The Student Workshops: Programs Ahead of their Time

JEFF GEORGANTES Donald Claflin Jewelry Studio Director

When I first arrived at Dartmouth College in September 2005, I was not quite sure what to do with the unique educational structure of the Hopkins Center’s Student Workshops. Before coming to Dartmouth I had taught art at a small northern California college. The fact that any Dartmouth student could come in to the Workshops during open hours and do whatever they wanted was the opposite of the learning environment in which I had taught. It was really confusing at first. Over time though, I’ve come to see the intrinsic value of this truly innovative program and to revel in helping to nurture the creative spirit of those students with whom I work.

The Hopkins Center Student Workshops were way ahead of their time. They might be the first “makerspace” in a college setting in America. The Workshops began as the School for American Craftsmen, a program started after World War II for returning veterans to gain hands-on training and help them to re-enter society. Created in partnership with the American Craftsmen Educational Counsel (itself a precursor to today’s American Craft Council), the school lived at Dartmouth for a number of years before moving first to Alfred University and finally to the Rochester Institute of Technology, where it has attained legendary status. What filled the vacated space were the Student Workshops as we know them today.

The concept of makerspaces is exploding across America. Every major urban area, and many rural ones as well, have them. Our own local community is no exception, with facilities opening in White River Junction, VT, and Claremont, NH. A number of colleges throughout the US are building entirely new structures to house their makerspace programs. As computer technology becomes a greater and greater part of our lives and much of our human experience becomes virtualized, we’re discovering a primal need to create with our hands. Makerspaces speak to that core need. One of Dartmouth’s current mantras is “experiential learning.” The Student Workshops excel in that practice. Every term, the Student Workshops are filled with students exploring their ideas and making them real. While most of our students go on a journey of personal creativity, many use the workshops for academic work as well. Entire classes use the facilities of the three Workshops and work with their outstanding professional artist-instructors. Individual students seek us out as mentors for such assignments as creating human artificial joints, architectural marvels, musical instruments and ideas that we could never imagine.

When I look at the world that we live in and see how there is literally a revolution of hands-on creativity in our country and academia, I wonder if the Student Workshop founders had any idea that the concept they came up with 70-plus years ago would be so relevant to today’s world.
**Collaborate and Make**

**GREGORY ELDER** Woodworking Shop Director

Collaboration gets a lot of attention these days, especially at a place like Dartmouth. It is widely recognized that more is achieved when people combine their knowledge and experiences. Collaborative work often has an energetic quality that differentiates it from work done in isolation. It can take advantage of the best ideas and the best qualities of everyone involved.

The Student Workshops are a natural place for collaboration to occur. Most students in the Workshops are beginners and need guidance from instructors; therefore, collaboration begins during the planning phase. The Workshops abound in productive relationships: instructors working with students, faculty working with students, students working with students, just working alongside others in a studio or workshop offers the hum of creativity and its motivating power.

The woodshop staff has interacted with many academic departments, social organizations and students to help them imagine, design and build their ideas. Examples from this past year include a beekeeping project involving the Dartmouth Organic Farm in which graduates and undergraduate students made beehives and harvested the honey; a structural engineering student's gear wall, made for a digital design course; Nick Lombardi '15 and Christopher England '15 working on their maple table; Lukas Zirngibl's gear wall and drawing machines, made for a digital design course; Nick Lombardi '15 and Christopher England '15 working on their maple table.

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**JEWELRY**

**JEFF GEORGANTES** Donald Cliftin Jewelry Studio Director

Jewelry Studio Teaching Assistants are usually hired as first year students and work with us for their entire time at Dartmouth. It’s always both a happy and a sad time to see them graduate and begin the next incredible phase of their lives. This year we thank these seniors for four awesome years!

This year we thank these seniors for four awesome years!

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**CLAY**

**JENNY SWANSON** Davidson Ceramics Studio Director

At the Davidson Ceramics Studio, professional staff and studio assistants collaborate to make the studio a rewarding place to learn.

Sarah Heimann, a studio potter, joined the Davidson staff in 2012 as a part-time instructor. Previously she taught at Hamline University, NH Institute of Art and NH League of Craftsmen. Hannah McGehee '15, of Denver, CO, was a studio assistant last year.

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**HANNAH MCGEHEE ’15**

When I arrived at Dartmouth, pottery was a hobby I loved but rarely had the chance to do. Four years later, I am preparing to move to Asheville, NC, to join an independent study and mentoring program at the Village Potters and work as a studio assistant. I now realize what a unique and amazing place the Davidson Ceramics Studio is and what an important role it played in my time at Dartmouth.

At Davidson, it’s up to you to decide what and when you want to learn, and who you want to collaborate with. I learned about hollow forms leading to thrown pumpkins, handles leading to teapots, and ultimately coiled forms leading to female figures, a central part of my Dartmouth Senior Fellowship, Living Fibromyalgia: Communicating Chronic Pain through Narrative and Creative Expression.

The studio team encouraged me to push my technical and creative skills through collaborative work in tandem with students working at their own pace. As each step is illustrated, reactions to the piece can clarify a student’s idea, and set a project on another path.

There’s an art to helping someone translate an idea into form—breaking it down into manageable steps, so a student with expanding skills can have success. It involves unpacking ideas about form and balance, composition and color. This interplay of ideas forms the challenge and delight of teaching in the ceramics studio.

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**SARAH HEIMANN**

Student interest directs each project. I demonstrate in tandem with students working at their own pace. As each step is illustrated, reactions to the piece can clarify a student’s idea, and set a project on another path.

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**HANNAH MCGEHEE ’15 glazing**

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**SARAH HEIMANN**

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**HANNAH MCGEHEE ’15 glazing**

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**JENNY SWANSON** Davidson Ceramics Studio Director

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**HANNAH MCGEHEE ’15 glazing**
Gifts from our Friends

We would like to thank our Friends for their incredible generosity. Gifts of all sizes are so important as they provide the means to continue offering a team of top-notch professional craftspeople to work with our students. Your gifts also allow us to offer lectures and workshops from some of the best and most brilliant artists in their fields. And only through your gifts are we able to maintain and update the Student Workshops’ facilities and tooling.

We wish to acknowledge a significant gift of a wonderful new tool for the woodshop: Mr. Curt Gridley G’83 and Ms. Tracy Hoover have given us a ShopBot CNC router. This state-of-the-art tool adds digital fabrication to the woodshop’s capabilities. This new asset will be used by all three workshops and, along with the traditional tools, greatly expands our capacity for teaching, creativity and making. Thank you!

A Big Year in the Jewelry Studio

JEFF GEORGANTES Donald Claflin Jewelry Studio Director

Every year, between 700-900 students participate in Claflin Jewelry Open Studio. Given that there are only about 5,000 Dartmouth students, that is an amazing statistic. This past year we hosted numerous events in addition to our regular Open Studio hours. Nearly 800 students participated in this record number of afterhours events. Combined with our Open Studio participants, this constitutes an unprecedented level of annual participation.

Workshops Interns

Now in its second year, the Hop intern program gives Dartmouth seniors an insider’s view of how the different divisions of an arts organization work. The Student Workshops have two interns this year: Ben Geithner ’16 in the Student Woodshop and David Wu ’16 in the Davidson Ceramics Studio.

Ben, an Earth Sciences major, and David, a Computer Science major, bring to their internships keen interests in art and craft disciplines. We appreciate their commitment to teaching and helping other students in the studios and their personal accomplishments in clay and wood.

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU

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