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Access to Awe, Wonderment and Beauty are Basic Necessities

By Chung Park
UCF Forum columnist
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“Going into my fifth year at UCF I’ve started to think more about access to the things that contribute to our happiness,” writes music instructor Chung Park.



When I interviewed at UCF in 2015, I was completely astounded by the scale of everything I encountered—the size of the student body, the campus, the sprawling Orlando metroplex.

What I came to understand is that things aren't big just for the sake of being big. There are reasons for it and I see several of them even from my narrow vantage point, but the one that stands out to me the most was that of access.

In a world where poorer students [don't even bother applying](#) to prestigious schools because they don't know that they'll be accepted, if they'll be able to afford tuition or are worried about being socially isolated, our vision and action are needed more than ever. Where these students might have been failed by the system, UCF is creating one that helps ours succeed.

I've seen time and again how hard everyone at UCF works to make sure that a student who really wants to be here can get here if they put in an effort. This has led to tremendous growth. Yet our size doesn't prevent my colleagues at the university's School of Performing Arts or the incredible people I've worked with in admissions from sweating over every applicant we look at. This care has built our school into an academic powerhouse while still being inclusive of those students who might be on the academic fringe.

Access is the central tenet of my "why," explained with eloquence and passion in author and motivational speaker [Simon Sinek's](#) fantastic [TedX talk](#). His thesis is that great companies, organizations and people succeed because they are driven by a powerful core belief and not simply by external compulsion. For me, access to education and the upward social mobility it provides is that core belief.

Going into my fifth year at UCF I've started to think more and more about access to the things that contribute to our happiness that we often take for granted. Stick with me, for the path is going to get a little circuitous. For example, who would think that simply having peace and quiet is becoming a [province of the wealthy](#)? Similarly, studies have shown that access to [green spaces](#), [clean water](#) and even [grocery stores](#) are determined by socioeconomic status.

The success we are striving for is meaningless without love, affection and fellowship. These are the true currencies of a human existence, the things we use to build bonds.

Making these things available to us is why we work so hard. Let's focus on fellowship for a moment. I believe that a shared appreciation of the beautiful is one of its most powerful forms. We've all had that moment where we've wordlessly shared a powerful appreciation of the beautiful with others. It transfigures you, bends your sense of time, takes your breath away. As much as we need access to the incredible education UCF provides, we need access to the ineffable and unexplainable. We wouldn't even be here were it not for the generations upon generations of our ancestors who wondered what it was like "up there," leading eventually to our space program and the founding of Florida Technological University, this university's original name.

If it seems like I'm on a runaway tangent, I'll get us back on track with this: I think access to awe, wonderment and beauty are basic necessities and as much of a human right as clean water, healthy food and a great education.

Amidst the excitement of our UCF Symphony Orchestra going on the road for a concert, there is always a small pang of regret. While we give our Central Florida community access to beautiful music played at a near professional level by our incredible students, we leave the campus silent, our students bereft. The appreciation of an intimate moment between soloist and orchestra is missed, the power of a full orchestra playing fortissimo isn't felt. The conversations that start with, "Did you see that?" or "Did you hear that?" and most importantly, "Did you feel that?" are missing.

Talk of a planned performance hall on campus focuses too often and too narrowly upon the needs of our students in the arts. Yes, we need one for them, for they have goals and dreams, and the number of them who go on to represent UCF brilliantly is legion.

I, however, want to turn our focus to the engineering, sociology or pre-med student who is in an incredibly demanding major and craves a moment of beauty. Sometimes they don't even know they need it, but every day I see students pause in their hustling to class, captivated by the music pouring out of our humble rehearsal hall. I want to invite these students in, to communicate openly with them as we might have with an old friend on the village green a century ago.

Our lives are often weighed down, heavy with the importance of making the grade or getting tenure. We need the leavening of spirit that beauty brings to our lives to make all of this effort worthwhile. We also need to share it with others—to give access to it—in a beautiful space dedicated to this endeavor and reserved for fellowship.

Chung Park is the director of the UCF Symphony and Chamber Orchestras, head of string music education and instructor of viola in the Department of Music. He can be reached at Chung.Park@ucf.edu.