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snaap

STRATEGIC NATIONAL ARTS ALUMNI PROJECT

DataBrief

DataBrief provides arts educators and arts policy makers
with highlights of SNAAP data and insights
into the value of arts-school education.
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Arts Graduates in a Changing Economy (part 2)

This DataBrief highlights some of the findings in a recent special issue of *American Behavioral Scientist* (ABS) titled "Arts Graduates in a Changing Economy." The special issue engages with SNAAP findings and themes discussed at the 2016 *3 Million Stories* conference, covering several topics of interest both to academics and the broader arts community: the cultures of arts schools; job outcomes after college; the geography of artistic work; creative identity; and the multiple conceptions of creativity.

Thanks to Alexandre Frenette for editing the ABS special issue as well as coordinating this DataBrief.

Lost in Transition: College Resources and the Unequal Early-Career Trajectories of Arts Alumni

Nathan D. Martin and Alexandre Frenette

A steady chorus of politicians, pundits, and policy advocates question the usefulness and worth of undergraduate arts programs and other "less practical" fields of study. However, to date there has been surprisingly little empirical research that focuses on employment outcomes in the period immediately after college graduation. With the goal of identifying the campus experiences, opportunities and resources that help arts graduates find relevant jobs quickly, we analyzed data from the 2015 Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) survey administration. SNAAP offers a unique opportunity to examine the educational and career pathways of arts and design graduates since the 1970s and to consider broader patterns of inequality within the cultural and creative industries.

Our analysis revealed that it has become
increasingly common over recent decades

for arts alumni to experience a prolonged job search after graduation or find initial employment in an unrelated field (Figure 1). Additionally, not all aspects of the undergraduate curriculum were predictive of labor market success. Surprisingly, academic skills such as critical thinking, research, or communication skills, gained through traditional instruction, were not associated with successful job searches.

"After graduation, how long did it take for you to obtain your first job or work experience?"
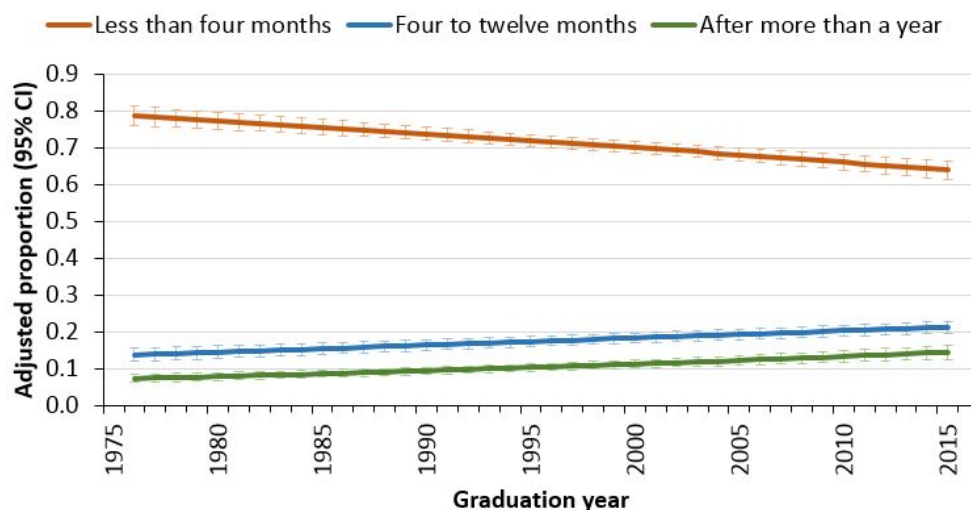
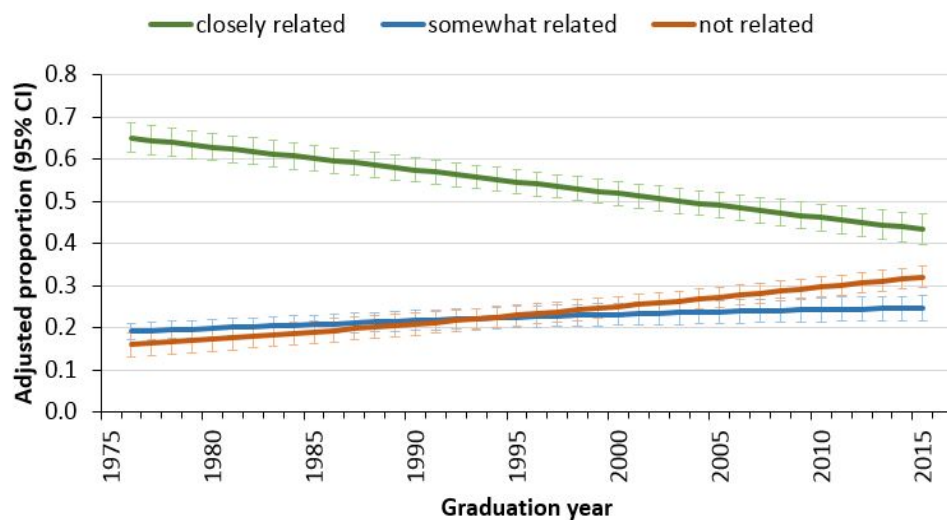**"How closely related was your first job or work experience to your undergraduate training?"**

Figure 1. The probability of arts alumni being "lost in transition" by graduation year. Adjusted proportions (also known as predictive margins) represent covariate-adjusted probabilities of being in each response category (adapted from Martin & Frenette, 2017, Table 3 and Table 4).

Instead, we found that arts alumni who reported more frequent participation in campus activities, greater exposure to diverse networks, more extensive career training, and internship experience during the college years, were more likely to have short initial job searches and to find jobs related to their fields of study. These social resources and experiential learning opportunities could serve as important forms of professional

socialization that prepare arts graduates to recognize potential job opportunities, respond to shifting trends, and navigate the fluid and dynamic artistic marketplace.

Although female college students are more likely than male students to major in an arts-related field, our results uncovered a paradoxical pattern of gender inequality in terms of access to college resources and early-career trajectories. Nationally, women receive three in five bachelor's degrees awarded in arts-related fields. Yet, we found that female arts alumni were more likely to have prolonged initial job searches, were less likely to find a first job that matched their college training, and reported lower levels of social engagement and career skills in comparison to male arts alumni.

Furthermore, gender moderated the relationship between career skill development and job-search length such that career skills were associated with stronger gains for men than for women. In other words, women alumnae were not only less likely to have access to beneficial resources across the college years, but also received fewer advantages from these resources during the initial job search.

Overall, our results suggest that arts students would be well served by programs that emphasized opportunities to gain real-world experience, including internships and networking functions with the broader artistic community. At the same time, our findings highlight the need to address pervasive inequalities based on gender as well as racial-ethnic identity and socioeconomic status. Arts institutions should strive to increase representation from historically marginalized groups, with a focus on ensuring that all students can acquire the skills and experiences for success in their respective fields.

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Alexandre Frenette is a Postdoctoral Scholar at Arizona State University's Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts and SNAAP Associate Research Director. Drawing on fieldwork in the music industry, Frenette is currently working on a monograph about the challenges and the promise of internships as part of higher education, tentatively titled *The Intern Economy* (under contract, Princeton University Press). His writings on the intern economy have won awards from the Society for the Study of Social Problems as well as the Labor and Employment Relations Association.

Photo credits (top and bottom): Art Academy of Cincinnati

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