

The story of the Story Arts Centre

Celebrating 25 years of storytelling unleashed

In late 2019, the Story Arts Centre celebrated its milestone 25th anniversary. It's been a quarter century of constant evolution for a campus that celebrates the power and possibilities of storytelling in modern times.

Home to Centennial's School of Communications, Media, Arts and Design, the Story Arts Centre is brimming with imagination, diversity and cutting-edge technology. From its original 300 students and five program offerings, today over 1,600 students are enrolled in 36 programs spanning everything from 3D Animation to Dance Performance to Contemporary Journalism. It is one of the most productive and exciting sites of creative education in Canada today.

Its exponential growth over the past 25 years has been driven by a guiding belief that stories are at the very core of what it is to be human.

“We’re not human unless we’re involved in stories,” says Nate Horowitz, Campus Principal of the Story Arts Centre and Dean of the School of Communications, Media, Arts and Design. “It’s primal. It goes back to the beginning of human history; of self-expression.”

When the doors to 951 Carlaw Avenue opened in 1994, the Story Arts Centre – then known as the Communication Arts Department – marked the beginning of a new future for Centennial as a focal point for young people pursuing careers in media and the arts. As a dedicated campus where a broad range of disciplines are co-located under one roof, the Centre has been the catalyst for boundless creativity.

Housed in an east-end mid-century modern building originally designed for the Toronto Teachers College, and later the setting of the famed *Degrassi High* television series, the Story Arts Centre’s limited footprint has the effect of enabling, rather than inhibiting, the intersection of students’ crafts.



“Degrassi High,” the famous CBC television series, was filmed in 1989 and 1990 at Centennial College’s East York campus, which is now The Bell Centre for Creative Communications.



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“What we’ve got with the Story Arts Centre is one building for communications, media, the arts and design programs, and you can’t help but trip over each other’s stories,” says Nate.

Students are educated and trained to tell those stories in a multitude of forms. Photography, painting, music, gaming, digital graphics and the possibilities they can create together are just a few examples of the storytelling channels students have an opportunity to explore. “A lot of people think media and the arts are like oil and water and don’t blend well together, but I disagree,” says Nate. “Why not put them together and see what the possibilities in the future of work can be?”

As the school has evolved over the years, so too has its student body. In recent years, growing numbers of international students have brought tremendous diversity in experiences and perspectives. Young people are travelling to study at the Story Arts Centre from all over the world, with strong representation from the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico, South America, Russia, Russian Siberia, Ukraine, India, Nigeria, Kenya, China and South Korea. The school has also seen an influx of students from Western European countries like Italy, Finland, Spain and Germany.

The global tapestry of the Centre’s student population has dramatically enriched the creativity emerging from 951 Carlaw Ave.



“I love the way our international students have changed and influenced how stories are being told,” says Nate. “Today, the Story Arts Centre story is one of diversity, culture and the richness they bring to this campus.”



Nate and his team are exploring the adoption of a unique model of learning – a “disruptor to storytelling” – that will allow students to pursue primary and secondary disciplines which may be radically different, rather than staying in their lanes and doing only interdisciplinary team work. Allowing students to explore their interests and push the boundaries of their creativity has the potential to lead them to new frontiers of storytelling.

“So many of our students will be the leaders in storytelling in this country and in the world over the next 25 years,” says Nate. “We’re thinking not only about what skills they’ll need to navigate the future, but what more we can do to help them think on both a local and global scale.”

