

January 15, 2025

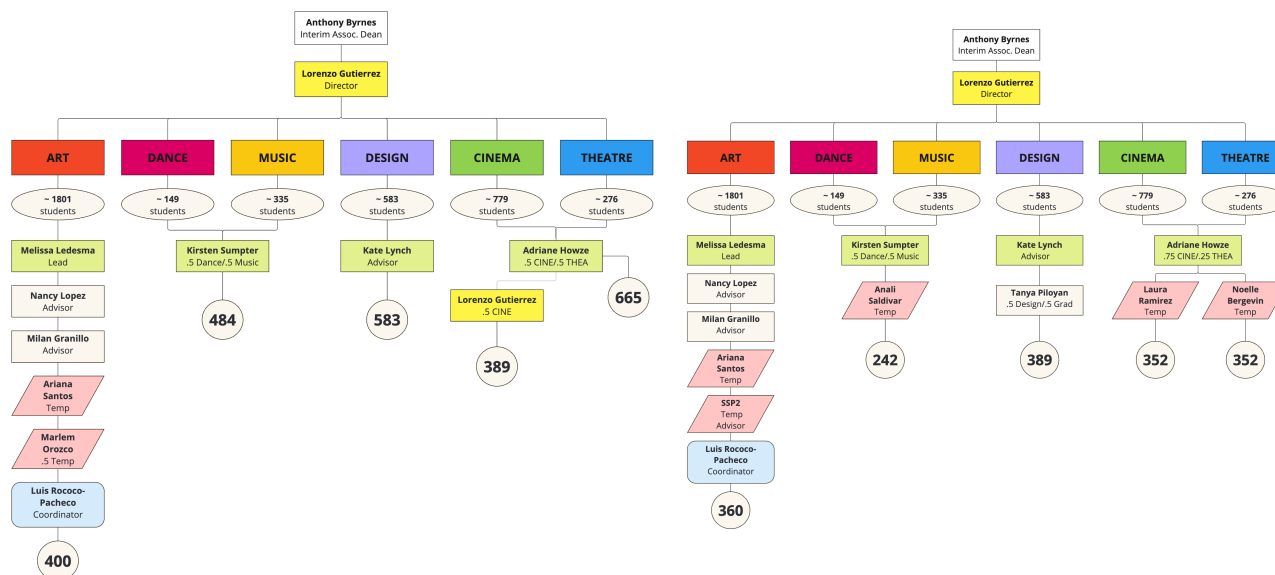
Dear Members of the COTA Associate Dean Search Committee,

For the past 15 months, I have had the honor of serving as the Interim Associate Dean for Student Success and Outreach at CSULB's College of the Arts (COTA). Based on this experience and the work in front of us as an institution, I am writing to enthusiastically apply for the Associate Dean for Student Success and Outreach position. To highlight my qualifications and share my approach and passion for this work, I am providing examples from three key facets of my work in the role as interim associate dean. These examples illustrate the deep sense of service that guides my commitment to this role, our college, and, most importantly, our students.

Undergraduate Advising

When I assumed the Interim Associate Dean position, our undergraduate advisors carried unmanageable caseloads of 400 to 665 students each—among the highest on campus. This issue, identified in a 2021 external program review, was compounded by a lack of resources and a specialized advising structure that made centralized solutions infeasible. When I joined the COTA office in fall of 2023, there was no plan or strategy to address the issue. The advisors were overworked, and it was directly affecting students.

To address this challenge, I thoroughly researched the problem to develop a clear understanding of it both within COTA and across the university. I benchmarked against other colleges across campus and developed a concise infographic (see below) to communicate COTA's unique challenges and advocate for change.



The next challenge was to identify funds to support additional advising within the existing resource constraints of the institution. This required a deep understanding of CSULB's complex funding structures and collaboration with stakeholders within COTA and the broader university. By developing a novel funding proposal and holding targeted meetings to contextualize and clarify the issue, with the Dean's support, I was able to successfully identify funding to secure four temporary and 1 permanent hire in advance of the 2024-2025 academic year.

