

Expressions

Volume 11

SJSU | COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND THE ARTS

Table of Contents

<i>Meet Chris Burrill, the Hammer’s New Director!</i>	3
<i>Martha Heasley Cox: A Legacy of Giving</i>	5
<i>Animation/Illustration: Going Beyond SJSU</i>	7
<i>Profile: Ruby Ramírez</i>	9
<i>Profile: Andrea Bechert</i>	11
<i>Profile: Jennifer Johnson</i>	13
<i>Profile: Vanessa Fernández</i>	15
<i>Profile: Michael Locher</i>	16
<i>Profile: Sarah Jones-Hayes</i>	18
<i>It’s a Dean’s Life Vol. 11</i>	20

Meet Chris Burrill, the Hammer's New Director!



Meet Chris Burrill, the Hammer's New Director

The Hammer Theatre has a new (and first!) Executive Managing Director, Chris Burrill. Coming to us from Orange County where he previously directed the Irvine Barclay Theatre, Chris brings years of experience to oversee operations at the Hammer Theatre, using his previous successes as a

model for moving the Hammer forward.

"The Hammer Theatre has enormous potential both as a performance space and as a community center," he says. "Many times when you have a university in a city, there's a virtual wall between students and residents, between the school and the city. A place like the Hammer tears down those walls, integrating the university within the larger community. Plus, it's a spectacular building. 530 seats and not a bad view in the house."

Chris has worked in the theater for most of his life, starting at Disneyland as a "blue polyester person." "I did lighting design and was a stagehand for performances at the different stages around the park, like the river stage and the space stage. Our uniform was blue pants and blue polos, so we called ourselves the 'blue polyester people.' It was a great introduction into the industry."

Chris continued working in the theater, eventually becoming director at the Irvine Barclay Theatre, where he worked for nearly 27 years. "With the Irvine Barclay Theatre," he says, "I was there from the beginning—even in the construction stages. I appreciate coming to the Hammer where everything in the building is finished and ready to go. From the lighting, to the sound, to the stage dimensions, everything at the Hammer is top notch, which means I can focus all of my energy on bringing in performers and putting on great shows."

So what are his plans as director? "Right now," he says, "we're focusing on staffing and finishing a few additional renovations. We're starting with performances from the College of Humanities and the Arts, but we want all departments at SJSU to know that we're ready to work with them, too." Burrill is also coordinating productions with local and national arts groups, seeking to make the Hammer a premiere performance spot in Downtown San Jose. "We've got several big events

coming up," he says. "The goal now is to turn several into many. Success for me is making this place busy!"

Burrill also sees future success in the opportunities the Hammer provides for students. "This is a spot to train and mentor students from the production side of things—lighting, sound, performance management, or even the front of house or in the box office." Students are also encouraged to stage their own events at the Hammer. "Each production is a tremendous learning experience for everyone involved," he says.

"The Hammer Theatre is an open opportunity for anyone interested in getting involved at any level," Chris says. "Seriously! Come and volunteer, come take a tour, come talk to us. We're your theater."

To volunteer, inquire about rental rates, or check out upcoming events, visit the Hammer website at <http://www.sjsu.edu/hammertheatre/>.

Martha Heasley Cox: A Legacy of Giving

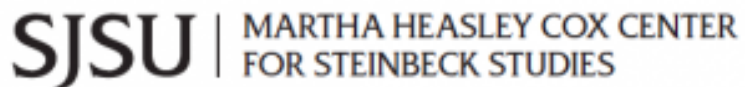


Martha Heasley Cox: A Legacy of Giving

The College of Humanities and the Arts is deeply grateful for a bequest from the estate of Martha Heasley Cox in the amount of \$4.8 million. The gift is dedicated to the Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies, which houses one of the world's largest archives of materials related to John Steinbeck.

The Steinbeck Center grew out of Martha's single-minded commitment to Steinbeck's work. During her 34 years of teaching at SJSU, she focused her research on Steinbeck, and collected the materials that serve as the foundation for the Center's collection. Martha provided financial support for Center operations for many years, including the Center's signature Steinbeck Fellows Program, which provides emerging writers with a \$10,000 fellowship to finish a significant writing project. Approximately 75% of the bequest will expand the Fellows program, which currently brings two to three scholars to campus per year to write and share their work. Thus far, the Center has hosted 38 Fellows, including writers of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry.

