Academy of Art University
Strategic Plan

2022–2027

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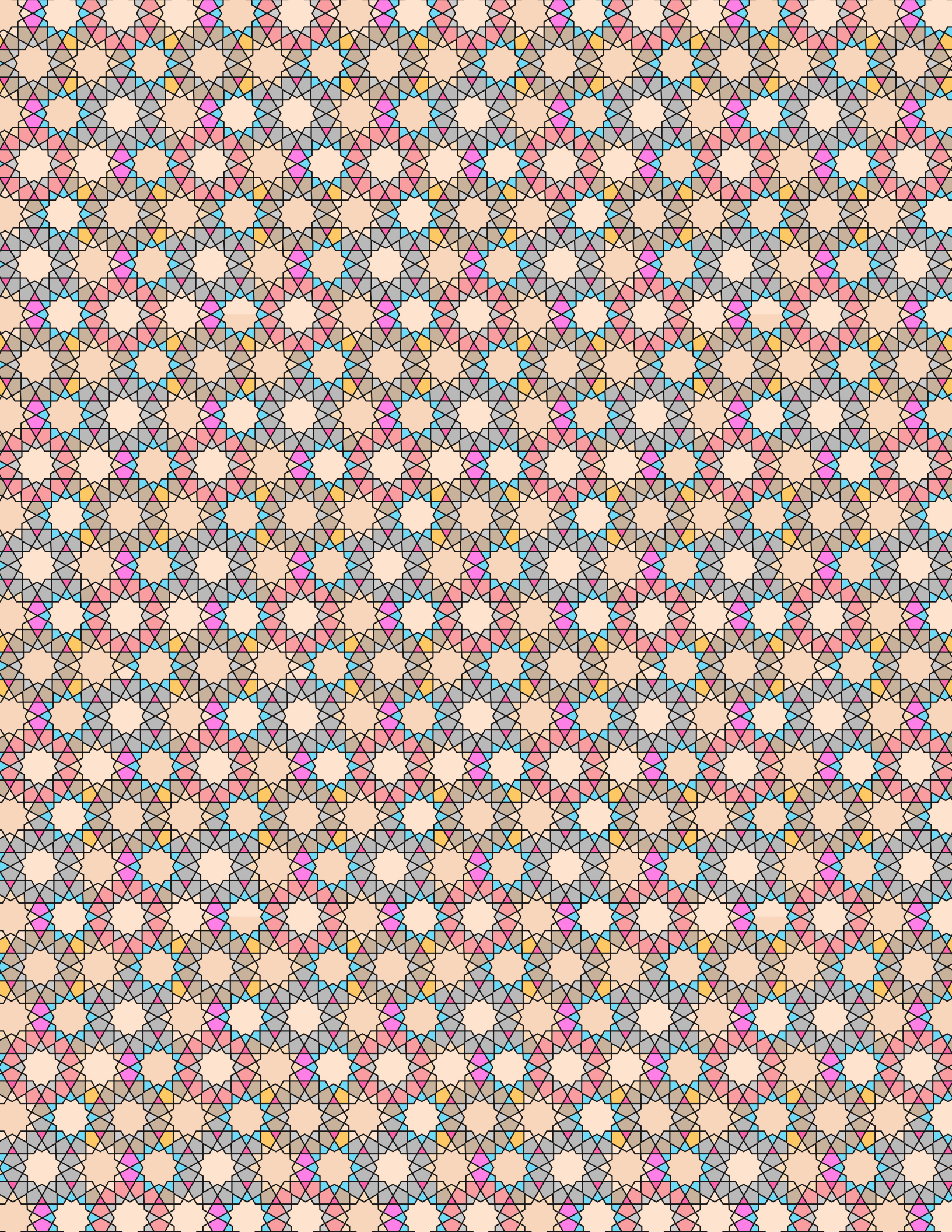

Academy of Art University

Since 1929, artists and designers have called Academy of Art University their home. Founded in San Francisco and family owned, it is one of the largest private, accredited art and design schools in the nation.

We are first and foremost a professional school — a specialized place that helps our students master their craft as they prepare for professional roles as artists and designers. Our hands-on, practical curriculum is taught by some of the finest professionals working in today's creative and innovative industries. They help students develop the talent and skills sought by the creative marketplace.

All are welcome here. Our inclusive admissions policy is rare among art schools. We have found that our students' potential does not depend on their past elsewhere but on their future with us. Students find their place and their purpose at Academy of Art University as they prepare for rewarding professional careers.

DAVIS

Academy of Art University
Strategic Plan 2022–2027

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About the Artwork

Throughout this document, student (and alumni) projects are used as the means to articulate various portions of the Strategic Plan. Supporting projects that are important to students is one of the ways that the Academy delivers on its vision to be the first choice for students.

School of Fine Art

In the School of Fine Art, career artists teach foundational and innovative techniques in painting, sculpture and printmaking, while imparting the business savvy necessary to make a living. Forward-leaning programs and curriculum anticipate future trends in business and society.

1 **Institutional Effectiveness** **A** **Curriculum**

Academy of Art University Strategic Plan 2022–2027

Since its inception in 1929, Academy of Art University has been at the forefront of art and design education. The Strategic Plan 2022–2027 provides a roadmap for the institution to continue to achieve its mission and deliver educational excellence over the next five years.

While a lot has changed since 1929, the foundational values of inclusion and a disciplined approach to art and design taught by a faculty of industry professionals ("by artists, for artists") have not and will not change at the Academy. Those values remain the foundation of who we are today and underpin the development of the strategic plan.

In spring 2021, Dr. Elisa Stephens tasked the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) with leading the creation of a new strategic plan, building on the accomplishments of the 2016–2021 strategic plan. Throughout the year, input was solicited from across campus via department team work groups, surveys and committee meetings. Contributors include the SPC leadership and staff, academic department directors, students and faculty, alumni and the Board of Directors. Academy of Art University's Strategic Plan 2022–2027 represents the culmination of feedback from those contributors.

Vision, Mission and Focus Areas
The Academy's Vision and Mission guided development of the Strategic Plan 2022–2027.

