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Study Shows that Recent Arts Alumni are Resilient, Adaptable and Involved

Bloomington, IN: A study released by the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project shows that America's most recent arts graduates are using skills learned in school combined with internship experiences to find work, forge careers, and engage their communities, despite higher student debt levels than older alumni.

The report, "[Making It Work: The Education and Employment of Recent Arts Graduates](#)," analyzes data from more than 88,000 arts alumni of all ages, with a particular focus on the 17,000 recent alumni – those who finished their undergraduate or graduate level degrees up to five years prior. Arts alumni participating in the study attended 140 degree-granting institutions in 40 states and the District of Columbia.

Recent arts alumni differ most from their older cohorts in their frequent use of internships to gain experience, and in unprecedented levels of student debt. They also are more likely to have learned transferable skills including persuasive speaking, networking, and project management.

A large majority (80%) of recent alumni report finding first jobs that are closely or somewhat related to their arts education. Arts alumni generally feel well prepared to pursue further education: 84% of recent graduates who pursued further education felt "very well" or "fairly well" prepared. Interestingly, a somewhat higher percentage of alumni of color pursued additional degrees compared to their white counterparts.

Recent arts graduates demonstrate a high level of community engagement, with 90% reporting they had supported the arts in the previous 12 months by volunteering, donating money, or attending an event.

The report's primary author, Jennifer C. Lena of Columbia University Teachers College said, "These data give us a unique and granular sense of the joys and frustrations of young alumni. In many ways, recent graduates in the arts may be better off than their peers—they have technical and management skills that are applicable to a wide range of work contexts, they're entrepreneurial and adaptable, and hard-working." Lena added, "These recent grads also give back to their own communities by volunteering for the arts."

(more)

Noteworthy findings include:

- 35% of all recent graduates said that student debt had a “major” impact on their educational and career decisions, compared to only 14% of non-recent alumni; similarly, 39% of recent graduates gave debt as a reason they do not currently work as professional artists, versus 22% of less recent graduates.
- More than half (54%) of recent alumni participated in at least one internship during their undergraduate years, as compared to 32% of less recent alumni.
- While many undergraduate arts alumni currently teach in some capacity, only 21% said that their institution helped them acquire teaching skills “very much.”
- Overall job satisfaction is high: 75% of recent alumni are satisfied with the job in which they spend the majority of their time, versus 82% of older alumni.
- Slightly more recent alumni reported acquiring financial and business management skills (25%) and entrepreneurial skills (30%) in school than their older cohorts, who reported 21% and 24%, respectively.
- 56% of recent alumni said they do not work as professional artists because artistic work is not available, versus 36% of older alumni.
- 49% of recent graduates who are not working as professional artists reported that they are not doing so because they could find higher-paying or steadier jobs in other fields, whereas 59% of older alumni gave that reason.

“These findings affirm that design and arts schools are providing invaluable training and that our graduates are more likely to work in related fields than many other college majors and degrees. Still, we need to do a better job of training our students not only how to make art, but also how to make it as artists and workers in the world,” said Steven J. Tepper, SNAAP Research Director and Dean of the Herberger Institute of Design and the Arts at Arizona State University. “We also know that unpaid internships and mounting debt are not sustainable. This issue is urgent and faculty and school leaders must consider how to deliver high quality instruction in a more affordable way.”

SNAAP is based at the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. Registration for the 2015 survey, open to all degree-granting colleges and universities as well as arts high schools, will begin in Spring 2015.

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