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Connecting Art and Business

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A new class at the University of Dayton will explore the intersection of art and business and, along the way, may boost the development of a neighborhood business district into an arts magnet.

"This is a very practical class. Its point is that art doesn't exist solely in some romantic remove but is tethered in many ways to business realities," said Roger Crum, professor of art history.

Crum has teamed with accounting professor Joseph Castellano to design and teach "The Art of Business and the Business of Art," which will explore how principles used in the arts can make for a healthy business and how business concepts can support art and artists.

Crum said it's uncommon for business and arts students to come together in this kind of course. "The class, taught between two academic disciplines of the University, will draw on the strengths the students are developing in their majors and will allow them to bring those strengths to a common problem," he said.

Students in the semester-long class will learn via teleconferencing with art enterprises such as Christie's art auction house and Steve Martino, co-director of a full-length animated Disney film. They'll learn about entertainment law from UD law professor Dennis Greene, a founding member of Sha Na Na and explore the business dynamics of the Dayton Art Institute with the museum's new director.

And they'll be asked to apply that knowledge on four real-world projects that include helping to develop a marketing plan for the Oregon Arts District, researching business models for art galleries, designing an artist-in-residence program and exploring the feasibility of a joint UD-Oregon Arts District gallery.

The connection with the Oregon district came through Dr. Michael Ervin, a retired physician and Oregon Historic District resident and ardent downtown Dayton supporter, who in February 2008 donated \$250,000 to establish the Oregon Arts District. Ervin and the district will act as clients for the class projects, which will culminate in a public symposium at the end of the semester.

"In less than a year, numerous art galleries and other creative businesses have opened in the Oregon Arts District, enhancing the existing mix of dining, retail and entertainment options," said Ervin, a former University of Dayton trustee. "Now, we're ready to take the Oregon Arts District to the next level, which includes establishing strong connections with such institutions as the University of Dayton.

"This course gives students a real-life opportunity to build on existing programs in the arts business, further enhancing our community," Ervin added. "Students will be taking this to a national level, connecting with such heavy-hitting players as Christie's Fine Art Auction House and Disney, as well as looking at business models for arts organizations nationwide."

Ervin believes the arts can be an effective catalyst for economic development, serving as a foundation for the revitalization of downtown Dayton and drawing creative people to the city. Indeed, the strength of the existing arts community in the district and throughout downtown has been one draw for several students who signed up for the class.

Graduate student Julie Roth, assistant in the course, is originally from Toledo, but is now staying in Dayton to earn an MBA degree. The course is offering her "exactly what I'm looking for."

"My undergraduate degree is in economics, but I'm a musician and have been performing around Dayton," she said. She's lived and worked at ArtStreet, the on-campus learning-living community devoted to the arts.

"I've been able to play off campus and have been exposed to the rich arts scene in Dayton through ArtStreet. There's a side of Dayton that's very artistic and well known – even internationally," Roth said. "It's very good to be able to contribute to that scene using my business background.

"So it's looking like I'm going to stay in Dayton," she said.

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