Vision *To be the first choice for students seeking a world-class education in the arts and the first choice for those seeking to employ artists globally.*

Mission *Academy of Art University prepares aspiring professionals in the fields of design, communication and the arts by delivering excellent undergraduate and graduate degrees and certificate programs, and portfolio and upskill courses.*

To fulfill its mission Academy of Art University:

a. maintains an inclusive admissions policy for all persons who meet basic requirements for admission and instruction and who want to obtain higher learning in a wide spectrum of disciplines in art and design;
b. teaches a disciplined approach to the study of art and design that encourages students to develop their own styles that blend their talents, technical skills and creative aspirations with professional knowledge;
c. enlists a dedicated and very able full-time and part-time faculty of career artists, designers and scholars who are professionals and whose success as educators comes from their ability to teach students through the wisdom and skill they have amassed through years of experience and study;
d. operates in an urban context so that academic programs can draw upon and contribute to the cultural wealth of those communities that are served;
e. provides a creative environment that is at once supportive and challenging and underpinned by excellent personalized teaching and support services that address the needs of students of diverse ages and backgrounds;
f. offers an undergraduate general education program designed to stimulate development of critical thinking and communications skills and to encourage emerging artists to draw upon a variety of disciplines, to look at issues from multiple perspectives and to cultivate the ability to function as educated global citizens;
g. manages in an ethical and efficient manner and administers the finances in a prudent fashion; and
h. fosters optimum quality in all aspects of programs and services.

Four Focus Areas

Four Focus Areas and their associated Critical Success Factors provide the foundation and framework to implement and track execution of the Strategic Plan 2022–2027. The focus areas highlight the components required to deliver the optimal learning experience to ensure student success.

1) Institutional Effectiveness
2) Students and Faculty
3) Organization and Facilities
4) Finance and Regulatory Compliance

The Critical Success Factors (see Strategic Plan at a Glance, page 7) for each Focus Area drive the Academy toward continuous innovation in academic programs and student services supported by advances in technology and improvements in facilities. Measurable goals and objectives are developed for each Critical Success Factor with ownership taken by appropriate staff for execution and monitoring of achievement. Progress on implementing the plan will be reviewed at executive cabinet and key faculty and staff committee meetings and as part of the regular President's Report to the Board of Directors. The plan will be reviewed annually by the Strategic Planning Committee.

The four Focus Areas also reflect the Core Commitments of the Academy's accreditor, WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC).

- Student Learning and Success
- Quality and Improvement
- Institutional Integrity, Sustainability and Accountability

This strategic plan builds on the Academy's exceptional history and ability to evolve to quickly meet the changing needs of both students and industry. Although our foundational values have not changed, the world continues to change both in expected and unexpected ways. Adaptive strategies are required to ensure that we remain relevant and resilient as an institution of higher education, as we continue to nurture innovation.

Each Focus Area, Critical Success Factor and the associated goals and objectives play a role in achieving our vision "To be the first choice for students seeking a world-class education in the arts and the first choice for those seeking to employ artists globally."

Vision *To be the first choice for students seeking a world-class education in the arts and the first choice for those seeking to employ artists globally.*

Mission *Academy of Art University prepares aspiring professionals in the fields of design, communication and the arts by delivering excellent undergraduate and graduate degrees and certificate programs, and portfolio and upskill courses.*

Four Focus Areas	Critical Success Factors
1 Institutional Effectiveness	**A Curriculum** *Systematically analyze and apply stakeholder feedback and student achievement data to deliver engaging, industry-driven programs* **B Student Success** *Ensure students have the preparation, resources and support they need to thrive as art and design professionals* **C Reputation** *Increase Academy of Art University's standing locally, nationally and internationally* **D Enrollment Growth** *Attract and enroll students; effectively manage growth*
2 Students and Faculty	**A Student Experience** *Deliver innovative student-centered learning experiences and support services that enhance student satisfaction fostering engagement, academic success, career readiness, health, wellness, and fitness* **B Faculty** *Recruit and retain a faculty of industry professionals by providing the opportunity, training, and tools for them to thrive as educators in the Academy community*
3 Organization and Facilities	**A Business Practices** *Implement processes to deliver world-class programs and student services* **B Art/Academic Department Management** *Develop effective organizational model* **C Talent Management** *Select, train, develop, assess (morale/performance), and retain operational staff* **D Facilities and Technology** *Manage and expand to meet student needs* **E Campus Safety** *Ensure campus safety, security and emergency preparedness*
4 Finance and Regulatory Compliance	**A Legal** *Strive to meet the requirements, guidelines, and best practices of our regulators and comply with all applicable federal, state and local requirements* **B Accreditation** *Maintain institutional and programmatic accreditations; achieve new accreditations as needed* **C Financial Stability** *Maintain effective fiscal management to ensure institutional stability and sustainability*

1 Institutional Effectiveness

Academy of Art University has effectively prepared students for the realities of work in art, design and related fields for over 90 years. Achieving institutional effectiveness requires strategies for delivering an engaging curriculum, supporting the needs of a diverse population of learners, preparing students to meet industry needs and consistently innovating while anticipating the changing landscape of education and the workplace. These strategies will ensure that aspiring artists and designers choose the Academy for their higher education and that their achievements as students and as alumni will raise the profile and prestige of an Academy education.

Key to our success continues to be the robust real-world partnerships and feedback loops that come from our faculty of working professionals and frequent contact with and evaluation by industry representatives. The Academy seeks to both contribute to and benefit from the communities it serves as an institution of higher education and learning in the fields of art and design.

A Curriculum

Systematically analyze and apply stakeholder feedback and student achievement data to develop and deliver engaging, industry-driven programs

1. Develop and or refine programs, tracks and short skills-based courses of study to prepare students for work in the industry and support effective enrollment management and timely graduation

2. Ensure excellence in academic programs through rigorous and relevant curricula that prepare students effectively to develop portfolios to meet industry standards for employment

3. Create a highly, engaging academic experience that reflects the intersection of art and technology and that is responsive to the ways in which students in the 21st century learn, access information and collaborate

B Student Success

Ensure students have the preparation, resources and support they need to thrive as art and design professionals

1. Develop new support strategies and align and apply support resources to ensure that students are effectively engaged, advised and mentored

2. Implement dynamic processes to identify and remove barriers to student success

3. Leverage new technology tools and resources to track and improve student success

C Reputation

Increase Academy of Art University's standing locally, nationally and internationally

1. Increase visibility of the breadth and depth of our curricular offerings both nationally and internationally

2. Effectively disseminate information about faculty, student and alumni achievements and success both nationally and internationally

3. Support and increase ongoing industry on campus and alumni events for all academic departments

School of Fashion

Our facilities, faculty and hands-on learning approach provide students with the tools they need to succeed as professionals in the world of fashion.

Producing industry-caliber runway shows is one of the ways that the Academy delivers on its commitment to student success.

