Music Alumni Play a Different Tune: Reflections on Acquired Skills and Career Outcomes

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STRATEGIC NATIONAL ARTS ALUMNI PROJECT

Introduction

- One important means of assessing effectiveness is through alumni surveys (Cabrera, Weerts, & Zulick, 2005)
  - Alumni surveys can provide direct information on both skills acquired and career attainment

- Acquired skills: discipline specific vs. transferable
  - Both are important in the curriculum to prepare for the workplace (Stasz, 2001)

Skills in the Curriculum

- Both employers and arts graduates report that they enter the workforce lacking practical "real world" skills such as networking, business, and financial (Bauer et al., 2011; Creech et al., 2008)
  - Entrepreneurial programs are increasing within the arts to address this gap (Hong et al., 2012)

- Students in the arts may be more adept in other skills, including revising, critical thinking, and interpersonal understanding (Badcock et al., 2010; Edstrom, 2008)

Accountability and Outcomes

- Music programs face added difficulty in terms of evaluation and demonstration of accountability
  - Skills needed by working musicians continue to fluctuate as the industry shifts in response to the economy, self-employment patterns, and technology (Kerr & Knight, 2011; Coulson, 2012; Rowley, 2012)

- Those majoring in the arts have some of the lowest income levels, especially among recent graduates (Carnevale et al., 2012)
  - Perhaps assessing other aspects of one's career can provide just as important information as can the traditional measures of income and prestige

The Current Study

- Given the need to show evidence of effectiveness and address criticisms of skills gaps and career outcomes, the current study looks at the following topics with a sample music alumni:

1) Skills acquired for different types of music majors (education, performance, and theory)

2) Career outcomes for different types of music majors (education, performance, and theory)

The Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP)

SNAAP

- To address these questions, we will utilize data 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

- Now able to combine 2011, 2012, and 2013 respondents to create a "SNAAP Database" with over 92,000 respondents

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

Method: Participants

- Only undergraduate and graduate alumni with primary majors of music education; music history, composition, and theory; and music performance were included:
  - 16,317 alumni from 105 different institutions
  - 63% undergraduate level and 37% graduate level
  - 47% male, 52% female, 0.1% transgender
  - 91% Caucasian ethnicity
  - Average institutional response rate: 18%

- Majors (grouping variable):
  - Music education (28%); music history, composition, and theory (9%); and music performance (63%)

Method: Measures of Institutional Experiences

- Overall satisfaction with time at institution ("Poor" to "Excellent")
- Whether would attend same institution again ("Definitely no" to Definitely yes")
- Preparation for further education ("Not well at all" to "Very well" and excluding those who did not pursue)

- Set of 16 different skills and competencies
  - Acquired at institution ("Not at all" to "Very much")
  - Important in their work ("Not at all important" to "Very important")

In your opinion, how much did Sample University help you acquire or develop each of the following skills and abilities?

	Very much	Some	Very little	Not at all
Critical thinking and analysis of arguments and information	○	○	○	○
Broad knowledge and education	○	○	○	○
Listening and revising	○	○	○	○
Creative thinking and problem solving	○	○	○	○
Research skills	○	○	○	○
Clear writing	○	○	○	○
Persuasive speaking	○	○	○	○
Project management skills	○	○	○	○
Technological skills	○	○	○	○
Artistic technique	○	○	○	○
Financial and business management skills	○	○	○	○
Entrepreneurial skills	○	○	○	○
Interpersonal relations and working collaboratively	○	○	○	○
Leadership skills	○	○	○	○
Networking and relationship building	○	○	○	○
Teaching skills	○	○	○	○

Method: Measures of Career Experiences

- Individual income for previous year (in ranges, converted using mid-points)
- Amount of time to get first job (Categorical responses)
- Relevance of training to first job ("closely related," "somewhat related," and "not related")
- Current job in which they spent majority of work time (list of 45 options)
- Relevance of current job to training ("very relevant" to "not at all relevant")
- Self-employment status (currently, in past, never)

Analyses

- To compare across the grouping variable of major (music education; music composition, history, and theory; music performance):
  - ANOVAs were run for continuous and Likert-type response options
  - Chi-squared analyses were run for the categorical variables

Results: ANOVAs

- Music history, composition, and theory majors reported acquiring more clear writing, critical thinking, creative thinking, technological skills, and research skills
- Music performance majors had greater development of entrepreneurial skills
- Music performance and education majors reported more development of artistic technique
- Music education majors acquired more broad knowledge, persuasive speaking, project management, financial and business, leadership, interpersonal, networking, and teaching skills

Results: ANOVAs

- Similar patterns emerged when looking at importance of skills in the workplace

- However, music performance majors cited a greater importance of financial and business management skills and networking and relationship building, even though they did not report the highest skill development in these areas

Results: ANOVAs

- Music education majors gave higher ratings for their overall institutional satisfaction, how well their institution prepared them for future education, and their likelihood of whether they would return to the same institution

- However, music history, composition, and theory majors reported the highest current incomes, with music education in the middle and music performance the lowest

Results: Chi-squared Analyses

- Music education majors are more likely to find their first job either before leaving school or within four months and to report that this first job was closely related to their arts training

- Music performance majors and music history, composition, and theory majors are more than twice as likely to go on to further education after graduation

