“I met a lot of creative people who were supportive in a way that said, ‘You can try anything you want and it isn’t going to be wrong.”

—Oscar-nominated visual effects wiz (and SF State alum) Rich McBride

At San Francisco State University, a renewable resource has always powered our culture: creativity. Whether you’re looking at the arts, science or business, SF State cultivates the kind of unfettered inspiration that leads to innovation.

**Nurturing the write stuff**

“Creative writing programs can be stodgy,” admits novelist, editor and Carl Sandburg Award-winning poet Maxine Chernoff … who also happens to be the chair of SF State’s Department of Creative Writing. According to Chernoff, there’s nothing rigid, old-fashioned or insular about SF State’s creative writing program, which was founded in 1955 by celebrated novelist Walter Van Tilburg Clark. Though it’s more than 60 years old, the program still emphasizes new ideas, openness and freedom.

“We give people a lot of flexibility,” she says. “So people experiment and collaborate and follow what interests them. That leads to a trust in themselves that doesn’t just help with career building but with life building.”

That confidence-stoking approach has paid off for scores of writers who’ve been through the program, including Pulitzer-winning poet Rae Armantrout, National Book Award finalist Kim Addonizio, best-selling memoirist Kelly Corrigan, former poet laureate of California Carol Muske-Dukes, young adult novelist Kelly Loy Gilbert and legendary “Interview with the Vampire” author (and onetime program chair) Anne Rice.
Developing the stars behind the cameras

The University's School of Theatre and Dance, School of Art and School of Music also are world renowned, having produced such lauded alumni as Obie-winning playwright Ed Bullins, Broadway music director (and Tony Lifetime Achievement Award winner) Paul Gemignani, painters Carmen Lomas Garza and Roy De Forest and conductor Kent Nagano. But the art form SF State might best be known for is the one that requires a synthesis of several others: filmmaking.

Named one of the top 25 film programs in the U.S. by The Hollywood Reporter, SF State's School of Cinema has helped launch the careers of Oscar-winning Pixar producer Jonas Rivera ("Inside Out"), Oscar-nominated (and Golden Globe-winning) director and screenwriter Lisa Cholodenko ("The Kids Are All Right") and screenwriter Steve Zaillian, an Academy Award nominee for four films (and a winner for one: "Schindler's List"). In fact, between 2000 and 2014, not a year went by without at least one SF State grad being nominated for an Oscar. In 2016, three were, including Rivera and "The Revenant" visual effects supervisor Rich McBride.

"I met a lot of creative people [at SF State] who were supportive in a way that said, ‘You can try anything you want and it isn’t going to be wrong,’” recalled McBride, who helped create the dazzling visuals for such Hollywood blockbusters as "Avatar" and "Gravity."

Promoting intelligent (and groundbreaking) design

Sometimes creativity isn’t just about dreaming up new and better works of art. It’s about applying artistic skills and thinking to meet real-world goals.

That’s the mission of SF State’s School of Design, where students learn how to solve problems and meet needs by finding creative approaches to product design, graphic design and digital media design. The goal? Produce socially aware graduates on the cutting edge of modern design.

The School of Design’s Furniture Institute for Technology and Sustainability encourages students to explore green materials and practices, for instance, while its Design Center for Global Needs brings a social justice component to the school’s classes and projects by addressing the needs of diverse groups from the aging to the disabled.

Other departments are encouraging innovative design projects, too, with the School of Engineering and the Department of Kinesiology both adding 3D printers for their students. Two new 3D printers and a 3D scanner have been added to the J. Paul Leonard Library’s Digital Media Studio, as well.

"What we’re trying to provide is not just the 3D printers but a place that encourages collaboration,” said Information Technology Consultant Christopher Novak, who helps manage the Digital Media Studio, a “makerspace”-style lab that also features a poster printer, layout tools, video equipment, editing bays and team meeting spaces. “Traditionally, a library was the place for students to go and say, ‘How do I do research for my project?’ But we’re facilitating creativity in a new way.”