

Seton Hill University Offers Only Art Therapy Program in Region

by Christopher Cussat

Our “Artists Among Us” series is constantly looking for examples that describe the creative and artistic talents that often lie among and within health industry practitioners. Perhaps nothing better epitomizes this balance of art and healthcare than the discipline and profession of art therapy. Art therapists and community artists work with people of all ages, disabilities, and needs—as well as with individuals and groups. Most commonly, art therapy is utilized in schools, hospitals, correctional facilities, social service agencies, and treatment centers. Community arts specialists, meanwhile, focus specifically on settings outside of mental health-care such as homeless shelters, senior centers, after-school programs, and neighborhood service centers.

One of the few college degree programs for art therapy offered in Pennsylvania (and the only one in Western Pennsylvania) is available at Seton Hill University (Seton Hill) in Greensburg. Seton Hill’s Bachelor of Arts in Art Therapy Program recognizes that the entire process of art therapy (how it unfolds, the art form and content, verbal associations, and social interactions while art making) are all important. The program believes that art and psychology are uniquely combined, and the creative process becomes a vehicle for communication, self-expression, and personal growth. Seton Hill helps students combine their love of art and their desire to help others into an opportunity to transform communities and the world.

The Bachelor of Arts in Art Therapy Program at Seton Hill also prepares students who intend to specialize in community arts, and who may or may not go on to graduate studies. Students with this area of focus intend to use the arts to address issues of social change, or to make arts experiences accessible to populations that have limited opportunity to engage in the arts. Seton Hill art therapy majors who elect to focus on community arts have the opportunity, after earning their bachelor’s degree, to begin careers as arts specialists or community artists, or to continue on to a graduate program in art therapy.

Art therapy students who graduate with bachelor’s degrees are prepared for a variety of professional and career opportunities, including: activities specialists, art therapist assistants, child welfare specialists, caseworkers or care managers,



recreation specialists, rehabilitation assistants, teacher’s aides, life skills counselors, teaching artists, and arts/community arts specialists.

Many art therapy majors plan to continue their education in art therapy after earning their bachelor’s degree. A minimum of a master’s degree is required to practice art therapy and to become a registered (ATR) and board certified (ATR-BC) art therapist. Seton Hill’s goal is to assist these students in exploring art therapy as a career choice and to help prepare them for graduate level education.

Seton Hill also offers a Master of Arts in Art Therapy with a Specialization in Counseling Program. This program prepares students to combine their love of art and their desire to help others into one creative, inspiring, and meaningful career. The Seton Hill graduate art therapy program is designed to develop compassionate scholar-practitioners. The program’s art therapy classes are experiential and students make art in almost every class—thus learning from their own art and the art of others about the power of art to transform feelings, thoughts, and lives.

Graduates of the Master’s program have gone on to work with diverse clients in a variety of settings including: hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, alternative educational settings, prisons, homeless shelters, juvenile detention centers, residential group homes, day treatment centers, halfway houses, burn centers, pediatric hospitals, rehabilitation centers, sheltered workshops, drug and alcohol treatment centers, and in private practices.

Professional preparation is guided by standards established by the American Art Therapy Association (AATA). In fact, the Seton Hill Master of Arts in Art Therapy with a Specialization in Counseling Program has been approved by the AATA since 2000, because the program couples a strong foundation in counseling with an in-depth exploration of art therapy theory and practice. In addition, graduates of the program have become Registered and Board Certified with the Art Therapy Credentials Board and have obtained Professional Counseling Licensure in the state of Pennsylvania.

According to Nina Denninger, Associate Professor and Graduate Art Therapy Program Director, when students study art therapy at Seton Hill, they participate in a voyage of self-discovery. “They learn how to create art that draws on unconscious feelings and thoughts, how to interact with images in ways that elicit their deeper meanings, and how to respond to their own art and the art of others in ways that engender trust and further self-exploration.”

She adds that art therapy students also learn a lot about themselves and the natural gifts they have to bring to a healing practice. Denninger says that art therapy blends one’s love of art and one’s love of helping others into a meaningful and creative career.

For more information on the Seton Hill University Art Therapy Program, please call 724.830.1047 or email gadmit@setonhill.edu. To find other available programs in the country and where they are located, visit the American Art Therapy Association website at www.arttherapy.org/aata-educational-programs.html.

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