ACADEMICS

AARC offering new services for students this fall

By Nathan Thompson
News Editor

SFA's Academic Assistance and Resource Center located in Ralph W. Steen Library is offering several new services this fall. The changes include a new scheduling system, new appointment opportunities, new resources available for check out and a redesigned space. However, the AARC's largest change is Aspire, a bridge program designed to help orient incoming students to the University a few days before class begins.

"We are offering a new bridge program right before the fall semester begins." Marli Garrett, an accounting graduate student and AARC graduate assistant from Texarkana, Texas, said. "We are partnering with the Office of Multicultural Affairs. This whole program is just to serve as a bridge for incoming freshmen and help them prepare for the fall. It really focuses on diversity and inclusion."

Freshmen will be allowed to move in early to their dorms before the semester begins and spend time becoming acquainted with their surroundings.

"They get to move in early on Aug. 16, and they will spend three days making new friends and learning about academic resources to help them succeed in class," Garrett said. "They can connect with other new freshmen, as well as current Lumberjacks. They can chat with AARC tutors about how they have turned their grades around, and OMA mentors will share how they have found their home at SFA."

Through this program, Garrett hopes students will learn how to develop goals, how to be involved, what opportunities are available, how to communicate with professors and how to push through academic setbacks. The AARC will also have a new layout this fall.

"We rearranged our space so that there are lanes to walk in and to expand our waiting area," said Christina Noto, an Austin senior majoring in graphic design and AARC team leader. "We also have been seriously expanding our appointment options. Appointments are now available in many forms for students to choose from: in-person or online, one-on-one, or small group settings, and one-time-only, weekly, or biweekly."

The AARC is also utilizing a new scheduling program that will allow students to reserve appointments online.

"We're switching over to Trac.Cloud for appointments," said Citori Helveston, a senior from Beaumont majoring in general business and a math and business program assistant for the AARC. "That way students can sign up for one-on-one tutoring through the system online. It will go through their email, so everyone should be aware of their schedule."

The AARC has also upgraded its resource center with additional tools for students to use while visiting the AARC.

"The other big change is our expansion of our Resource Center," Noto said. "By fall, we will have tons of resources for students to check out and use within the AARC that will all be listed on our website. Some of these resources include laptops, calculators, Wacom tablets, textbooks and biology models."

The AARC's services are available to all students regardless of academic standing and can be a useful tool in boosting your grade.

"I would 100% recommend the AARC's services to anyone, even if you're not on the verge of failing," Garrett said. "It can truly make the difference between an A and a B."

School of theatre and dance announces performance dates

Photo courtesy of the MIcky Elliott College of Fine Arts

From SFA's award-winning presentation of the play "Bootycandy" last fall, to the popular Danceworks concerts, excitement continues to build as two artistic programs merge to form the School of Theatre and Dance in the Micky Elliott College of Fine Arts.

The School of Theatre and Dance at SFA has an exciting production schedule for the 2022-23 academic year that will, in part, celebrate the addition of SFA's dance program to the Micky Elliott College of Fine Arts.

Cleo House Jr., director of the School of Theatre and Dance, and Heather Samuelson, associate professor of dance, are looking forward to the opportunities this new collaboration can provide for students, as well as for others who may benefit.

"Probably not since I accepted my job at SFA have I been this optimistic and hopeful about what's to come," House said. "The new School of Theatre and Dance and its faculty and staff are open to using this momentum to re-evaluate why and how we do what we do.

"It's a great time to look at our traditions and embrace what is working for us," he added, "but we also feel empowered to make changes or experiment in ways that seek to make the most of this moment for our students and the community."

The dance program had previously been a part of the Department of Kinesiology in the James I. Perkins College of Education.

"The dance program is thrilled to become a part of the ECFA," Samuelson said. "Our students will have the opportunity to collaborate and grow as artists in a setting that enhances their education and transforms their lives. We look forward to the future of dance at SFA and the possibilities that lie ahead."

To accommodate growing fine arts programs at SFA, construction and expansion continues on the Griffith Fine Arts Building, bringing with it new theaters and dance studios, along with filmmaking and sound recording technology facilities, in addition to modern new classrooms, laboratories and offices.

House described the slate of productions and concerts for the coming year as "modern, inclusive and exciting," offering a preview of what's to come in future seasons.

"We have made a conscious effort to make sure that

See **SCHEDULE** *on* **Page 4C**

Center promotes student success

The Student Success Center, a hub for support and resources for SFA students, has moved to a larger, more visible location on the first floor of the Ralph W. Steen Library. Incoming students are welcome to visit their new offices located in Room 104.

The center houses a variety of programs, including: SFAS 1101—New Lumberjack Experience; Academic Advising for Undeclared/Exploratory Majors; Generation Jacks; Jacks Pass; Texas Success Initiative; Smith-Hutson Scholarship; and Peer Mentors. All of these were designed with one goal in mind—helping you succeed at SFA.

"We understand that navigating college is very challenging, and it can feel confusing and even overwhelming at times," said Raquel Skidmore, director of the Student Success Center. "Our team works hard to ensure all our students know how to access the critical resources and programs we offer to not only help them accomplish their SFA goals but also to prepare them for success after graduation."

Many incoming SFA students are first introduced to the Student Success Center through academic advising, which is required for course registration. The SSC provides advising services for all students who have not yet declared an academic major. Full-time advisors are available to help students select courses, explore SFA majors and areas of study, and access career-exploration resources.

