were offered at the NOCCA facility on Chartres Street. In order to facilitate this new program, five new faculty members were hired in the fall of 2011. (NOCCA

"2011-2012 Founding Faculty") Then in 2011 8<sup>th</sup> graders were given the option of applying to the academic studio for the first time. (NOCCA "Frequently")

### Everyday Running of NOCCA

A typical school day at a traditional high school usually consisted of seven classes that were each approximately one hour long. If students attended their morning classes on this schedule and then spent the afternoon in a different school taking classes in 2-1/2 hour blocks it changed the number of courses that could be taken in a school day. Because of this difference, NOCCA students were required to be very specific in the courses they took at their feeder school. No elective credits would generally fit into the feeder school schedule or the students would not be able to complete all of the classes required to graduate in four years. In addition to this, students attending NOCCA could not participate in extra curricular activities at the feeder school because they attended classes at NOCCA until 6:30 pm and frequently were required to attend rehearsals or performances in the evenings during the school week and on weekends. (Signal interview)

Another challenge of the school day at NOCCA was that the students and parents of students were required to figure out

their own mode of transportation from the feeder school to NOCCA. There was no housing provided and no transportation so these needs had to be secured by the students and/or their parents. Some students traveled via streetcar while others carpooled. Some simply drove themselves, took the bus or walked depending on the distance from the feeder school. (Otis interview) Students who attended NOCCA did not choose an easy option for their high school career but they chose an option that allowed them to develop skills that were not being honed to the extent hoped for in the feeder schools.

Funding was an issue from the very beginning of NOCCA. Although Ms. Corey initially asked for the salaries to pay seven to thirteen teachers, she was allotted the funds for only four.

She placed two instructors in music and two in theatre because she believed these two areas were the "more obvious art forms." (Corey interview) However, she and the schools' advisory committee both agreed that NOCCA needed a visual art component from the onset. Ms. Corey was able to convince the advisory committee to raise half the money for an additional teacher to be used in the visual arts if the Orleans Parish School Board would match that amount, each was successful. A visual arts teacher was brought on to the staff for NOCCA's opening in 1974. (Tews, MK August 1973)

Although exact salaries from the time are not available, The approximate salaries for teachers in Orleans Parish Schools in 1973-74 was \$11,077. By the time the school changed to a state institution during the 1999-2000 school year, the average salary was 42,546 and the 2005-06 school year shows an average salary of 49,396 (National Center for Education Statistics). For the year 2011-2011 a job posting for a new teacher for the academic studio program at NOCCA advertised the position as full time for \$40-43 K per annum. Despite NOCCA's desire to be an exceptional school the salaries being offered were in fact typical entry-level salaries for the time period.

In terms of space, NOCCA wanted an old elementary school in Armstrong Park, but it lost that battle and was without a building until Dr. Gustav Staub, the head of the theatre department at the University of New Orleans (UNO), offered the use of four classrooms on the fourth floor of the new theatre building in time for NOCCA's 1974 opening. That location at UNO was where the music and theatre classes were held the first semester. Ms. Corey then approached Mr. John Baird, who was the head of the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA), and she asked for use of the basement of that building for the visual arts classes. (Corey Interview)

The music program began with two faculty members. The vocal instructor was William Nichol. Mr. Nichol's background was in

music history, and he had studied voice in the Northeast where he also taught at the University of New Hampshire before coming to New Orleans to teach at the newly opened center. The other music faculty member was to focus on instrumental music. For this position Dr. Bert Braud, a native of New Orleans, was hired. Dr. Braud's background included work as an arranger, conductor, pianist for recordings and teaching. He had composed music for film and television over the years and had recently received a commission for a work that he composed for jazz players and the New Orleans Symphony Orchestra. The combination of these accomplishments made him a perfect candidate for the new center's instrumental faculty member. (NOCCA Faculty)

The theatre area also received two faculty members. The first was Robert Cronin, an actor, stage manager, and teacher/director who came from a background in Massachusetts and New York. The second teacher in theatre was H. Elliot Keener, who came to New Orleans from the Midwest. Another actor, Mr. Keener had experience in lighting, movement, and improvisation in addition to his acting credits. Where Mr. Cronin had experience teaching at University and performing off-Broadway, Mr. Keener had both stage and television experience. The combination of the two filled a large range of areas within the theatre field. The two men split between them classes in acting,

movement, improvisation and other important theatre training courses. (NOCCA Faculty)

In the area of visual art there was only funding for one faculty member. For this position, Lucienne Simon was hired. Ms. Simon was a painter from Shreveport in north Louisiana, who had completed graduate school in Baton Rouge at Louisiana State University, where she then taught various fine arts and crafts courses. She was responsible for all visual arts courses: painting, sculpture, printmaking, etc. (NOCCA Faculty)

New curricular areas were added beginning the second semester of NOCCA's existence. The area of dance was added in the fall of 1974 when NOCCA moved into the LaSalle Elementary School Building at 6048 Perrier Street. Two part-time faculty members, Mrs. Karen Mullin and Mrs. Rosemary Fuhrman, taught this discipline, paid for by the Orleans Parish School District. When these instructors moved on Denise Oustelet became the new dance instructor. Ms. Oustelet not only taught dance but made significant changes to the dance program by suggesting and instituting an early entry program for dance students. The dance program became the first program to admit students before they reached the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Her argument for this change was that dancers needed more than three years of training in order to achieve the professional preparatory goals of NOCCA's program. This suggestion was approved and although three years, or

levels, of study were maintained students began entering this discipline in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. In order to maintain the three level program that was used in all other disciplines of the school, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders were classed as level one, 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> graders were level two and 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> graders were level three (Lee). Then, in 1977, creative writing was added to NOCCA's slate of arts disciplines with one faculty member, Thomas Whalen to write the curriculum and teach the courses (Perry "Young Authors"). This was the last discipline to be added until the school changed hands and became a state agency in 2000.

In addition to the regular full time faculty funded primarily by the Orleans Parish School Board, NOCCA's advisory board also raised money to bring in visiting artists to workshops and classes to the students. These programs ranged in length from one day to one semester depending on the budget and needs of the program. (Corey interview) The advisory board eventually became Friends of NOCCA that was a nonprofit organization. The purpose of Friends of NOCCA was to raise funds for artist-in-residence program and scholarship money for students. When NOCCA became a state agency in 2000, the Friends of NOCCA was changed to the NOCCA Institute that labeled its donors as "Friends of NOCCA" (Corey interview, Otis interview, Tews T. interview).

Through its innovated programs and teaching staff NOCCA was able to provide a superior educational opportunity to gifted and talented arts students from across the State of Louisiana. In the following chapters I will consider these aspects of NOCCA in more depth and link them to a discussion of the importance of arts education in Louisiana's school curriculum.

## Chapter Three

In Chapter three I focus on the founding of NOCCA, the reasons for its inception and a detailed look at the founder's vision for NOCCA and what it could be. The chapter contains a rendering of her vision for what became NOCCA and how that vision became a reality, including challenges to its implementation. The information in this chapter covers the time from roughly 1965 until 1974.

### NOCCA's Founder

Prior to her career as an administrator, and the establishment of NOCCA, Shirley Trusty Corey<sup>1</sup> was a dedicated high school drama teacher. She became an administrator for an extensive federal theatre program in New Orleans that was created through a one-time venture of the United States Department of Education, working in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts. This institution existed for a brief period as an office of arts education (Kennedy).

Approximately a year after the National Endowment for the Arts was established in 1965 (NEA History), Roger Steven, who was the first chairman of the NEA, and Katherine Bloom, who was in

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<sup>1</sup> Shirley Trusty married Orin Corey and took on the name of Corey after NOCCA came into being. This document will refer to her as Corey in order to limit confusion.

the Department of Education and then later went on to become the Executive Director of the JD Rockefeller III Arts and Education fund, created a widespread theatre project with three locations: one in Providence, Rhode Island; one in Los Angeles, California; and the third in New Orleans, Louisiana. Mr. Steven and Ms. Bloom used Title 2, Title 3 and NEA funding to create this education and theatre project. Each of these three locations opened a professional theatre company that had weekday performances so that school children could be brought in to experience live theatre (Corey Interview).

When New Orleans was selected as one of the sites for this program, Ms. Corey was brought in as the Education Director. This proved to be important in the creation of NOCCA in that she was the liaison between the schools and the professional theatre.

The theatre company had a League of Resident Theatres (LORT) contract. It was officially a regional theatre, and they had eight performances a week. Over the course of a year, the company produced five shows and high school students were brought from Orleans, St. Bernard, and Jefferson Parishes to attend the shows. It was not limited to public schools, but 10th, 11th & 12th grade students from public, parochial and private schools were brought in to see live theatre three or four times a year (Kennedy).

The theatre and the schools worked hand-in-hand. The students would read the plays as part of their course work and then they would see the live performances. The theatre provided study packets for the teachers to use in the classroom. Each show was chosen with specific lessons in mind for the students. They began with *Charlie's Aunt* which Ms. Corey viewed as "just a romp," a play that students would go see in order to understand that theatre was a very different experience from television, "the whole teaching purpose there was come and have a good time, this is live theatre not television" (Corey interview). After introducing the students to theatre through *Charlie's Aunt* Ms. Corey chose a wide range of plays including *Romeo & Juliet* by William Shakespeare and *The Bald Soprano* by Eugene Ionesco. The schools required the students to read the plays and they discussed the main topics, the styles of the writing, the performances and the historical significance of each play. (Corey Interview)

Working as a part of this program allowed Ms. Corey to conceptualize ways in which teaching and learning could change and possibly improve. When the theatre program was no longer able to be sustained financially, Ms. Corey went back to the school district. She turned down a position as principal, saying that she would be an awful principal, but she was then given the opportunity to write a job description for a position as an

Instructional Supervisor within the Orleans Parish School System. The title she gave herself was the Supervisor of Cultural Resources, "I wrote a job description for something called the Supervisor of Cultural Resources because I thought that was a broad enough context of trying to deal with all of the arts and trying to identify resources trying to make a bridge to use as a learning resource for the schools" (Corey interview) and her mission was to aid the schools in becoming aware of and beginning to use locally available cultural resources. Over time, Ms. Corey's title was changed to the Supervisor of Arts Education to better reflect her function within the system and the school system's growing recognition of the context, and the acceptance of arts education as a viable, sustainable, and beneficial program that met the needs of an identifiable segment of the student population and effectively provided a combination of basic concepts and specialized training that better prepared those students for future professional success (Corey interview). This was especially recognized after NOCCA was created.

