



2024

DEAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

Paul Kassel

College of Visual and Performing Arts



**Northern Illinois
University**

College of Visual and
Performing Arts

Introduction

This year, after consultation with the College Council and input across the college, we have adopted a revised format for the Dean's Report to better align it with the actual tasks the dean performs over the course of a year. In addition to being a more accurate representation of the duties and responsibilities of the position, the report will thereby be more concise, and tie more directly to the survey by which the dean's performance is evaluated.

As I stated in my August address, this past year we have experienced powerful examples of the belief in what we are doing in the college, the schools, the Office of External Programs, and the NIU Museum. The college has seen growth in the budget, in enrollment, and retention, even as the university continues to face challenges in all those areas. In addition, the college, like the university, received its largest gift ever from a donor, demonstrating that the support is not only for what we have done or what we are doing, but what we will do in the future. Students, faculty, staff, administrators, donors and our audiences are investing in the college because they believe in what we are doing. We are providing access and opportunity to the next generation of students, giving time and place to new and diverse

visions, new and diverse voices, new and diverse people. We are ensuring new and diverse stories are being told, seen, heard, enacted. We are ensuring that children in our schools are being taught by teachers who look and sound like them and understand them. We are training scholars who will transform our understanding of the canonical and point us to the future. We are changing the face of our professions.



Machinal, 2024

The Dean's Annual Report

Advancing University and College mission, vision and values

- *Develops and implements a vision/mission for the College that aligns with university mission/vision/values*
 - Progress continues on the [CVPA Strategic Plan](#).
 - **Goal 3— Recruit and retain BiPoC students to better represent the demographics of the society in which we live and the region that we serve.**

Nearing our goal of 1,000 students in Fall of 2025, our headcount stands at 946. We have increased diversity in every category—Hispanic, Black and Asian students.

Our retention rate is among the highest at the university (72%) and our four- and five-year graduation rate is also increasing (7% and 4% respectively)
 - **Goal 4 - Diversify NIU College of Visual and Performing Arts faculty and staff.**

Although our total numbers have decreased, our diversity has increased in both Hispanic and Asian faculty/staff. We did decline slightly in Black faculty/staff from 2023, but we are still up since 2021.
 - **Goal 5 - Eliminate equity gaps in student learning outcomes and reduce D/F/W/U grades**

These numbers continue to improve, and my office regularly work across the schools with faculty to identify and address deficiencies, particularly in the General Education courses the Schools offer, which present the most persistent challenges.

Managing Financial Resources

- *Effectively oversees fiscal operations in the College and aligns resources to College and University priorities*
 - Budget increase/adjustment: For Fiscal Year 2025, the college received a substantial increase in allocation to address long-standing deficiencies in our operating budget. \$240,000 was added to our budget year-over-year. This was the result of my advocacy over the years that has been finally recognized by the provost's office. But it was also the result of working with the current school directors to provide the provost with clear and accurate data about our instructional and program needs. Much of this can be attributed to the excellent work of our Director of Finance, Ms. Kelly Black. Her expertise and her strong working relationship with the Directors, the Office

Administrators, and Tim Condon in the provost's office has been invaluable. Now that the staffing in the schools has stabilized (see more below), I am confident that we will effectively manage the finances of the college, even as the university faces significant challenges with the structural deficit.

- o The Art and Culture fee has been set at a rate of \$.80/credit since its inception. This year, due to budgetary pressures, we had to make a one-time allocation to sufficiently support the NIU Museum resulting in a temporary reduction of allocations from that fee to the schools. This year, I have requested an increase to the fee and met with the committee responsible to make a recommendation to the provost to make my pitch. The response was very positive, and a recommendation will be made on or around January 15. The final decision will not come until later in the semester, but I am confident that we will receive some increase and will be better able to meet the needs of both the school events the fee supports as well as resume bringing in guest artists from around the country. I am currently working with the provost and the president of the NIU Foundation to find a sustainable path forward for the NIU Museum (more on this below).



