



WICHITA STATE
UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS
Shocker Studios

Legislative Testimony - Senate Bill 91

Introduction

Chair Erickson and members of the Commerce Committee, -

Hello - I am Justin Rorabaugh, Director of Wichita State University's School of Digital Arts and Shocker Studios. Thank you for allowing me the time to speak with you about what Wichita State University is doing regarding workforce development. Particularly, in direct support of film and digital media production as presented in Senate Bill 91.

School of Digital Arts and Shocker Studios

Bachelor of Applied Arts in Media Arts – Approved as a new degree program by the Kansas Board of Regents in the summer of 2017 and launched 60 days later. The program is housed in Shocker Studios, our 35,000 sq ft production facility consisting of classrooms, and multiple cutting-edge production spaces including, film, animation, motion capture, clay modeling, multiple recording/podcast studios, and our industry leading editing suite.

Original degree concentrations included Animation, Audio Production, Filmmaking, and Game Design and had a five-year enrollment goal of 65 students. However, enrollment the first year hit 97 students. By the end of year 5 we reached an enrollment of just under 450 students. We have expanded our concentration areas to include Acting for the Digital Arts and Collaborative Design. In 2019, the School of Digital Arts was founded and has since become the largest school in the College of Fine Arts at Wichita State.

The demand has not subsided. Our admitted student list for Fall 2023 is already up by 12% over the previous fall. In the filmmaking area alone, we have over 100 students focused on the technical skill sets necessary to perform the behind-the-scenes work described in Senate Bill 91.

One of the major components of our degree program is the applied learning aspect. All students in the school are required to complete three different semesters and levels of Practicum work. This is all hands-on, production-based work performed outside of the classroom. Just this semester alone, we have 140 students in our



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practicum courses, completing working on projects ranging from short films, animations, video games, and audio recordings.

There is a significant aspect of this work that is missing...Kansas does not have regular, film and television production opportunities for our students to work on. While our students do get opportunities to work on smaller, local productions, the magnitude and comprehensive nature of a “regular” set is missing. The potential impact of students having the opportunity to work on the scale of production proposed through this legislation would be unrivaled.

This past weekend we hosted a shoot in our film studio to conduct interviews for a film release. The producer messaged me after the shoot had wrapped and said, “Turned out we had 3 of your former students helping us out. They were all great, sincerely.” Through the School of Digital Arts at Wichita State University, we are molding future filmmakers, animators, visual effects experts, sound designers, and the list goes on... Our students are ready and primed to help the film industry expand and thrive in the State of Kansas.

One of the questions I am often asked by parents of prospective students is, “But, can they stay in Kansas working in this industry?” Passing this legislation makes that answer a resounding YES.

We have students credited on Netflix and on tv shows like *The Bachelorette*. When we see the day our students are credited on productions that also boast being filmed and/or produced in the State of Kansas, I will know that the infrastructure we have been working so hard to train our students in, has come to fruition.

Call to Action

With the passage of Senate Bill 91, you can help us keep the creative workforce we are developing and training through the applied learning at Wichita State University right here in Kansas. Let’s make Kansas a state people want to come to, rather than a training ground that fosters high-end talent and then sends them away.

Justin Rorabaugh
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Wichita State University