

Belhaven College Among Only 24 Schools in Nation With Comprehensive Arts Accreditation

JACKSON, Miss.- Belhaven College, long known for its commitment to fostering students in the Arts, has recently achieved national accreditation for all of its departments in the School of the Arts—a status attained by only a two-dozen institutions of Higher Learning in the country.

Belhaven College joins only 23 other colleges and universities nationwide that include Florida State, University of Illinois, Ohio State and California Institute of the Arts, in having all four branches of the Arts—Music, Visual Arts, Dance, and Theatre—accredited by the respective National Association of Schools accrediting board. “It is remarkable that Belhaven has earned this high status in the Arts among these gigantic institutions,” reflects Belhaven’s President, Dr. Roger Parrott, “and we want to use well this platform to especially help the Church understand the value communicating into culture through the use of top quality in the Arts.”

The only school in Mississippi, other than the University of Southern Mississippi to achieve comprehensive national arts accreditation, it has done so without the government funding of a public university.

In order for a school’s arts program to receive national accreditation, all aspects of the program are evaluated for compliance with nationally held standards of excellence. During a detailed on-site visit, peers from already accredited institutions assess the curriculum, faculty qualifications, arts facilities, evaluation processes and student performance levels.

Using its Worldview Curriculum, Belhaven challenges students to incorporate their faith into every aspect of their studies through coursework that is both demanding and rewarding. Dean of the Arts, Dr. Colin Harbinson puts it like this: “Because God is the source of all creativity, therefore human artistry must be viewed as both a profound gift and a reflection of the Creator—to be pursued responsibly and with the highest level of excellence.”

The School of the Arts faculty consists of award-winning artists, published authors and prominent performers, many of whom are well known and well respected within the Arts community around the world. Dr. Lou Campbell, chair of the Theatre department, for example, has directed over 120

productions in classical theater, opera and musical theatre, and has assisted in the design and construction of over 100 performing arts facilities worldwide. Dance faculty member, Ravenna Tucker, was principal ballerina for many years with England’s Royal Ballet, and modern dance instructor, Stephen Wynne, was principal dancer and company choreographer of the resident modern dance company at the Metropolitan Opera House in Cologne, Germany.

Belhaven also offers facilities that are second to none. The Center for the Arts (CFA) features a beautiful concert hall, a flexible theater and a music recital room, all of which are used to showcase the talent of the school's students as well as local, national and international artists. In addition, the complex offers private practice rooms, state-of-the-art digital composition labs, Steinway concert pianos, instruction studios and multi-media classrooms.

The Bitsy Irby Visual Arts and Dance Center is home to four professional dance studios, a fully equipped dance performance theatre, computer design labs, photography studios and darkroom, painting, drawing and sculpture studios, and a beautiful art gallery. Individual art studios, reserved for students majoring in the visual arts, are the envy of many a graduate program.

“This makes a huge statement about the commitment to excellence in our arts programs,” commented Dean Harbinson, “And, with each of our programs now nationally accredited, a prospective student can trust the quality they are going to get from a Belhaven College arts education before they get to experience it.”

Numerous success stories are evident as the students of Belhaven College's School for the Arts go out into the arts community, impacting their world and making a difference in people's lives.

Lee Farrar Bailey, a current student in the Music department, is the official singer for the Mississippi House of Representatives, and is currently preparing to begin his professional singing career. He has already sung with several opera companies around the nation, launched his own production company, and recently released two CD recordings showcasing his talent.

Gratuitous B Productions is a theater company started by three former graduates of Belhaven College. Guinn Terry Davis, Jonathan Lowery and Chad Miller are graduates of the theatre department, and began the company in 2005. They have produced several plays, including *Esther, Oh, Jackson the Beautiful!* and *Bandits in Bandages*.

Krista Pieper, a 2006 graduate of the dance department, is the owner and director of the Yazoo City School of Dance in Yazoo City, MS. Krista is also a founding member of TALK Dance Co., a professional modern dance company in Jackson. In the summer of 2006, Krista served as the assistant school administrator for the USA International Ballet Competition in Jackson.

Since graduating from the visual arts program, Dayton Castleman has gone on to take his art both to the church and the streets of downtown Philadelphia in a significant way. Informed by a passion for sacred space, scripture and spirituality, his innovative art installations engage life in meaningful ways, and are critically acclaimed as successful public works of art.

Belhaven's newer arts programs, such as Theatre and Dance, are initially required to undergo re-accreditation every five years, while the more established programs of Music and the Visual Arts

undergo re-accreditation every 10 years. This kind of stringent oversight by the accrediting boards, serve to insure that the quality of the programs is upheld.

With the type of name recognition that Belhaven College is gaining for its School of the Arts, there is little wonder that the talent level of students seeking acceptance into the program is increasing. "It is only a matter of time before competition for placement in our arts programs will rival that of the best schools in the nation," commented Dr. Harbinson,

Although the reputation of Belhaven's arts program is substantial, the attention to education and the overall wellbeing of the student in accordance with the mission statement of the College, is still the central aim. "We are so grateful for each and every young artist that entrusts the development of their gift to us. As the level of talent rises, it allows us to really prepare highly-skilled artists to fulfill the school's mandate—to prepare men and women to serve Christ Jesus in their careers, the world of ideas, and in human relationships," Harbinson said.

Interviews and photos available on request. Please contact John Brower, Assistant Director of Integrated Marketing and Public Relations Officer, at 601-965-7044, or by email at jbrower@belhaven.edu.