At first, Ms. Corey needed to develop programs that would identify resources that could benefit all of the children attending all of the schools that would be brought into the program as she envisioned it. It was necessary to assemble and categorize this information before she could formally approach

the functional leaders within the Orleans Parish school system, pushing for the creation of the creative arts center. As she developed strong relationships and confidence in the program within the teachers and administrators with whom she worked, she recognized that she was paving the way to do more for those students of the arts than was currently being done in all but the most select school systems nationally (Corey Interview).

Ms. Corey's position within the organization established by the joint DOE, NEA program allowed her to observe arts education in action and she began to understand more fully the impact that these programs had on students. Her position gave her the power and opportunity to develop a program with more levels of exposure and, through this process, the idea that a real need existed for a creative arts center was recognized (Corey interview).

### The Vision

Ms. Corey described her initial vision for the school as three overlapping circles. "The first circle would be training students, the second would be training teachers, and the third, would be affecting the community" (Corey interview). From Corey's perspective as founder and sustainer, NOCCA has achieved all three visionary aims and continues to aspire to achieve and

sustain those visions. Visions tend to evolve as they emerge into reality. Ms. Corey's vision of NOCCA became reality. NOCCA has since grown and continues to change, but as she has stated, "it's just getting better" and it continues to maintain her three circle vision as it evolves. Ms. Corey's concepts of training students, training teachers and affecting the community have become a hallmark of NOCCA's program.

### Training Students

Dr. Tews believed very firmly that the purpose of NOCCA was to aid students in developing their talents in every way possible without creating limits. In the NOCCA Parents Newsletter of December, 1974 Dr. Tews answered several parents' questions justifying the basis for NOCCA's curricular decisions. He began by stating that arts curriculum was the centers first priority. Within that frame-work, the students were to prepare to exercise three abilities: first, students needed to become aware of the options available to them as career choices including college training and field experience in the arts discipline that they have chosen to pursue; second, students had to develop the independence to make a choice that was truly their own; and third, students had to acquire the skills within themselves to make that choice work for them (Tews December

1974). As a part of this concept, the curriculum included an integrated arts component that took all of NOCCA's students out of their individual areas of study and exposed them to all of the disciplines taught at the school.

It was rare for a student to be able to study an art for two or three years because arts programs were elective hours and not part of the academic curriculum. It was commonly believed that there were not enough hours in the school day to allow students to receive any real in-depth training in the arts. Ms. Corey recognized this problem and resolved that something would be done to provide a more in depth arts education for those students who had strengths in the arts and a desire to learn more.

From the outset, the school was dedicated to bringing in visiting artists for master classes. Individuals with varied specialties within the arts were invited for either short or long-term residencies as budget allowed and needs dictated. Visiting artists were important because they were able to share their experiences as professionals working in the field with the students. A few of these include Tony and Emmy award winning actress, Blythe Danner; renown jazz drummer, Jeff "Tain" Watts, and filmmaker, Ken Burns. This concept has been maintained throughout the history of NOCCA, and today many of their alumni return as visiting artists, giving back to the program through

which they began to hone their skills and showing the success of NOCCA's training program. A few examples of these alumni who have come back as part of the visiting artist program to share their talents with the students of NOCCA are opera singer Jeanne-Michelle Charbonnet, actor Wendell Pierce, and musician Wynton Marsalis.

This practice is in keeping with one of the initial concepts that ultimately led to the creation of NOCCA: to implement activities and experiences that would motivate learning and truly prepare the students for success in the art form that each had chosen to pursue. The visiting artist program is an integral part of achieving that goal.

Another way that NOCCA differed from the traditional training model of the time period was that the students were not in one hour classes each day but in a single class for two to three hours each afternoon where the students would spend the time practicing their art form one day then being a part of a critical discussion about their own work and the work of their peers. (Corey, Adamo, Otis) Each day the students were required to put themselves and their work on the line in front of teachers who worked in the field they were studying and the other students who had similar career goals and learning to not only create but to honestly critique their own work.

In addition to the hands on application of his/her own art, each student spent time learning about the other arts disciplines once a week as all the students would come together weekly for an integrated arts lesson. This approach was process oriented; it was critique and feedback as well as open, honest dialogue and honest assessment. The focus was on internalization of skills, critical thinking, and evaluation. This approach was vastly different from the memorize-then regurgitate for the test and move on approach that was being used in the traditional high school programs at the time of NOCCA's creation in 1974.

### Training Teachers

One of the innovative ideas introduced at NOCCA was the concept of the artist-teacher and the recognition that the school would benefit both from the art forms and from the artists themselves. Ms. Corey explained that NOCCA still maintained that essential premise in all the classes taught at the school. With that basic assertion, NOCCA is able to analyze and implement emerging trends in art education. The artist teachers identify individual components of the learning process and put those components into academic use.

When Ms. Corey began to put her plan into practice, it was considered revolutionary to hire teachers on the basis of their

talent as artists rather than their academic background and educational certification. The board wanted to hire good teachers but they also recognized the need for skilled artists with "real world" experience who could truly prepare the students for the sometimes-tumultuous life of an artist. The number of certified teachers, who possessed that type of real world experience, or artistic certification, was relatively few. Ms. Corey strove to strike a balance between the two disciplines. She was able to obtain temporary TIN certification (which stood for trade in industry) for the artists she hired to teach. This certification opened up countless opportunities. Without it, the school would never have been able to hire the individuals that Ms. Corey sought to bring into the faculty. The additional freedom to utilize visiting artist faculty helped maintain high levels of enthusiasm in the students and the fact that eventually many of those visiting faculty were themselves NOCCA alumni resulted in highly motivated learning. Without it, the school would never have been able to hire the individuals that Ms. Corey sought to bring into the faculty.

Ms. Corey stated that the inspiration for NOCCA "came from the students themselves. It grew out of the obvious desire of the students to learn more and their ability to do more" (Corey interview). She also reported that the students showed a great

eagerness and openness in their desire to have more exposure to the arts.

### Major Players

The New Orleans Center for Creative Arts would not have succeeded in becoming the program it is if not for the dedication and hard work of faculty and staff that truly believed in the program. Although NOCCA was truly the "brain child" and dream of Shirley Trusty Corey, she would not have been able to make this dream a reality solely on her own. Success required the support of other influential people.

Dr. Gene Geisert was appointed superintendent of Orleans Parish Schools during the summer of 1971. He brought Dr. Samuel Scarnato with him as the Deputy Superintendent (Kennedy 93). Together these two men helped to clear the way for Ms. Corey's Creative Arts Center. According to Al Kennedy, who studied New Orleans jazz for his doctoral dissertation, Dr. Scarnato "intervened at critical times to keep the NOCCA project moving" (Kennedy 94)

In addition to key supportive personnel within the Superintendent's office, there were key faculty members who stepped in to create specific exceptional elements that would

become major attributes of NOCCA, beginning with teacher certification.

When NOCCA opened its doors in January of 1974, Dr. Scarnato classified NOCCA faculty as "vocational faculty" since the school was officially classified a part of career education for New Orleans Parish students. By classifying the faculty this way, the school was able to access state career education funds, and it also circumvented teacher certification requirements for the first year. By the second year, the certification of teachers became a major issue that Dr. Thomas Tews, the new principal of NOCCA, battled. The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), the governing state board over schools, required teacher certification, but Dr. Tews, and his faculty, appealed to the school board because guidelines were not in existence for the disciplines being taught. Dr. Tews then scheduled a meeting with the state board's Certification Appeals Committee where Dr. Bert Braud, who was the instrumental music faculty argued, "Leonard Bernstein could not teach at NOCCA because he lacks a teaching certificate" (Kennedy 104). Due to the faculty's appeal, Dr. Tews and his staff, with the assistance of J. Kelly Nix, who was the State Superintendent at the time, drafted procedures to certify artists with a demonstrated record of achievement in the arts as teachers at NOCCA. The guidelines drafted by Tews and his staff were

eventually adopted by the Bureau of Teacher Certification and the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

Dr. Tews had been hired during the summer of 1974 to be the first principal of NOCCA. Initially, the school board wanted his title to be headmaster but he fought that because he knew that he would need to deal with other principals and having the same title would aid in his ability to be accepted on the same level as other schools. He won that battle and, until 2000, the position initially held by Dr. Tews was classified as "principal."

#### Affecting the Community

Continuing with Ms. Corey's three-circle vision, NOCCA was to affect the community. The first way that this was accomplished was the advisory board. When Ms. Corey began developing the concept of a Center for Creative Arts she did not just rely on her own thoughts and experiences. She immediately created an unofficial advisory committee that she could use as a sounding board and a means for building support throughout the creation process. That committee would not only be a major influence in creating the center, it would over time, evolve

into a fund raising foundation known now as the NOCCA Institute, which continues to support the center.

When the Superintendent of the Orleans Parish School Board gave Ms. Corey the go ahead to develop her ideas for a creative arts center, she put together a committee of people who she could draw upon for ideas and support. As the center drew closer to realization, the committee was formalized with the title "Community Liaison Board." When that Board held its first official meeting, there were twenty-two members; all were prominent members of the community and many were in key positions within the art community of New Orleans. Dr. Milly Barringer was the Chairman of the Theatre Department at Tulane University. Mr. Norman Boothby taught in the Art Department at Newcomb College. Dr. Joe Buttram was the Chairman of the Music Department at Loyola University. Mrs. Victor Bruno served on the Louisiana Council for Music and Performing Arts. Dr. Wayne Hobbs was the Chairman of the Music Department at LSUNO. Mr. Carter Nice was with the New Philharmonic Symphony. Mr. Ralph Platou was with the New Orleans Museum of Art. Mr. John Scott taught at the Art Department at Xavier University. Dr. August Staub was the Chairman of the Theatre Department at LSUNO. Mrs. Mary Kate Tews was the Cultural Director for the New Orleans Recreation Department and her husband, Dr. Tom Tews, was with the Theatre Department at Loyola University.

