

MARCH 2024

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Arts and Design Alumni

snaap

STRATEGIC
NATIONAL
ARTS ALUMNI
PROJECT

Tracking the
lives & careers of
arts graduates

Dr. Rachel Skaggs
Dr. Jennifer L. Novak-Leonard
Dr. Jeff Barbee

*The preparation of this report was supported in part by
an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.*



Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Executive Summary	1
The Creative Workforce & The COVID-19 Pandemic	4
Who is Included in This Report?	6
The Impact of the Pandemic on the Working Lives of Arts and Design Graduates	7
Employment	7
Nature of work	10
Income	12
Disparate impacts	13
Expanded creative work & new skills	15
Acquiring New Skills	17
Preparing for Resilient Arts and Design Careers	20
References	22

Acknowledgements

This report was supported in part by an award from the Research: Art Works program of the National Endowment for the Arts: Grant 1891787-38-22 to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, with matching funds provided by the University of Illinois College of Fine and Applied Arts, the University of Illinois Investment for Growth Fund, and the Department of Arts Administration, Education, and Policy at The Ohio State University, in partnership with the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP).

SUGGESTED CITATION:

Skaggs, R., Novak-Leonard, J. L., and Barbee, J. (2024). *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Arts and Design Alumni*, Strategic National Arts Alumni Project Report. Austin, TX: Arts + Design Alumni Research, SNAAP.



**College of Fine &
Applied Arts**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



**The University of Texas at Austin
College of Fine Arts**

SNAAP is supported by Arts + Design Alumni Research, the nonprofit that oversees the management of SNAAP, and its institutional partnerships with the University of Texas at Austin’s College of Fine Arts and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s College of Fine and Applied Arts.

SNAAP’s 2022 survey administration was made possible by the dedicated efforts of the SNAAP staff—Lee Ann Scotto Adams, Executive Director; Deanna Ibrahim, Director of Research Services; and Angie L. Miller, Data Consultant—and through support from The Mellon Foundation, The Emily Hall Tremain Foundation, and sponsorships supplied by:

- ArtCenter College of Design
- College of Art & Media at University of Colorado Denver
- College of Arts and Architecture at Penn State University
- College of Fine Arts at University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Eastman School of Music at University of Rochester
- Emerson College
- Herb Alpert School of Music at University of California, Los Angeles
- Indiana University, Bloomington
- Institute of American Indian Arts
- Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts at the University of Houston

- Maryland Institute College of Art
- Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University
- Pratt Institute
- School of the Art Institute of Chicago
- Thomas S. Kenan Institute for the Arts at University of North Carolina School of the Arts
- Tyler School of Art & Architecture at Temple University
- University of Southern California
- Yale University

Questions? Email: info@snaaparts.org

Author Affiliations

Dr. Rachel Skaggs, Assistant Professor of Arts Management and Holder of the Lawrence and Isabel Barnett Professorship Endowed Professorship of Arts Management at The Ohio State University

Dr. Jennifer L. Novak-Leonard, Research Associate Professor, College of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign; SNAAP Research Director and SNAAP Board Vice President (2019-2023)

Dr. Jeff Barbee, Director, Office of Curriculum and Scholarship, School of Medicine, The Ohio State University

Executive Summary

During the COVID-19 pandemic there were many changes in arts and design alumni's paid work, creative work, income and in the skills that they needed to be successful in their careers. Given the documented impact of the pandemic on the arts and culture sector, on arts and creative workers, and on institutions of higher education, we turn to data from the 2022 SNAAP survey to understand how the impact of the pandemic was felt by people doing arts, design, or creative work as part of their job or occupational roles and the varied experiences across socio-demographic characteristics. This report focuses on providing insight into arts and design graduates whose work is—or before the pandemic was—in the arts, design, or creative realm by examining their working lives, economic lives, and the skills that they needed to attain or update during the first two years of the pandemic in the United States.

