PROJECT

Modernized visual arts facilities will transform education

Decades-long impact planned

By Lou Ponsi
contributing writer

Speaking in front of stakeholders at the preview event for Cal State Fullerton's $65 million Visual Arts Modernization Project, College of the Arts Dean Arnold Holland talked about how technology has transformed the way art is created.

Illustrations once created using pen and paper, 3D models once crafted from clay, and photographs once produced with film and a darkroom are now being imagined and produced on computer screens with cutting-edge software in modern facilities, Holland said.

"The visual arts modernization project will position our visual arts program as a leader in visual arts education and practice of the arts," Holland said during the Jan. 28 event, held in the atrium of the Clasius Performing Arts Center, across the walkway from the heavy equipment working at the site of the future visual arts complex. "For decades to come, this incredible complex will provide our students with the tools, technologies and innovations they need to inspire their academic and creative ambitions, transforming how we teach, share, engage in and experience art."

The original buildings making up the College of the Arts were designed to accommodate up to 1,200 students when they were constructed 60 years ago.

Today, there are nearly twice that many art students, said Jade Jewett, former chair of the Visual Arts Department, who has served as a consultant for the modernization project for five years, working with the architect and builders.

"We've kind of been packed in like sardines, so it is exciting that we are going to have the scale of buildings and facilities to meet our needs," Jewett said.

Construction got underway in August 2022 and is expected to be completed in fall 2026, Jewett said.

Planning for the project began about six years ago. It includes the construction of two new buildings, G and H, adding more than 122,000 square feet to the complex, along with major renovations to two existing buildings.

Building G will be a 15,000-square-foot, single-story space that will house the Nicholas and Lee Begovich Gallery, three student galleries, an arts research library and a room for artists to prepare and store exhibit pieces.

Building H will be a two-story, 37,000-square-foot structure running parallel to State College Boulevard.

The first floor of Building H will house illustration and animation studios, computer lab, computer commons room and the new dean's suite.

A variety of instructional spaces will be on the second floor, including a green screen room, multiple computer labs and a film screening area.

Building F was demolished in fall 2022 to make way for Building H.

Building A, which is the previous home of the Nicholas and Lee Begovich Gallery, will undergo light renovations to create more space for graduate students.

The renovations include the addition of studio space, painting and drawing areas, and a maker's space for graduate projects. The visual arts department offices will remain in Building A.

The first floor of Building E will be upgraded to include drawing and painting rooms, instructional space for art education, a 2-D foundations classroom and an instructional space for art education and faculty offices.

Building E's second floor will house the photography department with two studios, a room for large-scale printing, a darkroom and a photo computer lab.

A state grant is funding the bulk of the $65 million for the project. The College of the Arts plans to raise an additional $10 million to equip classrooms and work spaces with the latest technology.

Fine art photographer Darryl Curran, former chair of the CSUF Art Department and founder of the university's photography program, donated a $250,000 endowment for the project.

"The whole idea of visual arts as being part of the overall experience of anybody in the state is important and so we need to train those students to provide that," Curran said. "Part of that training needs to be supported, so that is what I am trying to do ... and everybody else is trying to do. We are trying to influence donors to come forward and do the same thing."

CSUF President N. Fram Virjee, who played a leading role in securing the grant for the project, pointed out that the university's visual arts department is the largest in the Cal State system and has helped shape the creative landscape of the county and region, despite operating in spaces built decades ago.

"They bring us a love of the world, helping us to see the world in a different way," Virjee said. "They have been learning and creating in facilities that have been built more than 50 years ago, but that is about to end."