SNAAP News Spring-Summer 2020

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Message from the Guest Editor

As Chair and Associate Director of Jazz Studies at The Juilliard School, I can attest that the late winter and spring of 2020 have been like none other. We have lost numerous jazz legends to COVID-19, seen the disappearance of live performance opportunities for faculty and students, moved all instruction to remote learning, and adapted to shelter-in-place orders. These times have also witnessed incredible creative responses that prove again the purpose of artists, the incalculable value of the arts to humanity and the importance of resiliency in one’s career. Our institution’s video project Bolero Juilliard speaks to this resiliency, interdisciplinary work and new ways of creating and creating meaning in our time.

Knowing that SNAAP data can help us better prepare young artists is very reassuring. The Spring 2020 SNAAP special report by Alexandre Frenette and Timothy Dowd entitled Career in the Arts: Who Stays and Who Leaves? is a timely aid in reflecting on factors that increase career satisfaction for arts students so they can have long artistic careers.
in an uncertain world that desperately needs their energy and thoughtful creativity.

In normal times, I enjoy welcoming our alumni back to interact with current students and their former teachers through virtual and in person sessions. It’s invaluable to us that they share what they’re seeing in the world and to reflect on how our education can better serve and prepare students to be artists in this society. It’s always wonderful for alumni to compare their educational experience with that of current students and appreciate how the education has been modified due to previous feedback. We are all learning and the cycle continues. This process is bolstered by national data from SNAAP on how arts alumni across the country are feeling and what they’re learning about artistic practice.

I write just days after the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the unfortunate actions of Amy Cooper here in New York. These acts of inhumanity are juxtaposed against the incredible respect and charity being shown those suffering from COVID-19 and the joy and celebration shared at recent Commencement ceremonies around the country.

What is the role of artists and arts educators in the midst of this current pandemic and acts of inhumanity? How can we better prepare our students to be positive influencers in the world and not lose hope?

I trust we will all continue to keep creating. This is what we artists do and what the world needs us to do.

Aaron Flagg is Treasurer of the Board of Directors of the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, and Chair and Associate Director of Jazz Studies at the Juilliard School in New York.

SNAAP 2021 Research Fellowships Available
Deadline August 31, 2020

SNAAP is pleased to announce the availability of SNAAP Research Fellowships for 2021. Two 12-month fellowships will be awarded @ $5,000 each. Individuals or teams of researchers can apply for specific projects. The application deadline is August 31, 2020.

The purpose of the fellowships is to further expand existing knowledge about the lives and careers of arts graduates, using the rich SNAAP database. The selected fellows will develop and conduct new research using the quantitative items in the SNAAP database of arts alumni. Fellows will receive guidance on using the data set from the SNAAP Research Scientist at Indiana University, who will also facilitate Fellows’ attainment of their SNAAP data-use agreements.

Researchers from any discipline are eligible to apply, including faculty members, graduate students and researchers with affiliations other than institutions of higher education. Unaffiliated researchers are also welcome to apply. The full guidelines can be accessed here and a description of the 2020 fellows and their projects can be found here.
New SNAAP Special Report
Who Stays and Who Leaves?

By Liz Entman, Vanderbilt University

What you do in college has a surprising impact on your ability to sustain a career in the arts long-term, according to a new report co-authored by Alexandre Frenette, assistant professor of sociology and associate director of the Vanderbilt University Curb Center for Art, Enterprise and Public Policy.

“There’s been a fair amount of scholarship on whether what you study in college helps you break into the arts,” said Frenette. “But very little work has been done on what helps you stay in the arts.” His study, coauthored with Timothy Dowd of Emory University, is the first to examine that question explicitly.

People who pursue artistic work—which encompasses a wide variety of professions in the visual arts, performing arts, literature, architecture, design and arts education—tend to be more satisfied with their careers than people in other professional fields. However, the industry is notoriously difficult to break into, offers little job security and, for most, does not pay all that well. For that reason, a great deal of scrutiny has been paid to the value of arts education.

For the report, Frenette and Dowd analyzed a SNAAP survey of more than 52,000 arts graduates in the United States aged 30 to 65 to learn how many of them went on to work in the arts after college, and how many were still working in the arts today. Of those surveyed, approximately a third had subsequently left the arts; about 38,000 remained.

The most interesting finding, Frenette said, was how important college was to sustaining an arts career—in surprising ways. “What you do in school can continue to make an impact years and even decades later,” said Frenette. “While many arts majors said they wished they’d gotten more training in business and entrepreneurship in school, those with a second major outside the arts were much less likely to remain in an arts career later on overall. On the other hand, participating in arts-related clubs, paid internships and other related co-curricular activities makes you much
more likely to stay in the arts, thanks to the networks they help you develop when you’re just starting out.”

“What you do in school can continue to make an impact years and even decades later.”

The report noted that choice of field also mattered: Architecture and design students were most likely to have durable careers in the arts, while theater, dance and arts management majors had the lowest odds.

There is also no escaping the social inequality that pervades the broader economy, either, Frenette said. “The odds of women staying in the arts after starting a career in a creative field were about 15 percent lower than they are for men. The odds of a person of color staying in the arts after starting such a career is 24 percent lower than they are for whites,” he said. “And while parents’ level of education didn’t predict whether someone was more likely to leave an arts career, having more than $50,000 in school-related debt certainly did.”

Many artists have “day” jobs as well. Frenette and Dowd found that having a second job outside the arts reduces an artist’s odds of remaining in the arts in the long run. “It may be that the promise of a steady paycheck or insurance becomes too good to pass up,” Frenette said. “But we find those with second jobs teaching the arts or working for an arts organization, for example, are much more likely to stay.”

Overall, Frenette said, the report’s findings highlight the importance of cultivating artistic networks while still in school and reinforcing artistic goals with complementary artistic work.

SNAAP at Conferences SPRING 2020

SNAAP findings were featured at several on-line conferences in Spring 2020. SNAAP consulting director Sally Gaskill joined a panel at the 2020 National Arts Action Digital Summit, presented by Americans for the Arts, on Protecting the Arts in Higher Education on April 30.

For the annual conference of the Association of Arts Administration Educators, Jennifer Novak-Leonard (SNAAP vice president, Northwestern University), Rachel Skaggs (SNAAP researcher, The Ohio State University), Amy Whitaker (SNAAP Research Fellow, New York University), and Sally Gaskill shared findings on Setting Up Students for Success: Lessons from SNAAP on May 19.

On June 9, SNAAP researcher and Vanderbilt University professor Alexandre Frenette presented Unpacking the Entrepreneurial Skills Gap: Educational Experiences and Career Outcomes among Arts Graduates for the Indiana University Center for Cultural Affairs and the National Endowment for the Arts’ Arts, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation (AEI) Lab.
If you or someone you know is presenting using SNAAP data, please share to be listed in the next newsletter.

Next SNAAP Survey SPRING 2022

It bears repeating: the next SNAAP survey of arts alumni will take place during the 2022 Spring semester. Any North American institution that gives degrees in the arts and/or design fields will be eligible to participate.

The 2022 questionnaire is in development. Do you have burning questions that you would like to see posed on the next survey? Certainly, issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion will be at the forefront. The impact of COVID-19 on arts education also will be included. If you’re interested in sharing your thoughts on what your institution needs to make data-informed decisions, please reach out to any Board member below, or via snaap@indiana.edu.

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