By creating this committee of prominent members of the city and the arts community, Ms. Corey assured a strong backing for the new center and these people played a very active role in gaining support within the local community and among the more influential and prominent members of Louisiana society. When the school was looking for a location to open, the Community Liaison Board lobbied for space in the Louis Armstrong Park that was being planned at the time, they wrote letters and had meetings with various members of the city council and planning committees to gain access for the creative arts center, and when the center lost the fight for that space, they intervened by providing other spaces as a temporary home for the center until a more permanent home could be established.

In addition to providing lobbying power for the center, the advisory board also became a source of fund raising. Ms. Corey had initially requested funding for eleven to thirteen faculty members but the school board only granted funding for four. It seemed to the committee that the very minimum that would be acceptable was five and so Ms. Corey set out, with the backing of her board, to make a deal with the School Board. If the School Board would provide enough money to pay half of the salary for an additional faculty member for the first semester and the full salary for the following school year, the Community Liaison Board would raise the necessary additional funding for

that faculty member for the first semester. Based on information from the Digest of Education Statistics published by the United States Department of Education, the advisory board and the school system would each have to provide approximately \$2700.00 to pay one additional teacher for one semester (US Dept of Ed, Digest). The School Board agreed to the arrangement and the Community Liaison Board raised the second half of the salary for the initial semester. By doing this the Community Liaison Board set its fund-raising mechanism in motion.

Over the years that Board changed its name to "friends of NOCCA" and finally became the "NOCCA Institute". The Institute continues to serve in both an advisory and financial capacity. In addition to its other functions, the advisory board provided continuity. Because of its existence from the start of the creation process and because of its large membership, the committee allowed for changes in its composition. As members moved on or had other commitments that pulled them away from the center, similarly minded individuals who knew of, and supported, NOCCA's mission, replaced them. As those new members came on board, there were always those with longer tenures that were able to provide historical information to them and so the oral history and sense of mission was maintained. In a way, this avoided the complications of "reinventing the wheel." The re-

hashing of older difficulties could be avoided, allowing the board to move forward more effectively (Corey Interview).

By creating a board that included prominent members of the arts community, the school was a touchstone for events that needed young, energetic volunteers for arts programs. When advertisers needed young performers to aid in advertising they would frequently audition students at NOCCA for parts in commercials or performers for events (Signal Interview).

NOCCA also helped with neighborhood revitalization at the LaSalle School on Perrier Street. In spite of the fact that this location was only supposed to be a "temporary" home, the students and faculty worked with community members to improve the school and its grounds so that it would be a place that was not only functional but also a place that would be in better condition than it had been before they arrived.

Another way that the school affected the community was through outreach programs such as the tv show that the students produced on Saturday mornings. This program was called "For Kids" and was written and executed by the students for children of the community. (Cuthbert "Creative Arts Center")

## Milestones

Ms. Corey never fully left NOCCA since its inception. At first she developed the concept, then she oversaw its creation, and later, she moved into an advisory capacity as she continued with her other responsibilities within the public school system. When questioned about her involvement with NOCCA since its creation, in an interview, Ms. Corey responded:

"I stayed close to it because I felt close to it and I was still guiding and helping move the community board until finally we made a non-profit board and hired an executive director. So you know, I was constantly playing those roles and then trying to move that board into visions of a new school, so I never was not involved. I just shifted the points of emphasis. I was never really far away, but certainly the responsibility shifted. The principals and faculty became stronger, as indeed they should have, and I'm still on the state board" (Corey, Interview).

When asked about major milestones in NOCCA's history, Ms. Corey listed the following:

- evolving from a local school to a state conservatory;  
(Gray "Attorney's")

- changing the fund raising arm from a community board to the NOCCA Institute which was a "nonprofit support organization" (NOCCA Institute)
- going through four governors; and going through so many political trials, and consistently meeting the budget necessary to continue the school. (Tews interview, Otis interview)
- moving from a condemned elementary school to a brand new facility; (Gray "Artistic")
- realizing a state of the art physical location that articulates the modern realities of the arts as an industry; (Gray "Attorney's")

According to Ms. Corey, other milestones included the continuum that has generated more publicity and support to establish a history, or legend, that allowed the school to grow and obtain the twenty-four million dollars needed to move from the old campus to the new one.

She also listed expanding from a local public school to a state facility, recruiting throughout the state, the summer session that brings in students from long distances, and extending the arts curriculum as additional major accomplishments. She further identified the leadership role within the NETWORK, and the success of its students over the years as achievements of which she is proud.

Corey posited that her goal was to have the best school for the students, a dream school. To summarize this, she restated that the major milestones were "expansion, curriculum expansion, facility, growing, strength of curriculum, and developing leadership in cutting edge ways." (Corey Interview)

NOCCA has continued Ms. Corey's vision over the years in two major ways. Specifically, her vision is not just her vision anymore; it is the vision of everyone involved in NOCCA. Expanding the concept of education to include academics and arts within a greater context and, going back to her concept of students, teacher and the community interacting and learning and growing together.

### Major Challenges

Ms. Corey identified credibility as the biggest challenge during the creation of NOCCA. The fact that Ms. Corey boldly proclaimed the idea that the arts were crucial and that talented students mattered enough to create a school that catered to their needs was revolutionary. There was no public outcry asking for this school to be created. It was purely Ms. Corey's vision, her ambition, and her determination that made this dream become a reality. Her wisdom in creating a powerful and dedicated advisory board greatly helped her push the project forward.

When the concept of a special school for the arts began to gel in her mind, Ms. Corey suggested the idea to the Superintendent of the Orleans Parish School District. The response she received was, "go ahead and keep the superintendent informed". Ms. Corey naively thought that meant that she would have the necessary money to make the concept a reality. Off she went to create a formal proposal for presentation to the Superintendent. When she returned, the response was less than enthusiastic. The superintendent hadn't really expected her to come back with a fully thought out plan for a new school.

Since that time, the concept of arts education has grown dramatically throughout America and many school systems have initiated specialized arts education in one form or another. Although still less than adequate in most places, NOCCA's unique contribution was that it was created before the recognition of arts education as a desirable component of a balanced education system.

When asked how she overcame these challenges, Ms. Corey stated, "If you believe in what you're doing, you just have to go forward with your goal and you can't let the naysayers influence you, because if you do, you'll never get it done. You have to put the blinders on and go." (Corey Interview)

Ms. Corey felt very strongly about her goal. She had the advantages of youth, determination, vision, and faith in the

high school students with which she had worked. While she remained focused on her objective, she was also motivated by her compassion for those students whose needs were not being met, students with ability, desire, talent, and a willingness to work hard to see their dreams become a reality, students who were willing to pay the price to achieve their dreams. "It was always about the students." (Corey, Interview)

## Chapter Four

In Chapter four I deal with the initial opening of NOCCA and its structure at that time with a detailed development of the curriculum and a more detailed overview of its curriculum and the subsequent development of its curriculum in the performing arts. Additionally, I look at the beginnings of the struggle over a permanent home for NOCCA and the acceptance versus rejection of NOCCA as an educational option for students by faculty within the Orleans Parish School System. This chapter covers events from 1973 until 2000.

### Opening the Creative Arts Center

In the initial semester of its existence, NOCCA was financed with a small career education grant and, although Shirley Trusty Corey had asked for seven to thirteen teachers, she was only allotted funds for only four if she was to pay the average salary of \$11,000 per teacher (National Center for Education Statistics). She placed two of those teachers in music and two in theatre because she believed those two areas were the more obvious art forms associated with the City of New Orleans. However, she and the advisory committee agreed that the institution really needed a visual art component from the outset.

Ms. Corey was able to convince the Community Liaison Board that they should raise half the money necessary to provide an additional teacher, if the Orleans Parish School Board agreed to provide matching funds. It was successful and an additional visual arts teacher was hired for the first semester. The Orleans Parish School Board then continued to provide the necessary funding for the position after the first semester.

In terms of space, the founders wanted to utilize an old elementary school in Armstrong Park but they lost that battle and were without a building until Dr. Gustav Staub, the Chairman of the Theatre Department at the University of New Orleans, offered the use of four classrooms on the fourth floor of the new theatre building. That location on the university campus was where the music and theatre classes were held during the first semester. Ms. Corey then approached Mr. John Baird, who was the head of The New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA), and she asked for use of their basement for her visual arts class (Corey, Interview). Her vision, drive, and tenacity yielded results for NOCCA.

Teachers were recruited through the American Educational Theatre Association. Ms. Corey began auditioning nationwide for artists who would be good teachers. Her goal was to obtain exceptional artist teachers. She wanted to open the audition process for faculty to more than just those who were certified

teachers. She wanted working artists in theatre, music, and visual art who could not only teach but who could instill lessons with personal knowledge of how to succeed in the arts and in life. The classes at NOCCA were scheduled in two and a half hour blocks so that the students could not only be taught through lecture but they practiced their art in practical sessions where they created their own art and then were critiqued honestly by both the teachers who had working knowledge of the field and by fellow classmates.

On Wednesdays, the visual art students were bussed from NOMA to UNO to attend interdisciplinary classes with the other students. The goal was to provide a broader aesthetic education that allowed the students to learn, not just about their own craft, but to gain exposure to, knowledge of, and appreciation for all of the art forms being taught (Corey, Interview). That first semester, a total of five faculty members, plus one coordinator, were in place when the doors were ready to open.

The "coordinator" was Andrea Roane. Before taking the position at the Center for Creative Arts Ms. Roane had been a speech teacher at Kennedy Senior High School in Orleans Parish. She had also served as a Language Arts Resource Teacher at Livingston Middle School, where she also served as the school's Media Coordinator and Cultural Resources Coordinator - a

position that put her in regular contact with Ms. Corey (Corey, Interview).

The music program began with two faculty members. The vocal instructor was William Nichol. Mr. Nichol's background was in music history, and he had studied voice in the northeast where he also taught at the University of New Hampshire before coming to New Orleans to teach at the newly opened center. The other music faculty member was to focus on instrumental music. For this position Dr. Bert Braud, a native of New Orleans, was hired. Dr. Braud had composed music for various media over the years and had recently received a commission for a work that he had composed for jazz players and the Symphony orchestra. Dr. Braud's background included work as an arranger, conductor, session pianist for recordings, and teacher. The combination of these accomplishments made him a perfect candidate for the new center's instrumental faculty position (NOCCA Faculty).

