

This is Eastern Michigan University's Career Corner. Welcome to season 3, major choices and career decisions.

Welcome back to the Career Corner podcast. We're so excited to have you back with us on this awesome series devoted to major choices and career decisions. Our episode today is centered around the arts and what are some of the amazing learning opportunities here at Eastern and the School of Art and Design. And so we're going to be talking about some of these and some potential career options.

So let's welcome our guest today, Sandra Murchison. Sandra is a collegiate art professor and multimedia artist working predominantly in printmaking and encaustic paintings. Originally from New Jersey, she received her BFA from Alfred University and her MFA from Louisiana State. Currently, she is the director of the School of Art and Design here at Eastern, and before that, she worked as a professor of art at Millsaps College where she taught book art, printmaking, painting, and drawing. Lastly, she is the director of The Parsons Center for Arts and Sciences near Traverse City, Michigan. So welcome, Sandra, and thank you so much for taking the time today to chat with us. Can you share a little bit about your background and how you got into your career?

Thank you so much. I appreciate you all have an interest in what's happening in the School of Art and Design. And for my part, I can say that my beginning was really pretty straightforward and based on a full love for drawing and painting since I was a kid. It was a very obvious choice that I was going to be spending my life dedicated to art and all things related to art. From that love of making work, I went into college at Alfred University which has likewise a substantial art school, similar to EMU. And I realized as I was at college how involved the art processes were at a university level and that I most likely really wanted to teach and remain in that same sort of atmosphere and teach higher education as a professor.

Just the same, I went on to earn my teaching certification in art for K-12 with the thinking that it is wise to stay broad while in school and earn as much of an overall education as possible since none of us truly know what the future has in store. I went on and volunteered at a museum while I was in college. I worked closely with faculty. I served as a print shop monitor. I did anything and everything that I could to make the most of my college education.

Excellent. Excellent. Well, we appreciate you sharing a little bit about your background and I love that

last point about really just kind of getting the most out of it and really broadening your horizons and taking on opportunities. So with that in mind, can you kind of share a little bit about what your specific role here is at Eastern?

Yeah, thank you so much. I'm the school director which is a full-time administration position. In order to get to that spot, it requires a very comprehensive set of skills going into it. And so I actually taught at Millsaps College for about 18 years before coming to EMU. I was a full college professor but I also founded and ran a nonprofit arts center in the city of Jackson, Mississippi. And now, I've been at EMU for about four and a half years, and I occasionally get to teach while serving as school director which is a treat. But for the most part, I work with faculty and staff on programming, scheduling, curriculum revision, and I advise students. I help students work through college and even personal issues. And really, I manage all of the budgets, facilities, and safety aspects for the art school. My job is comprehensive. And one of the reasons I like my work is that it is both a challenging puzzle to solve and one that is ever changing.

One thing I've done the whole way through in my career is reach out to all aspects of art. So anything that's art related. I use that phrase a lot, art related, in my life and in my choices. I taught elementary and high school art when I was earning my teaching certification as a student teacher. So that wasn't directly about making art. Likewise, I volunteer as a board member at the Riverside Art Center. I do lots of things that are related to art that help provide art in a lot of other people's lives.

I also make art. I'm a very productive artist of my own right, still exhibiting. But that I sort of circle around art making. And my position as school director does that very much so. And I think it's sort of my mantra for college students to try to connect with their interests from as many different points as possible because, again, you just don't know exactly what those job opportunities will be eventually.

Well, Sandra, it seems like you wear many hats and you're definitely a prime example for our students who are interested in art. And a lot of our exploratory students are interested in art but they might not know what career paths are available to them or even the majors here at Eastern. So can you tell our listeners and our students what can students expect to gain if they were to declare one of our amazing art majors here at Eastern?

Thank you. Great question. So we go out of our way to match all of our art majors up with the faculty advisor in the student's area of choice. And we ask that students do set appointments to meet with your advisor in every semester in preparation for graduation. So we want to walk with you in this process. All of our programs are accredited by the National Association for Schools of Art and Design.

Our students can major in art history, art education, and there are actually two different degrees for studio art at the undergraduate level. We also have a graduate degrees.

Let's speak about the undergraduate degrees for now. About one third of our art students choose to earn their BA in studio art which is really a liberal arts degree because they want to minor in another field. For example, perhaps you wish to go into art therapy. Then the BA in studio art which requires fewer credits, only 48 credits in art history are required for the BA, that allows you to then minor in psychology as a good choice for someone pursuing art therapy. Or perhaps, you want to go into marketing and you wish to minor in business, then the BA, the liberal arts degree, is a good choice for those studio art students.

Of course, two thirds of our students actually choose the BFA, the Bachelor in Fine Arts, because that's a professional degree for art and it requires 81 credits in art design and art history, and no minor requirement. These students are just focused really on art design and art history. If you are interested in becoming a graphic designer, for instance, you would really want to earn your BFA without that minor.

Our BFA does require a concentration and our students choose between four concentrations. One is graphic design, another is 2D media, and the 2D media concentration includes painting, drawing, watercolor, and printmaking. A third concentration is 3D media, and that is comprised of furniture design, metals, jewelry smithing, sculpture, digital fabrication, fiber arts, and ceramics. Our fourth concentration is called photo new media. And photo new media is a combination of everything from traditional darkroom photography to digital still photography, video, time-based, experimental, web design, and installation.

