

SIGHTS and SOUNDS

FEBRUARY 2026



COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS & COMMUNICATION
LAMAR UNIVERSITY

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Can't Miss This!

Hello!

I am Golden Wright, privileged to serve as the Dean of the College of Fine Arts & Communication at Lamar University. Our college is a dynamic hub housing an array of talented individuals, including students, staff, and faculty. Through this monthly newsletter, we aim to shine a spotlight on the exceptional achievements of these individuals across various disciplines within the fine arts and communication fields.

Our college boasts an exceptional student body, each pursuing their passions in fields ranging from artistry to performance. Student success will always be our core mission here in the College of Fine Arts & Communication.

At the heart of our college is the profound connectivity we foster among students, faculty, and staff through the common thread of communication. Each distinct area within our college relies on communication in its own unique way. Communication serves as the cornerstone of each departments' success within the college.

From the multifaceted realm of communication and media, utilizing mediums such as television, radio, social media, and newspapers to disseminate information, to the evocative storytelling of music majors who convey emotions and narratives through voice or instruments, the immersive experiences offered by theatre and dance provide an escape from reality through the interplay of movement and text. And lastly, the visual eloquence of art captures moments and places, transporting us to new dimensions and inspiring our imagination.

We hope this newsletter illuminates all of the possibilities that our College provides. We are immensely grateful for the unwavering support of our surrounding community, which generously provides funding for scholarships, new equipment, and invaluable learning opportunities.

Thank you!

“THE BEST KEPT SECRET...”



Golden Wright
College of Fine Arts & Communication, Dean



Teaching Art, Making Art

The Department of Art & Design is proud to announce that they have faculty and alumni participating in the Houston Center for Photography 2026 Print Auction & Gala.

This year's Gala is honoring Keith Carter, retired Endowed Walles Chair of Art at Lamar University. Carter is the recipient of the Texas Medal of Arts, the Lange-Taylor Prize from the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, and the Regents' Professor Award from the Texas State University System. He was inducted into the International Photography Hall of Fame in 2025 and is the author of sixteen books. In addition, his work has been shown in over 100 solo exhibitions in thirteen countries.

Our own Sunni Forcier, Assistant Professor of Art Education will have work in the auction. Her piece, titled "The World As I See It," is a mixed media sculptural piece including photography and thread.

Forcier encourages her students to seek out opportunities to showcase and sell their artwork in the community, even if they may be hesitant at first.

"I think that for my art education students, specifically, sometimes they only see themselves as an educator. My hope is that I can show them that it's okay to sell your work," Forcier explains, *"You can do both!"*

The Le Grand Bal Art Auction is a wonderful start for any community artist looking to showcase their work, as it provides visibility and the opportunity to discuss their work with local art collectors and make connections.

"It's the perfect place to start for them. They just have to go up and talk to people!" says Forcier.

From large auctions like the Houston Center for Photography 2026 Print Auction & Gala, to local auctions like Le Grand Bal, our faculty encourage our students to put themselves out there, and for educators like Sunni Forcier, the best way to do that is leading by example.

We wish Sunni the best of luck at the 2026 Print Auction & Gala and look forward to seeing what her students contribute to the Le Grand Bal Art Auction.



FROM NEWSROOM TO CLASSROOM

Meet Dr. Awais Saleem! Dr. Saleem is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication & Media and has taught courses in Business and Professional Speech, Communication Theory, Interviewing, Broadcasting and more.

Dr. Saleem, originally from Pakistan, earned many degrees before coming to the United States, including a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from Islamia University, a Master of Arts in Development Journalism from the University of the Punjab, and a Master of Philosophy in Mass Communication from the University of the Punjab.

While in Pakistan, Dr. Saleem began his professional career in print journalism, working for a newspaper that was printed in English, before turning his attention to television in 2007.

"Private television was relatively new in Pakistan," Dr.

Saleem explains, *"I rose quickly through the ranks and then I got an opportunity to manage two newsrooms."*

In 2011, Dr. Saleem was sent to Washington D.C. to establish a U.S. bureau for the network. This allowed him to cover many exciting stories including the 2012 presidential election.