The theatre area also received two faculty members. The first was Robert Cronin, an actor, stage manager, and teacher/director who came from Massachusetts and New York. The second teacher in theatre was H. Elliot Keener, who came to New Orleans from the Midwest. Another actor, Mr. Keener had experience in lighting, movement, and improvisation in addition to his acting credits. Where Mr. Cronin had experience teaching at the university level and performing off-Broadway, Mr. Keener

had both stage and television experience. The combination of the two covered a broad range of disciplines within the theatre field (NOCCA Faculty List).

In the area of visual art, there was only funding for one faculty member and for this position, Lucienne Simon was hired. Ms. Simon was a painter from Shreveport, in the northern area of Louisiana. Ms. Simon had completed graduate school at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, where she taught various fine arts and crafts courses. The combination of these five people, with the directions envisioned by Shirley Trusty Corey, constituted the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, with its first entering class containing 120 students (NOCCA Faculty List).

### Curriculum Development

Although each discipline within NOCCA's program had unique objectives, they all had a single primary goal. According to Tom Tews, the primary goal was "to prepare all of our students to take the next logical career step immediately upon graduation, while, at the same time, allowing them to keep their non-arts options open" (Kaufman, Tews and Milam 212). This primary goal was supported by three supplemental objectives: first, to provide in-depth training in the art discipline with the intent

to develop self-sufficiency; second, to provide students with artistic skills necessary for successful careers; and third, to assist students in developing an understanding of excellence in the arts (Kaufman, Tews and Milam 212).

The three abilities that NOCCA faculty felt were mandatory for all students had a direct bearing on every curricular decision. "Curriculum development is a continual process engaged in by the faculty. It is particularly difficult because we try not to narrow a student's horizons, but to broaden them. We don't want to pre-decide where students are going by simply limiting what they are exposed to" (Tews December 1974).

When NOCCA began its existence with theatre, music, and the visual arts, the curriculum was still in its infancy. When the school moved to the LaSalle Elementary School for the fall term, the faculty was charged with creating a formal curriculum for its students as a part of this process. They chose to add dance as the fourth "art" within that curriculum and in 1977 a writing program was added as well.

#### Theatre as Curricular Area

Mr. Robert Cronin and Mr. Elliot Keener developed the theatre curriculum. As with all of the disciplines at NOCCA, the courses were designed to advance critical thinking, practical

application and use a unique approach from the traditional school setup. The basic courses included Theatre awareness and Improvisation. "Theatre Awareness" was designed to "initiate" the students into the practical aspects of drama, including basic terminology and introductions to opportunities that were available within technical theater. "Improvisation" was the beginning acting class offered to help students explore the body, the voice, emotions, and the environment. This course taught the student-actors to use these tools to enhance the effectiveness of their communication with an audience.

"Acting" was a more advanced course that focused more into the practical application side. It helped students develop their acting skills through various styles and performance pieces. This class was also a resource for outside opportunities, allowing students to perform in scenes for Tulane University directing projects, providing opportunities for students to perform as extras in several movies, and opportunities to perform in plays at local high schools.

The curriculum balanced the practical training with critical thinking classes. The curriculum's script analysis course, "Plays and Scripts" was a critical thinking type of course. This course encouraged students to read as many plays as possible and to read those scripts as dramatic literature with the perspective of a theatre professional. This approach was

different from the study of plays in English courses in the other parish schools because it looked at the literature not only for its grammar, structure and style but also for its perform ability, sub textual analysis, design requirements, and then the information actors, designers and technicians would need to fulfill their roles in the production process.

"Literature and History" taught students to analyze the various scripts being discussed through an historic lens, helping students understand the value of each script through its place in history.

A course unique to NOCCA's curriculum in theatre was "Performance Core and the Companies." This was a class where the students were divided into five companies. The members of each company moved through the program together. In addition, each company was responsible for a one-hour performance period on Fridays. During this period, all theatre students met to view and critique their own work and the work of their peers (Tews December 1974).

#### Music as Curricular Area

The music department was developed by Dr. Bert Braud, Mr. Ellis Marsalis, Mr. William Nichol, and Mr. Henry Butler. Dr. Braud and Mr. Marsalis both taught instrumental music with Mr.

Marsalis focusing on jazz. Mr. Nicol and Mr. Butler taught the vocal courses. The students were also taught music theory, acoustics, and the physiology of music. Each course was a combination of critical thinking and practical application with both elements in the forms of music they studied. The students learned the theories, the history and the styles of form of music they studied at each level throughout their time at NOCCA. This practice of immersing the students in the subject aided in the internalization process that allowed a true mastery of the subject for example a student in classical performance would also be required to take courses in jazz in order to round out their knowledge.

Students were introduced to various styles of music and were not allowed to merely bury themselves in a small specialized area that interested them at a particular point in time. The music instructors worked to prepare their students to do more than merely perform in school recitals. The faculty was dedicated to producing future professional musicians, not merely good high school musicians. Faculty members also helped prepare students for auditions and performances, both for NOCCA and for off campus opportunities including graduate school professional gigs (Tews December 1974).

## Visual Arts as Curricular Area

Just as in theatre and music, the visual arts discipline was developed with the goal of teaching students to think critically and to develop skills in their art form through practical application.

Beginning visual art students took an introductory course that gave them an overview of the basic visual elements and then began to allow them to develop skills in line, and style. They then had opportunities to further develop their particular talents, but they did so with the added advantage of understanding styles and techniques that might not initially seem to be a part of their specialty but that could become a part of their future creations.

The students also enrolled in an art history course that utilized the talents of a guest artist-in-residence, Mr. Don Fuller, who was a sculptor.

Advanced courses within the visual art discipline would include the critical courses & the practical courses but also had a component where students learned to use photography, film and tape. As in the other disciplines, each course used both critical thinking and practical application to aid in the internalization of the subject matter at each level of study. These skills that the students were taught from the first day of

study at NOCCA were to be used not only in the NOCCA coursework but in all the activities and courses the students would participate in at each school and in their lives outside of the classroom.

The visual arts courses were taught by Mr. F. R. Gross and Mr. Elfman. Courses within the visual arts included a media workshop for each level. This media workshop was an opportunity for the students to learn to create the tools they would use to complete their assignments. For example, in the second level, the students were taught to make their own reed pens that they then were able to use in their calligraphy course.

#### Dance as Curricular Area

Dance was added to the NOCCA program in the Fall of 1974 when it moved to the LaSalle Elementary school. From the outset, the dance program was structured differently than the other areas of NOCCA. Mrs. Karen Mullin and Mrs. Rosemary Fuhrman were the initial two part time dance faculty members who stayed until 1976. In 1976, Denise Oustelet joined the faculty as a one-woman, full time dance department. She suggested adding both 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders to the dance program as level one students. This practice would differ from the rest of the school but she pointed out that dancers needed more than three years of study

to achieve the goals of the program. Her suggestion was approved and while the dance program was still divided into three levels, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders were level one, 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> graders were designated as level two, and the third level included both 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders (Lee).

Both ballet and modern dance were taught as a part of the new curriculum and the classes were geared primarily to creative and technical development, but even here the practical application included the history and theory that would aid in developing the critical thinking skills emphasized in each discipline. One example of the courses taught in the school of dance was a course entitled, "Body Dynamics." This class had the following goals:

1. Superior control of the body
2. Improved balance
3. increased muscular power with corresponding endurance
4. increased suppleness
5. A confident student, which is the result of having achieved a more disciplined body"(Tews December 1974)

The students were required to develop the mental discipline to achieve these physical goals. Although many of the dance classes focused on the physical aspect of dancing, choreography and history instruction within these classes instilled critical thinking to the application.

## Writing as Curricular Area

In the fall of 1977, NOCCA added a writing discipline to the curriculum. Nate Lee, a journalist for *ARCADE* magazine, wrote an article about NOCCA in November of 1976. In his article he announced the upcoming "professional writing program." The focus of said program would be "writing as an interpretation of experience through imaginative language, with an orientation towards a wide range of writing careers" (Lee). Thomas Whalen was the first instructor hired for this new area. This program offered both critical analysis through evaluation of own practical application not in separate courses but by writing and then learning to criticize their own work and the work of their peers.

This discipline gave instruction on the more traditional modes of writing such as novels, poetry and plays but it also broadened horizons for the students in the more commercial aspects of writing such as journalism and writing for film and television. Students were introduced to a broad array of opportunities; both in publishing, advertising, and institutional environments, where the skills that they were developing could find application. This program was comprehensive, as the music program was, in that students were allowed to have a focus that they wanted to pursue but they were

also required to learn about a broad range of writing careers and options.

In an article published 2 May 1980, James A. Perry quoted Mr. Whalen as stating "telling students the truth about pursuing a writing career saves a lot of time and trouble"(Perry). This "truth" that Mr. Whalen discussed was that it would not be easy to make a career out of writing but that it would take a great deal of work and personal discipline and that not everything the students wrote would be considered "good". The writing program, like the other disciplines at NOCCA, was geared toward helping students find their own direction within their chosen field without promoting the romanticized idea that it would be easy, or that success could be achieved without a great deal of effort and discipline.

#### Commonalities of Various Curricular Areas

Because there was a common primary goal for all students, supported by the supplemental objectives of providing in-depth training with the intent to develop self-sufficiency, to provide skills necessary for successful careers, and to develop an understanding of excellence in the arts; all disciplines had certain commonalities within their individual curriculum. All areas required a great deal of outside work and preparation in

the community, participating in arts events and simply practicing. A professional artist rarely follows what people outside of the arts consider "regular" work hours, such as an actor who may not work for six months but then works twelve to sixteen hour days for sixty days straight. Students needed to be made aware of the frequent necessity of extended activity from the onset of their training. "Only by forcing students into the professional mode can a career program provide the necessary information and experiences for a student to be able to make personal decisions about their place within or outside of the profession"(Kaufman, Tews and Milam 214).

In each program except for dance level one was tenth graders, level two was eleventh graders and level three was twelfth graders. At each level of study for respective disciplines, the commonalities in curricular goals were similar. While they are on level one which is the entry level, regardless of perceived talent or ability, students explored possible paths that were available within their discipline. Level two, which was the second year, students were all required to take the PSAT and begin corresponding with college level training facilities and performing companies. They were also advised to possibly consider alternative career paths. Once the students were in level three, their senior year, they were required to apply, and

audition, for future careers that they might consider viable options.