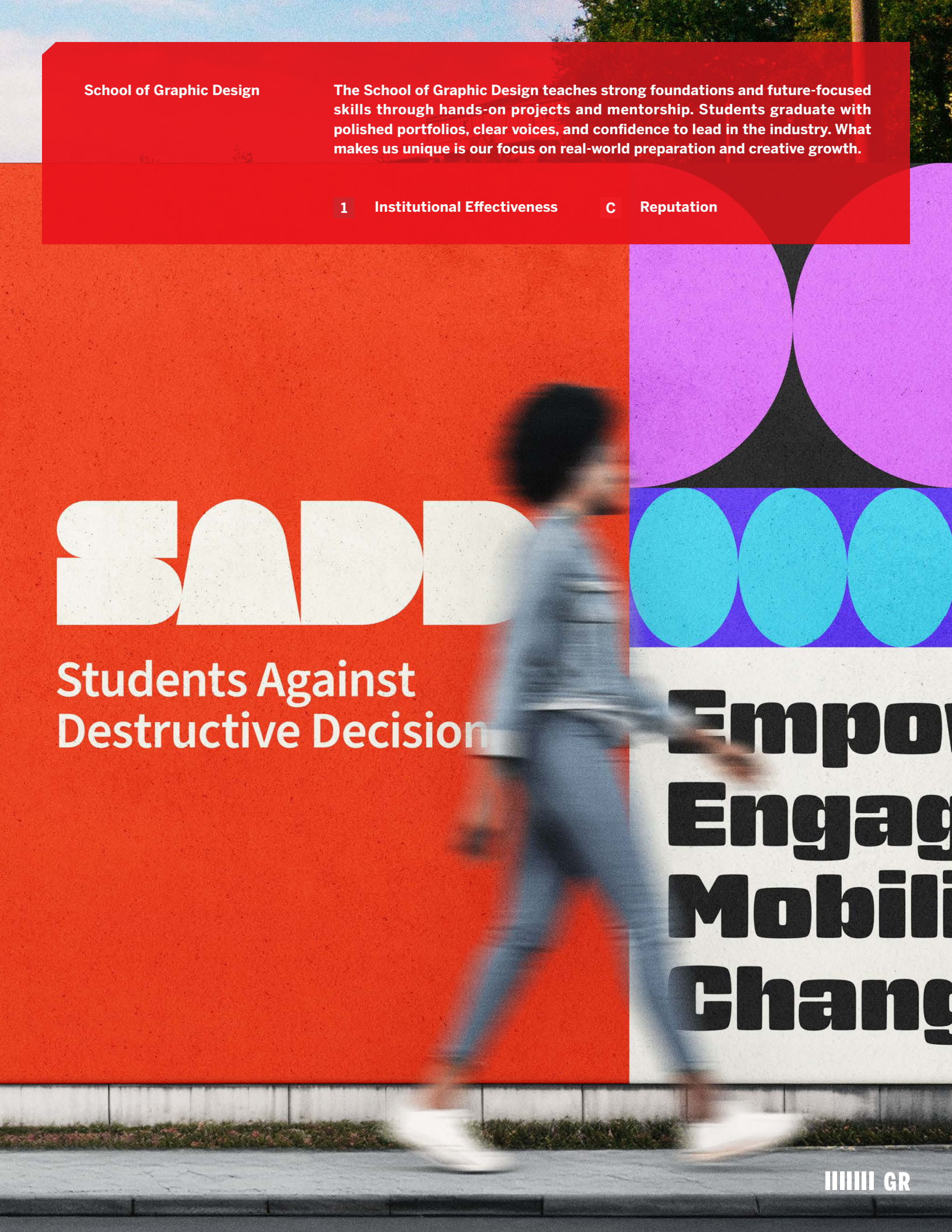
1 **Institutional Effectiveness** **B** **Student Success**

School of Graphic Design

The School of Graphic Design teaches strong foundations and future-focused skills through hands-on projects and mentorship. Students graduate with polished portfolios, clear voices, and confidence to lead in the industry. What makes us unique is our focus on real-world preparation and creative growth.

1 Institutional Effectiveness

C Reputation



GR

School of Game Development

The School of Game Development degree programs deliver the entire game production cycle — from creating concept art and UI & UX for games, to coding for artificial intelligence (non-player character behavior) and virtual reality gaming experiences. Faculty from the game design industry provide specialized skills to prepare students for careers in the vibrant, multifaceted and rapidly growing gaming industry.

1 Institutional Effectiveness

D Enrollment Growth

D Enrollment Growth

Attract and enroll students; effectively manage growth

1. Market and recruit students by improving conversion and aligning programs with market demand

2. Drive sustainable enrollment growth by improving conversion, yield, and retention across the enrollment lifecycle

3. Leverage academic leadership and program strengths to enhance differentiation, credibility, and enrollment conversion

2 Students and Faculty

Supporting our students and faculty and delivering an inspiring and highly-relevant student-centered experience are at the heart of what we do. Both curricular and co-curricular offerings e.g. student organization and intramural team sports, are designed to foster an effective culture of communication, collaboration and teamwork.

We aspire to bring the industry's high level of expectations and innovation into our classrooms through the industry wisdom, contacts and professional experience of our faculty. Faculty challenge students with a disciplined, objective approach to creativity. Within an inclusive admissions environment, our faculty work to connect students who may not have had artistic learning opportunities to professional opportunities.

A variety of support services help faculty to be successful in the classroom. Faculty are encouraged to participate in structured and unstructured opportunities to inform institutional decision making and shape the curriculum and student experience.

A Student Experience

Deliver innovative student-centered learning experiences and support services that enhance student satisfaction fostering engagement, academic success, career readiness, health, wellness and fitness

1. Create an environment with opportunities to increase students' interaction with industry

2. Deliver support services and experiences that meet student needs and improve retention

3. Continue to develop intramural, wellness and fitness programs to foster student teamwork and engagement

B Faculty

Recruit and retain a faculty of industry professionals by providing the opportunity, training, and tools for them to thrive as educators in the Academy community

1. Engage faculty in the larger campus community and institutional decision-making processes through formal and informal participation opportunities (especially curriculum development)

2. Provide relevant and adaptive instructional support services to faculty

3. Ensure a process for review of the compensation structure for all faculty

3 Organization and Facilities

Effective organizational practices depend on the work of hundreds of people outside the classroom to provide the environment necessary for inspiration to occur. Recruiting, training and developing faculty and staff at every level will help deliver the optimal experience for our students.

Strong communication channels support efficient business and operational planning and delivery. Efficient processes result in operational effectiveness and benefit the entire community. State-of-the-art facilities and technology enable the Academy to remain at the forefront of preparing students to develop relevant portfolios that support their professional success. The assurance of a safe, secure environment for students, staff and faculty facilitates delivery of a world-class learning experience.

