

**Statement in Support of the Nomination of
Saul Zalesch, College of Liberal Arts
For the University Senate Chair Award**

My chief goals as a teacher and scholar have been to: a) open the eyes and minds of students, other scholars, and our neighbors to kinds of art rarely addressed in books and articles—to the universe of art that surrounds us and molds our tastes; and b) stress the desirability of using our imaginations, and thinking for ourselves, insofar as seeking out and experiencing art and using intelligently the ever-multiplying information and advertising/propaganda that bombards us. This statement spells out how I pursue these goals through my teaching, scholarly work, and community involvement.

In the past five years I have increasingly incorporated into classes original works of art of kinds generally ignored by scholars and institutions. These materials consist of publications (e.g., booklets, catalogs, etc.) whose design and artistry helped mold consumers' aesthetic ideals, and film paper (e.g., posters, heralds, etc.) that functioned similarly. I make my students handle these objects to break down barriers between them and works of art—to stress that art is part of life, not just sacred artifacts to be seen but never touched, and to be possessed only by wealthy individuals and elite institutions.

Just as important as introducing artworks into classes is how I use the insights of Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman and such writers as Taleb, Gladwell, and Ariely to encourage and cultivate critical thinking. I use standard examples like the “Linda Problem” and the “ball-and-bat” exercise to spotlight that our thinking is often flawed; that it is necessary to make a conscious effort if we want to be careful and methodical in assessing what we read and hear. I stress that having a logical, systematic framework for thought is more valuable than any specific information and essential for both seeing outside life's blinders and recognizing and getting the most out of the opportunities that life offers.

The courses that I have taught during the past 5 years have been:

- Art 266 Art History I (9 classes)
- Art 267 Art History II (8 classes)
- Art 290 Art Appreciation (8 classes)
- Art 459 Women and the Arts. (2 classes)
- Art 466 Modern Art (3 classes)
- Art 468 American Art (3 classes)
- Art 469 Italian Renaissance Art (1 class)

During my 26 years teaching at Tech I covered all of the art history classes except for a 2-year period when we had a second art historian and since the recent hiring of

Associate Dean Brian Ziegmont, who is also an art historian. My student evaluations averaged 3.6 until Tech switched to the online evaluations when, I confess, they dipped significantly. They had recovered by last quarter, however, when the ratings were 3.8 (Art 267) and 3.3 (Art 266).

During my first 15 years at Tech I published extensively, but in recent years my scholarly focus switched to acquiring the kinds of unconventional art that I talk about above, finding ways to use them in classes, organizing exhibitions of such materials, and donating them to libraries and institutions where they will be used by researchers from various fields. The exhibitions that I organized and mounted fall into 2 categories: those in the Taylor Visual Arts Center for the benefit of students, and larger exhibitions mounted at the Lincoln Parish Library and elsewhere. These exhibitions were:

Taylor Visual Arts Center

- “Bidding Farewell: a final look at selections from the ephemera collection of Professor Saul Zalesch” 2020
- “Did Graphic Design Help Millions of Americans Learn to Love the Web?” 2020
[exhibiting AOL packaging from version 1.5 to version 9]
- “Art History and Film” 2019-2020. [photos from films about artists]
- “Specimens of 19th-Century Graphic Design” 2019
- “European AIDS/HIV/STD Awareness Postcards of the Early 2000s” 2019
- “Corporate Publications of the Early 20th Century” 2019
- “Graphic Design 100 Years Ago” 2018
- “Film Heralds of the 1920s” 2018
- “Graphic Design in America 1875-1940: Some Highlights of a Local Collection” 2018
- “American Almanacs: the 19th Century” 2018
- “American Almanacs 1900-1939” 2018
- “Not Everybody Was Poor: Mail-Order Catalogs of the Great Depression” 2017
- “Graphic Design 100 Years Ago: Printed Ephemera of 1917” 2017
- “Images of the Modern Woman in the late 19th and Early 20th Centuries” 2017
- “Travel Literature Between the World Wars” 2016
- “Graphic Design 100 Years Ago: Ephemera of 1916” 2016
- “Graphic Design and Ephemera” 2015

