

## FINDING THE RIGHT SCHOOL: TYPES OF ART PROGRAMS

Whether a student is pursuing a BFA or an art minor, examining the type of art program a school offers will help them get a sense of the style of instruction and the community they'll be joining. Different art programs have varying levels of structure or freedom, competitiveness or cooperation, tight focus or openness to combinations of interests.

### DIRECT ENTRY

These are programs for students who are ready to commit to a career path without the exploration of a Foundation Year. Maybe they've had a broad exposure to the studio arts already, or are laser-focused on the studio discipline they are passionate about. These programs allow students to jump directly into their intended area of study and hit the ground running.

- Generally focused on specific career outcomes and industry-driven skill sets (in fields like Graphic Design, Fashion, or Animation), as opposed to covering a broad set of transferrable skills.
- The curriculum will be streamlined to focus on the area of choice and students will be part of a cohort who are all headed towards the same field of employment.
- Often have direct ties to industry recruiters and offer a curriculum that is driven by what those industries would like to see on a resume.
- Something to consider: this structure is great if you've made up your mind and nothing's going to change it, but it's not uncommon for high school students to discover an unexpected direction that captures their imagination. Switching majors in a program like this is a little more of a hassle, and may mean adding a year (or more) to your education.
- The benefit of a tightly focused resume may also introduce an unexpected challenge. Everyone from the program will have a similar resume and set of experiences. Students will have to work hard to distinguish themselves from the pack and look for ways to add dimensionality to their resume.
- In general, students in Direct Entry programs are trading away a broadly-applicable skill set which may serve them in a number of different careers, for a head-start on a specific industry skill-set that they might otherwise have to learn on the job.



# FOUNDATION YEAR

The most common way to organize an art program. It mirrors the liberal arts model: get exposed to a bunch of different things, then choose the one you'd like to focus on.

- Students spend their first year completing courses in 2D and 3D areas, building a broad range of basic skills and often getting exposed to techniques and equipment they haven't had access to before.
- After that first year, students will generally be asked to choose a major (or studio focus) that leads them into a sequential program with other students who have chosen the same pathway. Depending on the program, they'll have varying levels of access to other electives, and to students who are focusing on other studio disciplines.
- Something to consider: for students with extensive backgrounds in the studio (say 4 years at an art magnet high school), a foundation year can feel like starting over. Similarly, a student who has a strong desire to choose their path from day one may want to consider a different style of program.

# INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

Interdisciplinary Studies programs attempt to combine the advantages of both Foundation Year programs and Direct Entry programs. Students will be encouraged to build a broad range of transferrable skills, but will also dive deep into classes in their chosen medium (or mediums). Students aren't required to start with a foundation year, but can create one if they choose, and have access to any disciplines they are interested in. The theme here is choice.

- Students in these programs are encouraged to design their own course of study. As they gain hands-on experience, try new techniques, and refine their sense of a future career, their curriculum shifts to meet these developing goals and ambitions.
- Students can innovate at the intersection of disciplines, or take a more traditional approach. They can explore one, or several mediums.
- They'll be part of a diverse cohort of students, each pursuing a different pathway and possessing different experiences and skill-sets—a perfect setting for collaboration.
- Depending on the school, access to disciplines may stretch beyond the studio to other academic areas, allowing students to build unique combinations of skills and experiences.
- Students don't have to have their whole educational and professional trajectory figured out before they arrive. These programs are designed to offer support and feedback as students explore the right personal balance.
- Something to consider: students have to take some responsibility for collaborating on the design of their curriculum and considering what makes the right education for them. If this sounds like the good kind of challenge to your student, then this might be the perfect fit. If it sounds overwhelming and amorphous, a student might want to check out a more traditionally structured program.