

Building a Better Foundation

Delaware College of Art and Design partnership with NextFab makerspace enriches opportunities for multidisciplinary, multidimensional student learning **BY SUSAN COULBY**

THE ART AND DESIGN students of today are the working artists and designers of tomorrow, and the future for creative professionals is increasingly multidisciplinary. Recognizing this evolution, Delaware's first and only professional art and design college sought to partner with what is now Wilmington's premier makerspace as soon as the opportunity arose.

Delaware College of Art and Design had been offering associate of fine arts degree programs and serving as an anchor institution in the revitalization of downtown Wilmington for 20 years when NextFab launched an expansion from its Philadelphia base. Wooed by the Wilmington Renaissance Corporation, which was instrumental in founding DCAD in 1997, the highly regarded makerspace moved into the city near the College's campus in mid-2017. Within six months, the two entities were announcing a collaboration that DCAD President Jean Dahlgren views as a match made in education heaven.

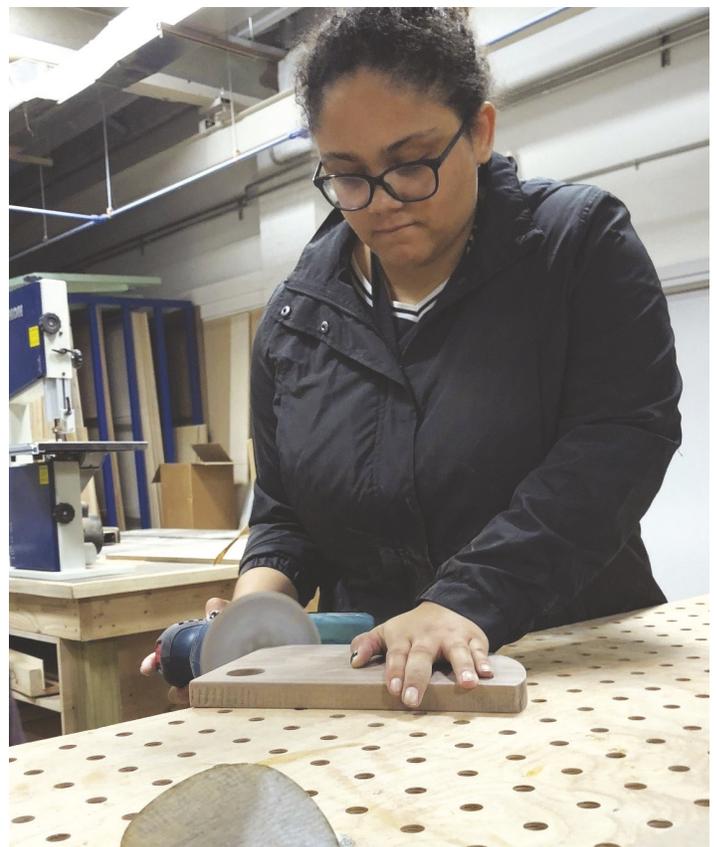
"Our partnership with NextFab allows us to provide our students with a cutting-edge studio environment in which to prototype, imagine and then execute their ideas," Dahlgren says. "Additionally, working in a makerspace allows them to see and interact with its members, many of whom are design entrepreneurs who are showing them what's possible in terms of their futures as artists."

DCAD's accredited foundation curriculum includes a three-dimensional design class, which this year was held jointly between the NextFab facility on Tatnall Street and DCAD's location on Market Street. At NextFab, students receive hands-on training and instruction in each of the workshops and labs. As this preparation meets the students' innate creativity, innovation follows.

"Being a photography major, I never thought that I would be into 3D or that I would be very good at it," says Sarah Graff, who graduated from DCAD in May. "But it has definitely opened up my eyes to incorporating more 3D elements into my photographs."

A particularly valuable aspect of the partnership is that NextFab's entire third floor is dedicated exclusively for use by DCAD students and instructors. This classroom, lounge and exhibition space enables a truly immersive experience for the students. According to fine arts major Erika Wilson, the lounge area is perfect for informal student discussions and group project work. Student artwork already has been exhibited at NextFab during Art Loop Wilmington on a number of occasions.

"We couldn't ask for a better partner in art and design education than



NextFab," Dahlgren says. "I just can't say enough about the staff and how they've worked with us every step of the way to enrich the opportunities we provide our students."

Those associated with DCAD, NextFab and the Wilmington Renaissance Corporation aren't the only ones aware of the value of the DCAD-NextFab affiliation. In May, the College and the makerspace co-hosted a visit by a delegation from the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in New York. DCAD and NextFab were selected for the visit as models of creative partnerships and with the goal of exploring potential collaborations between entities in Delaware and Hong Kong.

Wilmington Renaissance Corp. public relations coordinator Martin Martinez contributed to this article. ■