Level two and level three students were encouraged to look at, and categorize, alternative opportunities on three levels. The first level was what they considered a "long shot" or a future path that is highly selective and nationally recognized such as attending school at Yale or Julliard or a training program at the Bolshoi Ballet. This was a highly competitive option that they might not think they were likely to achieve. The second level was a more modest option, one that had national recognition but one that the student was more likely to achieve than the "long shot." Possible options for this may be public, nationally recognized programs like Southern Methodist University or working in a regional theatre like the Arena theatre in Houston, TX. The third level is what they thought of as the "sure thing" or, in other words, an option that is probably available to accept the student such as Louisiana State University as a place where they could continue their training in a broad liberal arts education or teaching. Someone who may be interested in being a costume designer may look at costuming as a trade. As third level students they were required to apply to at least five colleges and/or professional programs that fell into these categories (Kaufman, Tews and Milam 214).

At all levels of every discipline within NOCCA the faculty encouraged their students to pursue a diverse education within an area. One example of that is the requirement within the vocal music department for all vocal students to learn to play the piano. This allowed the students to become more well rounded within their discipline. One of the vocal music faculty, Mr. Henry Butler, stated, "you try to get them to learn the universal world of music" (Lee)

Following this pattern, every discipline attempted to teach its students that they must strive to be the best that they can be both in art and academics. This attitude runs contrary to the frequently prevailing attitude that students of the arts do not have time to do well in both. It was not only expected, it was demanded in the contracts that each student signed when they were accepted into the program. They were required to maintain high grades in their academic work at their feeder school in order to continue their work at NOCCA (NOCCA Student Guide). In order to meet the stringent requirements of their contracts, students needed to learn time management skills, how to prioritize, the value of hard work and how to implement their cognitive skills in all they did. This way they tied their arts education to both their academic courses and into their everyday lives. The symbiosis of arts education and academics was achieved not by someone saying this has to happen but by the

very nature of the educational process that NOCCA students underwent on a daily basis.

In the interview between Nate Lee of *Arcade Magazine* and Shirley Trusty Corey, Ms. Corey stated "I would like to see the disciplines we have grow richer, rather than adding more disciplines"(Lee). True to Ms. Corey's wishes, NOCCA did not add disciplines to the original program and, as a result, the school developed not only a strong curricular program but, an outstanding reputation. The students were not asked to spread their focus but to strengthen their talents within their chosen field. The idea was to build a specialized core of programs that would allow students to be exposed to many areas with mastery in one field rather than the idea that a student could master all aspects of a given art form. For example, a student was not expected to be a sculptor, a painter, a calligrapher all at the same time but they should be familiar with all of those areas but they could focus on one.

#### Location

1973 was a big year for NOCCA although the center didn't officially exist yet. On 11 June 1973 Corey made "her first public full-scale presentation of the Arts Center" at the regular Orleans Parish School Board meeting. She left the

meeting with the full endorsement and a commitment of up to one million dollars to renovate McDonogh 41. On 15 January the New Orleans Parish School Board officially moved to "adopt the concept" that Corey had set out (Kennedy 95).

McDonogh 41 was a dilapidated school that was located in close proximity to the Municipal Auditorium and Cultural Building II, where the symphony & opera were housed. It also happened to be in the area that was being planned as Armstrong Park. The New Orleans City Planning Commission had hired Lawrence Halprin and Associates, a San Francisco firm, to plan a park in honor of Louis Armstrong, New Orleans' native son and renowned musician. The park was to be located downtown (Kennedy 95). Although Halprin and Associates wanted the McDonogh 41 building demolished to make room for more profitable establishments, Corey's supporters began a campaign to utilize the school as the site for the new center for creative arts.

Mary-Kate Tews was the executive director of the Council of Arts for Children and she "wrote on behalf of numerous arts organizations to Halprin and Associates and to the New Orleans City Council in support of a combined Creative Arts Center and High School of the Arts" (Kennedy 95). This letter was just the beginning of a concerted effort to change Halprins' plans for McDonogh 41's future. As a part of Corey's plan she "organized a coalition of activists that prevented the McDonogh 41 building

from being demolished" (Kennedy 95). Corey acknowledged that "correspondence, personal dialogue, newspaper coverage, and interaction were choreographed by the Supervisor of Cultural Resources" (Corey, Interview) The plan included bringing political pressure and community action to establish the center within the Armstrong Park (Kennedy 96). As another part of this plan, Corey prevailed on Louis Armstrong's widow to write a letter to Mayor Moon Landrieu. The letter stated that "Louis would have been pleased to know the park would have a facility for high school students because of the opportunities it would afford the youth (Tews, M.K. 9 Aug 73). The political pressure caused by Corey's campaign delayed the demolition on McDonogh 41 but in the end, they lost the battle for the space. "It was a crushing defeat" (Kennedy 95).

"In August 1973, Dr. August Staub, Chairman of the Department of Drama and Communications at University of New Orleans (UNO) and a member of the Community Advisory Committee, offered the use of several classrooms on the third floor in the newly constructed Performing Arts Center on the LSUNO (Louisiana State University - New Orleans) campus" (Kennedy 98). UNO was the first home of NOCCA but it would only serve for one term as NOCCA needed more space in order to house a second incoming class.

In addition to UNO's space for theater and music, Corey and the board felt that it was important to begin visual arts that first semester as well and so Corey approached John Baird, the head of the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA). At first Mr. Baird said there was no space available, but Corey pointed out that she was aware of space in the basement that would be perfect for the class. Mr. Baird agreed and NOMA became the first home for the visual arts classes (Corey, Interview).

Although NOCCA had a home for its first term, Corey knew that they would need a new home by fall because they would have a second incoming class and the additional students would require more space. With continued pressure from the Community Liaison Board, Dr. Scarnato, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, acknowledged the need for a more permanent home. On 22 April 1974 the LaSalle Elementary School, located at 6048 Perrier Street, closed. It was a deteriorating neighborhood school that had a declining enrollment and so the remaining students were sent to Allen, Lusher, or McDonogh 24 elementary schools for the rest of the school year, leaving the LaSalle building empty (OPSB Minutes 22 April 1974). "On 14 May 1974, Dr. Scarnato sent a memo to the staff of NOCCA informing them that LaSalle Elementary School would be the new home for the Creative Arts Center for the 1974-75 school year (Kennedy 101). David Cuthbert of the Times-Picayune reported that LaSalle would

be NOCCA's new home until a new building could be constructed for the center (Cuthbert 6 June 1974).

Once the LaSalle location was formalized, the faculty, students and community worked together to make improvements that would enhance the usefulness of the space for the center. In 1976, NOCCA celebrated the completion of a renovation of the school's backyard. The yard was divided into three distinct sections: a study area, an amphitheater, and a basketball court, all created through the diligence and hard work of the NOCCA community. Included in this space were murals that were designed by Mr. Emery and painted by the students (Lee).

Although Shirley Trusty Corey was pleased that NOCCA had a home at the LaSalle Elementary School, she also realized that the center still needed a permanent home that was specifically designed to meet the needs of the specialized curriculum of the school. She stated in an interview with Nate Lee, a journalist with the Times-Picayune that "A theatre and performing arts space is essential to the center. Also, we need more music rooms" (Lee).

Despite its status as a "temporary" space, the LaSalle Elementary School remained the home of NOCCA for the next twenty-six years, from 1974 through 1999.

## Acceptance vs. Rejection

Acceptance was an issue that NOCCA had to deal with on many levels over the years. Acceptance vs. rejection of students based on ability and school affiliation was a legal and official issue. Students were accepted to NOCCA through a process of application, audition, and interview. Once the student was accepted to the school, then both the student and the student's parent or guardian was required to each sign a contract that the student would live by for the duration of their time at NOCCA. This contract included the not only standards of behavior for the time physically at the schools' location but also for the time they were anywhere as a representative of the school (i.e. on field trips, in concert, in performances, etc.), and it mandated that students of NOCCA were required to maintain a high GPA at both the feeder school and NOCCA. If a student allowed his or her grades at either school to drop they were put on probation and if the grades were not improved the following term the student would be asked to leave NOCCA. In addition to maintaining standards of behavior and good grades, the students had an annual evaluation by the faculty to determine whether or not the student would continue their studies at NOCCA the following year. (NOCCA student handbook) NOCCA had to fight for "the right to refuse the return of students who were not working

up to par" (Tews, Interview). According to Dr. Tews, they won that battle.

NOCCA also faced a battle involving the acceptance of students that were not a part of the public school system, but were a part of the parish. From the very beginning, acceptance into NOCCA was by audition. However, the administration had not considered the fact that this new school might attract private or parochial school students as well as public school students. In 1980, Harry Connick Jr. wanted to attend NOCCA and was turned down because he was not a public school student. His father, District Attorney Harry Connick Sr., wrote to the school board, arguing that since NOCCA was publicly funded, any qualified citizen of the parish should be able to attend (Connick). This issue was then brought to the school board, discussed at meetings, investigated, and then voted on at the 25 August 1980 meeting. After discussing the issue, the Board members voted 4 to 1 to accept private and parochial school students into NOCCA. Following the school board vote, Reporter Chris Gray wrote "Connick's action cleared the way for hundreds of other students, in private and parochial schools, from across southeastern Louisiana to attend NOCCA" (Kennedy 107)

Dr Tews had other battles to win as the school struggled in its fight to not only exist, but to be accepted as a real asset to the school district. As Dr. Tews began recruitment for NOCCA

students, he found that acceptance of the NOCCA program by faculty and staff of other Orleans Parish schools was also a challenge. Many teachers felt that NOCCA, like other magnet schools, was syphoning the best students away from home attendance centers, thus weakening their programs. (De LaCroix) Dr. Tews had to fight this attitude for his entire tenure at NOCCA (Tews Interview), and the students and faculty still fight this battle today (De LaCroix interview). There will always be some teachers who do not feel that NOCCA should take students away from the home schools' programs, but there are other teachers who fully accept and support the program. John Otis was one of the faculty members who began recommending students to NOCCA in 1975 and continued to do so until he became the Principal of NOCCA in 1985 (Otis, Interview).

#### John Otis

John Otis was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Principal of lengthy tenure at NOCCA. He served in that office from 1985 until 2003. In an interview with Mr. Otis, he said about Dr. Tews leaving NOCCA, "I couldn't believe my ears when I heard he was leaving after eleven years, and instantly thought 'well my God, that's me, that's my job', so I got busy" (Otis, Interview). Once in the position of

Principal, Otis says that it wasn't easy, but that he learned quickly.