These changes reduced our highest advising caseload from 665 to 389 students—a 41% improvement—and allowed our advising lead to refocus his time on critical leadership tasks instead of direct advising. While the solution is not yet permanent, it represents a significant step toward a more equitable, proactive, student-centered advising culture.

To sustain this progress, at the beginning of the 24-25 academic year, I invited four of our advising leads to join me on a University Data Fellows project to identify and catalogue equity gaps among COTA students. This initiative will help better position COTA for future funding opportunities as part of the Chancellor's new program to replace GI2015 and will further elevate the visibility and expertise of our advisors across the university.

The progress I have been able to make in this area reflects my ability to effectively collaborate within COTA and across the university, creatively address challenges within existing structures and funding mechanisms, and remain committed to equity and excellence for our students, staff, and faculty.

Strategic Planning Process

One of Dean Smith's key priorities when he began in his role was the development of a long-overdue strategic plan for the College. To lead this effort, he engaged an outside consulting firm and appointed Associate Dean Chiara Ferrari and me as co-chairs of the process. Chiara and I began our work with a 22-person steering committee and a foundational plan developed by the consultant.

We quickly realized that while the consultant's plan could guide the creation of a strategic plan, it would not foster the conditions necessary for its success within the college. COTA's culture and ethos required a more open and inclusive process. Additionally, the steering committee—comprised of staff, faculty, a student, and an alumnus—took on this demanding work alongside their full schedules and without additional compensation.

Chiara and I quickly developed a parallel process to the consultant's plan, designed to foster broader engagement and reimagine the steering committee's role. We also recognized the importance of incorporating input from students, faculty, staff, alumni, and donors. To achieve this, we implemented college-wide surveys, organized a day of focus group meetings, and facilitated several group retreats.

For the committee, we fostered a meeting culture that respected members' time by using meetings to engage their voices and opinions rather than simply provide updates. This required us to support the committee by sharing relevant information in advance and carefully scheduling meetings around their availability.

Chiara and I transformed the committee from a reserved and skeptical group at the first meeting into a collaborative team that, by the final meeting, worked efficiently and creatively resulting in a first draft of a strategic plan that reflected multiple feedback points from across the college.

I share this experience to highlight my strong collaborative partnership with Chiara and our mutual respect for students, faculty, and staff, as well as their contributions to the college's shared goals. I believe the strategic plan reflects this ethos and commitment.

Third Attempt Meetings

I'll be honest: third-attempt meetings are my favorite part of the position. These occur when a student who has failed a class twice has to meet with the Associate Dean to seek permission for a third attempt. These are not easy meetings for students—they've tried twice and haven't made it across the line, and it can feel like being sent to the principal's office. They're challenging for me, too, as the stories are

almost never about a student simply failing to do the work. Instead, they reveal students grappling with financial, medical, personal, and societal challenges, doing their best in circumstances that sometimes overwhelm them.

Why are these my favorite meetings?

Because they provide an opportunity to shift a student's perspective on themselves, their experience of the college, and their path forward. I can listen, validate their struggles, offer advice, and let them know they have an advocate in the COTA office. What begins as a daunting meeting can turn into something positive—not only granting permission but also opening a line of support, checking up on them midway through the semester to see how they are doing and possibly connect them with resources or, if they've hit an obstacle, keep the communication alive between them and their professor.

With any luck, the need for these meetings will diminish as our support structures improve. But as long as students face these challenges, I'm grateful to play a role in helping them succeed.

