Arts and the Real World: Career and Lifestyle Outcomes of Artistically Gifted High School Students

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Introduction

- Arts-intensive high schools can vary in their specific characteristics:
  - Public vs. private
  - Day vs. residential
  - Locale: urban, suburban, rural
  - Disciplinary focus: fine/visual arts, performing arts
  - Admission: lottery, audition process

- But all provide a unique atmosphere for artistically gifted students by customizing learning experiences to fit artistic talents
Purpose

- At arts-intensive high schools, the students’ extensive interactions with arts faculty and exhibition/performing opportunities allow them to develop their artistic talents.

- But what are the long-term impacts of attending this type of school? What are current careers and personal activities of alumni from these arts-intensive high schools?

- Surveying alumni of these schools about their institutional experiences, career outcomes, and avocational arts contributions can provide a unique perspective for addressing such questions.
The Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP)
To address these questions, we will present findings from the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP)

What is SNAAP?
- Online annual survey designed to assess and improve various aspects of arts-school education
- Investigates the educational experiences and career paths of arts graduates nationally
- Findings are provided to educators, policymakers, and philanthropic organizations to improve arts training, inform cultural policy, and support artists
Who does SNAAP survey?

- Participants drawn from:
  - Arts high schools
  - Independent arts colleges
  - Arts schools, departments, or programs in comprehensive colleges/universities

- Cohort Year Sampling
  - 2008 and 2009 Field Tests: 5, 10, 15, & 20 years out
  - 2010 Field Test: 1-5, 10, 15, & 20 years out
  - 2011 and forward: all years to generate the most comprehensive data possible
Increasing Numbers...

- 2011 Administration
  - More than 36,000 respondents
  - 66 institutions

- 2012 Administration
  - More than 33,000 respondents
  - 70 institutions

- 2013 Administration
  - More than 27,000 respondents
  - 48 institutions

- Able to combine 2011, 2012, and 2013 respondents to create a “SNAAP Database” with over 92,000 respondents

- Revised survey for 2015: Administration currently under way!
Participating Arts High Schools (2011,12,13)

- Baltimore School for the Arts
- Boston Arts Academy
- Douglas Anderson School of the Arts
- Duke Ellington School of the Arts
- Houston High School for the Performing and Visual Arts
- Idyllwild Arts Academy
- Interlochen Arts Academy
- LA County High School for the Arts
- Lehigh Valley Charter High School for Performing Arts
- Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts
- Orange County School of the Arts
- South Carolina Governor’s School for the Arts & Humanities
- Walnut Hill School for the Arts
SNAAP High School Alumni

Number of High School alumni respondents:
- 3,946 (4% of total sample)

Demographic characteristics:
- 30% male, 69% female, <1% transgender
- 81% White/Caucasian
- 96% were U.S. citizens while at institutions
- 76% had at least 1 parent with a bachelor’s degree (SES proxy)
- Median age is 32 (ranges from 17 – 90), and 42% are 29 or younger
SNAAP High School Alumni

Top Disciplinary Concentrations:

- 41% Music Performance
- 17% Theater
- 15% Fine & Studio Arts
- 13% Dance
- 5% Creative and Other Writing
Questionnaire Topics (2011,12,13)

1. Formal education and degrees
2. Institutional experience and satisfaction
3. Current work
4. Career
5. Arts engagement
6. Income and debt
7. Demographics
Career Outcomes

Are alumni of arts-intensive high schools successful?

- Further education:
  - 71% of alumni immediately pursue further education after graduating
  - 98% pursue further education at some point (although not necessarily a traditional Bachelor’s degree—some pursue certificates, Associate’s degrees, or other training)
  - 95% say their institution prepared them “very” or “fairly” well for further education
Career Outcomes (cont.)

Do alumni of arts-intensive high schools continue with careers in the arts?

- 62% have been or currently are professional artists
- 51% are currently working at least one arts-related job
- 45% spend a majority of their work time in an arts-related occupation
- Only 3% are unemployed and looking for work
Top Arts-Related Jobs

- Musician (18%)
- Private teacher of the arts (11%)
- Writer, author, or editor (10%)
- Arts administrator or manager (7%)
- Actor (6%)
- K-12 arts educator (6%)
- Dancer or choreographer (5%)
- Film, TV, video artist (5%)
- Higher education arts educator (5%)
Top Jobs Outside of the Arts

- Education, training, and library (13%)
- Communications (8%)
- Management (7%)
- Healthcare (6%)
- Office and administrative support (6%)
- Sales (6%)
- Computer and mathematics (5%)
In Their Own Words...