A Business Practices

Implement processes to deliver world-class programs and student services

1. Streamline business processes to deliver better services
2. Improve communication among staff, instructors and students
3. Continue to refine and optimize organizational structure

B Art/Academic Department Management

Develop effective organizational model

1. Assess academic departments individually for operational effectiveness and ability to meet institutional goals

C Talent Management

Select, train, develop, assess (morale and performance) and retain operational staff

1. Enhance the employee experience through a culture of employee engagement, wellness, diversity and inclusion, that leads to overall employee well-being, productivity and retention
2. Formalize internal talent identification and succession planning processes

D Facilities and Technology

Manage and expand facilities and equipment to meet student needs

1. Introduce more equipment and technology standardization across the University
2. Continue to embed security best practices into every new technology choice and continue to harden existing systems as opportunities arise
3. Leverage artificial intelligence to enhance operational efficiency, decision-making, and customer experience by implementing AI-driven solutions across core business function
4. Maintain academic, administrative and residence hall facilities
5. Develop and enhance the online learning environment by providing modern, effective, and reliable technology to deliver online courses

E Campus Safety

Ensure campus safety, security and emergency preparedness

1. Leverage new technologies that ensure the safety of the campus community
2. Maintain and update campus emergency preparedness plans
3. Prioritize and align organizational structure, training and standard operating procedures

4 Finance and Regulatory Compliance

Ensuring compliance with expectations of consistent quality, integrity and responsibility is essential to operating as an institution of higher learning. Academy of Art University is guided by and adheres to high internal and external standards to remain in a position of trust and transparency for its constituents.

Fiscal responsibility is achieved through reconciling fiscal resources with the physical resources needed to deliver a world-class education and by managing our budget in concert with enrollment trends.

A Legal

Strive to meet the requirements, guidelines and best practices of our regulators and comply with all applicable federal, state and local requirements

1. Meet legal requirements for operating as a private postsecondary institution, maintaining compliance with all applicable local, state, federal and international laws
2. Update privacy programs to ensure compliance with state, federal and international legislation and ensure effective and secure data management

B Accreditation

Maintain institutional and programmatic accreditations; achieve new accreditations as needed

1. Maintain accreditation with the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC)
2. Maintain programmatic accreditation where applicable

C Financial Stability

Maintain effective fiscal management to ensure institutional stability and sustainability

1. Earn a Financial Responsibility Composite Score greater than 1.5 per Department of Education requirements that reflects the strong financial health of the institution
2. Support and advise departments in developing and meeting budget goals

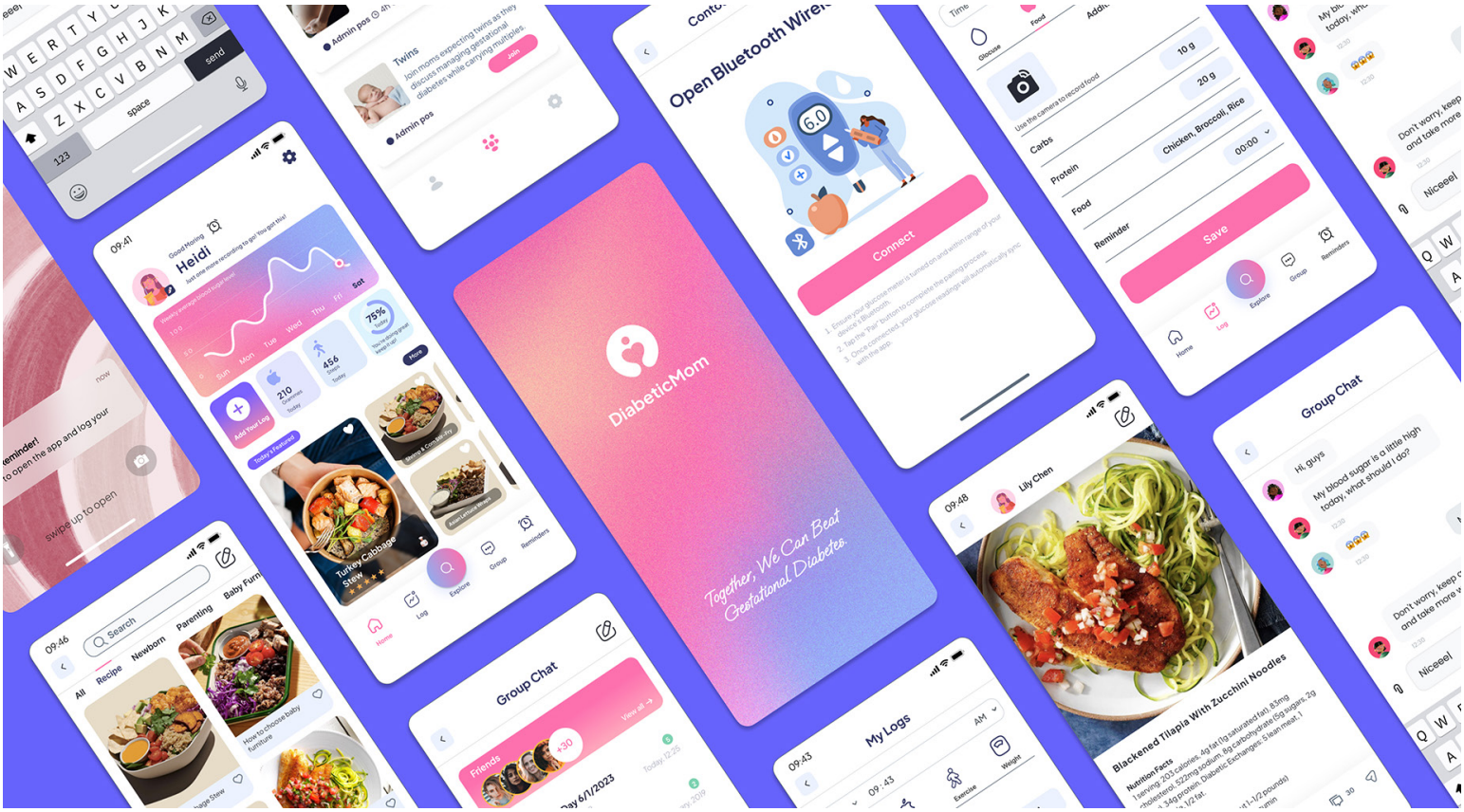
School of Advertising

School of Interaction & UI/UX Design

The School of Advertising degree programs ensure that students master both traditional and emerging media to create compelling advertising that connects with people. Students in our Interaction & UI/UX Design programs are strategic thinkers, producers and technologists poised to lead innovation in interaction and experiential design.

