

## VOX HUMANA

It's a SNAAP!



THE WORLD has its dreamers/believers, its data wonk/empiricist, and a few people who fall between. The population also has those who assert that the arts have lost ground as a profession, a pastime, or a passion. The term “arts” has endured redefinition, including an expansion, much as a city might annex the county lands around it. It is a challenging environment today—some would say catastrophic times in the arts world. We know. We’ve contemplated the demise of symphony orchestras, the redefinitions of culture, the future

of the organ. It is ever more depressing.

But there has been afoot a whimper of hope, since at least the 1980s or so, when data began suggesting that the arts offer something different. Perhaps some new findings in economics, demographics, educational policy, national priorities, social fabric, or personal achievement would come to the aid of the beleaguered arts community. Inchmeal, startling facts emerged and insinuated a new argument. Little morsels of fact, like the knowledge that one of the main undergraduate majors of those applying to medical school is music, or that applicants to medical school with a major in music are the most likely to be admitted (66% compared to 44% of biology majors), lent a new argument in favor of learning and teaching the arts. But have these discoveries and the attempts to leverage them sufficed to influence the policy shapers or, for that matter, the American public? Have they given confidence to the talented teen student weighing the merits of majoring in music rather than business or biology?

Perhaps a more deliberate and recent effort to gather the data can help. Two heavyweight policy research centers—the Center for Postsecondary Research at the University of Indiana and the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University—joined hands to create an ambitious Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP). With the leadership of resolute and high-profile education policy and research luminaries, their abundant findings have been, for several years, both encouraging and eye-opening. We should embrace encouragement and wide eyes out here in the trenches of the arts business. And before leaving this and turning the page to see whose picture is in the “Pipings” department this month, remember that we as organists, no matter professional or avocational, liturgical or academic, performing or listening, are a significant population in the arts business.

The question that SNAAP crackles pops to the heart of our concerns. Although sometimes voiced parochially on these pages—where do we find the organists? how are they trained? what is the viability of the profession let alone the instrument?—overarching it all is truly one summative question: What is the value of anyone committing to training themselves in the arts in America today? Value . . . significance . . . usefulness . . . consequence . . . meaning?

Once a college, conservatory, or graduate degree in the arts denoted, at least approximately, a career *in* the arts. Today, we worry about the path that artistically talented youth take in their formal learning. We suspect many never pursue a career in the

arts. Stop suspecting. These SNAAP results facilitate some powerful arguments. How?

SNAAP circulates an annual online survey of a broad swath of arts graduates nationally (through 70 participating postsecondary schools yielding 33,801 returns in 2011 from fields as diverse as fine arts, media, dance, writing, theater, architecture, and, yes, even music), probing deeply into their careers, their training, and their general satisfaction. Look at some revealing snapshots.

Eighty-seven percent of arts graduates are satisfied with their current jobs; 82% report ability to be creative in their current job; 90% rate their arts education experience as “good” or “excellent.” But here’s the real kicker: 46% of these graduates work *outside* of careers or jobs in the arts. Let’s underscore two essentials. First, we are talking about the *arts*, albeit defined diversely to include some applied areas like media and design. We are not speaking about the *liberal arts* (an altogether other and likewise valid argument about the value of broad learning and preparation for life). Second, the non-arts career destinations of these graduates embrace a small universe, from communications to construction, engineering to education, human resources to health care, manufacturing to the military, sales to social services. Please remember, more than 80% of the respondents with an arts degree say they are content in these respective roles. Could we artists be training happy bankers?

Why, and what of the impact? The data break out skills and competencies in work. Take the quality of entrepreneurialism. Fifty-four percent of the workforce that has never been trained in the arts finds entrepreneurial skill important, but 80% of artists find it so. In nearly each category of essential career tools like listening, teamwork, leadership, broad knowledge, technology, and both written and speech communications, the arts-trained folks lead the way in deeming these important as compared to the non-arts-trained population.

Now, before saying “that’s nice” and giving up here and flipping pages to the Cover Feature to drool over someone’s new pipe organ, just take away one more thought. Where are these arts graduates coming from?

There’s the rub. The likelihood that particular respondents to SNAAP began down their path to an arts major in college, conservatory, or graduate school as a result of direct and sometimes prolonged interactions with *you*, the reader, not only adds up to a probability of greater than zero (to play out the data wonk leitmotif here) but suggests a huge correlation. To repeat, for emphasis: this readership has likely contributed to the life-satisfaction, positive contributions, and probably high-value citizenship of a considerable swath of the American working and professional population *outside of the arts*.

Enjoy romping through these data and, if you have the time, an enlightening special report founded upon them called “Painting with Broader Strokes: Reassessing the Value of an Arts Degree.” All appears online at <http://www.snaap.indiana.edu/>. Click the links under “findings” on the top navigation bar for the data from both 2010 and 2011 and the reports.

And we thought that all we did was save souls, entertain, uplift, create glorious sound, give glimpses of eternity, and leave behind a more beautiful world!

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