During his time in the U.S., Dr. Saleem decided to revisit an earlier goal, pursuing a Ph.D. After initially beginning doctoral studies at UNC Chapel Hill in 2008, family circumstances caused him to pause his academic journey.

"I thought, maybe there is a possibility that I can resume my Ph.D. instead of spending my life thinking that I had an opportunity but couldn't complete it," says Dr. Saleem.

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He then resumed and completed his Ph.D. in Communication Theory and Research at Florida State University.

After completing his Ph.D. In 2017, he joined the faculty at Lamar University as a broadcast instructor.

"I came here and I saw the studio and how the classes were set up and it felt exactly like what I was doing in the newsroom. I was working with the bureaus, I was working with the reporters, I was generating ideas, I was working on stories with them. And here I was doing all the same with the students," explains Dr. Saleem.

Dr. Saleem has dedicated the last nine years of his life to educating Lamar University students and preparing them to be professionals in the workforce.

Many of his students are first-generation, commuters, or balancing multiple jobs.

"I always say, anyone can be a good teacher of good students," says Dr. Saleem, *"But to be a good teacher of students who need help crossing the finish line, that is the most rewarding part of the job."*

Dr. Saleem realizes that each student needs different approaches and tools when it comes to education.

"It is not always very cut and dry. There has to be an empathetic factor," he explains, *"When I am in class as an instructor, I don't forget what I was doing when I was their age and I was sitting on that side of the table. So if you remember that, then it becomes easier to be empathetic to their situation."*

Outside the classroom, Dr. Saleem continues to engage with global media, frequently appearing on international news programs and representing Lamar University at conferences and events. Whether in the studio, the classroom, or the public sphere, his work reflects a career built on curiosity, empathy, and a deep commitment to communication and to his fellow colleagues and students.





Drumroll, Please...



The Mary Morgan Moore Department of Music is excited to announce the return of the Percussion Festival. A full day of rhythm that will inspire our students, faculty, staff and guests to pursue their passions and march to the beat of their own drums, literally!

The festival will feature a wide range of performances, clinics, and master classes centered entirely on percussion.

Dr. Reese Maultsby, Assistant Professor of Percussion and organizer of the event, is proud to announce that the festival will also host two guest clinicians, Casey Cangelosi, Director of Percussion Studies at James Madison University, and Hector Gil.

Cangelosi, often described as the "Paganini of percussion," is commonly hosted world-wide by educational institutions, music festivals, and educational music seminars. Since 2011, Casey has performed solo recitals in Italy, Germany, Costa Rica, Mexico, Argentina, Australia, Croatia, Sweden, Taiwan, Portugal, and widely across the U.S.

Gil, is a percussion education consultant and percussion curriculum designer for various secondary programs throughout the U.S. Most recently, he served as Director of Percussion at Vista Ridge High School and Henry Middle School from 2008 to 2024, where his students achieved numerous national accolades.

The morning of the festival will be filled with solo and ensemble performances by students from across the region, including elementary, secondary, and collegiate groups. These performances will allow the groups to receive feedback from the guest clinicians so they can perfect their craft.

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Following these performances, the guest clinicians will host master classes and clinics, open to anyone interested in percussion, including current students, educators, and community members. Education majors and aspiring teachers are especially encouraged to attend, as the sessions will explore a variety of approaches to teaching and performing percussion.

The evening will conclude with a shared concert featuring a solo performance by Cangelosi, followed by a performance from the Lamar Percussion Ensemble

"This festival is really about bringing people together," says Dr. Maultsby, *"Even if you're not performing, just coming to listen, observe, or attend part of the day can be really meaningful."*

From first-time listeners to seasoned musicians, the festival aims to offer something for everyone.

Join us for the Percussion Festival at the Susan and Jimmy Simmons Music Building on March 28th, starting at 9:00 A.M. with the concert beginning at 7:30 P.M.



THE *Beauty* OF THE *Everyday*: MIDDLETOWN



February 19th - 21st at 7:30 p.m.

February 22nd at 2:00 p.m.

University Theatre



The Department of Theatre & Dance is excited to present its first production of the semester, *Middletown*, written by Will Eno and directed by Department Chair and Professor, Joel Grothe.