I learned very quickly because I loved it, kids learn what they love and I was kind of a kid at 39 years old and I just ate it up and my steep learning curve served me well. I was able to master the process as Tom Tews had, inspired by my appreciation of the program, and it took a lot of delicate work and finessing over many years to ensure the integrity of that program, which was primary (Otis, Interview).

Mr. Otis was able to adapt to the challenges of his new position as the principal of NOCCA because he was like a kid there, eager to learn and to help the program grow. He, like his students, were excited to be at this institution and although there was a learning curve to being a principal rather than a teacher, he aided the school by bringing an excitement along with hard work to the position. His first concern was strengthening the program.

It's a strong program. It didn't start out as a strong program. I mean that Shirley Corey really worked hard to make it happen and once it opened, there obviously have been changes and developments that have taken it from simple music, acting, visual arts. I don't even think they

even had dance when they first opened their doors. So it's developed into this really big program (Otis, Interview). Part of strengthening the program involved effectively utilizing every increase that came to NOCCA.

Once I got . . . increased staffing through the state or good advocacy, or whatever it was, a point two or a point five, boy I held on to that because, to regular schools, a point two was not (important), you'd just throw it away, round off down, but to us that was program, that was an accompanist in vocal music or a part time art teacher or any number of things (Otis Interview).

Where most administrators would sweep a small percentage of a budget increase for staffing under the table, Otis grabbed each percentage and utilized it as fully as possible. For instance, if the school was granted a quarter-time position he would bring in a rehearsal pianist or another part time position and utilize that money within his budget as best he could to upgrade the faculty and staff. No percentage was left to be taken away by the school board. In addition to strengthening the program, he spent a great deal of time and energy focused on the development of a new facility.

Soon after I got to NOCCA we started looking at other sites, and planning, and consultants coming. Ben Graves was a wonderful consultant, the late Ben Graves was part of the

old Ford Foundation, a group of thinkers, and Shirley had known him from earlier NOCCA experience. He came in to do wonderful work with us, we bonded very well and out of that came the first book, about a telephone book thick document that then guided. That came in the late 80's or early 90's I suppose, but we looked at any number of places. So I guess longitudinally that whole new NOCCA work was pivotal in itself, even though it doesn't turn on a dime, it spans so many years (Otis Interview).

Because John Otis was so accepting of NOCCA from the time he began teaching in the Orleans Parish Schools he was an ideal candidate to become the principal who would follow up Dr. Tews as a long standing member of NOCCA's leadership. He not only strengthened NOCCA as an arts program but also spearheaded the design plans for a state-of-the arts facility that would eventually become NOCCA's permanent home, However, this transition would have far reaching implications for NOCCA's future as an educational institution transitioning from a locally run school to a state agency.

## Chapter Five

In Chapter Five, I chronicle NOCCA's transformation from a locally based, parish run school to a state conservatory as a part of its search for a permanent home. The events of this chapter take place from 2000 until the fall of 2011. Included in this chapter are ways in which NOCCA has expanded curricular offerings with the changes of both venue and leadership.

### New Facilities

When NOCCA was first created, a major obstacle faced by its leaders, students, and supporters was the battle to find a permanent home. NOCCA did not succeed in this battle until the year 2000, over a quarter of a century after its inception as a specialized high school in New Orleans. Under the direction of John Otis, NOCCA moved into a "permanent home" in the Fauberg Marigny area of New Orleans beginning with the 2000 academic year.

From the time that NOCCA moved into the LaSalle School on Perrier Street, those associated with the school knew it was not the home that they needed. To begin with, the facility was ill suited for the unique requirements of an arts school. The building lacked proper ventilation and airflow for paint fumes,

sculpture, and technology. It lacked proper rehearsal spaces for music and performance students. It did not even have suitable space to store easels for its visual art students. The most glaring lack associated with the building was that it had no theatre space. All performances had to be held off campus (Gray, "Artistic"). Although the students and faculty accepted these limitations and made the most of the facility, the organization continued to work to find, or create, a space that would resolve these problems.

Under the leadership of John Otis, the faculty and staff worked to locate a proper facility for NOCCA's permanent home. In the mid 1980s the school administrators finally decided on a group of warehouses in Fauberg Marigny that could be renovated to create the needed facility. Faculty members were consulted on the needs of each discipline and each provided a "wish list" for their areas. The Friends of NOCCA, formerly the Community Liaison Board, raised funds. The group raised \$7 million dollars for the new facility and acquired a commitment of \$17 million from the State of Louisiana for the renovation (Gray "Teens"). The school staff worked with architect Ed Mathes of the Mathes Group and Billes/Manning architects on developing the plans (MacCash).

The design for the new NOCCA was intended to blend the restored 19<sup>th</sup>-Century warehouses with created contemporary

structures. The final result was that the facility included five warehouses that take up "an entire block of the Fauberg Marigny beside the Mississippi River wharves" (MacCash). The facility was just downriver from the French Quarter and was well integrated into an historic and residential community.

In addition to being well integrated into the community, the new facility was state-of-the-art in its content. The space included Administrative offices, seminar rooms and studios, sprung-floor and wooden-floor dance studios, jazz classrooms, language labs, soundproof practice rooms, a black box theatre and a 300-seat theatre. For the visual arts, it included two studios for ceramics and print making along with both a gas and an electric kiln, computer labs for graphics, a painting studio with a view of the river, a portfolio assembly room, a photography lab and additional art studios for visiting artists.

In addition to the administrative and classroom spaces, the facility housed an art gallery, an audio-visual recording studio, a canteen for students to use for lunch, a fitness center, and a library which included carrels where students could listen to music and foreign language recordings (State Arts). In short, NOCCA now had the state-of-the-art facilities to ensure maximum implementation of its state-of-the-art curriculum.

Once the new facility was ready in the fall of 1999, the students were excited to move in but they were faced with another unexpected delay. The NOCCA Institute (formerly Friends of NOCCA) moved into the building, changed their name to NOCCA Institute and had begun an effort to have the State of Louisiana assume control of the school by making it a state institution, capable of meeting the needs of talented students from the entire state, not merely the residents of New Orleans and its environs. The reasons were financial; NOCCA needed a stable budget to ensure that the school would stay operational in spite of the financial needs of its new home. The NOCCA Institute claimed to believe that it had four State of Louisiana board members on its side, but the news reports showed that the Orleans Parish School Board was prepared to do battle to keep this 'crown jewel' within its jurisdiction" (Gray "Attorney's"). The resulting struggle resulted in major changes to the curriculum and structure that otherwise may not have happened had NOCCA remained under the auspices of the Parish School Board.

### Becoming a State Conservatory

Commenting on the sometimes chaotic conditions that ensued in attempting to make the transition from a local specialized

high school to a state wide conservatory, Dr. Otis said, "The actual move from Orleans Parish to the state was pivotal enough in itself and that whole span lasted oh maybe a year, year and a half, it was kind of a funny thing. I was basically serving two masters for a period of time" (Otis Interview).

In the summer of 1999, a meeting was held that included the NOCCA Institute and a few members of the Orleans Parish School Board. This discussion led to the NOCCA Institute approaching the State of Louisiana about taking over the school. The primary motivation for State oversight was financial in nature. The administration of NOCCA requested \$3.8 million to operate the new NOCCA for the 2000-2001 school year and the Orleans Parish School Board only allocated \$1.9 million (Gray "State to Shutter"). This disparity created a serious concern to the NOCCA Institute, who had raised the money to finance the new facility. In addition, the state had provided \$17 million dollars for the facility. The Orleans Parish School Board had not provided any funds for the physical rehabilitation of the facility. These factors helped to motivate the NOCCA Institute in their campaign to justify a state takeover. The position taken by the NOCCA Institute and the Governor's office was, "The School Board does not have the resources to nurture NOCCA to its full potential as a school, a cultural center, and a source of economic development" ("Digging"). This move was not greeted well by the

Orleans Parish School Board since it had "consistently referred to NOCCA as a 'crown jewel' in an otherwise troubled district" (Gray "Attorney's") and over the next several months, the battle played out both in meeting rooms and in the press.

Although the official players in the power struggle included the State of Louisiana, the Orleans Parish School Board, and the NOCCA Institute, which raised the funding for the new facility, the students and faculty were caught in the middle. They could not continue the move into the building until a settlement was reached, and the faculty felt they had not been adequately consulted on the issue of a state takeover (Elis, L). The faculty had concerns about its contracts because, if the state took over, members would no longer be a part of the Teachers' Union. The parents of students on the other hand, were concerned that if the School Board maintained control, the school would be in a constant struggle for adequate funding. The attorneys for all parties involved needed to come to an understanding so that NOCCA could continue one way or the other (Gray "Teens").

In late fall of 1999, an agreement was reached. The School Board would run NOCCA in its new facility for the spring semester of 2000, and then it would turn the program over to the State of Louisiana (Gray "Artistic"). According to the agreement between the Orleans Parish School Board and the State, in the

fall of 1999 the school could only use the school name or its acronym if used with an additional word not connected to the Orleans Parish School Board (NOCCA Reaching). That is why the school is now known as NOCCA|Riverfront instead of just NOCCA. In addition, the State "shall use the facility consistent with the history, traditions, goals and principles of the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts" (A Memorandum of Understanding). This guaranteed that the State would not change the goals or vision of the programs. It was legally bound to maintain the standards and curriculum previously set by the Orleans Parish School Board.

On January 25, 2000, the students attended classes in the new facility for the first time. Chris Grey of the *Times-Picayune* stated, "After 10 years of construction delays, financial roadblocks and political dust-ups, the \$23 million New Orleans Center for Creative Arts|Riverfront campus will debut Tuesday, opening a new chapter for the South's premier arts school" (Gray "Artistic").

During the spring Legislative session of 2000, the Louisiana Legislature passed the Revised Statute RS 17:1970:21 - 26 which turned the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts/Riverfront into a state agency (*Louisiana Revised Statutes*). In a statement to the *Times-Picayune*, Mr. Otis said "We were funded, are funded, out of the governor's budget just

like Louisiana High School for Math, Science, and the Arts up in Natchitoches" (Digging)

According to the new legislation, the intent of NOCCA|Riverfront was:

to honor the history and past contribution of the state to the creative and performing arts, and to provide continuing opportunities for the development of young artists by preserving and enlarging a program for providing professional training to high school students by reorganizing the program as a state agency (Louisiana State LA Acts 2000).

