Dedicated to promoting equality, diversity, and community in Utah State University’s Caine College of the Arts and the institution at large, Laura Gelfand has overseen many efforts to help open one’s mind to a broader world of art and visual culture. During her time as department head for Art + Design, Gelfand oversaw the creation of the lecture series Communitas, where students are exposed to, and able to interact with, a diverse and highly accomplished group of artists, art educators and art historians working in various disciplines. For the series, Gelfand encouraged her faculty to focus on inviting distinguished visitors whose work intersected with the themes of equality, diversity and community, to create an opportunity for students to become deep thinkers with an awareness of the diversity inherent in the larger cultural world.

Furthering her mission to increase diversity awareness, Gelfand also promotes the importance of public access to the arts and the sense of community it brings to a university campus. Gelfand played a fundamental role in the development of the inaugural Facticity series that brings together scholars from a variety of fields at USU to publicly discuss timely, fundamental concerns – the slipperiness of truth, information gathering and knowledge sharing – showcasing her dedication to creating a space for civil discourse and the ability to share multiple perspectives.

With the idea of art’s ability to unite, Gelfand was involved in bringing the national project, For Freedoms, to the USU campus. For Freedoms is a network of more than 300 artists and 200 institutional partners who produced nationwide public art installations, exhibitions, and local community dialogues to inject nuanced, artistic thinking into public discourse. Gelfand also served as a leader for USU’s Year of the Arts capstone event where USU students, staff, faculty and community assisted artist Patrick Dougherty with his installation of a large-scale, temporary willow sculpture on the university campus.