In a small American town that feels oddly familiar, ordinary lives unfold in extraordinary ways. *Middletown* follows the intersecting paths of its residents—an expectant mother, a lonely handyman, a librarian, a cop—as they navigate the quiet joys, absurdities, and deep questions of existence. With poetic language and gentle humor, Will Eno's acclaimed play explores the beauty and sadness of everyday life, capturing the mysterious in the mundane. Both deeply human and subtly cosmic, *Middletown* invites us to reflect on connection, isolation, and what it means simply to be alive.

Grothe first saw the production 15 years ago at the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago.

"It was an extraordinary experience," says Grothe, *"Hilarious but also deeply sad and emotional. A unique play from a unique voice."*

Middletown is a perfect production to train and mold the young actors of Lamar University. Filled with strong characters, emotionally grounded topics and themes, and the overarching existential questions, *Middletown* will provide excellent learning opportunities for acting and technical students alike.

"It specifically checks the boxes for us because, beyond being an excellent play, it is a contemporary script that serves the needs of our student performers and designers to grow in their current roles at Lamar," explains Grothe.

Grothe aims to push our actors to dig deep to resonate with the emotions of the characters.

"It [Middletown] also has a life beneath the surface that actors have to embrace," Grothe states, *"Actors have to learn to feel everything a character feels."*

Grothe hopes that the production will resonate with both our students and audience members alike.

"You hope they take something away from it that resonates with them. You hope that both for the students producing the play and the audience that it is a rewarding experience and some aspect of it stays with them for a long time," says Grothe.

Middletown is a production you won't want to miss!

Middletown will take the stage on February 19th - 21st at 7:30 p.m. and a matinee performance on February 22nd at 2:00 p.m. All performances will be held in the Studio Theatre between the Dishman Art Museum and the Susan and Jimmy Simmons Music building on the campus of Lamar University.

Tickets are available through lamar.edu/lutdtix.

A Toast to *the Dishman Legacy*



The Dishman Art Museum's annual fundraiser, Pairings, is a fan favorite; gathering donors, friends, family and art connoisseurs from all over Southeast Texas for an evening of fine dining, artisan wine and good company.

"I love walking in the room at Pairings and seeing so many familiar faces. It's always a treat, because you can lose track of people and maybe don't get to see them as often as you like, but you know you'll see them at Pairings!" shares Cindy Dishman.

Creators of the event included Dean Russ Schultz, Floyd McSpadden, Lee Ann and Terry Garth, and Roy and Kim Steinhagen. Roy took inspiration from his trips to Napa where he had been introduced to wine tastings. He contacted his friend David Duncan, the owner of Silver Oak in Napa, and encouraged him to be the speaker at the first Pairings event in 2013. The event sold out the minute Save the Date cards went out: an immediate success.

After Kim Steinhagen was offered a job at Lamar University in April of 2014, it became one of her duties to ensure the event's success each year. This illustrious event provides the students of Lamar and the Southeast Texas community with wonderful opportunities.

The event's success is due to its returning sponsors, donors and supporters each year, including continued support from the family of the original founders of the Dishman Art Museum, Herb and Kate Dishman.

Granddaughter of Herb and Kate, Whitney Neighbors is honored to support fine arts education at Lamar University.

"We live in a time where the arts are among the first cuts made to shrinking budgets for educators, even more so now than when my grandparents observed the need back then," explains Whitney, *"Supporting arts and fostering those that create is so important; following my grandparents' lead is such a joy and continuing their legacy is the honor."*

Cindy Dishman also honors the Dishman's legacy, noting that Herb and Kate had great pride in Beaumont.

"I think that Beaumont is great at promoting the arts, and Herb and Kate Dishman saw that and chose to help invest in the arts of Southeast Texas through the museum," says Cindy Dishman.

While honoring the past, the family looks forward to the future.

"As the reputation of the Museum continues to grow with it becoming a premier facility for talented artists and artistic educators, I look forward to seeing artistic program enrollment grow and even more thought-provoking exhibits including artists and students alike," says Whitney Neighbors.

"I believe a community dies when there is no art influence. When people see an investment in the arts, they know that it's a core value for the community. And I look forward to what the future brings," says Cindy Dishman.