Looking Forward

I hope these examples convey my enthusiasm, dedication, and the deep sense of service and responsibility with which I approach and engage this role on an interim basis. Looking forward to the challenges the college will face in the coming year and the potential still to be realized, I think of the additional impact that would be possible were I to hold this position long term: the promise of taking the strategic plan from concept to reality; helping the college weather economic turbulence through equitable and sustainable decisions and policies; continuing to be of service to the college by listening to students, staff and faculty; the potential for continuing to create a more sustainable, transparent infrastructure for the college's policies and procedures; expanding professional internship opportunities and funding for our students; providing and extending the institutional memory and stability of the COTA office. All of these challenges and opportunities inspire me and are what drive me to apply to apply for this position.

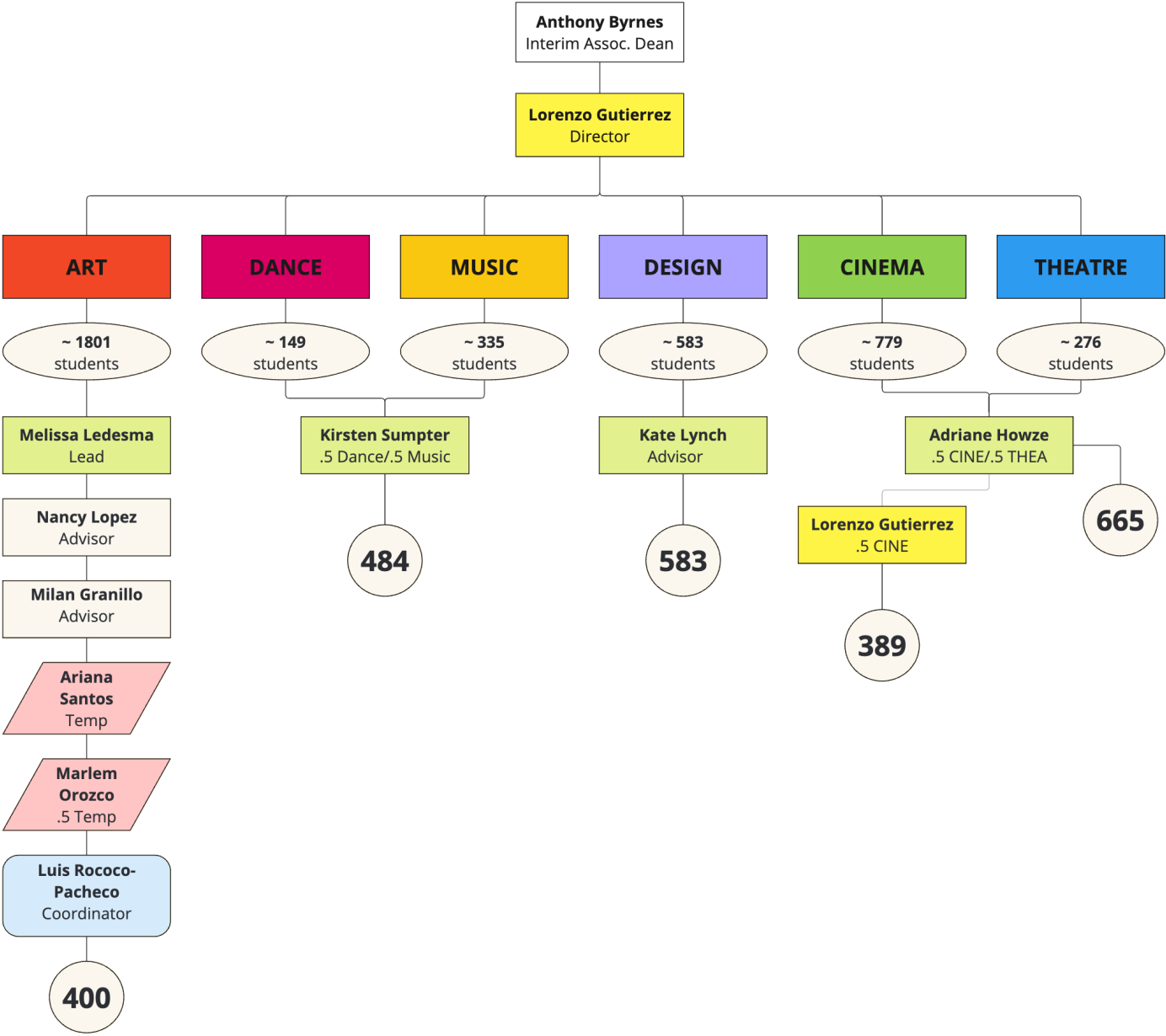
If you find my materials and experience compelling, I would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss my candidacy for the Associate Dean position further.