Clockwise from upper left: NIU Jazz Orchestra, Banda NIU, NIU Chamber Choir, Japanese Ensemble

Personnel Management (including faculty and staff recruitment and development)

- ***Successfully advocates for tenure-track faculty needs to the upper administration***

Every year since my arrival, the method by which colleges have received approval for tenure-track searches has changed. This past year, we were asked to justify each hire based on four points that aligned with the university goals. The school directors and I collaborated on this, and I submitted our request in a ranked order. Two faculty searches were approved this past year, resulting in the hiring of two outstanding new faculty members in the Schools of Art and Design and Music. In addition, we successfully argued for, and received approval, to search for an Admission Counsellor for the School of Theatre and Dance.

- o Successful searches

- Assistant Professor of Jazz
 - Assistant Professor of Visual Communications
 - Admissions Counsellor

- o Promised searches for Academic Year 25-26

The following positions were not approved but have been given provisional approval by the provost for search in the next academic year.

- SoAD. Assistant Professor of Illustration
 - SoM. Assistant Professor of Trumpet

- o The administration has implemented a strategy to use retirements and separations to help mitigate the university's structural deficit. This will make the approval process for searches even more challenging. That said, we have needs in each school that must



Macbeth, 2024

be met. I have been working with the provost to create a multi-year hiring plan that I believe will address the most acute needs in the next few years.

- ***Effectively manages staffing needs across the college***

- o Reclassification of Admission Counsellors (AC). With the hiring of a new AC in SOTD, we successfully argued to re-classify ALL the ACs in the college to the appropriate category. This also resulted in salary adjustments to achieve equity. We have a very strong team now and are already seeing an increase in moving accepted students to admitted students.
- o Reclassification and re-allocation of Dean's office clerk. Human Resources has implemented policies that require we examine how staffing needs are met before receiving approval to hire replacements. Recently, an office administrator moved to another college. In looking for efficiencies, I determined that the clerk in my office could be re-assigned 80% to the School of Theatre and Dance and reclassified (promoted) to Office Associate. In addition, I have asked that all office administrators/associates cross-train so that no school or unit in the college is without staff to help meet its operational needs. Kelly Black is managing that training.
- o Reclassification of SOAD office staff. Working with HR, Jessica Labatte (SOAD Director) and I were able to successfully re-organize and re-classify the SOAD office staff resulting in salary adjustments, increased responsibilities and greater efficiency.

- ***Addresses and resolves faculty, staff, and student challenges***

The dean's office is one step in the personnel and classroom management process when dealing with complaints, grievances, safety issues and other concerns. These are mostly confidential matters, but they are an important aspect of the dean's responsibilities. Below is a general summary of these activities and personnel involved.

- Labor relations management—David DeThorne, Marlene Bryant, Barbara Gonzalez
- Workplace management—Brian Smith, Catherine Doederlein
- Classroom management—Ed Klonoski, Kelly Olsen, Clint-Michael Reneau

In the past year, I have addressed the following issues:

- Course modality
- Remote work policy
- Faculty-to-faculty collegiality
- Disciplinary procedures
- Bias incidents
- Instructional accommodations
- Labor grievances
- Discrimination claims



NIU Philharmonic

The goal of these activities is to resolve conflicts at the earliest opportunity and at the most immediate level. When things rise to my office, it is my responsibility to follow all university and state regulations and guidelines. But I approach these situations with empathy and compassion. My belief is that anyone can succeed, and I always seek to find ways to support growth and improvement.

Supporting Program Management and Development

- ***Effectively manages program review processes***
 - o Art Ed PhD
 - The PhD program was identified by the IBHE as an under-performing. Subsequently, a review was initiated, programmatic questions derived, and resources allocated to assist in the process (including funding external reviewers). We established a timeline for reports and responses to be completed by December 15, 2024. The faculty in the program effectively addressed the issues, the external reviewers provided excellent feedback, and I recommended to the provost that the program continue, requiring annual review and specific outcomes met.
 - o MFA in Acting
 - In conjunction with the provost's office, it was determined to pause the recruiting of the next class of MFA actors in order to complete a self-study in preparation for an accreditation site visit. Specific questions were derived in collaboration with faculty and school director, and a timeline was established for reports to be submitted and responded to. The faculty

in the program are now addressing the issues. The accreditation reviewers have provided useful feedback in the report the submitted. I have promised to allocate resources to assist in the process (including funding additional internal or external strategic planning assistance) and will make a recommendation to the provost following receipt of the report in spring of 2025.