The legislation included language that would enforce a consistency with the program's history and goals. It did not attempt to change those goals but to provide a stable financial backing in which it had already invested \$17 million. As a part of a local school system the chance of the whole program being cut was much higher than the possibility of the state eliminating a full agency.

The transformation to a state agency also opened up access to the school for students from around the state. As a member of the Orleans Parish School system NOCCA was geared to accept students only from the New Orleans proper area, but as a state agency, the school was open to any resident of Louisiana, free of charge. This change expanded the adjustment that was made in

1980, when Harry Connick, Sr. forced the Orleans Parish School Board to accept students from private and parochial schools in Orleans Parish through the threat of a lawsuit. In Chris Grey's article "An Artistic Triumph," Mr. Connick was quoted as saying that "The school should be open to every talented student in the state" (Gray "Artistic"). As a state agency, NOCCA|Riverfront is now open to every talented student in Louisiana. Due to geography and transportation issues, the largest percentage of students served were still from the Southeastern Parishes, but there are programs provided on weekends and in the summer to bring students in from anywhere in the state.

One downside to the takeover by the state, according to one interviewee, who was a former student of NOCCA, was that serving the whole state diminished the percentage of minority or students of color at the school (Signal). The rebuttal to this concern is that NOCCA was created to fill the needs of talented students without regard to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status or any other demographic concerns. The other argument is that since NOCCA|Riverfront now serves the entire State of Louisiana it should reflect the demographics of the state, not merely the population of Orleans Parish. Regardless, no official study has been done since the school changed hands regarding the demographics of its student body.

Overall, NOCCA's purpose was to provide arts training to talented students. The first and last concern in the audition/interview process for admission is to find students who would be well served by the program without regard to where they come from in the state. John Otis believed that the minority representation within the school has always been a good sample of New Orleans' demographics because the program is available to all residents. Acceptance into the program only considers audition/interview results, not his/her demographic profile (Otis Interview).

The most important reason for the state to control NOCCA, according to the new administration and faculty of NOCCA|Riverfront, is that the school is now budgeted as its own entity. It is a separate line item in the state budget, and so it is more likely to survive, even in a difficult economy (Otis Interview, Adamo Interview, Corey Interview, Wedburg Interview).

### Expanding Curriculum

The move to a new facility and the change from being a local, public school to a state agency, necessitated internal changes as well. For example, the curriculum was adjusted and expanded. The administration did not add to the established disciplines, but it allowed a few specialized fields to become

focus areas in themselves within those established disciplines. For instance, within the visual arts discipline, new Media Arts such as film, photography and television had been developing since the beginning of NOCCA, but in the new facility, Media Arts was able to develop as a defined focus area. This new area brought the skills needed for the film and recording industries into their own as a specific area of study. The new facility included filming and recording studios so the move provided the means by which students were allowed to focus and explore more deeply an interest within this field (*NOCCA Student Handbook*).

As with each of the larger disciplines, the focus areas included both critical thinking and practical application within each course that was required. Each year a student would take Media Arts, Digital Graphics & Animation and a software course prevalent within the media arts field such as Final Cut Pro training or Digidesign ProTools training. These courses would give the students a basis in the history and terminology of film, video, audio and digital media along with the theoretical background required to understand the field. These courses were essentially a series of workshops where the students not only learned the basics but applied those skills through practical exercises which allowed an internalization of the cognitive skills needed to trouble shoot and execute projects.

Theatre also developed new areas to augment its already successful programs in performance. Theatre Design became a focus area for students interested in the technological aspects of theatre, as opposed to only focusing on performance. In terms of critical thinking courses the design students must learn the history and theories of design throughout history within the technology, scenery and properties, costume, and stage lighting areas. The students within this focus area study are required to work on all productions presented by dance, theatre and musical theatre programs. This provides the practical aspect to their training program. There were also students who needed a program that would permit them to develop a merger between music and theatre. For these students, a musical theatre track was developed within the theatre department.

As a musical theatre focus, students were required to take dance courses and music courses as well as theatre courses. In Dance they were to take jazz, ballet and tap which were both critical and practical in nature. In Music these students took music theory and musical theatre history focusing on critical thinking as well as studio voice and vocal ensemble that were the practical application courses. In addition to these dance and music classes the musical theatre students took courses within the acting program along with the drama students. Although technical theatre and musical theatre officially fall

within the theatre discipline, they developed as integrated focus areas that involve multiple disciplines.

There is an additional area that was added in the fall of 2011; it is a culinary arts program. This is a new discipline that was tested and developed during the summer program and on weekends of the three years prior to its official addition into the curriculum. As with all programs at NOCCA, the funding arm, NOCCA Institute, led the evaluation with the help of renowned Chef, and television personality, Emeril Lagasse. Mr. Lagasse is also aided in the development of the culinary arts curriculum. While the area of culinary arts does not seem to fit into the performance aspect world of NOCCA, this addition shows a growing understanding that the arts are not merely the fine arts but that all arts require attention and training. In addition, adding the culinary arts reflects a large part of New Orleans and Louisiana culture, renowned for its cooking.

The fall of 2011 also saw the addition of a new academic program. This program was developed so that students would be able to attend from anywhere in the state without having to travel between a "home" school and NOCCA during the school day. This academic program allows students to attend academic classes at NOCCA in the morning while the other students were at their home schools and then go into their arts courses in the afternoon at the same location (NOCCA "Academic Studio"). This

is the first step toward a residential program. This new academic program is designed to teach students in the integrated way that it teaches the arts and carries that method through all of the courses during the school year. These academic courses are not taught in a traditional way but they combine math and science in one course and the humanities are taught together. To implement this program, five new faculty members have been hired to teach in the morning hours with students taking their arts courses in the afternoons as has been traditionally done at NOCCA. (New Orleans Center for Creative Arts "Academic Studio")

To aid in the development and accessibility of NOCCA's programs to students from regions outside of a reasonable commuting distance, there are plans to construct dormitories in order to house students from various parts of the state who would be unable to attend without on campus housing. (Hassbrock, personal communication) All of these curriculum/curricular expansions and shifts reflect NOCCA's awareness of growing trends and changes in arts education and also indicate their desire to stay current and to serve a wider population. It is also indicative of how pervasive the arts in any format are to a thorough grounding in an educational setting hence the academic studio program that has the integrated package they put together. This reinforces the concept that arts education is a vital component in education. NOCCA always realized that

academics were important, but it was finally able to integrate academics totally into what it does and not separate them. This symbiotic relationship between arts and the traditional core curriculum has resulted in this final academic program that allows NOCCA to draw in a greater population of students from across the state. In addition, the new academic program reflects their educational model and it keeps the arts central but it uses the arts to reinforce the cognitive development that comes out of arts in all of its courses.

#### Hurricane Katrina

While NOCCA is first and foremost an institution of learning it also serves as a place for students, faculty and staff to come together as a supportive family that may depend on each other in times of crisis. At no time was this more evident than during and immediately following the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina. As Hurricane Katrina tore through Louisiana and Mississippi, it left a trail of destruction. On August 28, 2005, Hurricane Katrina was in the Gulf of Mexico, where it powered up to a Category 5 storm on the Saffir-Simpson hurricane scale, packing winds estimated at 175 mph. At 7:10 a.m. EDT on August 29, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in southern Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, just south of Buras, as a

Category 3 hurricane. Maximum winds were estimated near 125 mph to the east of center (National Oceanic & Atmospheric Association).

The schools throughout the city were closed with no certainty as to when or if they would reopen. Some saw this as a possible time for improvements and others saw it as a loss, but it was unclear as to the impact that the storm would have on NOCCA.

Gary A. Woods was the Principal of NOCCA when Katrina hit and, although there is not much information available about what happened during the fall semester, the school survived the storm (Hassbrock). According to Matt Hassbrock, the school's librarian, Martin Adamo, the schools' non-arts teacher, and John Otis, the schools longest tenured Principal, the school survived the devastation of Katrina due to Gary Woods persistence and leadership throughout the crisis.

Mr. Woods' tenure with NOCCA|Riverfront was short but vital. He came in as CEO of the new state school, and when the hurricane destroyed the city, he maintained communication with students, faculty and staff as best he could via the Internet. He was able to post updates to the school's web site, making it a place for NOCCA community members to contact each other. This was important because the city of New Orleans faced a mandatory

evacuation order during the storm and many people were lost to their loved ones.

Many of those who lost everything in the storm and its aftermath were left unsure of their futures and where they might have to go. Mr. Woods helped NOCCA students find similar programs that they could attend in other parts of the country. He contacted other arts programs, and he facilitated the design of classes that were held in alternate facilities in the spring semester. The fall following the storm, he saw to it that the school was reopened in its home on Chartres Street (Adamo). By following through with the students in an effort to pull families together and locate new programs for students to continue in as well as reopening the school as quickly as possible showed that Mr. Woods was maintaining Ms. Corey's vision for a school that tied students, faculty and community together.

## Chapter Six

### Structural History Summation & Next Steps

The structural history of NOCCA provided here indicates that in spite of having an overall dismal reputation for elementary and secondary education, Louisiana does contain an exemplary school where students get excellent training in the arts that helps to improve their cognitive skills and aids in the general learning these students receive at their feeder schools. Studies on arts education, the efficacy of arts education and the changes in legislation have shown a shift from the idea of arts as extracurricular to academic in nature (Title 10, Part D; Title III, Sec. 302).

This shift in thought could be demonstrated by the success of students in both their arts training and in their core course work. Two highly visible examples of student success are Harry Connick Jr., who has become a recognizable artist in music, on stage, and in film; and Wynton Marsalis who has won multiple Grammy Awards for his music over the years since his graduation from NOCCA in 1978. These are probably the two most prominent of many former students who have gone on to become highly successful in their careers after studying at NOCCA. (Harry Connick Jr. did not graduate from NOCCA but is still loyal to the program and does return for various events.) Additional

examples of successful graduates from NOCCA are: Actor Terence Blanchard, Costume Stylist Elizabeth Staub, Opera singer Jeanne-Michelle Charbonnet, and actor Wendell Pierce, all of whom make a living in their chosen substantive fields both regionally and nationally.

