New SNAAP Report Focuses on the Impact of Gender, Race and Socioeconomic Status of America’s Arts Graduates

Findings from a national study released this week by the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) show that a postsecondary arts education affords some unique advantages for women, minorities, and disadvantaged students. However, significant gaps remain and inequalities persist related to school debt, racial diversity within artistic occupations, and disparities in earnings by gender.

The report, An Uneven Canvas: Inequalities in Artistic Training and Careers, details findings from more than 65,000 arts alumni of all ages from 120 institutions in the United States and Canada. Participating schools include public and private institutions: research universities, colleges of art and design, conservatories, liberal arts colleges, and arts high schools.

Alumni from disadvantaged backgrounds work as artists and persist in artistic careers at very similar rates to those from more privileged families. Women graduates who work in the arts seem to face no wage penalty for having children or dependents, unlike women working in most other fields. Minority graduates may be more likely to go into more commercially oriented and higher paying arts careers, such as web design or graphic arts. In fact, a slightly higher percentage of Black alumni (47%) who work primarily within the arts earned over $50,000 in the previous year, compared to Whites (45%), Asians (45%), and Hispanics (43%).

However, SNAAP data reveal that students who majored in the arts are not immune to patterns of inequality found in other educational disciplines. For example, 76% of Black alumni and 72% of Hispanics accrued student loan debt in order to attend their institutions, compared to 52% of White alumni and 44% of Asians. Only 24% of White respondents cited debt as a barrier to their artistic careers, compared to 36% and 41% respectively for Hispanic and Black alumni. Further, Blacks who carry school debt are less likely to work as artists compared to Blacks with no debt (53% and 64%, respectively).

“These findings reinforce the widely known fact that debt can have significant repercussions for the career paths of graduates across all types of educational institutions, especially for minority students,” said Vanderbilt professor Steven J. Tepper, research director for SNAAP. “Arts schools are no exception. This is just further evidence that issues of access and equality do not end at admissions, but can often follow graduates throughout their careers,” added Tepper.

Other key findings in the 2013 SNAAP Annual Report include:

- The vast majority of arts graduates continue to rate their overall educational experience at their institutions as good or excellent (between 86% and 93% of all graduates).

(more)
• Arts graduates are overwhelmingly satisfied with their ability to be creative at work; 92% of first-generations students, and 89% of Black and Hispanic graduates are satisfied with their ability to be creative at their primary job.

• Having had private art lessons at some point in their lives seems to benefit Blacks more than Whites. In terms of working as professional artists, the gap between Blacks and Whites almost disappears when the advantage of having had private lessons is factored in.

• Social and professional networks are more important for minority alumni than for Whites. Among those who have ever worked as artists, 74% of Black, Hispanic and Asian alumni report that “a strong network of peer and colleagues” has been important for success in their artistic careers compared to 70% of White alumni.

• 36% of Black alumni and 34% of Hispanic alumni took longer than the recommended amount to time to complete their degree, as compared to 30% of White alumni.

• Income gaps remain between men and women regardless of when they graduated.

“As we try to build a more inclusive and diverse arts community and industry that reflects the nation’s population and cultural histories, this report documents some of the disparities that persist for women, minorities, and disadvantaged students in training and pursuing a career in the arts,” said Abel Lopez, SNAAP National Advisory Board Member and Chair of Americans for the Arts in Washington, DC. “More importantly, the study identifies areas where our educational institutions can take action to address these inequities, which can lead to greater participation in the arts by diverse communities in our country. I look forward to seeing actions that will result in this change.”


SNAAP is a collaboration between the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and the Vanderbilt University Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy. Participation in the annual survey is open to all degree-granting colleges and universities as well as arts high schools. The registration deadline for this year’s national survey administration is July 15, 2013.

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SNAAP was launched in 2008 with generous support from the Surdna Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Houston Endowment, and other funders. The project is based at the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, School of Education, 1900 East Tenth Street, Suite 419, Bloomington IN 47406. More information is available at [snaap.indiana.edu](http://snaap.indiana.edu) including an interactive SnaapShot based on the findings.