

West Wales School of the Arts (WWSOTA)

Disciplines Offered:

- Painting
- Sculpture
- Fashion
- Textiles
- Graphics
- Photography
- Ceramics

Terms to Know:

- Course: Concentration
- Module: class
- Tutor: professor
- Tutorial: One-on-one meeting with a tutor in order to discuss problems that the student is having, or to give feedback and suggestions.
- Scheme: program
- Brief: a paper given at the beginning of an assignment or a project outlining the goals of the project and the grading guidelines.

General Information:

Structure:

There are two different levels of study at WWSOTA: Foundation and the BA program. Foundation students are roughly equivalent to students at Kansas State that are pre-CAR. They take a certain amount of classes in each area and do work in each area before deciding which course to follow. Foundation does not have to be taken at the same place as the BA program, and many of the students that I came in contact with did their foundation years in different institutions. After a student graduates with their Foundation course, they choose their concentration and move on to their BA program. The program lasts for three years. Years cannot be repeated for credit, a student either moves on from each year or doesn't.

The first year is spent learning techniques and becoming more intimately familiar with the technical aspects of the course. Since it's a learning kind of year, the grades could be considered theoretical and to help guide the student about the expectations of the course rather than fail students out of the year.

The second year then is when students are given more freedom and looser objectives for the term; however the grades are important as a factor in whether the student will move onto the third year. They still have modules/classes, but not every day, and students are encouraged to work independently on the projects, and demonstrations are mostly to aid the accomplishment of individual projects.

In the third year, students are expected to come up with their own projects and work towards their final show. It is a very independent process of working towards the goal of showing their final show. Again, demonstrations are given on an individual basis as a means to aid the accomplishment of a student's goal.

Modules generally run the entire day or half the day, with tea breaks and a lunch break, and may only happen one day of the week. The students of a certain level and course will take their modules together. For example, the second year painting students all have figure drawing on Wednesday afternoons. The figure drawing module is only for second year painting students. Second year sculpture students might take a class at the same time based on cupola design. Classes are specific to a course and do not usually overlap with other courses.

An exception to that is Contextual Studies. Contextual Studies is a class required on some level at all three years. In the first year, it is a survey and discussion of art history. In the second year, several topics are given and students choose a topic based on interest. Topics can appeal more to students of a certain course than to others, but students can sign up for any topic that interests them, regardless as to whether it directly corresponds to their course. Options for Fall of 2009 included: Thinking and Debating Art and Design; Culture and Cult of the Body; Taste, Beauty and the Sublime; The Culture of Photography and the Moving Image; Word and Image; Colour-fast; The Hand-made; Site and Space; Identity and Self; and Drawing and Mapping. Half of the topics were available for the first part of the year, and the other half were available at the second half of the year. At the end of each topic, each student must write an essay involving an element of the topic that interested them, using specific examples of artists, images of related artwork, and researching views on the subject.

News or information for a course is best found on the bulletin boards found in each of the course areas. Tutors will post any notices if they will be absent for a certain day, or if there is an event happening that may be of interest to students. It is also where a student can sign up for tutorials and in some cases, sign in for attendance. The e-mail system is largely unused. If needing to talk specifically to a tutor, the best bet would be to knock on their office door or sign up for a tutorial.

The WWSOTA building is open from approximately 8 am to 8 pm (earlier on Fridays). Around closing, students are escorted out of the building and the building is locked. There is no 24 hour access to facilities.

There are a number of resources available at WWSOTA. Many basic supplies are available for the different disciplines.

- Color photocopier available near the main office at the entrance
- Publically available computers
- \$10 free printing per term for the public computers

Library:

The library is in Pibwrlwyd (pronounced pim-bur-loyd), which is a short bus ride away. There is a walking route, which takes about thirty minutes. There is usually an introductory tour of the library wherein the librarians explain the process to check out books and use the library. The library has a large collection of art books, including art history, technical processes, current events, and individual artists. The librarians are very helpful and there is a drop box in the office at WWSOTA to return books from the library which is emptied every day.

Grades and Assignments:

Grades are stricter at WWSOTA than at KSU. Grades are given in percentages and in a general classification. Grades above 50% are passing.