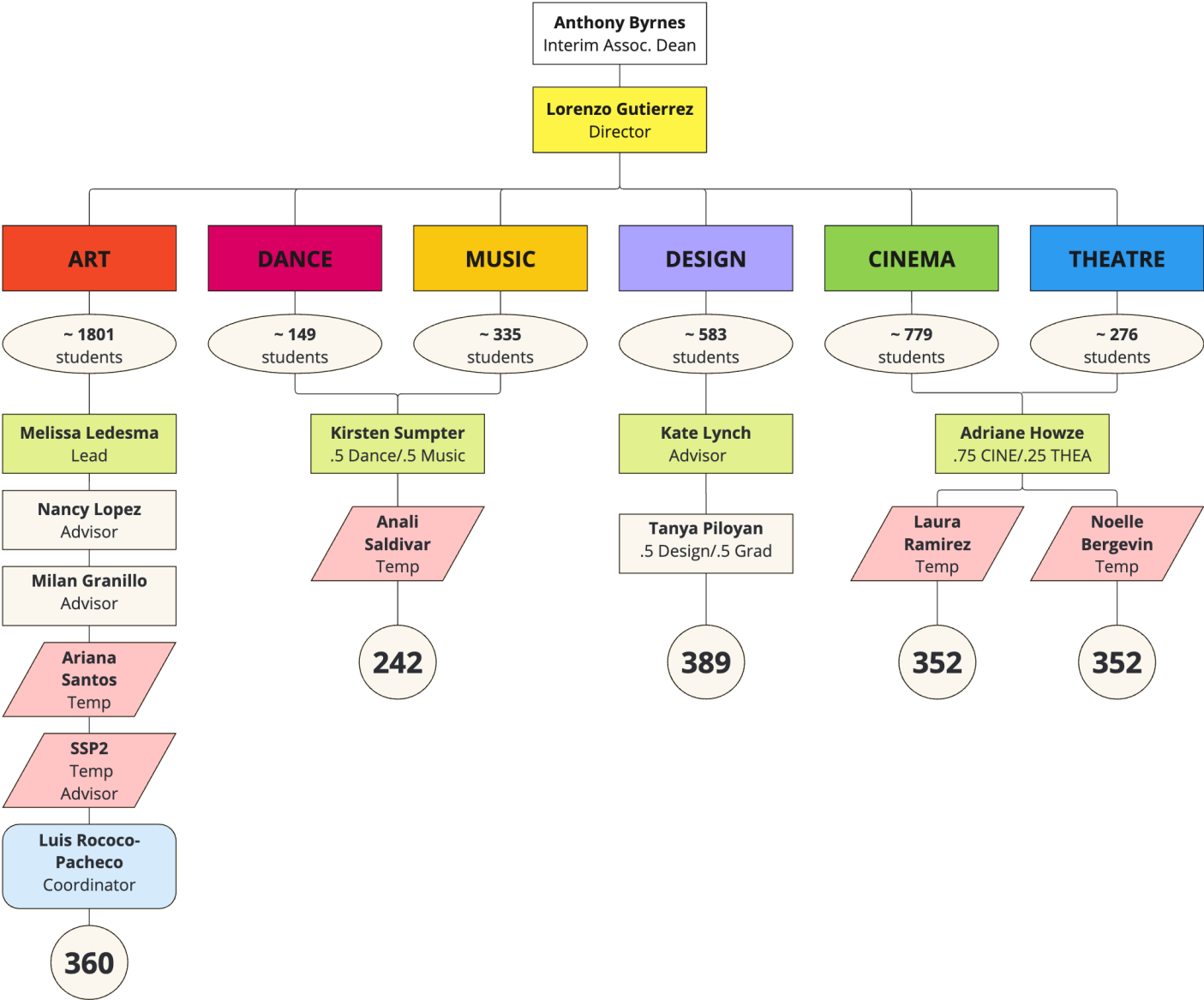
With gratitude and respect,



Anthony Byrnes

Attached:
Advising Infographics
Strategic Plan
Diversity Statement





Investing in the Next Generation of the Arts for All

Preamble: When we speak for the College of the Arts (COTA) we speak of a community that is inclusive of students, staff, students, administrators, alumni, friends. We all have a role in this work and this plan.

FOCUS AREA 1:

INVEST IN THE FUTURE

The College of the Arts will transform the college to become a national model for inclusive excellence through a reimagined curriculum and revitalized facilities to forge sustainable careers in the Arts and creative industries that reflect the practical needs and skills of students in 2030 and beyond.

FOCUS AREA 2:

INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS

The College of the Arts will build transformational relationships, both internally and externally, fostering interdisciplinary work and teaching, cross-department collaboration and events, and strong connections in the Arts and creative industries.

FOCUS AREA 3:

INVEST IN OURSELVES

The College of the Arts will invest in optimizing its processes and clarifying its procedures to achieve a balanced and equitably distributed workload for staff and faculty while fostering an inclusive and diverse environment where COTA faculty, staff, and students can thrive.

GOALS - INVEST IN THE FUTURE

By 2030 COTA will:

1. **Develop and Implement a 2030 Ready Curriculum**
COTA will reimagine and begin implementing COTA curriculum that emphasizes student educational and professional needs in 2030 and beyond.
2. **Establish a Strategic Facilities and Technology Plan**
COTA will create a college wide assessment of current and projected facility and technology needs consistent with student needs and industry practices, as well as a fiscal plan to outline how these needs will be sustainably funded.
3. **Diversify COTA Revenue**
