

Alfred University's Art Force 5 awarded nearly \$400,000 in state funding

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Ting German, a member of Art Force 5, paints tiles for a mosaic honoring women's rights activists.

ALFRED, NY Alfred University's Art Force 5, a program that uses community-based art to inspire discussion on topics of equality and social justice, has been awarded nearly \$400,000 in state grant funding.

The funds, awarded through the State University of New York (SUNY) Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) and Provost's Performance Improvement Fund (PIF), are for \$387,120 over a two-year period. It will be distributed in equal amounts of \$193,560 in 2018 and 2019.

Established in 2008 as the outreach team for Alfred University's Drawn to Diversity program, Art Force 5 combines social justice with an art therapy approach. In addition to providing non-violence workshops to over one hundred audiences, it specializes in creating community-built art.

"This acknowledgement positions Alfred University as a movement leader, combining art therapy and social justice to strengthen communities," said Dan Napolitano, chief diversity officer at Alfred University, assistant dean of the School of Art and Design, and founder of the Drawn to Diversity and Art Force 5 programs. "The program's creative approach to often sensitive topics is gaining credibility and momentum."

For each of next two years, the PIF funding will be used to create a professional residency for a community-based artist to teach, lead and mentor current Alfred University students in the Art Force 5 program; fund paid internships for Alfred University students; and pay operational costs for 24 outreach efforts throughout the year.

The SUNY-sponsored initiative will take members of Art Force 5 team to a dozen SUNY campuses during the spring and fall semesters, where they will provide student-led diversity workshops for faculty, staff and students. On each campus, the team will develop a community-based art project that pays tribute to a significant alumnus, resident or social justice pioneer from that particular region. In some instances, the team coordinates the creation of elaborate mosaics which require participants (often numbering more than 300) to paint a tile used in the mosaic.

While visiting the campuses, students from Alfred University will be recruiting students from SUNY institutions to be part of an Art Force 5 All-Star Team. That group will participate in a summer 2018 residency program in Harlem, New York City, providing youth workshops at dozens of schools and community centers.

The team's community-based art design will be flexible enough to build pre-designed projects as well as respond to current events. The pre-designed program for next summer will feature construction of multiple mosaic tributes to the

Harlem Hellfighters, built in relevant locations throughout NYC. The Harlem Hellfighters were the nickname for the 369th Infantry Regiment of the New York Army National Guard, which consisted primarily of African Americans and fought in World Wars I and II.

“We are serving these communities by developing accessible no talent required projects which unite rather than divide,” Napolitano commented. “Each community will be involved with project design and process.”

The SUNY funding will have wide-ranging implications for Alfred University, impacting its APEX Applied Learning Initiative, admissions efforts, service-learning, and academic programs.

“The grant will allow us to strengthen our commitment to inclusivity in multiple ways: APEX internships with a service focus, and learning outside the classroom and studio for so many majors art, education, sociology, criminal justice, social justice studies, and more,” Napolitano explained. “From an admissions perspective, we will be taking this program into many more schools, inspiring creative problem-solving. We know high school students will respond to our visual teaching style.”

Art Force 5 organizers are seeking additional support to help fund the program&s efforts, and have already connected with various agencies and organizations in hopes of building partnerships for the summer program.

“While the funding will certainly boost our potential, additional support is still needed,” Napolitano said. “The team is currently considering New York City partners and locations for community-art projects or hosts for workshops. Also, suggestions for affordable New York City summer housing and a possible headquarters/workspace would be extremely valuable.”

Since its founding in 2008, more than 300 students have participated in Art Force 5. Each outreach effort has featured a different team of students, with upper class students passing down knowledge to the new recruits. The club has enjoyed tremendous success over the last nine year, earning national recognition for its diversity training and community-based art. In 2016, Art Force 5 won the Unite Rochester Challenge, a grant to help the city address critical issues such as racism and poverty. The team spent the 2016 summer partnering with city police and local youth centers to create a series of projects to engage the community in critical conversations.

Mosaics commemorating the 100th anniversary of the 1917 Silent Parade civil rights protest in New York City were constructed earlier this year at State University of New York (SUNY) colleges including Brockport, Purchase, Potsdam, Delhi, Canton, and ESF. The final works from that project were exhibited at July&s NAACP Convention in Baltimore.

Another Art Force 5 project from 2017 marked the 100th anniversary of equal voting rights being established for women in New York. The tile mosaics of noted women&s rights advocates were shown in November in Albany at the Women&s Suffrage Centennial Conference.

The program previously partnered with the University of Notre Dame, University of Oklahoma, and the College at Brockport in designing and leading projects which currently reside on those campuses.

Kathy Woughter, vice president of Student Affairs at Alfred University, praised Napolitano for his efforts to secure the latest grant funding and also for developing Art Force 5 into program that is unique and beneficial to the University.

“After having seen Dan work for well over a decade to establish the Art Force 5, giving 100 percent of his energy, dedication and passion to this project, I couldn&t be happier that SUNY has recognized its potential with this level of funding support,” Woughter said. “We&ve long considered it an “only at Alfred” project that nothing else compares to, in terms of the student experience and the positive impact on local, regional and national communities. Art Force 5 IS what Alfred University stands for, and I am so glad for Dan for this accomplishment.”