So I hope you're getting the sense that we're a really comprehensive school of art and design because we are. We have so many studios, it's wonderful. We also run two professional galleries and one student-run gallery. Students have lots of opportunities to show their own artwork, work in the galleries and see incredible artwork from national and internationally exhibiting artists. In tandem with our gallery programming, we offer a host of artists lectures throughout the year.

Wow, that is extremely helpful. And you're right, there are so many different options. I think one of the things that is coming up for me is, I think, that students a lot of times kind of come in with misconceptions about what a school of art and design is really about and what their opportunities are, and that can be pretty limiting sometimes. And they might get the wrong idea about what to expect. But what you're kind of saying is really, really important that there are a lot of different ways

to kind of navigate through and individualize their learning a little bit.

So with that in mind, also kind of taking into account some of the misconceptions, from the career coach standpoint and our work with students, a lot of times we have students that are a little apprehensive about going into the arts for potential job opportunities. And they feel like, oh, that that's going to be very limiting for me. Or maybe I'm not going to have the types of jobs that are really going to be in my best interest and that kind of thing, or get a good return on the investment or that kind of thing. So these are some of the things that we hear. And so I was hoping you could possibly speak to some of that and dispel some of those misconceptions.

Sure. I'm so glad you asked. Yeah, that's something that has been a crux of so many questions that I received when I was a student from my parents, as well as from prospective students and their parents that I work with now to tour them through our facilities and then work with on a daily basis. It's really-- I encourage again for everyone to think about arts-related opportunities and to have as broad an education as is suitable for your interests. For myself, I answer that by a combination of studio art and art education, and I allowed my education to sort of see where that took me.

So I still encourage everyone to ask themselves if they can and should be working in multiple disciplines simultaneously while they're in college to make the most of their degree. Having said that, I'll certainly tell you that some of our students go on to graduate school, especially in art history and in fine art for their own MFAs. I earned my MFA, it's the terminal degree in art. But our graduates can and do regularly become employed after graduation with design work as a common starting point for many. The way our program is set up, all students take our foundation's program first to receive training in 2D and 3D design, drawing, and art history.

So no matter if you are expecting to study ceramics or painting or design, everyone goes through foundations together. In fact both our BA and our BFA students take the foundation series. And then this allows many of our students to decide, and rethink even, which degree is best for them after taking some classes and learning more what it is really all about.

Gotcha. That's really, really helpful and I'm so glad that you touched on all of those different ways. So I guess one of the last things that we really wanted to focus on today in our episode is, are there any considerations any things that students need to be mindful of when they're thinking about success in the classroom and then after graduation if they're going into arts and design?

Sure. Thank you so much. I want everyone to make the most of their college education so do sign up for those internship opportunities, both on campus and off campus. Work in our galleries, do

volunteer and do work at the Riverside Art Center which is in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Work at the Ann Arbor Art Center, ask your faculty what sort of design agencies you can intern at. Work through the Honors College and see what opportunities are provided to you through the Honors College as well as the EMU Undergraduate Design and Research Symposium.

Take a class at The Parsons Center for Arts and Sciences, which is up North. It's an immersive experience that is like none other that you would have. The students become so close and bonded and understand so much more about what conceptual work they can and perhaps should be making in their own body of work. It's a beautiful 86 acres piece of property near Traverse City. Students adore The Parsons Center, and that is just this wonderful asset that we also run in tandem with the art school.

So make the most of your education and work in our studios, by the way, as area assistants and really learn how to manage the materials and how to deal with safety issues. I did all of these things even though I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do next. I always learned about all the nitty gritty information in every studio and that has eventually led me to, again, being the school director.

And so likewise, what do our alumni do after graduation? Our education in graphic design, in particular, are both really sound choices for career opportunities. Nationally and here at home in Michigan, we need more art educators in K-12 schools. And our alumni regularly receive job postings from us as I do routinely get requests for new teachers from the school districts in our area. We have a stellar job placement rate for our art teachers coming out of our program. Likewise, every company and organization needs at least one graphic designer for web design and social media needs these days. Our graphic design alumni receive good paying jobs and often choose which job they would like to accept. Of course, many of our students choose fine arts and craft-based disciplines to pursue. Countless of our alumni have become production potters, run their own jewelry businesses, and can work as furniture designers and welders. It's a wide span of career and job opportunities that come out of what is a comprehensive school of art and design.

Wow, just incredible. Incredible. Thank you so much for shedding light on this today and really expanding the awareness of all these amazing opportunities. And I think that's one of the major take-homes that students are going to get from this, is realizing that they are not limited as long as they get in and really experiment, as long as they take advantage of all these multitude of different opportunities. And I so greatly appreciate you coming on the podcast today and speaking about the range of different opportunities that they have both in and out of the classroom, as well as then what they can do after graduation. So it's been extremely insightful today. So thank you again.

It's all my pleasure. Thank you so much.

Yes, absolutely. So we want you to stay tuned. We have another amazing episode coming up next Wednesday on the Career Corner podcast. But until then, remember--

We're here for you and we support your goals.