Associate Professor Nick Taylor, the Director of the Center for Steinbeck Studies, explains that



the gift will bring the Steinbeck Fellows Program one step closer to Martha's vision. "Martha imagined that we would have enough money to bring all these people to campus—a fiction writer, a dramatist, a journalist, a marine biologist—and have them sit around a table and share their work." The bequest will allow the Center to greatly expand the program and invite a wider range of scholars to join the campus community as they further their work.

The bequest will also allow the Center to expand their online secondary bibliography, a database that Martha dreamed would include "absolutely everything that's ever been written about Steinbeck." The bequest will allow the dedication of more resources to the project, working to realize Martha's original vision.

"The true value of the vision of some people gets revealed years after they're gone," remarked Nick Taylor. "Martha was pretty insistent in her lifetime about what she wanted to do and what she wanted to accomplish. She proves that your work can be continued on in exactly the same manner that you intended it long after you're gone. All of the mechanisms are in place—endowments and physical

spaces, collections, awards series. She was incredibly generous with the University; she loved this place. And she'll never be forgotten." Professor Cox's generosity exemplifies the tremendous impact that a visionary donor can have on generations of students, faculty, and community members.

By Kaitlynn Magnuson & Associate Dean Kathleen McSharry

Animation/Illustration: Going Beyond SJSU

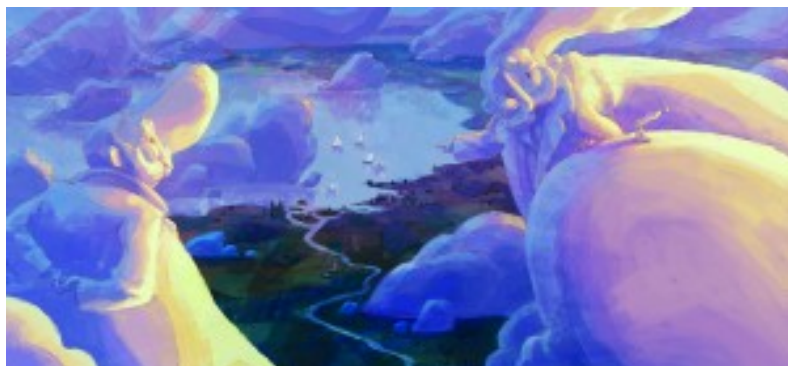
Animation/Illustration: Making a Difference Beyond SJSU



Consistently ranked as one of the premier programs in the nation, the Animation and Illustration program at San José State is no stranger to success. Students regularly win prestigious national and international recognition at festivals, exhibitions, and screenings, and gain opportunities for employment at top studios and corporations. Graduates have gone on to work for companies like Apple, Disney, Electronic Arts, Google, Lucasfilm, DreamWorks, and Pixar, to name a few, and have worked on feature films such as *Brave*, *How to Train Your Dragon*, *Star Wars*, and

many more, widening the impact that SJSU alumni are having on the film and game industry.

Noah Klocek, an artist and designer who graduated from the program in 2003, has worked for Industrial Light & Magic (ILM), DreamWorks, and Pixar, bringing to life animated films and shorts as well as picture books. Drawing inspiration from nature, his family, and the stories around him, Noah came to SJSU wanting to be a book illustrator, knowing very little about the animation industry, film design, or production. "I landed at San José State just when the Animation/ Illustration program was making a transition from book and editorial illustration into animation and film design," Noah recalled. "Along with an incredibly strong design skill set, SJSU's strongest effect on me and my career was carrying me along through the same transition from traditional illustration to development art and beyond." This transition would guide his career as he worked on his first project at Pixar Studios, *Wall·E*; he would go on to work on feature-



length films such as *Brave*, *The Good Dinosaur*, and *Inside Out*, as well as the animated short “Partly Cloudy,” which was screened before Pixar’s *Up*.

Noah’s work in the film industry is done alongside his “passion project” —writing and illustrating picture books. He explains, “I strive to make the kind of books that I loved when I was young—books filled with drawings and paintings; books with characters and imagination and adventure.” His first picture book, *Cloud Country*, was published in November 2015. As Noah went through the process of creating *Cloud Country*, he filled sketchbooks with drawings—*Cloud Country* would go through five complete versions before it was published. The dedication that Noah shows to his projects, both in the film industry and his own undertakings, is a testament to the rigor of SJSU’s Animation and Illustration program.

“There is not a top-tier animation or video game studio I know of in the U.S.A. that does not have one or more SJSU alumni working with them,” Noah remarked, highlighting the breadth of work and impact that SJSU graduates have on the entire industry. “The Animation and Illustration program at SJSU is something the University should be immensely proud of.”