2 Students and Faculty

A Student Experience



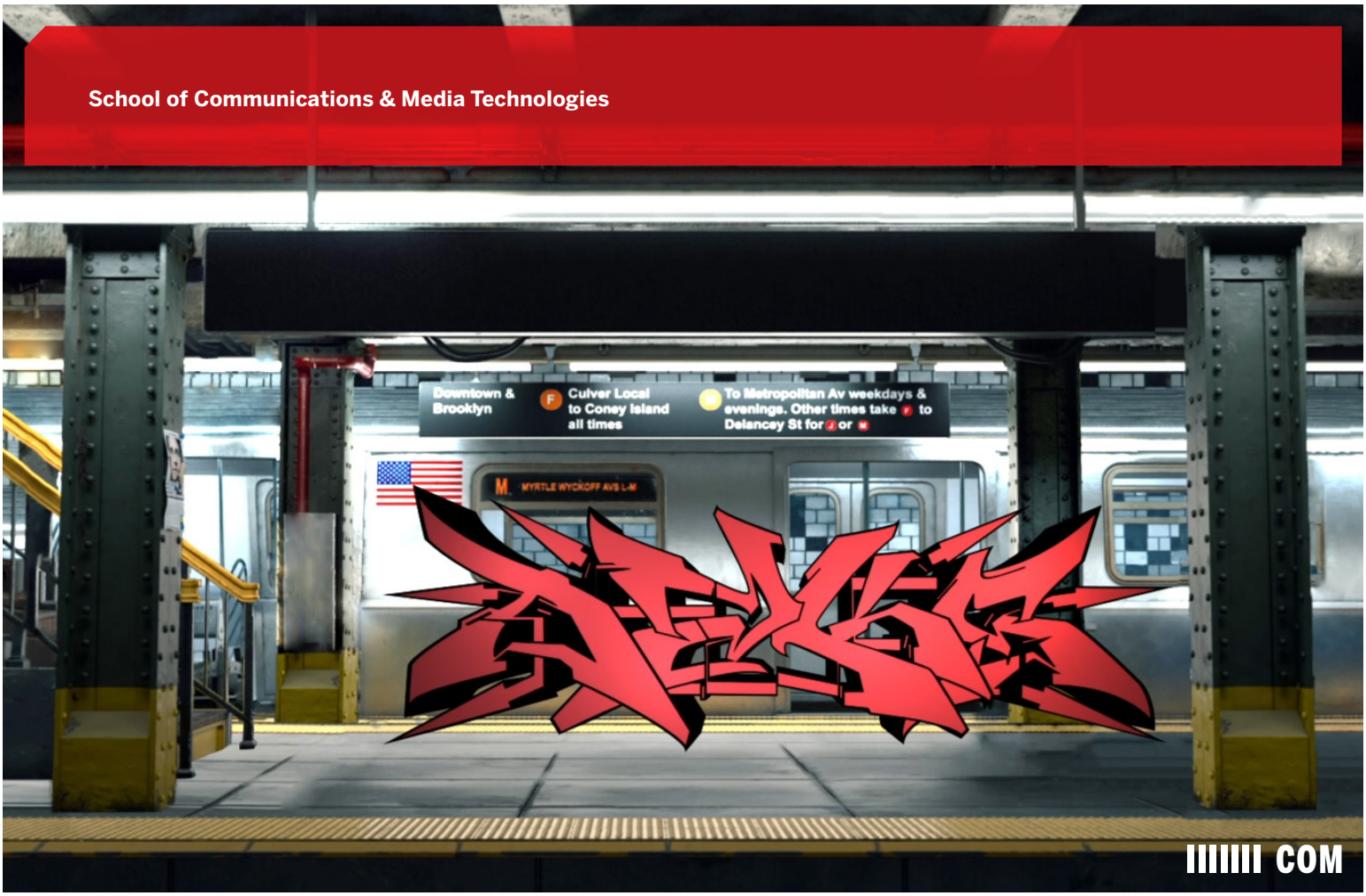
ADV

IXD

School of Jewelry & Metal Arts

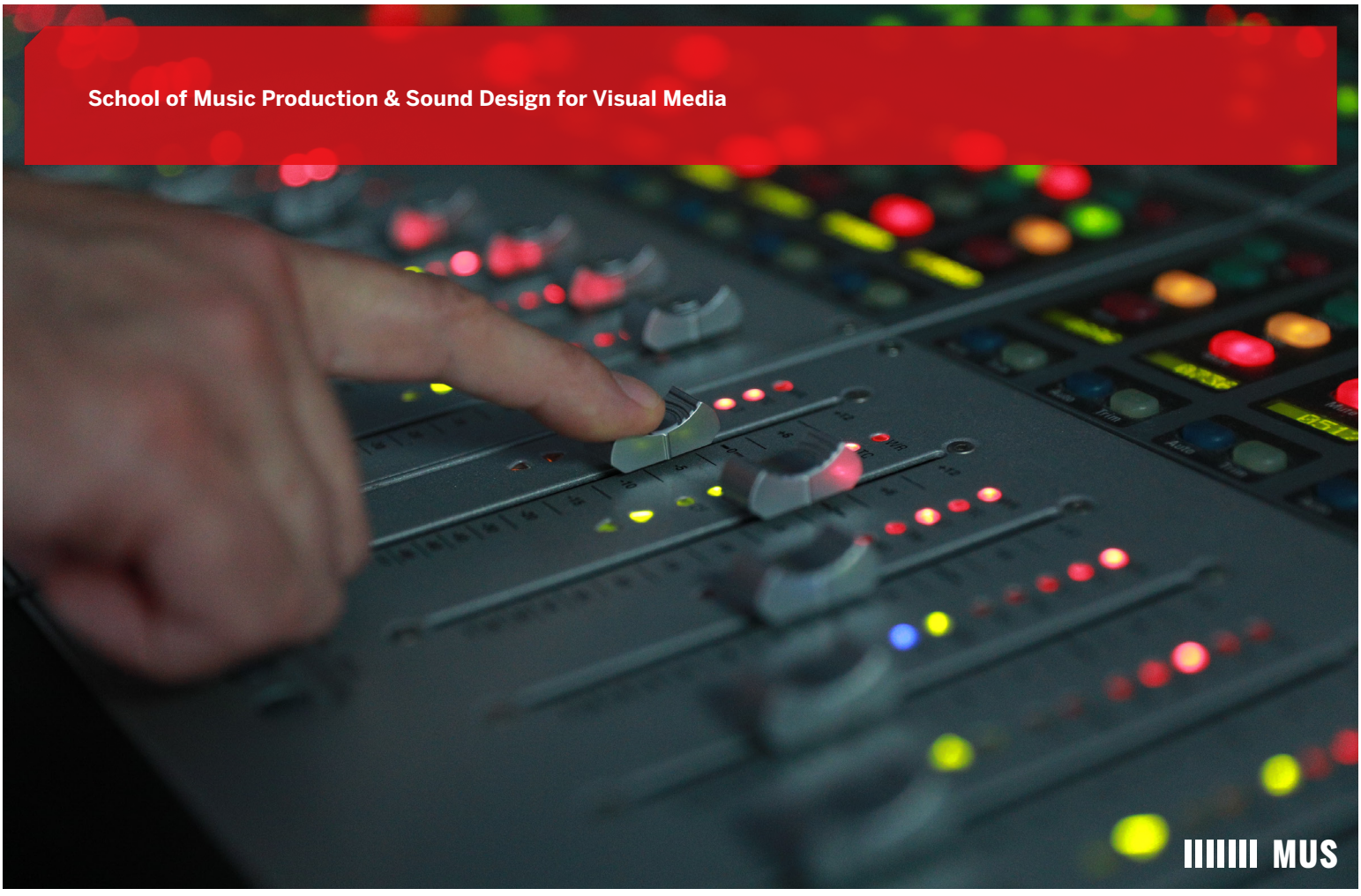
JEM

School of Communications & Media Technologies



IIIIIII COM

School of Music Production & Sound Design for Visual Media



IIIIIII MUS

A Message from President Chris Visslailli

Academy of Art University's Strategic Plan reflects the collective efforts, ideas, and commitment of the faculty, staff, students, alumni, leadership, and Board members who care deeply about the future of this institution and the success of our students.

As we carry this work forward, we do so during a period of significant technological, cultural, and economic change. The creative industries are evolving rapidly, reshaping how artists, designers, storytellers, and creative professionals work, collaborate, and build careers. New tools and technologies, including artificial intelligence, will continue to accelerate that transformation. Yet even as technology changes, one thing remains constant: the world will always need human creativity, imagination, originality, and vision. That belief remains central to the Academy's mission and future.

This Strategic Plan provides an important foundation for the work ahead. It reinforces our commitment to academic quality, portfolio-driven education, artists teaching artists, innovation, industry relevance, student success, and long-term institutional sustainability. It also reflects our responsibility to honor what has made the Academy distinctive for nearly a century while continuing to evolve in response to the needs of our students, the changing landscape of higher education, and the future of the creative industries.

Implementation of the Strategic Plan will continue to be tracked by the Strategic Planning Committee and guided by the Board of Directors. Progress will be assessed as priorities advance, outcomes are evaluated, conditions evolve, and new opportunities emerge. This ongoing process of review and adaptation is essential to ensuring that our strategies remain responsive, our resources are aligned with institutional priorities, and our work continues to advance the Academy's mission and the success of our students.

Our future will be shaped by the people who make this institution extraordinary every day. Together, we will continue strengthening a university that develops creative talent, expands opportunity, embraces thoughtful innovation, and prepares students not only to earn degrees, but to build meaningful careers and contribute to the future of art, design, media, technology, and storytelling.

As we approach the Academy's centennial, I am confident in what we can achieve together and deeply grateful for the dedication of our university community. The opportunities ahead are significant, and so is our responsibility to ensure that Academy of Art University remains a place where creative talent is developed, ambition is matched by opportunity, and students are prepared to shape what comes next.

Chris Visslailli
President
Academy of Art University

School of Visual Development

In the School of Visual Development, the faculty of working professionals guide students in designing movie characters and composing video game environments on their way to taking their places in the production pipeline — setting the artistic design and the moods for images that entertain us. Nurturing this ecosystem of alumni talent is one of the ways the Academy delivers on its ability to recruit world-class faculty.

2 Students and Faculty B Faculty

School of Industrial Design

The School of Industrial Design hosts large-scale multidisciplinary sponsored projects each semester working directly with the top industry studios. Exposing students to real-world business with actual clients is one of the ways that the Academy aligns its business practices with the industry at large. This ensures that our students are ready to be net contributors on day one of their careers.