- 1 (called a first): This classification is the highest that can be received. To get a first is a great honor, and can also be considered relatively difficult to attain. This designation signifies that the student is commendable in both concepts and execution. A first typically corresponds with anything above a 70%. There are usually only a few people in a concentration that receive this grade at the end of the term.
- 2:1 (called a two one or an upper second class): This classification is exemplary. While not the highest award, it is still considered a very satisfactory final grade, and says that the student was adequate in concepts and execution, but they still have some gaps. It could be considered a step in the right direction, but not quite there.
- 2:2 (called a two two or a lower second class): This classification is still lacking in conceptual understanding, research, or execution.
- 3 (called a third or third class): This classification is the lowest of the passing grades. It could be termed as a limited understanding of the project at hand, and a lack in the response to the project, or possibly a misunderstanding of the goal of the project.
- Anything below a 3 is considered failing.

Assignments vary between years. First years may receive a couple of different assignments based on the areas that they are learning at the time. Second years are given a brief for the entire semester, and left to work towards a single goal to be assessed at the end of the term. Each student must complete a sketchbook that includes research, progress, and an indication that the student is thinking about complex issues and about solving the problems at hand. Students can sign up for tutorials as needed to deal with any difficulties. There may also be other assignments depending on the other modules that the student is involved in.

Disciplines/Facilities:

- Printmaking (Technician: Ian Fischer [for etching and engraving], Lindsay Williams [for mostly screen-printing] and Marguerite Jones [lecturer primarily for screen-printing]): one etching press, one letterpress. There is a traditional rosin box and several hotplates for use. Screen-printing facilities are available but generally restricted to Textile Students. The printmaking facilities are open access for anyone to use once a week; the rest of the week, access is restricted to groups of students or certain modules. Before being allowed to use the printmaking facilities, students must complete a health and safety introductory session. The print shop is closed when the technicians are not there. There are plastic aprons, disposable gloves, and safety masks provided. Also, ink and solvents are provided by the University. Zinc and Copper plates are for sale in the Art Supply store in the building, but generally in small sizes (around 9" by 11" or smaller). Ian uses Edinburgh Etch (ferric acid + citric acid), but the baths are only open when he is available.

- Sculpture (Head of Department: Andy Griffiths): Iron pouring facilities, welding facilities, stone carving facilities, woodshop. Iron pours happen a few times a term and are a group effort. There are mandatory health and safety introductions at the beginning of the year. There are several technicians (Bob and Robert) who can answer any multitude of questions about construction or technical aspects of a project. Students are provided their own space to work in and store their materials and projects. While in any of the facilities, students are required to wear a flame-retardant jumpsuit and steel toed boots. If you are going for sculpture, don't worry! These things are easily found in Carmarthen's market and don't cost too much. There are tools available for public use for anyone who doesn't have their own, and many students are happy to share their own if asked politely. For any questions, ask Griff, or any other sculpture student, they will be glad to help you out.
- Painting (Head of Department: Cath Roche): Each student is given their own studio space and access to basic materials for free. Students generally work in Acrylic paint rather than oils in classwork and for projects, but working in oils is neither encouraged nor discouraged. Materials and paper are available in the University Art Store.
- Ceramics (Head of Department: Peter Bodenham): Each student has their own space for projects and working space. Hand building and wheel throwing available. Raku firing facilities are available.
- Photography (Head of Department:)
- Contextual Studies (various tutors): This is the equivalent to Art History at WWSOTA. Each year is required to take a corresponding Contextual Studies class, the topics vary by year. The first years discuss general art history up to present day and write essays on topics discussed. The second years are given a choice of several topics (e.g. Culture and Cult of the Body, Philosophy in Art and Design, etc.) and have discussions around issues in those topics. They choose an issue that interests them and expand on the topic through essay.

Other fun things about WWSOTA:

- Art Supply store located on-site
- Café located on-site
- Options to go on class trips – London, Venice, Poppet Sands
- Trinity University is an adjacent university to WWSOTA. They have another café where WWSOTA students can go to eat and a pub located on campus called the Union!

About Carmarthen (pronounced Kuh-maar-then) and Welsh Culture

Carmarthen is located in Southern Wales. Swansea is the nearest major city, located a twenty minute train ride away. Currently, they are in construction for building a movie theater and mall in Carmarthen. Carmarthen market is a popular weekend outing, and works like a kind of cross between a farmer's market and flea market. Stands house fresh meats and produce, as well as stands for different interests, restaurants, and clothing

merchants. In addition to the marketplace, they have several major retail chains, including New Look, Marks and Spencer, and T.K. Maxx (the British equivalent of T.J. Maxx). There are several art supply stores in the downtown area as well. Wales includes VAT (sales tax) in the marked price for items, so the advertised price is often exactly what you pay. For grocery shopping, there is several grocery stores including Wilkinson's and Tesco's, and both places sell general house wares (like Walmart). The town also has a main park, and there are local rugby games. For night life, there are many different pubs, including the Gold, the Three Salmons, the Friend's Arms and the pub on Trinity's campus (Called the Union). There is also a dance club called Metros, located further downtown, and the Union has a downstairs area that often has DJs and dancing.