COTA will develop sustainable self-support initiatives that will increase COTA's external/extramural revenue.
4. **Cultivate Global Awareness and Engagement**
COTA will develop teaching and learning, scholarship, and service opportunities that foster cross-cultural sensitivity and a global perspective.

GOALS - INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS

By 2030 COTA will:

1. **Promote Alumni Connection**
COTA will establish "homecoming" events in each department and within the college that reconnect alumni with COTA.
2. **Foster Campus & Community Partnerships**
COTA will identify and capitalize on mutually beneficial opportunities for students, campus partners, and community partners to work together in a way that creates gateways to learning and becoming involved with COTA.
3. **Strengthen Industry Connections**
COTA will establish and implement a strategy for identifying and engaging key industry partners to develop relevant educational and job opportunities for COTA students.
4. **Tell Our Story**
COTA will define our stakeholder audiences and create and implement a strategic communications plan that conveys the value of college and department initiatives.

GOALS - INVEST IN OURSELVES

By 2030 COTA will:

1. **Promote an Equitable College of the Arts for All**
COTA will launch data-informed initiatives to identify and close persistent equity gaps and ensure equitable retention and recruitment rates for students, faculty, and staff across the college.
2. **Focus on Student Centered Decision Making**
COTA will develop and utilize specific strategies and tools to ensure the student educational experience is front and center in every decision made by the college and its departments, schools and units.
3. **Create a Sustainable Workforce within COTA**
COTA will establish and implement collaborative assessment processes to equitably balance staff and faculty workloads, to increase retention rates, and to support faculty and staff in their professional development program amidst a changing workplace.