3 Organization and Facilities

A Business Practices

IIIIIII IND

School of Illustration

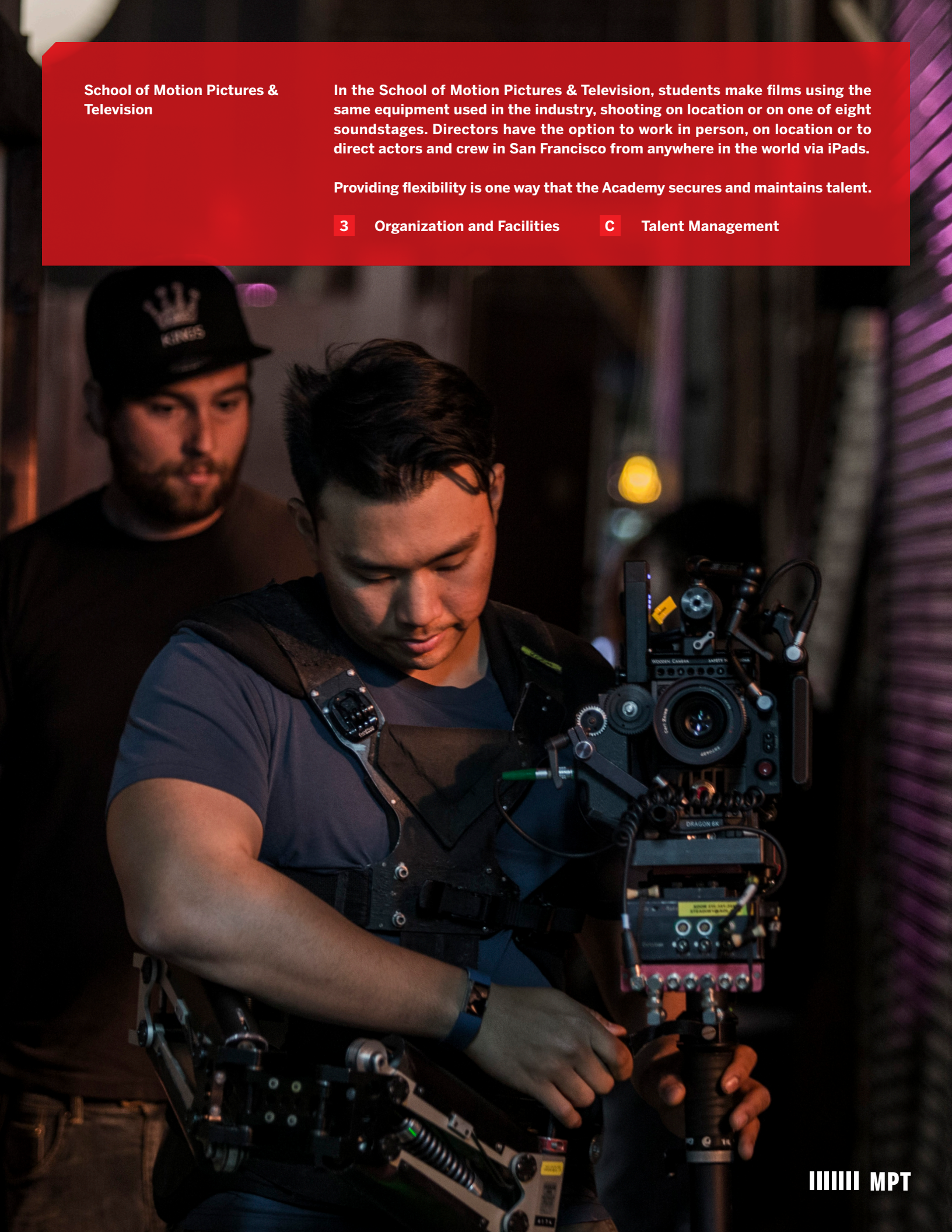
ILL

School of Motion Pictures & Television

In the School of Motion Pictures & Television, students make films using the same equipment used in the industry, shooting on location or on one of eight soundstages. Directors have the option to work in person, on location or to direct actors and crew in San Francisco from anywhere in the world via iPads.

Providing flexibility is one way that the Academy secures and maintains talent.

3 **Organization and Facilities** **C** **Talent Management**



Strategic Planning Committee

Torie Toler, Vice President, Operational Effectiveness (Chair)
Mahina Duran, Vice President, Academic Administration & Operations (Secretary)
Chris Visslailli, President
Elisa Stephens, Chief Executive Officer
Nancy Houston, Chair, Board of Directors
David Goodwine, Chief Academic Innovation Officer & Executive Director Game Development
Eileen Everett, Chief Educational Services Officer
Jennifer Brock, Chief Academic Officer
Serita Sangimino, Chief Admissions & Student Affairs Officer
Adam Adair, Executive Vice President, Finance
Brittney Drake, Executive Vice President, Financial Aid & Compliance
William McDonald, Executive Vice President, Admissions
Patrick Adsuar, Vice President, Information Technology

Writing Subcommittee

Anne Connors, Vice President of Compliance
Eileen Everett, Chief Educational Services Officer
Nancy Houston, Chair, Board of Directors

Board of Directors

Dr. Nancy Houston, Chair
Caroline Daniels
Dr. Kathleen Jordan
Jason Konesco
Tim Luing
Dr. Elisa Stephens
Joe Vollaro
Jennifer Walt
Carolyn Wente
Dr. Jamie Williams
Dr. Richard A. Winn
Charlotte Yates

School of Animation & Visual Effects

Aspiring visual effects artists, 2D and 3D animators and storyboard artists learn from industry professionals in the heart of the animation industry. With the implementation of the rLab, the School of Animation now provides processing power to students wherever they reside. Extending advanced digital infrastructure to remote students is one of the ways that the Academy meets students' technological needs.

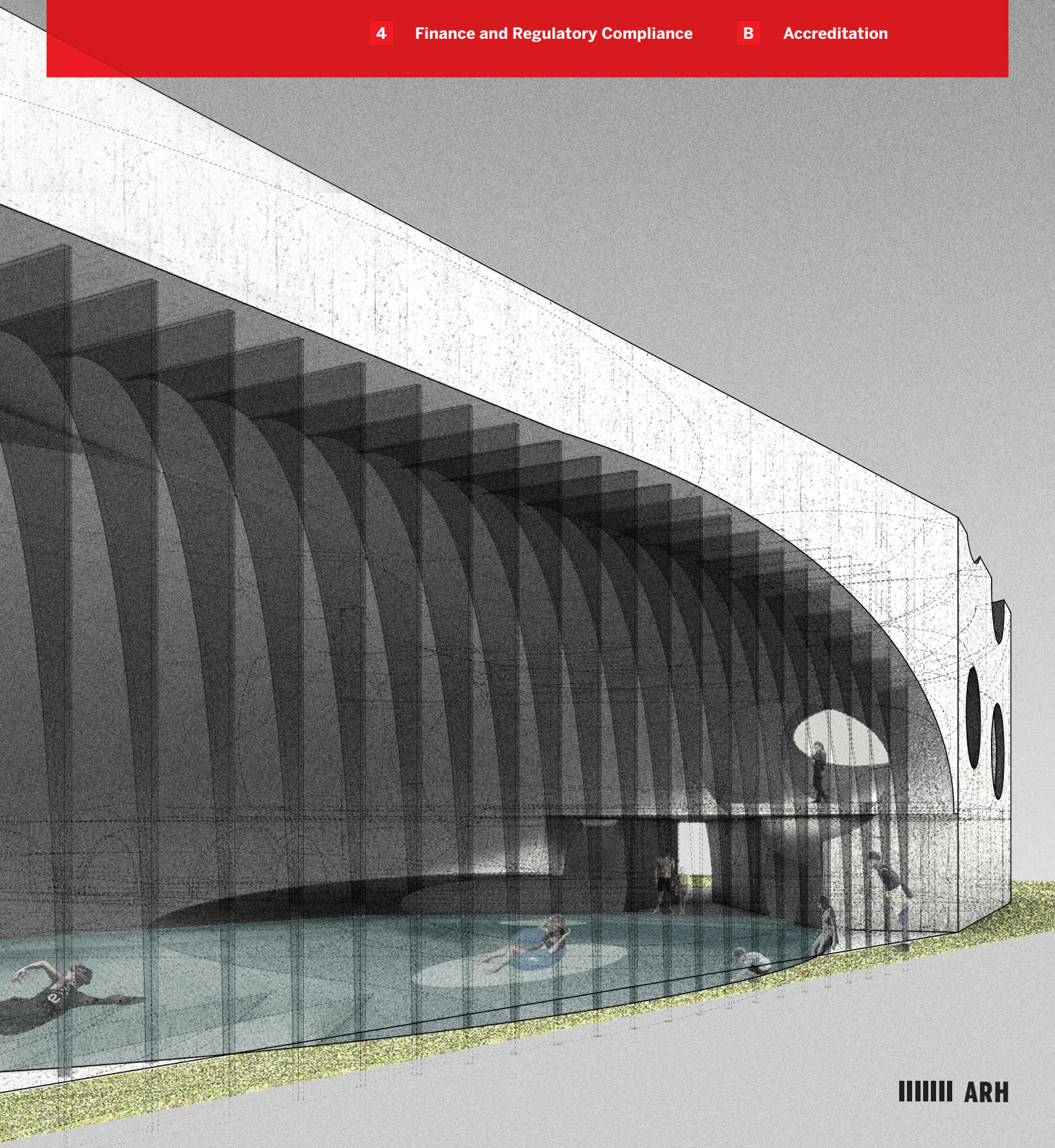
3 **Organization and Facilities** **D** **Facilities and Technology**