Carmarthen can be difficult to maneuver around the first couple of days there, but it's easy and quick to learn where to go. Even if you get lost, people are very friendly and will point you in the right direction. Going along with housemates on their errands will help you get the feel for the area and the ability to navigate it easily.

Welsh culture is distinct from that of the rest of Britain. Welsh is a commonly spoken language around Carmarthen, though almost everyone also speaks English as a second (or first) language. Signs are in both languages, and in the trains, instructions are given in both languages. Welsh people are viewed as distinct and separate from British people in their culture, so it is important not to generalize a Welsh citizen as British as it may not be appreciated. Students at WWSOTA vary in their countries of origin – from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales, and England, so there is a wide range of different cultures present in Carmarthen. If you have any troubles in the town, most townies are very friendly and happy to help.

Housing/Student Life:

Housing at WWSOTA is not available on campus, so all housing arrangements are made through private landlords. Often, a house has several rooms that are rented out by the landlord, though people who want to live in the same house can easily arrange to do so. The tenant has keys to their own room and to their house. There is usually a common living room, kitchen, bathroom(s) and backyard kind of area. The amount of people per house can range from three to about ten. There is often a washer located in the kitchen for washing clothing, but not usually a dryer. There is space in the back garden to hang wet laundry. If necessary, there is a Laundromat located down St. Catherine's St.

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Rent is collected either by a monthly basis, or on a term basis. Landlords may come around fairly regularly either to collect rent, or to check on the tenants. There are often house rules enforced by the landlord – often not to smoke inside the house, or to keep the common areas fairly clean. Rent amounts are roughly comparable to rent in Manhattan, and often slightly cheaper. Expect to pay at least as much as the average rent amount in Manhattan per month, or times by the number of months you are staying to determine how much your term rent would amount to.

Bills are paid slightly differently than they are in Manhattan, however. Often, in houses there are cards that fit into the electric fuse box or the gas box that can be charged with

different amounts of money. When the money runs out, the electric or the gas turns off. There is usually a £5 emergency amount on each card that can be switched on if no one can go charge the card that day. Cards can be charged at pharmacies, and at the co-op located downtown. Houses usually have a system of deciding who charges the card, for how much, and divides expenses accordingly.

Internet is a different charge, billed to your house. Internet can be provided by the Post Office, located downtown (see map), or from a variety of other providers. The Post Office (Royal Mail) can provide internet, and landline telephone service.

Cell phones can be topped up all over town, including at most pharmacies, at Tesco's, and most grocery stores (including SPAR). I used Virgin Mobile, however, many different types of providers are available, including one provided by Tesco. They all provide pay-as-you-go kind of plans and phones that you can purchase in town. If you are buying a cellphone in London, try to buy a universally unlocked phone so that if you buy a certain SIM card that doesn't get good reception, you can switch it out easily upon arrival. Phones can be very cheap, some even for £10.

Money Matters:

ATMs are located around town at all banks, and one at Tesco's. You will be informed if there are any fees to use the ATM, but most do not seem to charge a fee for usage. If you have any American money (or need Euros or American money), there is a place to buy travel money at Tesco's and at the Post Office, as well as many banks.

Travel:

There are many trips to surrounding areas that are interesting and provide a lot of variety to Carmarthen. Train tickets can be purchased from www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk

1. London: The capital of the United Kingdom is only a four hour train trip away. Train tickets usually cost about £20 or so. Accommodations can run about £20 - £50 a night depending on where you stay. Websites like www.hostelbookers.com and www.hostelworld.com can help you find a place to stay ahead of time. London has the Tate Modern Museum of Art, the Tate Britain Museum of Art, the Saatchi Gallery, the National Gallery, and many other art-related attractions. Ask your tutors, and they should be able to direct you towards areas that relate to your concentration and interest.
2. Swansea: Swansea is a port town, located about 30 minutes by train away from Carmarthen. Swansea has all the benefits of a larger town, and provides different entertainment and attractions from Carmarthen, including movie theaters, shopping, and galleries. Train tickets run about £8 to £12.
3. Tenby: Tenby is a town with a Victorian kind of flavor with access to the beach and even trips out towards Caldey Island (an island off the coast). There are all sorts of old-fashioned candy shops, and the town has a fun atmosphere that makes it a great get-away for a day.