The Animation and Illustration program has also played a role in leading collaborations with other departments. Animation Professor David Chai is working to develop projects such as Green Ninja—an educational initiative created by an interdisciplinary team to spark young people’s interest in the science of and solutions associated with the changing climate. The project, which has garnered more than two million views on YouTube, brings faculty and students from across the university together to make a difference, creating connections between the ever-growing SJSU community and the world around us. The College of Humanities and the Arts is proud that our programs provide students with an opportunity to gain the skills necessary to achieve excellence and effect social change through the arts.

You can check out more of Noah’s work at imageblock.com. To see what Green Ninja is up to, visit www.youtube.com/user/GreenNinjaTV.

By Kaitlynn Magnuson

Profile: Ruby Ramírez



Ruby Ramírez, Ph.D. — Assistant Professor of Spanish, Department of World Languages and Literatures

Born and raised in East Los Angeles and proud to have graduated from the CSU system herself, Ruby Ramírez is one of the newest faculty members to join the SJSU Department of World Languages and Literatures. Coming to the SJSU community from Santa Clara University, and prior to that from Utah State University, Ruby is excited to share her experiences with her students, and to encourage, inspire, and motivate them the same way that her professors did with her during her time at California State University, Dominguez Hills.

Desiring to help her students become better critical readers, thinkers, and writers, Ruby encourages engagement with different cultural texts that act as lenses for intellectual engagement. Ruby says, "As a teacher, I strive to foster an open and respectful attitude toward cultural differences by enhancing the multiple perspectives that a diverse student population and community embody." She firmly believes that faculty create effective learning environments when they are actively aware of students' social, political, and cultural contexts.

This is reflective of the research she has done over the course of her academic career. After graduating from California State University, Dominguez Hills with a B.A. in Spanish Language and Literature and in Chicana/o Studies, followed by an M.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies, Ruby went on to earn a Ph.D. in Spanish at the University of California, Riverside. Specializing in 19th-21st Century Spanish Peninsular Literature and Culture, her dissertation explores different notions of identity in contemporary Spanish narrative, film and theater with a focal point.

Ruby's interest in diverse perspectives not only shapes her teaching philosophy; it also permeates her life outside the classroom. Ruby loves finding new materials to analyze, especially non-traditional experimental short films. She enjoys going to book and film festivals, and is always excited to see upcoming authors and filmmakers present and promote their works. She hopes to discover even more as she continues her academic career at SJSU, following the philosophy of Bell Hooks: "My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them. Educating is a

vocation rooted in hopefulness. As teachers we believe that learning is possible, that nothing can keep an open mind from seeking after knowledge and finding a way to know.”

By Kaitlynn Magnuson

Profile: Andrea Bechert



Andrea Bechert — Assistant Professor, Department of Television, Radio, Film, and Theatre

The College is thrilled that Andrea Bechert has joined the Department of Television, Radio, Film, and Theatre this fall. Andrea Bechert returns to the Bay Area from Chicago, where she has spent the past eleven years designing work for theatres across the country. Andrea has served as a guest designer or faculty member at several universities, including Ohio University, University of Miami, and University of Michigan; she most recently worked at the University of Chicago's Institute for Molecular Engineering in the STAGE Lab. She looks forward to sharing the collaborative and creative world of theatre with SJSU students.

"The collaborative nature of theatre and the wonderfully creative people I get to work with makes my job one of the best in the world," Andrea explained. "Just as theatre and its craft is always changing, growing, and developing, so do the ways in which we learn and communicate with each other. Learning together with, as well as from, my students, is just one reward of teaching."

Andrea earned her B.S. in Theatre Design and Technology from Northern Arizona University and her MFA in Scenic Design and Costume Design from Ohio University. She views every class she teaches as an opportunity to learn more, not just about the subject matter at hand, but about herself, her students, and the world.

Andrea states that the best theatre productions have visual elements that emotionally impact and move the audience. Adhering to the philosophy that "alone we are smart, together we are brilliant," she believes that collaboration with others is the key to effective theater design. Andrea aims to create teaching environments in which students learn the art of collaboration, come to a better understanding of themselves, build lasting relationships with each other, and develop a lasting passion for theatre as an aspect of teaching that is extremely rewarding.

"Perhaps most rewarding, though," she remarked, "is seeing my students become working professionals in theatre – no longer my students, but my colleagues."