- Music performance majors report higher levels of being currently self-employed

Results: Chi-squared Analyses

- Music performance majors are more likely to be musicians and private teachers of the arts
- Music composition, history, and theory graduates more likely to be higher education arts educators
- Music education alumni more likely to teach the arts in K-12 schools
- Music education majors also more frequently report that their arts training is very relevant to their current jobs

Discussion

- Many of these differences between types of music majors are not surprising, given the differences in their curricular and workplace experiences
- Music education majors, who are more likely to work as K-12 arts educators, were higher in both their acquisition and importance of teaching skills, leadership skills, interpersonal relations, and persuasive speaking
- As pre-service teachers, they are required to take pedagogical courses and complete student teaching field experiences

Discussion

- While some of these skills seem to be tailored toward certain majors, there are still other skills that need more development

- While music performance majors do rate their development of entrepreneurial skills higher than other music majors, their development of this skill is still relatively low compared to other skills

- However, the average ratings of importance for business and entrepreneurial skills are quite high across all three majors, with music performance majors rating them significantly higher

Putting Results to Use: Example

- In 2011, Virginia Commonwealth University participated in SNAAP
  - Many of their alumni indicated a greater need for business, financial, and entrepreneurial skills because they were self-employed or had started their own businesses and organizations
- Data provided concrete quantitative evidence for the skills gap that faculty and administrators had already suspected anecdotally
- VCU School of the Arts was able to introduce a minor in Creative Entrepreneurship

Creative Entrepreneurship Program Overview

Program Mission

The Creative Entrepreneurship Program is designed to prepare undergraduate majors in the creative disciplines to lead their careers and lives as entrepreneurs in the highly connected and complex commercial environment of creative activities.

Program Goals

- Students develop the ability to combine deep expertise in their major creative discipline with a broad spectrum of entrepreneurship and transferable enterprise skills and knowledge, across a range of disciplines.
- Students develop the mindset for managing risk, learning from failure, and exploiting change as an opportunity.
- Students develop the ability to learn and work collaboratively and understand the skills, knowledge and values that contribute to successful team-based outcomes.
- Students develop the tools and confidence to increase their career prospects, and create their own jobs.

New Courses in Creative Entrepreneurship

We are pleased to offer the following new courses:

ARTS 350 The Creative Economy
Semester course. 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Examines the contribution of creative ideas to the world economy with a focus on where, how, and why creative ideas are produced and consumed.

ARTS 351 Piloting the Enterprise
Semester course. 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Introduces the language of the creative enterprise, focusing on intellectual property, contracts and negotiations; tracking business performance and using financial data to improve decision-making.

ARTS 352 Idea Accelerator
Semester course. 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: ARTS 350 or permission of the instructor. Exposes students to the processes and methodologies used to transform ideas and opportunities into sustainable business models. Students evaluate business case studies, engage industry professionals, and investigate the commercial potential of their creative ideas.

ARTS 353 Creative Destruction Lab (capstone course, not recommended until senior year)
Semester course; 3 credits. 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. Prerequisites: ARTS 352 or permission of the instructor. Provides a low-risk educational environment for students to develop their own ventures, including a product/service business model, legal considerations, financial and marketing plans, and media presence (web, mobile, social). Students work with a network of mentors from the university and industry. Course may be repeated for up to 6 credits.

Other Implications: New Resources Needed?

- Music education majors gave the highest ratings (relative to the other two majors) of overall institutional experience, likelihood of attending the same institution, and preparation for further education; also faster rates of finding closely related first jobs
  - Music education majors have a more prescribed course plan and a more direct career outcome
  - Decreases the ambiguity and uncertainty they feel towards their chosen major and subsequent career

- May be helpful for institutions to mimic the field experiences, resources, and networks education majors gain from student teaching for performance and theory majors

Other Implications: What *is* Success?

- High percentages of music majors of all types are currently working as professional musicians or music teachers

- Previous research utilizing SNAAP data (Lambert & Miller, 2013) suggests that the intrinsic satisfaction with aspects of one's job, such as opportunities to be creative, is higher for arts alumni who currently work in the arts, while extrinsic satisfaction, which involves things like job security and income, is higher for those working outside of the arts

- Job satisfaction is not solely based on monetary compensation, so alumni success is a more complex construct

Limitations

- Data was collected only from institutions that chose to participate, and only from alumni with contact information
  - Sample may not be representative of all music alumni and caution should be made when making generalizations
- Somewhat low response rate (18%)
  - Although recent research suggests that alumni surveys with lower response rates can still provide a representative sample (Lambert & Miller, 2014)
- Relied on self-reported perceptions of institutional contribution to skill development and workplace importance
  - However, most studies looking at student self-reports suggest that self-reports and actual abilities are positively related (Anaya, 1999; Hayek et al., 2002)

Conclusions

- Future research should continue to bridge the gap between acquired skills and career demands, as well as expand the measurement of successful career outcomes and comparisons across different sub-types of music majors

- Music faculty and administrators may be able to borrow and learn from other arts fields, as well as non-arts fields, when it comes to successful curricular reform or creating resources to assist students in their transition to the workplace

- Gathering data from current students is vital, but collecting alumni data is also an important element of assessment

Questions or Comments?

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**Full paper/reference list available upon request*