- ***Encourages and supports curricular innovation***

- o Art and Wellness—Compassionate Practice
 - In collaboration with the School of Nursing, the dean's office of the College of Health and Human Sciences, and the Director of the School of Theatre and Dance, I initiated an investigation of developing curricula that combines theatrical practices with ethical and empathic patient care. We are working with the Center for Compassionate Communication | T. Denny Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion, University of California, San Diego. Future plans include a team visit from the Center at NIU next fall. This is part of a large initiative to develop a pre creative arts therapy program (via existing courses) and partnering with institutions that offer Masters degrees in Art, Drama, and Music Therapy.
- o Data Science
 - In collaboration with colleges across NIU, this past year I worked with an ad hoc group investigating the development of programming in data sciences, primarily in the area of communicating data through visual, aural and dramatic representation.
- o Trek Talks
 - Working with the NIU Foundation, I assisted in developing the Trek Talk program, advising on production details, format, as well as coaching participants for their presentations.

- ***Encourages and supports transdisciplinary initiatives***

- o *The Rite of Spring*: Allocated Art and Culture fee funds to support the collaboration between the NIU Philharmonic and the dance program
- o *Opera workshop*. Allocated Art and Culture fee funds to support the spring and fall opera workshop productions.

Implementing Shared Governance

- *Effectively collaborates with CVPA Senate*
 - o Budgeting—collaborated on identifying budget priorities and developing arguments to advocate for greater resources
 - o Curricular—collaborated on curriculum revisions with Associate Dean Klonoski and the Schools of Art and Design and Theatre and Dance.
 - o Policies and Procedures—collaborated on revisions to workload policy (ongoing)
 - o Collaborations
 - It is a regular practice that at our bi-weekly meetings, the Senate and I discuss upcoming events and look for opportunities for cross-school collaborations. These vary from simple consultations from faculty, classroom visits, guest artists and lecturers, to fully realized co-productions (such as *The Rite of Spring*).
- *Effectively manages the work of the College Council*
 - o Sabbaticals—we received five applications this year and recommended four for approval, the ranking of which were approved unanimously. We also advocated for one to be given high consideration, should an additional sabbatical become available.



2024 Fall Dance Concert

- o Tenure and Promotion—we received two applications for tenure and promotion (none solely for promotion). Both were unanimously recommended for approval.
- o Revised Dean’s evaluation/process
- o CVPA Workload policy
- ***Effectively supports school, college, and university governance policies/procedures***
 - o Workload policy—this has been the major initiative of the year and is continuing this coming year. I worked with both the Senate and Council to develop the policy, and we have now distributed a draft to the entire faculty for feedback, including a PowerPoint presentation that summarizes the main points. This would not have been possible without the leadership of Associate Dean, Dr. Ed Klonoski, ably assisted by Donee Spizzirri, Assistant to the Dean.

Supporting Teaching, Research and Creative Activities

- ***Encourages and invests in curricular innovation, faculty artistry and research, and/or partnership projects***

1. Faculty Recruitment and Development

- a. Professional Development
 - i. \$21,016.41 Travel/Professional Development (25 participants)
 - ii. Art Faculty and ThD Director Start Up Expenses
- b. Recruitment
 - i. \$500 Directors’ Tour—Rockford School District
 - ii. \$1,000 Larking HS Elgin students masterclasses at the School of Music
- c. Accreditation
 - i. \$2,000 NASM Accreditation Space Updates

2. Encouragement and support of faculty teaching, research and artistic activities

- a. Sabbaticals/Leaves/Projects
 - i. Four sabbaticals approved for AY 25-26
 - ii. Conferences, memberships, seminars
 - 1. Support for transdisciplinary project (\$1,860)
 - 2. NASM attendance (\$2,010)
 - 3. NASAD attendance(\$1,760),
 - 4. SOTD Prof Dev in OH and Turkey (\$1,900)
- b. SOM*
 - i. \$10,300 Music rental/purchase/rights
 - ii. \$11,600 Student workers
 - iii. \$8,200 Design/Printing
 - iv. \$8,800 Guest artists/speakers
 - v. \$2,500 Opera