By Kaitlynn Magnuson

Profile: Jennifer Johnson



Jennifer Johnson, Ph.D. — Assistant Professor, Department of English and Comparative Literature

The College is thrilled to welcome Jennifer Johnson to San José State's Department of English and Comparative Literature. Dr. Johnson earned her Ph.D. in English Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. With a specialty in the sociology of teaching and learning in urban environments, Jennifer is committed to preparing future generations of teachers to encourage students' use of languages and literacies, foster civic engagement, and strengthen academic achievement, especially in urban education settings.

"English educators have an indispensable role in reimagining education in the U.S. to foster powerful literacies and global citizens in 21st century schools," Jennifer says. "We train and work with future and practicing teachers across the disciplines, and we document powerful literacy practices in schools and out-of-school settings that can help other educators actualize mantras like tapping into our students' strengths."

As she works to develop new teaching approaches, Jennifer recognizes the need to tailor methods that address the challenges younger students face. The rise of digital media in particular requires teachers to develop skills that help students navigate the wealth of information and opinion that is a part of their everyday lives. By continually developing a deeper understanding of the new literacies and various language practices that the younger generation confronts daily, Jennifer believes that teachers can cultivate classroom environments defined by access and social justice in culturally and linguistically diverse settings.

"My research and teaching is grounded in the conviction that education can provide greater access to higher education, gainful and rewarding employment, and civic spaces while also cultivating the critical literacies, pedagogies, and research needed for shaping vibrant and socially just schools and communities," Jennifer explained. Her research also serves as a testament to her commitment to fostering socially just and inclusive educational communities, a goal that she intends to pursue as she joins the SJSU community.

By Kaitlynn Magnuson

Profile: Vanessa Fernández



Vanessa Fernández, Ph.D. — Assistant Professor of Spanish, Department of World Languages and Literatures

Vanessa Marie Fernández is excited to join the SJSU Spartan community as one of the newest faculty members in the Department of World Languages and Literatures. Prior to arriving at SJSU, Fernández worked at Rice University in Houston, Texas; Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Sharing the Spartan commitment to student success and innovative scholarship, Fernández begins a new chapter of her story here at SJSU.

Born and raised in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, Vanessa grew up in a bilingual household of Spanish and English, and loves learning and teaching languages and literature. She completed her undergraduate degree in Spanish and Italian Comparative Literature at Princeton University and an M.A. in the Teaching of Spanish at Teachers College, Columbia University. Vanessa has taught middle school Spanish in New York City as well as high school Spanish at Beverly Hills High School. A proud Bruin, she earned her Ph.D. at UCLA and firmly believes in excellence in public education. Vanessa brings this conviction to SJSU's dynamic community of students and educators.

Her book project, "Bridging the Atlantic: Debating Modernity Across Argentine, Mexican, and Spanish Literary Magazines (1920-1930)," argues that print culture created a permeable intellectual network that traversed national boundaries and impacted Spain and Latin America's post-colonial relationship during the 1920s. Teaching from this perspective, Vanessa explores how transnational dialogues and points of contact generate literary and aesthetic movements, a topic that is relevant to students' reality today.

Passionate about sharing her interest in early Twentieth century Spanish, Mexican, and Argentine literature and culture with students and colleagues, Vanessa insists on maintaining a healthy, balanced lifestyle in order to better engage her community. She takes time to eat well, visit friends and family, and exercise. She enjoys yoga, spinning, ballet classes, museums, theatre, and connecting with nature. Vanessa looks forward to an exhilarating career at SJSU, where she knows she will grow while working with vibrant, enthusiastic, and creative students and faculty.

Profile: Michael Locher



Michael Locher — Assistant Professor, Department of Television, Radio, Film, and Theatre

Dr. Michael Locher has been a part of the SJSU community since fall 2013, when he began teaching theatre design in the Department of Television, Radio, Film, and Theatre. This fall, we are thrilled to welcome Michael back as an Assistant Professor of Theatre.

Michael brings with him an array of experiences, both from his academic career and his work as a freelance scene designer for the past 15 years. Focusing on theatre and scene design, Michael completed his undergraduate studies at the

University of California, San Diego, and his MFA at the Yale School of Drama. Since then, he has worked with prestigious theatre companies across the country, including the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Guthrie Theater, CENTERSTAGE, Yale Repertory Theater, and Cal Shakes. He is excited by San Jose State University's commitment to expanding and developing the study of theatre, especially in the use of onstage design and technology.

"Theater design is a wonderful merger of interests and practices: we're both individual artists serving in a unique capacity, and part of larger collaborative teams and systems," he elaborated. "Good designers are strong students of literature, history, and culture as well, meaning our projects give us wonderfully varied challenges each time."