School of Architecture

Graduates from the School of Architecture are critical thinkers and problem solvers who develop a diverse range of skills to bridge artistic vision with strong competence in the technical aspects of architectural design, sustainability and future technologies. They achieve the requirements for professional licensure of architects by meeting the high standards of the National Architectural Accrediting Board for the M.Arch and B.Arch degrees.

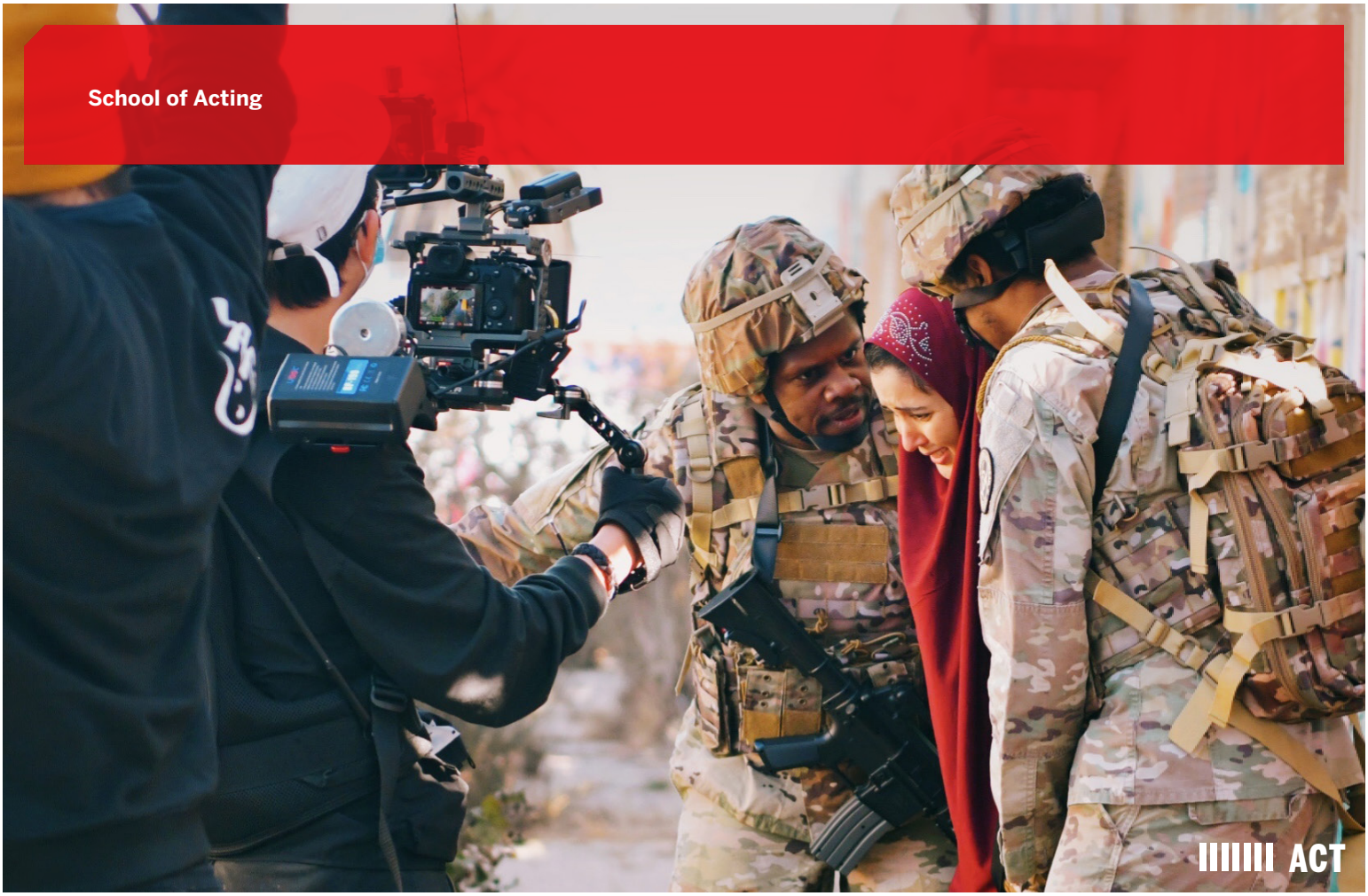
4 Finance and Regulatory Compliance

B Accreditation



ARH

School of Landscape Architecture
LAN


School of Acting
ACT

Appendix

Academy of Art University is located in downtown San Francisco and provides instruction around the world through its online campus. We offer training in many specialized creative disciplines:

Acting	ACT
Advertising	ADV
Animation & Visual Effects	ANM
Architecture	ARH
Art Education	ARE
Art History	AHS
Communications & Media Technologies	COM
Fashion	FSH
Fine Art	FA
Game Development	GAM
Graphic Design	GR
Illustration	ILL
Industrial Design	IND
Interaction & UI/UX Design	IXD
Interior Architecture & Design	IAD
Jewelry & Metal Arts	JEM
Landscape Architecture	LAN
Motion Pictures & Television	MPT
Music Production & Sound Design for Visual Media	MUS
Photography	PH
Visual Development	VIS
Writing for Film, Television & Digital Media	WRI

Design and Layout

David Goodwine, Chief Academic Innovation Officer and Executive Director of Game Development
Anna Villano, Executive Director, Schools of Brand Communication and School of Graphic Design
Nicolas Villarreal, Executive Director of Art Direction, Visual Development and 2D Animation

This document was created with Adobe InDesign and the typeface Benton Sans. It is populated exclusively with work from Academy of Art University students. Visit the strategic plan online for additional details.

Contact Us

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