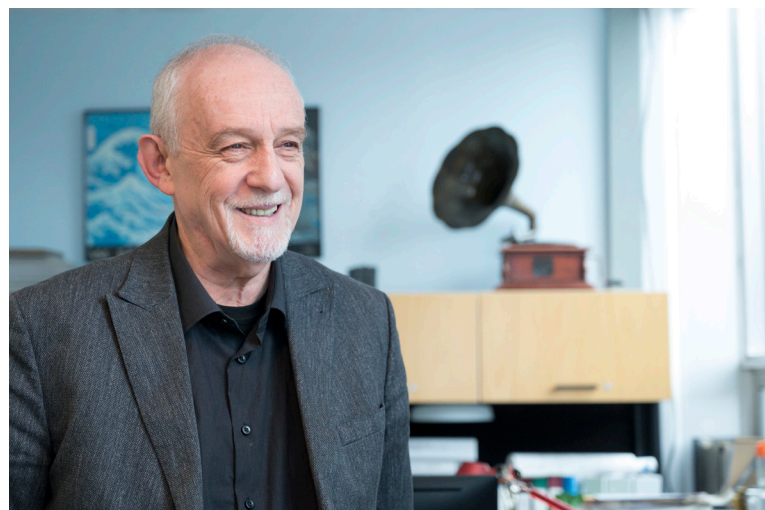
The past quarter century has also seen dramatic changes in technology and political and social thought, and the Story Arts Centre has worked hard to keep up with the ever-evolving landscape and demands of the digital era.

Becoming a primarily laptop-based campus long before many of its competitors, the Centre has recently updated three of its graphics labs – animation, digital visual effects and gaming – and offers state-of-the-art broadcasting and production equipment. The school’s leadership is now exploring the use of augmented reality and virtual reality to enable and enhance storytelling.

“The future is a mix of culture and politics and personal needs,” says Nate. “We’re constantly thinking about what storytelling is going to look like and what technology is needed to help drive those stories.”

But technology isn’t the only story. The Story Arts Centre is also committed to celebrating traditional modes of storytelling and weaving Indigenous practices into its curriculum and day-to-day activities. In 2019, the Centre welcomed its first Indigenous Storyteller in Residence, Harmony Nadjiwon, who has been helping students and faculty acknowledge, learn about and incorporate Indigenous history, culture and key messages into their course work and curricula.

Looking ahead to the future, Nate believes the next 25 years will be a crucial time for storytelling – and that the Story Arts Centre has a crucial role to play in preparing students to make their mark.



Photos in this article taken by second year photography student, **Neda Durovski** nedadurovski.com



NETWORKING MADE SIMPLE

How your experience can help the next generation of Centennial College graduates

Remember when you were a student at Centennial College? When graduation started to get closer and closer, the transition from school to your career, and how you were going to make that jump, was probably the biggest thing on your mind. Imagine if you’d known then what you know now about the career you’re in. What would you tell yourself? Today, there’s a whole new generation of students and recent graduates who are full of potential but don’t know how to make that jump, so you can do the next best thing, and tell them through the **Centennial College Hub**, while helping advance your own career. Centennial College has partnered with Ten Thousand Coffees and RBC Future Launch to create the Hub, and we need experienced industry partners just like you to lead it.

How does it work?

After you sign up for the Hub, you will be automatically matched with a student each month who has questions related to your background, degree and skill set. Next, you’ll grab a coffee with them in-person, chat on the phone, or meet virtually on Google Hangouts, to tell them what they need to know. If you’re not available for a monthly chat, you can just pause your introductions anytime on the home page of the hub.

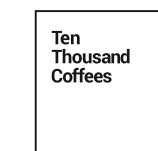
What’s in it for you?

Taking part in the Centennial College Hub can also give your own career a boost, in multiple ways. Networking is valuable no matter what stage of your career you’re in, and the Hub offers you a perfect chance to make new connections, and advance your own career. Signing up gives you access to our Member Directory and connect with other professionals like yourself. Participating also means we give you a LinkedIn profile certification to add to your volunteer experience, boosting your credentials.

By taking part in the Centennial College Hub, you’ll be sharing your career advice and experience, and having conversations could have a lifelong impact, all while helping improve your own career.

Interested? Sign up at tenthousandcoffees.com/schools/centennial and pass your wisdom on today!

Summary: Imagine if you’d known as a student what you know now about your career. You can pass your wisdom on through the Centennial College Hub, while helping advance your own career.



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