HISTORY OF SAIC

For more than 150 years, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) has been a leader in educating artists, designers, and scholars. SAIC’s history as a world-renowned college of art and design is interwoven with the Art Institute of Chicago and the city itself.

1866 A group of Chicago artists meet to discuss the formation of an art school with its own art gallery, laying the foundation for the Chicago Academy of Design

1869 The State of Illinois grants the Chicago Academy of Design a charter

1872 A teaching collection is established, consisting primarily of plaster casts as well as Egyptian and Classical material

1882 Name is changed to the Art Institute of Chicago to accommodate a distinct museum and school, which is later known as the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

1891 First diplomas are awarded

1893 The Art Institute of Chicago school and museum move into the iconic building on Michigan Avenue built for the World’s Columbian Exposition

1918 SAIC is now the largest art school in the world, with an enrollment of 4,520 students

1925 The Goodman Theatre is built on the northeast corner of the museum in memory of an SAIC alum who died in World War I

1936 SAIC is the first art school to be accredited by a regional accrediting association

1940 First Master of Fine Arts degrees are awarded

1969 SAIC establishes an interdisciplinary approach to art education, allowing students to determine their own pathways through the curricula with faculty consultation

1972 The Generative Systems program is launched, which evolves into the Department of Art and Technology Studies—the first department of its kind in the country

1982 The Early College Program for high school students is established

1993 Graduate programs diversify, with the introduction of the MA in Arts Administration, MS in Historic Preservation, and MFA in Writing

2001 SAIC faculty, students, and alumni develop the technology and production techniques for Millennium Park’s Crown Fountain, which increases SAIC’s focus on external collaborations

2002 SAIC is named the “most influential art school in the United States” in a survey of art critics conducted by the National Arts Journalism Program at Columbia University

2006 New graduate programs are introduced in design, including the Master of Architecture, Master of Design in Designed Objects, and Master of Interior Architecture

2009 SAIC produces the most Fulbright fellows among art and design schools

2012 The LeRoy Neiman Center opens, providing SAIC with its first campus center. For the 15th consecutive year, U.S. News and World Report ranks SAIC in the top three fine arts programs in its annual Best Graduate Schools edition

2016 SAIC celebrates 150 years as a leader in art and design education

2018 SAIC commissions US Pavilion at Venice Architecture Biennale with the University of Chicago