Bucking Conventional Wisdom: Arts Graduates Gauge Success Differently

New SNAAP Report Counters Prevailing Views for Assessing Educational Value

(Bloomington, IN) — A new report by the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) offers important new insights into the value of an arts school education – countering prevailing views about salary levels and job prospects as the most important indicators of alumni satisfaction and career success.

The SNAAP report, *Painting with Broader Strokes: Reassessing the Value of an Arts Degree*, offers insights into the careers and perspectives of 13,851 arts graduates from 154 institutions surveyed in 2010 – shedding new light on educational training and experiences, employment paths, involvement in the arts outside of work, and overall job satisfaction and income. Participating schools include research universities, independent colleges of art and design, conservatories, liberal arts colleges, and arts high schools.

Among the report’s key findings: a majority of arts graduates are happy with their intensive education in the arts and do not view salary levels as the dominant measures of their success.

Of those surveyed, 76% said they would attend the same educational institution again if they had to start over. In fact, even among unemployed arts alumni actively looking for work, 84% rate their arts school experiences as “good” or “excellent,” and 68% would go back and do it over again.

“Typically, economists define the worth of a college degree by using earnings and employment rates,” said Steven J. Tepper, SNAAP Research Director and Associate Director of the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt. “As a result, society often undervalues the educational experience itself and how it transforms and shapes lives. Arts graduates value what they learned in school and draw upon their training as they put together creative lives and careers.”

SNAAP is the only research project of its kind that annually tracks the training, career trajectories, and satisfaction of alumni on a regular basis at a national level. Since its start in 2008, SNAAP has surveyed more than 65,000 arts alumni from hundreds of schools, amassing data that provide an important window into the development of artists in the U.S. and Canada.

(more)
Other noteworthy findings from the new SNAAP report include:

- When it comes to current occupation, more arts graduates spend the majority of their time working in fields related to the arts (61%) than in other areas (39%).

- Sixty-two percent of those working primarily in a job outside of the arts say that their arts training is relevant to their current work.

- Arts graduates continue to support the arts at high rates even when they pursue careers in non-arts fields. Nearly a third - 31% - of alumni currently spending the majority of their work time in occupations outside of the arts indicate that they have volunteered at an arts organization within the past three years.

- Arts alumni still face significant financial obstacles to engaging in art professionally. Fifty-two percent of those who stopped working as professional artists did so because of better pay in other fields.

- Forty percent of respondents currently hold more than one job.

- Fourteen percent of SNAAP respondents founded their own (for-profit or nonprofit) companies. Media arts (including film/video as well as new/digital media) and design graduates are the most likely of all arts majors to start for-profit businesses.

- While about a third (32%) of alumni have found “using entrepreneurial skills” to be important within their working lives, only a fifth (20%) describe their institutions as helping them “very much” or “quite a bit” to acquire or develop this capacity.

SNAAP is a collaboration between the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and the Vanderbilt University Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy. Participation in the annual survey is open to all degree-granting colleges and universities as well as arts high schools. Registration for next year’s administration opens in March 2013.

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SNAAP was launched with generous support from the Surdna Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, Houston Endowment, and other funders. The project is based at the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, School of Education, 1900 East Tenth Street, Suite 419, Bloomington IN 47406. More information including a copy of this special report is available at snaap.indiana.edu.