- c. **SOAD***
 - i. \$9,500 Guest speakers
 - ii. \$1,600 Design/Printing
- d. **SOTD***
 - i. \$44,000 Guest artists
 - ii. \$8,400 Design/Printing
- e. **NIU Museum***
 - i. \$13,400 Student workers
 - ii. \$2,000 Guest speakers
 - iii. \$1,000 PastPerfect Public Access Program
- f. **Performing Arts Series***
 - i. \$30,000 Marlon Wayans
 - ii. \$10,000 Jazz Concert—guest artists for Reggie Thomas’ final concert
 - iii. \$2,000 U of Indiana African-American Dance Company
 - iv. \$1,500 Jesse Howard “Streets are Talking” exhibition
 - v. \$1,000 Saunder Choi World Music Residency

*Art fee

3. **Encouragement and support of students and student artistry and research activities**

- a. **Scholarships—Dean’s Discretionary Fund**
 - i. \$5,000 Six recipients
 - b. **Graduate/Undergraduate research/artistry/travel support**
 - i. **College**
 - 1. \$585 Fine Arts House
 - 2. \$1,250 Artists for Athletes
 - ii. **SOTD**
 - 1. \$450 Opening night celebration
 - iii. **Music**
 - 1. \$2,250 Capoeira Workshop Guests
 - 2. \$1,000 Gala Suits Mariachi Band
 - 3. \$750 Steelband Shirts and Music
 - 4. \$1,000 Jen Shyu Interdisciplinary Residence Program
 - 5. \$230 National Trumpet Competition Travel Support
 - iv. **Art**
 - 1. \$650 Graduate Student Art Education Convention Attendance Support
- Encourages and invests in student artistry and research, or partnership projects***
- o ISPAR approved projects—this program was reinstated post-COVID and this past fall I awarded two proposals at \$2,500 each.

- o Fine Arts House (FAH)—Students pay a fee to be in the FAH, but that fee is not always sufficient to cover the cost of some of the activities. I provided Foundation funds to support trips to Chicago Art Institute,
- o **Events**
 - **SoAD**
 - Closing Reception. Maeve Wallace. Johns Gallery. 28 March
 - **SoM**
 - Steelband Concert. Boutell Concert Hall. 21 April
 - Opera Theatre. 14 November
 - **SoTD**
 - BFA Showcase. Chopin Theatre. Chicago, IL. 1 April
 - Spring Dance Concert. O'Connell Theatre. 26 April
 - **NIU Museum**
 - Biennial Faculty Show. 21 November
 - **CSA**
 - **Chamber Music Encounters. Recital Hall. 20 April.**
- o **Teaching**
 - THEA 312—Directing I (Spring 24)
 - HESA 590 – Workshop in Higher Education. Guest Lecturer. 25 January
- o **Creative Activities**
 - Audition. Goodman Theatre. Actors' Equity of Chicago. 6 May
 - Audition. Marriot Marquis Theatre.
- o **Coaching**
 - Trek Talks presentation. Pallavi Singh. Three meetings.

Advocating for and Promoting the College

- ***Develops and supports inter-and transdisciplinary activities across colleges and divisions***
 - o Art and Wellness (see above)
 - o Data Science (see above)
- ***Develops and supports partnerships with community colleges, higher education organizations, professional associations, local/state/national government***
 - o Illinois Fine Arts Deans
 - o Ingenuity
 - o Arts Alliance of Illinois