- “Art helps keep me stable and as a Clinical Social Worker that is essential. I am very aware of the healing aspects of doing art and encourage clients to participate in some creative activity.”

- “I work with spreadsheets primarily. When designing a new sheet or a report for a layman, I consider how eyes follow information and how easily the reader can get lost in the details presented. I consider my work on reports to be artistic because apparently many others in my field lack the ability to present data in a way that is easy to understand and clearly organized.”
In Their Own Words...

- “My theatre arts training made me a better communicator and a more well-rounded, empathetic human being with the ability to work with others across a broad range of socio-economic and frankly, intelligence levels. In my current career as a training specialist with a finance company, these skills have been vital.”

- “Performance has helped me in every aspect of my life. I have to give presentations in meetings internally in my organization, and also to customers. The poise and nerve-control I learned for performing helps a lot in my presentations!”
Applications

• Because not all students at arts-intensive high schools will go on to become professional artists, exposure to a variety of careers is important.

• Schools could consider expanding internship opportunities or courses exploring potential careers.

• Since many will go into education fields or become teachers of the arts, could collaborate with local elementary schools, daycare centers, and arts-related nonprofits for service-learning projects and teaching opportunities.

• Need for discussion about how arts can be beneficial in multiple careers and across disciplines.
Career Outcomes

Are alumni of arts-intensive high schools satisfied with their careers?

- Overall, 79% are “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with the job where they spend the majority of their work time
Career Outcomes (cont.)

Are alumni of arts-intensive high schools satisfied with their careers?

- Alumni are also satisfied with:
  - Job security (72%)
  - Opportunity to be creative (74%)
  - Income (62%)
  - Work/non-work life balance (68%)
  - Opportunity to contribute to the greater good (75%)
  - Opportunity for career advancement (67%)
  - Work that reflects personality, interests, and values (76%)
In Their Own Words...

• “I feel incredibly thankful that I am now able to support myself and in large part support my family as a musician. Things are very tight financially for us, and my schedule is almost impossible at times, but because I am doing what I love, I'm able to keep up the fast pace. If I had a job(s) I hate, I would have crashed and burned many years ago... I am not looking for advancement or higher salary because I'm happy doing what I'm doing.”
Applications

- During their career explorations, discuss with students their values and priorities concerning their future careers.

- Do they want to make a lot of money? Have a flexible schedule to accommodate a family? Be able to travel or relocate? Provide a service to others? Make a creative contribution?

- These questions can help develop a broader conceptualization of success (past simply income) and can inform their future goals.
Lifestyle Outcomes

Alumni of arts-intensive high schools have a lifelong appreciation of and engagement with the arts

- 72% make or perform art in their personal (not work-related) time
- Of those who do so, 67% consider practicing this art to be “very important”
Lifestyle Outcomes (cont.)

Alumni of arts-intensive high schools also contribute to the arts in their communities

- **92%** have supported the arts in some way in the past 12 months:
  - Volunteered at an arts organization (**28%**)
  - Served on the board of an arts organization (**12%**)
  - Volunteered to teach the arts (**20%**)
  - Donated money to an arts organization or artist (**41%**)
  - Attended an arts event (**88%**)

In Their Own Words...

• “Although my ‘real’ job is not arts related (MD) I still am active in music, and it has enriched my life in so many ways... An art education is so important no matter what profession ends up on your tax forms.”

• “[My arts training] raised my awareness of the meaning of art in our society-- not for just artists but for those looking to live a full life, to have an outlet for expression/feeling, to experience commonality”
Applications

• Encourage students to recognize how the arts make an impact on the larger community, outside of the school setting

• Take field trips to exhibits, performances, concerts, etc. to demonstrate the lifelong impact of involvement with arts organizations

• Connect students with practicing artists in the community for job shadowing and field experiences, as well as local avocational artists who have careers in other fields
Conclusions

- Arts-intensive high schools can provide important educational experiences for artistically gifted students.

- In general, alumni of these high schools go onto to a variety of successful career outcomes, including further education, careers in the arts, and job satisfaction.

- Even those that may not end up with careers in the arts still often contribute to their communities through avocational arts engagement.
Conclusions (cont.)

• There is a need to systematically track graduates of arts-intensive high schools

• Data can be used to help current students via advising for careers and further education, and exposure to the importance of the arts community for personal satisfaction

• Data can also be used for accountability purposes, arguing for the benefits of these unique schools in securing financial resources
  • Federal, state, local, and private funders
Questions or Comments?

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