We would like to thank all our donors for their continued support for the fine arts at Lamar University. Pairings allows the Dishman to continue its mission of bringing quality art exhibitions to Southeast Texas. Because of the funds raised, the Lamar students and broader community have first-hand access to well-known artists such as Julie Speed, John Alexander, Dornith Doherty, Paul Manes, Michael Kennaugh, and David Cargill. Additionally, the students learn how to install and talk about their work during the senior thesis presentations, and the faculty have an opportunity to exhibit their work in the museum. If you would like to be placed on the waiting list for Pairings, please contact Kim Steinhagen at kim.steinhagen@lamar.edu.

We also invite you to visit the Dishman Art Museum at Lamar University. The museum is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M., and select Saturdays from 12:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.



TRUE COUNTRY, TRUE STORIES

Spend your Sunday evenings reconnecting with your roots by listening to the cherished histories of classic country on County 101 on 91.3 FM, KVLU, hosted by Dr. Brett Welch, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Music has always been an important aspect of Dr. Welch's life. He's played the guitar and piano since his early teens, using those skills to accompany his vocal talents.

"I have always loved music and then I had an aptitude for playing it," says Dr. Welch.

For Dr. Welch, music became a lifelong outlet.

One that has remained steady even as his professional responsibilities have grown.

"When I started to move up within my profession, I thought I would have played less," explains Dr. Welch, *"I do play a little bit less, but I still play because it's almost therapeutic."*

Recently, Dr. Welch has had the opportunity to expand his musical horizons through Lamar University's own radio station, KVLU. Born from a routine visit to the station, surrounded by the walls of Vinyl and CDS, a conversation about academics...

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

turned into an unexpected invitation for Dr. Welch to host his own radio show.

Choosing the topic and genre came naturally. Pulling from his personal roots and histories, Dr. Welch chose to highlight the real, raw, emotional power and storytelling of classic country.

Featuring artists like Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard to George Jones and Don Williams, the show centers on songs written through the pains of lived experience, often with dark, complicated endings.

"A lot of musician stories are not fairy tales. They're very dark stories with sad endings and country music may be at the top of that list," says Dr. Welch, *"The stories behind the songs and the artists are real. That's real life. In a tough way. But I think that's what makes the music so great is that the individual that wrote it and the individual that's performing or interpreting it lived it. And it's very real."*

Not only is Dr. Welch drawn to the storytelling of classic country, but he also enjoys finding what some consider "mistakes" or "mess-ups" in the original recordings. Wrong notes, early starts, clicking noises, and more all add to the imperfections that make classic country so real and honest.

"You go way back, there's a mistake, within the recording. I like that it's not polished, it's not mass produced. It's very personal and very intimate," explains Dr. Welch.

For Dr. Welch, the most rewarding aspect of hosting Classic County 101 is getting a chance to interact with the students and staff of KVLU and sharing their work with the larger SETX community.

"I'm always an advocate of what we can learn outside the classroom, and the radio station provides so many of the positive experiences for our students. They're interviewing people, they're talking to people, they're being interviewed, meeting deadlines," says Dr. Welch, *"I never walk into an empty studio. You can walk in and there's a dozen kids either hanging out or working or editing or prepping their own show. And that's really cool."*

In Dr. Welch's final reflection, he praises the radio station and is grateful for the opportunities it has presented him.

"I'm glad I connected with them because the show is fun. Not only am I having a blast with them, but I've learned so much more from what they do and how it connects to our students," says Dr. Welch.

Ultimately, Country 101 is about the connection between generations, stories, and people. For longtime fans of classic country, it's a return home. For new listeners, it's an invitation to discover a new genre with deep historical meaning.

Tune into Country 101 with Dr. Brett Welch at 7:00 P.M. on Sunday evenings on 91.3 FM, KVLU.



CAN'T MISS THIS!

JAN – APR
23 – 2

"the tether that binds us"

Dishman Art Museum

FEB
19-22

Middletown

Studio Theatre

Tickets available at lamar.edu/lutdtix

FEB
24

Cardinal Jazz Orchestra Concert

University Theatre

7:30 P.M.

FEB
26

Symphonic Band Concert

Julie Rogers Theatre

7:30 P.M.

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