- o International Conference of Fine Arts Deans
- o Illinois Arts Council
- o Egyptian Theatre
- o Box Office
 - **Total Tickets Reserved** = 11,166 * (free and paying) (~ 30% increase from last year 8,412 total)
 - \$23,747 – SOM (2023: \$15,747)
 - \$17,869 – SOTD (2023: \$12,804)
 - **Total number of shows, concerts, dances, exhibits—all going back to January 2024.***
 - 47 Ticketed SOM Concerts
 - 46 individual Productions (eight play series)
 - 10 Dance performances (Spring & Fall concerts)
 - Plus BFA Showcase performances
 - **New Initiative Fall 2024 – Honors Society – Appreciation of the Arts**
 - April 25 – Marc Macaranas artist talk with pizza over 20 students
 - Spring Dance Concert SOTD
 - Oct 10 – over 30 honors students attended the Mary Stuart Play SOTD which included “Director talkback” and pizza
 - Nov 21 – over 40 honors students attended the Fall Dance Concert SOTD which included a talk with Rich Grund and pizza provided
- o **Continued Initiative – Athletes supporting Artists & Artists supporting Athletes**
 - Feb. 9 - Beauty and the Beast (wrestling and gymnastics) Meet
 - Feb. 24 - Cram The Convo
 - April 1 - Athletes 4 Artists
 - April 18 - NIU Jazz Orchestra Concert
 - April 25 - Spring Dance Concert
 - April 29 - BFA Gallery Show
 - Sept. 21 - CVPA students invited to tailgating and football game v. Buffalo

Increasing and Sustaining Philanthropy (may include, but not limited to, raising of funds and in-kind donations from philanthropy, foundations, corporations, government entities)

As announced in August, the College has received its largest gift ever—a bequest totaling over \$4 million. Originally estimated at \$2.3M, there has been devised a new investment strategy that will realize the new total. What it means is that, at the time of the bequest, each year the college will receive a six-figure amount, beginning around \$110,000 and growing to over \$230,000 over twenty years. The impact of this will be transformative. Plans are being developed so that the funds will be directed towards the highest and greatest needs at the time, with a focus on providing scholarships, travel, guest artists, and the most up-to-date technology. In addition to this, we are receiving now approximately \$25,000 a year for the next six years to establish the Simpson-Schatzle Fellowships. This will provide \$3,000 to two graduating students in each school to give them a head start as they begin their careers. The mechanism for nominating and awarding the fellowships is nearing completion and will be announced early in the spring semester.

- ***Builds and maintains strategic partnerships to support the College and its programs***
 - o Graduate String Quartet. I worked with Dr. Andrew Glendening, the Avalon String Quartet, and the Division of Research and Innovative Partnerships (RIPS) to establish funds to support a graduate string quartet. I negotiated a three-year grant from RIPS, with the goal to raise external funds in that time to sustain two quartets going forward.
 - o Re-establish Advisory Council. I invited six new individuals to form the core of the Dean's Advisory Council. We have met remotely three times in the past year. They have provided insight and perspective to our strategic plan and mission. I communicate with the group bi-monthly to keep them updated. This will continue in the next year.



2024 Fall Dance Concert

- o DeKalb Entertainment Consortium. This group of event producers convenes semi-annually to share event plans, identify possible collaborations, and discuss the state of the arts in the region. Members include the Egyptian Theatre, the Convocation Center, the Holmes Student Center, NIU Athletics, and representatives of the DeKalb Mayor's Office.



Graduate String Quartet

- o WNIU/WNIJ. I work closely with Staci Hoste, Director of the radio station, to promote our events, seek collaborations, and identify opportunities for our students and faculty.
- o Shaw Media. We have a five-to-one media buy of \$10,000 with a Shaw Media match that provides us with \$51,400 worth of advertising.

· ***Effectively seeks and secures support and resources for the College***

- o Gift report: \$2,102,292.60 received in 2024
- o Total Cash: \$374,357.40 *

*Pledge payments, cash contributions, realized bequests

Providing Service

Effectively engages in:

- **University Service**
 - o President's Budget Roundtable (monthly meetings)
 - o Dean's Council (college, graduate school and library deans only)
 - o Provost/Dean's Roundtable (includes representatives from provost's office and other divisions)
- **College Service**
 - o Senate
 - o Council
 - o Curriculum Committee (substituting for Assoc. Dean)
 - o College Advising Committee (substituting for Assoc. Dean)
- **School and Unit Service**
 - o Candidate interviews
 - § SOAD: Assistant Professor of Visual Communications
 - § SOM: Assistant Professor of Jazz Studies
 - o **Museum**
 - The NIU Museum is undergoing a review of its finances and its place in the university organizational structure. The goal is to determine the best way to sustain and grow the museum and broaden its connection to the regional art and culture sector. I have worked with Director Josephine Burke, members of the upper administration, and the NIU Foundation to devise a plan to achieve this goal. We hope to finalize this by fall of 2025.
 - o **CSA**
 - Theatre Camp. Warm-up leader. Stevens Building. 12 July 2024
- **Service to the Profession**
 - o College Art Association. Annual Conference. National Association of Art Administrators Panel. Presenter. Fostering a Trans-disciplinary Culture through Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Chicago, IL. 2 February 2024
 - o Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Vice Chair. Re-accreditation site visit. Pratt Institute of Art. Brooklyn, NY. 5-8 March 2024.
 - o [ICFAD](#). Conference Attendance. Montreal, CA. 8-10 October.
 - o Arts Alliance of Illinois. Appointed member of [Arts Leadership Council](#)

- o [Arts Engine](#).

Utilizing my own professional development funds, the College is a Creative Partner member of the Arts Engine, headed by Aaron Dworkin. Each partner “co-curates” an episode of Arts Engines by selecting a topic and associated guest that reflects innovation, trends, challenges and priorities impacting their institution and that are relevant for the field.

- Kassel Interview with Aaron Dworkin. 14 March 2024
- Interview between Aaron Dworkin and Roxanna Conner. 8 July 2024.

- o DeKalb Entertainment Consortium. Bi-annual meeting of arts producers in DeKalb to coordinate and collaborate on entertainment opportunities.
- o Illinois Consortium of Fine Arts Deans (ILFAD). 11 colleges and universities participate in this confederation of deans who lead fine and performing arts units at their respective institutions. I initiated this group and am a co-senior leader. We recently met with the Director of the Arts Alliance of Illinois to develop an advocacy agenda. IL FAD is developing a charter, with a goal to share resources, collaborate on projects, develop policy regarding arts education, and advocate for the arts in Illinois.

Operational Management

Effectively oversees

- **Dean’s office**

- o Supervises and evaluates the performance of Assoc. Dean, Admin Assistant, Budget Manager, Media/Marketing Director, Museum Director, External Program Director
- o Re-classification of Clerk to Office Administrator for SOTD (20/80 shared position)

- **College Facilities**

- o Boutell Memorial Concert Hall repairs (\$,1000)
- o Steelpan Workshop relocation to West Campus. Supported by Facilities Management (\$25,000)
- o Green Office Certification—dean’s office floor (Music building)
- o SOAD structural repairs (successfully delayed until summer)
- o Music Building maintenance/roofing scheduled by Capital Development Board for summer 2025

Future Plans

- **Performing**

- o This spring, I will be performing as “Vladimir” in two staged readings of *Waiting for Godot*. The cast features professional actors from across the country and will be performed first at NIU on March 19 in the Recital Hall, then at Miami University of Ohio in April (TBA).
- o In the fall, I will be performing a new cabaret act, “Seasons of Love” with Mary Nighosian, a professional actor/singer from the Chicagoland area.

- **Writing**

- o ***Playing: Notes on the Art and Craft of Playing***. [Substack](#). I continue to post on this platform regularly, developing my thoughts on the intersection of performance, neuroscience and evolutionary studies. In addition, I comment upon current events and entertainments to discuss the performative aspects of those events and how they might be understood through an evolutionary and neuroscience lens.
- o ***Passages***. I continue work on this multi-play drama about my family’s journey from Nazi Germany to present day United States. I shall be traveling to Germany and Poland in 2026 to do research on my family’s history.

- **Term as Dean**

- o Per the CVPA bylaws (5.24), in the penultimate year of the dean’s contract—in my case, this academic year—the dean, in consultation with the provost, determines whether to pursue a new term. I have submitted to the provost my intention not to renew my term. I shall finish my current contract on June 30, 2026, and step down as dean. The provost has indicated that she intends to engage in a search for the next dean during academic year 2025-2026.



CVPA Faculty Biennial Art Exhibition, NIU Art Museum 2024-2025