Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: This year has been a busy one for the College of Arts and Letters (COAL) at Missouri State University. As 2018 ends, the college is looking forward to several exciting things in 2019. I'm Emily Yeap.

 Joining me today to share some highlights are Dr. Shawn Wahl, COAL interim dean, and Dr. Christopher Collins, Missouri Fine Arts Academy (MFAA) director and assistant professor in the Department of Communication.

 Wahl.

Shawn Wahl: One of the things that we've been working on for several years is actually becoming an all Steinway school. I'm proud to announce that we are now officially an all Steinway school. Our faculty have selected the Steinway pianos. We saw a huge delivery in August. The remaining inventory arrived in November. We're really looking forward to 2019 because we're officially going to have an all Steinway launch celebration. We're also going to have an opportunity for friends of the university, alumni, anyone who's passionate about the arts, to join what we're calling “The All Steinway Circle.” There's a number of events that we'll be announcing in early 2019.

Emily Yeap: The college will continue to provide a variety of pre-college learning experiences across its seven departments.

Shawn Wahl: One of the pre-college learning experiences that we've been fostering for several years now is supported by Any Given Child. The particular project affiliated with Any Given Child is actually a pre-college arts experience that brings students to campus to dream about going to college, but also to experience the arts.

Emily Yeap: A couple of COAL's other pre-college learning experiences involve writing and debate.

Shawn Wahl: We have a series of writing projects that are important for youth across the region, but we also have on-campus training for public school teachers, and it's really exciting to see people come to the university to focus on and celebrate writing. We also have the Summer Debate Institute. This brings in students from all across the state to really practice debate, where they learn critical thinking, research, and of course, oral communication skills.

Emily Yeap: After a one year break, the Missouri Fine Arts Academy, launched back in 1996, makes its return. Collins explains more about the academy and what's in store for next summer's program.

Christopher Collins: The academy is a two-week, residential, interdisciplinary arts program, specifically designed for sophomores and juniors in high school, to give them a pre-college experience, but also to expose them to a variety of different art methods, processes, ways to inspire and influence the art that they're creating as they move forward.

 The major difference from some of the previous years is that we've shifted from a three week to a two week version of the academy. Part of that was to deal with some of the funding costs. But we also wanted to make sure that we kept the academy financially accessible for students.

 In terms of what we're going to do, it's similar. In my talks with many of the alumni of the academy, everybody mentioned the transformative nature of the experience, and so for me, part of it is to continue to maintain that transformative ability of the academy itself.

 We have several different areas that they can choose to explore: visual arts, theater, dance, creative writing or music. They can experience shows like Tent Theater on campus. We're looking to have guest artists come in and work with them individually in their specific area, how one might write their particular stories, their narratives. Then stand those up, perform those, begin to use some of the acting classes to be able to articulate their voice.

Emily Yeap: The academy will accept 100 participants.

Christopher Collins: We are looking for students that have excelled in their area. They clearly show a lot of potential and promise. Particularly, I'm interested in students that are the diamond in the rough, that are looking for that little bit of inspiration that can begin to really push them in the right direction for their journey, so that they can make the changes on, not just their local community, but also Missouri as a whole.

Emily Yeap: Wahl believes it was necessary to bring the academy back.

Shawn Wahl: When we had the opportunity to really take a look at the difference that the academy had made in students' lives, it was just an automatic. We had to bring it back. The academy has a clear legacy, and the legacy of the academy is one part of our foundation that's led us to be a destination campus for the arts.

Emily Yeap: MFAA 2019 will take place June 2nd to 15th. The online application is now open and closes in February. To get more details, visit MissouriState.edu/MFAA.

 I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at KSMU.org.