With his breadth of experience, Michael offers many learning opportunities for students. In addition to designing scenes, Michael has also extensively worked as a freelance illustrator and graphic designer, widening his artistic sense and ideals. He is devoted to the idea that artists should feel free to express themselves through their work, potentially in provocative ways, but should also create an atmosphere that invites discussion and accepts both positive and negative criticism.

When asked about his favorite aspect of teaching, Michael remarked: "I used to envy my professors – it seemed they were most effective when simply sharing their craft, and conveying their passion. It turns out they were onto something, and it's great fun."

By Kaitlynn Magnuson

Profile: Sarah Jones-Hayes



Dr. Sarah Jones-Hayes — Assistant Professor of Violin and Viola, School of Music and Dance

The College and the School of Music and Dance welcome Dr. Sarah Jones-Hayes as Assistant Professor of Violin and Viola this fall. Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, Sarah has performed as a soloist and chamber musician across the U.S. as well as in Europe and China. A seasoned instructor of music, Sarah has taught at Arkansas State University, Wayne State University, and the University of Michigan, as well as in the Cleveland Institute of Music's preparatory department and at the Interlochen Summer Camp and Violin Institute.

Sarah earned her baccalaureate and master's degrees in violin performance from the Cleveland Institute of Music. After completing her D.M.A. at the University of Michigan, Sarah served as concertmaster of the North Mississippi Symphony Orchestra, associate concertmaster of the Delta Symphony, and associate concertmaster of Cape Cod Symphony Orchestra. In addition to her work as a soloist and a chamber musician, Sarah has been a member of the symphony orchestras in Canton, Akron, Traverse, and Arkansas. She is excited to become a part of the SJSU community, and work with the dedicated faculty and students that make up the campus.

As a professor, Sarah strives to help students discover their potential, and then to develop the tools they need to perform throughout their careers at SJSU and beyond. Her extensive experience as a musician, a concertmaster, and a teacher allows her to build strong relationships with students that motivate them to work to achieve their musical potential.

Sarah remarks, "Having the best of both worlds, teaching and performance, is probably what I enjoy the most."

When performing, Sarah draws on the words of Henryk Szeryng: "Your conception of a work must be grand. If you feel this conviction, and your emotional message is

sufficiently clear, your public will understand it even if they may not be able to articulate it.”

By Kaitlynn Magnuson

It's a Dean's Life Vol. 11



It's a Dean's Life

The new academic year has begun, and with it we are celebrating a new era for the College of Humanities and the Arts. We continue to build a financially sound model for operating the city-owned [Hammer Theatre Center](#) in downtown San José. The theatre, formerly known as "The Rep," is a high-quality, 54,000 square foot performing arts facility. We are putting the finishing touches on contracts for an exciting 2016-17 season. To stay up to date, you can [sign up](#) to receive the Hammer

newsletter.

One of the hallmarks of our Hammer programming will be the [Paseo Public Prototyping Challenge and Festival](#). Funded by the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#), the challenge asks students to consider what prototypes they can build to make San José a better place to live, work, and play. You can sign up for e-mail updates on the nascent website and watch for further developments on [Facebook](#) and the [Paseo Prototyping site](#). The Paseo-Hammer festival will feature arts, innovation, and technology speakers, demonstrations, and installations on April 7, 2017.

Our College continues to expand its scope in other exciting ways. We have six new Assistant Professors who started this fall, and we are running eight more recruitments this year. As part of our overall effort to improve writing outcomes at SJSU, we will be hiring a faculty member with writing center expertise. And, to provide more support to students as they navigate their degree programs, we will be hiring two new advisors in our [Student Success Center](#).

In May 2016, 904 students graduated from the College, bringing our total alumni base to 32,000. With major efforts underway to improve our graduation and retention rates at SJSU, I expect those numbers to grow quickly over the next two years. You can read more [here](#) about what SJSU is doing to help students graduate faster and with less debt.

The most exciting news for all of us is the arrival of SJSU's 30th president, Dr. Mary Papazian. With a Ph.D. in English and more than 25 years of higher education experience under her belt, President Papazian is well positioned to lead the campus

into a new era. You can read more about her and her vision for SJSU's future [here](#). It is exciting to be at SJSU in an era that is bringing so many opportunities for innovation and growth that support our students, faculty, and staff!

Thank you to everyone who makes it possible for us to serve our students with integrity and pride! I look forward to seeing you around campus and at the Hammer Theatre this year!

In gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa Vollendorf". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

Lisa Vollendorf, Dean