

The Hong Kong campus of the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) will open this fall. What will the US institution bring to digital media education here, and what role will it play in Hong Kong's quest to become a creative and education hub?

By Kenny Lau

hen the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) opens its Hong Kong campus in Sham Shui Po this September, people will be impressed how old and new are blended together. The new refers to the vision of the school – to become a leading site for digital media education in Asia, and the old will be represented by the extensive

restoration and conservation on the North Kowloon Magistracy Building where the school will be domiciled.

SCAD was founded in 1978 to provide college degree programs not previously available in southeast part of the US State of Georgia and to create a specialized professional art college to attract students from throughout the United States and abroad. It is a private, nonprofit, accredited institution conferring bachelor's and master's degrees with two campuses in the US and one in France, and classes will start on its fourth campus in September here in Hong Kong.

SCAD Hong Kong will employ the US approach to undergraduate education, offering four years of instruction to provide students with

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advanced study, internships and preparation for creative careers. Its presence in Hong Kong will place students from Hong Kong and Asia in closer proximity to a digital media education that will prepare them for professional careers.



John Paul Rowan

"SCAD is recognized globally for its cutting-edge digital media courses. Leading companies visit the university each year to recruit talented students and alumni for positions in film, animation, game design and many other areas," says John Paul Rowan, Vice President for SCAD Hong Kong. The vision, he adds, is for SCAD Hong Kong to become the leading site for the study of digital media in Asia while helping to develop the city into a leading center for the creative industries in Asia.

Niche market

Students worldwide are attracted to the school for a number of reasons. For one, it is a learning program designed specifically around the needs of students in the field of creative design. Class schedules, collaborative projects and internships are designed to teach and model real-world experiences, Rowan points out.

"While SCAD is focused on helping students develop professional knowledge and master skills, the learning environment offers a full university experience to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of the world around them," he says, noting students can elect to study at Savannah or Atlanta, Georgia, in the US, or in Lacoste, France, besides Hong Kong.

As a result of established partnerships in the industry of creative design. students are placed in internships with companies such as Pixar, LucasArts, Apple, Rhythm & Hues Studios, Disney, DreamWorks, Electronic Arts, and Digital Domain throughout the year. Graduates of SCAD are also reputed to have a high rate of success in becoming part of the industry. According to Rowan, more than 8 out of 10 SCAD 2008 alumni responding to a survey were employed in their fields or had been admitted to graduate school within six month of graduation.

Currently, about 10 percent of SCAD's student population in the US is comprised of international students. The top four places of residence for all SCAD international students are in Asia: South Korea, Mainland China, Taiwan and India. Popularity of the institution among students from Asia has grown dramatically for the last few years, making Asia one of the most popular regions for students coming to SCAD.

"After significant investigation, SCAD determined that Asia, and Hong Kong in particular, is an ideal site for a new location," says Rowan. "Hong Kong is a sophisticated international city with a strong market and ongoing need for creative talent to which SCAD hopes to contribute."

In Hong Kong

SCAD already has well-established relationships within Hong Kong, including a growing network of students, alumni, professors and donors. It has more than 200 alumni currently living and working in Asia, and the enrollment of Asian



North Kowloon Magistracy Building

students at SCAD continues to increase. The institution has been establishing ties with an increasing number of organizations in Hong Kong that recruit SCAD graduates for internships and full-time positions.

Hong Kong-based companies with which SCAD has collaborated include VTech, Kids II, and MAP Office. With the opening of SCAD Hong Kong, new partnerships will be developed to bring fresh ideas and contributions to leading local, regional and global art and design organizations, particularly in the production and distribution of digital media.

As the only university to focus exclusively on art and design in Hong Kong, SCAD will collaborate with other local universities to further enhance educational opportunities for students, Rowan points out. Past examples of SCAD collaborations with universities in their respective local communities include a joint game development venture with the Georgia Institute of Technology and a design-based business solution workshop series with Emory University's Graduate School of Management.

"Hong Kong is a vibrant city with a wealth of inspiration and creative talents," Rowan believes. "Together with other Hong Kong universities, we can enhance creative education in Hong Kong and develop art and design talents for Asia."

In addition to providing a formal education platform for students, SCAD also serves as a channel contributing "in a meaningful way" to the local arts community, similar

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to the 12 existing galleries it operates in the US and France. A new gallery in Central, SCAD Gallery, is a place for open dialogue with the local arts community, Rowan points out. The current exhibition Generation SCAD features more than 30 original works by some of their students, professors and alumni, and is open to the public free of charge.

North Kowloon campus

Preservation of historic contents has been an important aspect that SCAD continues to emphasize. Since its founding in 1978, SCAD has restored more than 100 buildings in Savannah and Atlanta, Georgia, and in Lacoste, France, creating a living laboratory for the study of art, architecture and design. The institution has won numerous recognitions by the US National Trust for Historic Preservation, the American Institute of Architects, and the International Downtown Association, among others, for its excellence in historic conservation and urban revitalization.

"SCAD is continually inspired by the challenge of blending old and new, form and function, art and technology," says Rowan. "With this tradition, we thought the North Kowloon Magistracy Building, in the heart of this vibrant city, would provide an ideal location for a new campus."

The design concepts, he stresses, will preserve the integrity of the North Kowloon Magistracy Building as a legacy to the community while infusing it with modern technology and creative learning spaces. "We are actively conserving and restoring original finishes, furniture and paint colors." An educational and historical display will be set up to inform students, professors, staff and guests about distinguished past of the historic building.

The university's revitalization plans include a ground floor library and art gallery space, floors of computer labs and digital studios, classrooms and lecture halls, and a central lobby. The entire structure will be "updated" with the most innovative technology available for the benefit of both students and professors. Beyond conserving a historic landmark for future generations, the campus will also serve the Hong Kong community as a place for other educational and cultural public exhibitions and events.

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Despite the option of bringing the curriculum through a partnership with local schools, a well-facilitated field-specific campus was deemed critical in providing students an education of high quality. "With our unique focus on digital media at SCAD Hong Kong, a location with advanced, professionallevel technology, equipment and workspaces for our students to learn and practice is essential," Rowan explains. "We want to provide the best learning environment to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of real-world experiences."

And it is important to create a setting conducive to closer working relationships between faculty and students. Under such environment, students will benefit more from individual feedback and instruction, as classes at SCAD are generally small, with an average of 16 students.

Rowan also points out that "having a team on the ground here" will

help foster relationships with Hong Kong and Asian enterprises for internship and career opportunities for the students. This, he believes, will further allow students to participate in collaborative partnerships to learn all aspects of design through sponsored projects, custom-designed classroom assignments or creation of commissioned work.

When the campus at the conserved North Kowloon Magistracy building opens for classes this fall, the initial number of students will be around 300 but is expected to grow to around 1,500. The top five majors of interest so far are graphic design, advertising, illustration, photography and animation.

"Response from prospective students in Hong Kong, Asia and around the world has been extremely positive," Rowan says. "In fact, SCAD has received inquires from countries as diverse as Belarus, Canada, China, Ethiopia, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Thailand, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States and Venezuela."



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