

Volume 7, Number 1



TRACKING THE LIVES AND CAREERS OF ARTS GRADUATES



SNAAP DataBrief

DataBrief provides arts educators and arts policymakers with highlights of SNAAP data and insights into the value of arts-school education.



By the Numbers

The Impact of Higher Education Experiences on Who Stays and Who Leaves A Career in the Arts

by *Alexandre Frenette*

Prior SNAAP [research](#) looks at which arts alumni are able to break into a career in the arts, but what happens after these alumni get their start? In a forthcoming SNAAP report, Alexandre Frenette and Timothy J. Dowd ask: who stays and who leaves careers in the arts in the years after earning a postsecondary arts degree? They find that there are important predictors relating to personal characteristics, experience in their higher education program, and the impact of an uncertain arts labor market that affect whether alumni stay in or depart from a career in the arts. This DataBrief is the first in a series of four that focuses in on particular findings from the larger report. This research was supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.*

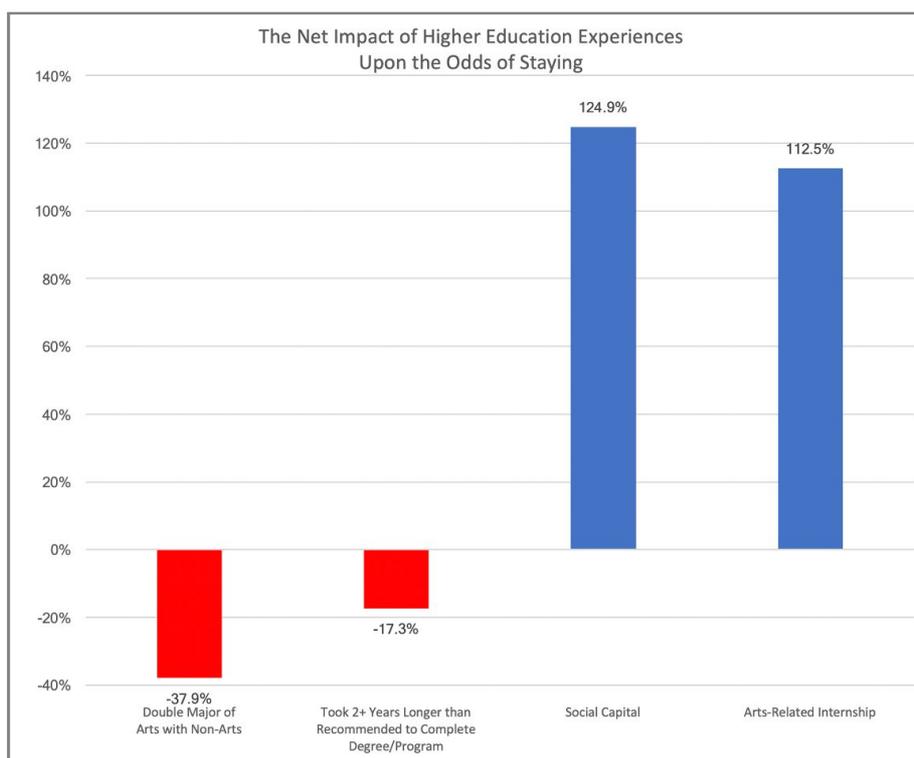
As sociologists Richard Pitt and Steven Tepper suggested [here](#), students who pursue double majors are arguably broadening their pool of knowledge, which can lead to heightened success in future employment. Past SNAAP [research](#) reveals that double majors are more confident in their

skills and may have different career plans than their single-major peers, but we also wonder if all double-majors are alike. For example, those doubling in arts majors are likely making themselves arts “generalists” who are able to engage in a number of activities as arts-based workers, expanding the range of jobs for which they are eligible. Yet, those combining an arts major with a non-arts major may feel the pull of the non-arts major – especially as jobs in such fields as finance or engineering can be more plentiful, or the pay can be higher, than is the case within arts-based occupations. Therefore, below we differentiate between double-majors within the arts (e.g., dance and music double major) and those who combine arts and non-arts majors (e.g., architecture and engineering double major).



Our analysis also considers whether SNAAP alumni took two or more years longer than recommended to complete their undergraduate degree; if the alumni had difficulty completing their degree requirements, this might impact their ability to remain in the arts. Regarding this curricular predictor, prior research has found that those who complete their program of study in a timely fashion will likely do better as they enter the world of work than those who struggle to finish their efforts in higher education (see [Alexander, Entwisle & Olson, 2014](#)). Those taking two or more years longer than recommended comprise some 7% of all the SNAAP respondents in this study.

We also consider how alumni experiences outside of the classroom might contribute to staying or leaving a career in the arts. The SNAAP survey allows us to measure “social capital,” the impact or value of one’s social connections, which we measure on a five-point scale based on whether the following networks of people had a “major influence” on their careers: classmates; faculty or instructors; staff members or advisors; guest artists; and alumni. Moreover, we consider the impact of arts-related internships during their time at their institution, since these experiences may offer “real world” information on arts-based occupations and industries.



The effect of double majoring is complicated by whether the two majors were both in the arts (no effect on the likelihood of staying in an arts-related career) or in one arts discipline and one non-arts discipline. Alumni who had one arts major and one non-arts major were 38% less likely to stay in an arts-related career, suggesting that opportunities outside of the arts may pull alumni away from their arts careers. Time to degree completion also has a significant impact on whether alumni stay or leave. Those alumni who took two or more years longer than recommended to complete their degree or program were 17% less likely to remain in an arts-related career.

Diverging from the negative or non-significant impact of certain variables, other aspects of alumni's higher education experience positively predict their odds of staying in an arts-related career. The degree to which alumni acquired social capital during their higher education experience positively influences the odds of staying in the arts. Increases in social capital development positively predicted staying in an arts-related career, increasing the likelihood by 125%. What is more, alumni who participated in an arts-related internship were 113% more likely to stay in an arts-related career than those who did not undertake such an internship.

These findings show that the world of arts alumni is like other worlds: those who struggle to complete their program of study in a timely fashion are also less likely to stay in the arts over an extended time compared to those who complete their program of study within the expected time. These findings also illuminate that the higher education experience is not only one of absorbing knowledge in the

classroom, it is also one in which students can forge key connections and learn on-the-job skills through internships. While it may be difficult for a student to predict which connections will *eventually* have a positive influence on their subsequent careers, the data clearly show that such influential connections are consequential – with each type they have (be it influential classmate, influential faculty, influential guest artist, and so forth) raising the odds that they will later remain in the arts when compared to those alumni who did not make such connections. These results give insight into the higher education experiences, both inside and outside of the classroom, that effect alumni on their career pathway. Consistent with current priorities at several arts schools, arts educators and administrators working toward alumni outcomes should focus on equal access to meaningful internships, facilitating a broad array of professional relationships, and supporting timely graduation.



**The larger forthcoming report examines the question of who stays and who leaves using a sample of 43,638 SNAAP alumni from the 2011, 2012, and 2013 data set who were at least 30 years old when they took the survey, had ever worked in an arts-related occupation, and were still active in the labor force. Specifically, the analysis controls for variables such as major or program of study, gender, race/ethnicity, social class, experiences of precarious work, home arrangement, and age in order to highlight the role of double-majoring, time to degree, social capital accrued while at school, and doing an arts-related internship.*

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