NOCCA's program was originally developed to serve the gifted and talented students of Orleans Parish but has expanded into a conservatory program designed to meet the needs of students from across Louisiana. It has also become a model for other arts schools around the country and internationally. Additionally, it serves the arts education community through its presence in the Art Schools Network where it maintains its status as one of the founding organizations.

NOCCA's founder, Shirley Trusty Corey, believed in a three-pronged approach of training students, training teachers, and serving the community. This approach was developed and fine-tuned over the course of NOCCA's history and continues to be nurtured by current faculty and administration.

NOCCA was not designed to be a traditional high school. Once the center was opened in 1974, it was different from conventional school programs in that its students attended a half-day at their feeder school where they took core courses required for graduation and then spent the afternoons at NOCCA studying their arts. The coursework at NOCCA was practical,

hands-on training that included workshops, discussions and critical analysis of the students' own work, as well as the work of their peers and the critique of their faculty. In this way, students not only received vocational training but also developed cognitive skills through application, reflection and analysis.

The focus of the school began with the traditional fields of theatre, music, and visual arts but added dance a semester after the school opened. In 1977, it again expanded programming with creative writing. For many years NOCCA retained the features of a typical fine arts academy; however, innovations in the concept of "art" led to curricular additions in areas such as film and media to the school's offerings. NOCCA has also added a culinary arts program in 2011 that has been developed with the aid of Emeril Lagasse and his alma mater, Johnson & Wales University. This addition has shown a broadening of the definition of the arts and arts education to include not merely what has been traditionally referred to as the "fine arts," but also the commercial arts as well.

In addition to changes in the disciplines it offered, the school transformed into a state agency, taking in students from across Louisiana. This shift necessitated the formation of an in-house academic studio for students from outside the Orleans

Parish area. In this way NOCCA has stayed current with and receptive to the needs of its students throughout the state.

### Conclusions

This study provides an historical setting of arts education using NOCCA as a fulcrum. It maintains that the NOCCA model is a positive approach to meet the needs of gifted students within the arts. Through further study we can extrapolate that the arts can help improve education within the State of Louisiana. There are people in Louisiana who do not agree with this approach, who believe that these students should be left in their feeder schools to help improve the arts by being examples to other students in their feeder schools.

On a micro level NOCCA serves the needs of gifted and talented students within the State of Louisiana by providing a training program that focuses on the arts as a realistic career choice. One-way Ms. Corey made this possible was the use of teacher/artists which included practitioners with real world experience to balance the instructors with traditional academic training. The use of such artists required Ms. Corey to acquire trade in industry certification for these people to teach at NOCCA. This was important so that students would learn the realities of a career in the arts.

The second way that NOCCA meets the needs of gifted students on the micro level is through its curricular design. A couple of examples of the non-traditional teaching method include the "Performance Core and the Companies" class in the theatre curriculum. In this course, the class was divided into five companies where each company moved through the curriculum together. Every Friday each company was responsible for a one-hour performance which would be viewed and critiqued not only by the faculty but also their peers.

In the visual arts an example of the non-traditional teaching method included a project which was used one year in a calligraphy class where the students were required to learn to make their own reed pens and then those pens were used to create the art for the next assignment. Learning to create the tools to be used to make art is not a process frequently taught in secondary schools and yet by using this method, NOCCA students gain more professional style training that makes them better prepared to succeed within their art. They gained a better application of the tool and the application of the tool. The faculty also used honest critique of students work and progress, which showed the students that the arts were not an easy field in which to find success but through hard work, reflection, and critical analysis, could enhance their ability to achieve their goals.

On a macro level NOCCA serves as an indicator of the success of the efficacy of arts education in curricula within Louisiana. Although NOCCA's structure is unique, the synergetic relationship between its arts components and its general education components provide a structural model which indicates a high degree of success based upon NOCCA's graduation rates and the percentages of its students continuing onto advanced training on scholarships. More than 95% of the students that attend NOCCA go on to either college or professional training programs in their fields when they leave NOCCA. (NOCCA study of graduating class 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010) Structurally it is apparent that students are pushed to improve when they are not achieving the expected standards. They are held to a higher standard both at NOCCA and at their home schools. Students, and their parents, are required to sign contracts upon acceptance into the program pledging that they will maintain high standards, and if the students do not uphold their end of the contract, they are asked to leave the program.

Not all students pursue professions in the arts upon leaving NOCCA but even those who do not go onto careers in the arts leave with valuable skills and an understanding of how to pursue their dreams through training and hard work. Students are taught that there are various levels of success and that some of

those can be achieved through hard work and skill where other levels require luck in addition. They understand that dedication is necessary to complete what they set out to do and they can apply their skills and work habits to any endeavor that they choose to pursue. Critical analysis and practical application gained from the coursework at NOCCA may be applied to all areas of life. The students are consistently pushed to improve and they take that lesson out into the world with them.

#### Implications for Future Study

The first caveat that must be made in this study is the dearth of available quantitative material. Over the years NOCCA has simply not made the gathering of statistical data regarding student demographics, ratio of student application to acceptance into the program, completion rates and other numerical information a part of its formal archives. It has focused more on amassing programmatic documents that, while useful to a structural study and the creation of an historical overview, do not provide the hard numbers necessary to back up many of the assertions that can be drawn from an analysis of the available data. However, this does not mean that these figures do not exist at all. It simply means that the information has not been compiled in a way that is beneficial to NOCCA.

For example, student performance on standardized tests requires retrieving that data from each individual student's feeder school as that is where the tests are administered, not through NOCCA. After the gathering of those scores, statistical matrices would need to be created to allow for demographics, margin of error, median shift, etc. on the conclusions that can be drawn from this information. As a person trained in the practice of history, this falls outside my purview. As a result of this, this type of research simply lies outside the scope of this study and requires collaboration with a trained statistical researcher experienced in the compilation and manipulation of said data. Therefore it is logical that the next step in this process would be to turn over my research to someone within the field of educational statistics with whom I could collaborate to flesh out and formalize my conclusions to see if my hypothesis bears itself out.

All previously compiled statistical data must be revisited for purposes of verification since NOCCA's interest in gathering this information seems random at best. For example, the statistic that 95% of its students and that those graduates go on to attend advanced programs in their arts over the years 1992 until 2009 needs to be revisited. This percentage needs to be looked at for factors such as what the phrase "consistently

graduated" means, how was this statistic reached, what were the factors being considered, and where this data came from.

Although I cannot compile and analyze the data on my own, it is possible to speculate what data might be useful to help guide and balance the study in order to prove or disprove my hypothesis. First and foremost, the available statistical data that claims that NOCCA consistently graduates 95% of its students and that those students go on to attend college or training programs in their field must be revisited, reanalyzed and problematized because at first glance such a blanket statistic appears specious. Although they were not introduced until 2000 it is worth examining the results of standardized tests scores from students home schools to gage scores in their general education subjects.

Since NOCCA also admits students into its various programs as young as in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade one can consider not only graduate exit exams but also 8<sup>th</sup> grade exams also other forms of the LEAP test administered to younger students for comparison purposes. Another form of data that needs to be gathered is information on alumni status and success rates 5, 10 and 15 years down the road. This may require the creation of a database and surveys or questionnaires to compile information about job status, work inside and outside artistic fields, and student perceptions of their NOCCA education on their overall quality of life. Finally,

gather data from students at NOCCA's home schools who do not go to NOCCA about their arts education experience and its perceived impact on their education. All of these places would be excellent starting points for compiling the quantitative evidence needed to test my initial hypothesis about the efficacy of arts education in Louisiana.

### The Future of NOCCA

As with any organization that exists for a long period of time, NOCCA will continue to evolve. Hopefully, the changes that take place will be constrained within the parameters set by historical precedent. The students will come first. The arts will continue to be taught in an interdisciplinary way that encourages not merely memorization and repetition but develops cognitive abilities through critical thinking and practical application. These skills will be used in every area of the students' studies and in their lives as they move on to fulfill their dreams after they leave NOCCA. The reciprocal relationship between the arts and other academic areas will continue to aid in all areas of the students studies.

The training of artists at NOCCA will ebb and flow with changes in successive administrations and also due to budgetary fluctuations that are inevitable in publically funded programs.

However, the students must continue to be the most important concern within the program. If the school's administration is able to continue to direct and control growth with the prudent enthusiasm demonstrated by previous leaders, the program will continue to grow and strengthen, and the numbers of students that will be trained will continue to increase, benefitting not only themselves, but the entire nation through their creative processes. Future programs will be initiated and will develop, not merely reflecting societal changes, but contributing to our nation's ever evolving culture, as the programs initially included under the eyes of Ms. Corey and Dr. Tews have so successfully done. These things can only happen if the state continues to maintain a budget that allows NOCCA|Riverfront to be administered independently, free from constraints so frequently imposed by political processes.

John Otis said it well when he said:

"NOCCA exists not for any kid, or every kid, but for those students who need this to fully realize their potential. For students, whether they are successful in the program or not, to bite into that and see how it works for them. Some take it far and some transfer that learning to other fields. It's my hypothesis that that feeling, that sense of things, is transferable. If I've grown up as an artist in training, that

visual art and I go to law school. Then I know I've got to be that good with these different tools and these different things to work with, and I know the feeling, I know what it takes, and how much time it takes. I know what I have to give up. I know I can't do everything. All of those modalities are results of training and the internalization of it is a taste, provides a taste, of Maslow's top level and can be transferrable" (Otis Interview)

The faculty and staff of NOCCA are there for the students. The program is there for the students, and the facility is there for the students. As long as New Orleans and Louisiana continue to support this program, children will continue to benefit from a strong program that does stand as a "crown jewel" in a state where a quality education can be difficult to achieve. And many, who might have failed in a program that didn't challenge them enough, will succeed because they have had the opportunity to experience the feeling, the emotions, consistent with giving their all to achieve a goal that they have set for themselves.

Those are the characteristics that lift ordinary men and women to greatness. Those are the experiences that teachers and administrators at the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts strive to have their students know.

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## Vita

Suzanne Michelle Blanchard Chambliss received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from Utah State University in 1994. She holds a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Southern Mississippi, which she completed in 1998. She is a member of the International Association of Theatrical and Stage Technicians local 478 in Louisiana and Southern Mississippi as well as a member of the Costume Designers Guild local 892 in Los Angeles, California. She is an active member of the theatre and film industries in Louisiana. The degree of Doctor of Philosophy will be conferred on her at the May 2012 Commencement at Louisiana State University.