SFAS 1101—New Lumberjack Experience is a one-credit course designed especially for first-semester college students that provides a roadmap for success in college. These intimate classes are capped at 25 students, and each is led by an experienced SFA instructor along with a successful junior or senior student. The Student Success Center also offers SFAS 1101 sections tailored for specific majors, as well as for transfer students.

"We help new Lumberjacks understand how the university operates and provide valuable insights to help them be successful at SFA," said Brittany Beck, director of orientation and transition programs and an SFAS 1101 instructor. "The class helps students sharpen their study and critical-thinking skills and also teaches important life lessons like time and money management, goal setting, and how to plan for a successful career. It's also a great way to make friends at SFA!"

First-semester freshmen who apply to SFA but do not meet the admission requirements have an opportunity to complete the Jacks Pathway to Accelerated Student Success program known as Jacks Pass. Students who successfully complete the required seven hours of summer coursework—including SFAS 1101—are invited to enroll for the fall semester and are better equipped for success.

GenJacks is a program designed for first-generation college students, meaning they do not have a parent or guardian who has graduated from a four-year college or institution. Benefits of the program include academic learning communities, service learning and mentor opportunities, the Summer Leadership Academy, Residential Learning Communities, early course registration and designated study rooms.

"The GenJacks organization helped me believe in myself," said Stephanie Limon, a Liverpool sophomore majoring in human sciences. "It allowed me to meet my closest friends and counselors who have been my greatest support during my first year of college. I am extremely thankful and blessed to be a part of the

See **SUCCESS** *on* **Page 4C**

Two new deans leading academic colleges this fall

Longtime SFA faculty member promoted

SFA recently named Dr. Gary T. Wurtz dean of the Micky Elliott College of Fine Arts.

With a 30-year history at SFA, Wurtz has served as interim dean of the ECFA since July 1, 2021 to the present. Joining the faculty at SFA in 1992, he was professor of trumpet at SFA from '92 to 2016 and director of the Swingin' Axes jazz band during most of that time. He served as director of the SFA Summer Band Camps for 10 years.

Wurtz was director of the SFA School of Music for five years from 2016 to 2021, having served as interim director for six months prior to that appointment. He has also served as associate director, assistant director and coordinator of undergraduate students for the School of Music.

"To be named dean of the Micky Elliott College of Fine Arts is an honor that humbles me to my core," Wurtz said. "I began teaching here as an adjunct trumpet instructor in 1992, and in the years since then I have taught hundreds of students, contributed to countless performances, worked alongside many inspiring colleagues, held every possible rank, and made more friends than anyone deserves. My wife and I decided many years ago that SFA was a good fit for us, and we chose to plant deep roots here in Nacogdoches. We have been active in the community, raised two children, and tried to make a positive impact wherever we could. I enter into this next chapter of my life knowing I have much to learn, but eager to get to work on behalf of the many fine students, faculty and staff members who study and work here."

Dr. Gary T. Wurtz
Fine Arts Dean

Wurtz is the recipient of SFA's Teaching Excellence Award for the College of Fine Arts in 2011 and was named a "Gem of SFA" by the provost the same year. He was the college's nominee for the Faculty Achievement Award in Teaching for the 2014-15 academic year.

He has served on numerous national, state and university committees and councils, including financial assistance and scholarship, budgeting, admission standards, policy, strategic planning and compliance committees, among others, at SFA. In the 2004-05 academic year, Wurtz served as chair of the Faculty Senate, and in 2020-21 as chair of the Chairs

See **WURTZ** *on* **Page 4C**

Knepp 'honored' to lead faculty in CLAA

Following a nationwide search, SFA named Dr. Dustin Knepp dean of the College of Liberal and Applied Arts in May.

With 17 years of experience working in higher education, Knepp comes to Nacogdoches from California State University, Bakersfield, where he serves as professor and in various leadership roles, including chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, co-director of the Center for Social Justice, and chair of the Department Chairs Leadership Council.

"I am humbled to be selected to serve as the next dean of the College of Liberal and Applied Arts," Knepp said. "I am honored to represent the incredible faculty and staff of the college, and I look forward to being on campus as we welcome back our current and new Lumberjacks in the fall. As dean, I will support faculty and staff as we serve our great Lumberjack students and will also work to support our communities, which is one of the great privileges and responsibilities we have at the university."

Knepp is no stranger to SFA or Nacogdoches. With family roots dating back many generations in East Texas and Western Louisiana, Knepp has a long history with the area. He first visited Nacogdoches as a child when traveling through town to spend time with relatives in Chireno and has had family members who attended SFA.

Dr. Dustin Knepp
Liberal and Applied Arts Dean

"I was and am interested in being a part of SFA because of the great impact the university has on the lives of individuals throughout the region," Knepp said. "I don't have any superpowers, but I do like working with people. The university, or any institution, is meaningless without people. As a Spanish speaker who has embraced multiculturalism as part of my academic and personal life, I look forward to broadening SFA's reach to diverse communities. As we look to extend the reach of our campus, we will even better serve East Texas and the broader region."

Knepp has been chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures since fall 2016. In that time, he has led the transition from a quarter to semester system and prepared a curriculum overhaul, including a restructure of Spanish bachelor's and master's programs, created separate paths of study for heritage and

See **KNEPP** *on* **Page 4C**