Lincoln Parish Library

- “Disney’s Feature Length Cartoons” 2019-2020 (60 plus posters from many countries)
- “Star Trek and American Culture” July-October 2019 (60 plus posters)
- “Posters from Movies Based on Books, part One: Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy Films” April-May 2017
- “Posters from Films Based on Books, part Two: War, Westerns, Crime and Espionage” August-September 2017

Other Venues

“Horror Posters Around the World” Parish Press October-November 2016

“Love is in the Air” Parish Press February 2016 [movie paper regarding romance]

“The Global Reach of Hollywood” Enterprise Center, Louisiana Tech University, 2015-2016

During the past 5 years I have given artistic ephemera and documentary materials to the following institutions:

Popular Culture Library, Bowling Green State University: c.5600 film presskits and pressbooks. 2019-20

Center for the Study of Political Graphics, Culver City, CA: c. 300 posters. 2019-20

Posterhouse Museum. New York City: c. 500 posters. 2019

Hoover Institute, Stanford University: c.1500 East German film programs 2019

Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, CA: c.12,000 German film programs; other miscellanea

Library, University of Cincinnati: c.5000 German film magazines. 2015

Library, University of Pennsylvania: c.1000 French film magazines. 2015

Winterthur Museum and Library, Winterthur Delaware: c.15,000 pieces of artistic ephemera, 2015-2020

The principal collection that I formed consisted of booklets, catalogs, almanacs, etc. published before 1940, which I gave to Winterthur, the leading center for the study of Early-American material culture. Its library has already catalogued over 5000 of the gifts. Its online catalog lists these 5000 plus publications and provides small photos of many of the covers. My gift to Winterthur came with but one stipulation: *that scholars will never be charged a reproduction fee for using images from these publications*. I required this because so many institutions have begun to charge very high fees for reproducing imagery in their collections. While it is not actually relevant to this five-year report, some 20 years ago I gave the Archives of the National Museum of American History, at the Smithsonian, some 10,000 modern mail-order catalogs, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art c.3000 issues of journals dealing with trade cards.

I have tried to serve the University and the local community since I moved to Ruston in 1994. The bulk of my University service occurred before the 5-year period under consideration, including four terms on the Senate, serving also on its executive committee; service on the Grievance Committee; and sitting on the Graduate Council between 2007 and 2018. In the School of Art I was for several years Director of the University art galleries, and I remained until last year its chief fundraiser. During the past two years I was the United Way Campaign representative for the School of Design. I also gave several talks on art and creativity as part of the AC/DC program that brought fifth graders from around this region to the Tech campus.

I began acting with Ruston Community Theatre during my first quarter here and have served on its Board of Directors since 1996. I have served on the board of the North Central Louisiana Arts Council since 1997. I joined the board of the Dixie Center for the Arts seven years ago and continue in that capacity (Earlier I was on the committee that planned the theater's restoration and reopening.) Besides my regular board duties I have sponsored during the past five years numerous shows for these agencies, including *Lion King Jr.*, *The Little Mermaid Jr.*, *Witness for the Prosecution*, and *Yes Virginia There Is a Santa Claus* for RCT and the film "The City that Sold America" for the Arts Council.

Throughout my teaching career I have avoided theory and theorizing because theories come and go with each generation of scholars that overturn the work of their predecessors to make their own careers. I have tried to supply our students with a solid grounding in basic information and critical thinking. I have collected the raw materials for the writing of more nuanced histories than have been possible so long as scholars kept consulting the limited range of documents prized by research libraries and the kinds of art heretofore prized by museums. Interpretations of historical events and American life will change constantly, but the artifacts I collected will always be there for scholars to make sense of as best they can. Making these documents and artworks available in perpetuity, and helping our students try to see art and history more clearly, has been my life's work.