In addition to presenting analyses and findings about arts and design alumni's experiences of the first year of the pandemic along these dimensions of their creative and working lives, we also dedicate a section of the conclusion of this report to the impressions and challenges identified by higher education arts leaders in a series of formal conversation at the beginning of 2021 to frame commentary about university preparation for resilient arts and design alumni. Though the COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented event in the contemporary era, it is likely that universities and their graduates will need to contend with further changes, shifts, and emergencies in the future.

The questions that the 2022 SNAAP survey asked of arts and design alumni about their experiences of the pandemic included questions about how much of their work was related to arts or design, changes to their creative work, and how their paid work was affected. The survey also asked about whether and what types of skills they needed to update or learn in order to advance their career, as well as where they acquired new skills during this time. As is the case for graduates of all non-vocational programs (Comunian et al. 2022), not all graduates of arts and design programs choose to work in the field they were trained in, some never intended to work in these fields even when pursuing their education, and some double major in arts and non-arts subjects with the intent to pursue a career outside of the arts (Frenette et al. Dowd 2020).

Despite challenges posed by the pandemic and changes in their working lives that occurred as a result of the pandemic, the majority of arts alumni doing arts, design, or creative work remained in the same kind of work as they were in before the pandemic and did not experience a loss of income due to the pandemic. However, those most likely to experience income loss were those in the lowest income brackets and those most likely to increase their incomes were those from higher income brackets. A majority of these arts and design

alumni said that it has been vital to learn new skills or update their skills for career success in a variety of areas, notably in technology skills.

Highlights from findings about arts and design alums who worked in an arts or design occupation in 2020 and/or who have an arts or design-relevant job or duties in 2022:

- Alumni in the creative workforce were mostly doing the same kind of work with as much or more focus on arts or design as before the pandemic.
 - 36% of those in the creative workforce were not affected during the first year of the pandemic.
 - 81% of arts and design alumni in the creative workforce said that they were doing the same kind of work in fall 2022 as they were before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic over two years prior.
 - 62% of arts and design alumni in the creative workforce reported that their work has remained the same, 20% say that less of their work is related to arts or design, and 18% say that now it is more related to arts and design since the onset of the pandemic.
- Most alumni in the creative workforce experienced a pay increase or no income change in the first year of the pandemic. Lower income alums were more likely to lose income and higher income alumni were more likely to increase their incomes during the pandemic.
 - 77% experienced a pay increase or had their income remain the same during the first year of the pandemic.
 - During the first year of the pandemic, 25% of alumni lost personal income or experienced a pay cut and 17% utilized unemployment benefits or other government assistance.
 - Of those alumni in the \$20,000 or less personal income bracket, 47% experienced a decrease in their personal income.
 - 55% of alums in the \$100,000 and above personal income bracket increased their income since the beginning of the pandemic.
 - For all income brackets, the majority of alumni's household and personal incomes remained the same or increased.
- Many alumni in the creative workforce needed new or updated skills after the onset of the pandemic, and those who attained or updated skills often taught themselves.
 - 64% of alumni said it was important or very important to their career for them to update or acquire new skills since the onset of the pandemic.
 - Technology skills were the most important for alumni to update or acquire, with 69% of alumni saying that they needed these skills.
 - The majority of alumni who updated their skills or attained new skills were self-taught (77%).

- Self-Employed alumni in the creative workforce were more impacted by the pandemic.
 - Self-employed alumni were more likely to have lost a job, been furloughed, or otherwise be out of work and more likely to have experienced a pay cut during the first year of the pandemic.
 - Self-employed alumni were significantly more likely in 2022 to have work that includes arts and design-relevant duties like creating or performing art or design, teaching art or design, managing, or administering programs or other people in arts or design.
 - 10% of alumni doing arts, design, or creative work as part of their job or occupational roles started self-employment since the beginning of the pandemic.
- Recent graduates in the creative workforce need new and updated skills for their careers despite their recent educational experiences.
 - 53% of recent graduates (two or fewer years since graduation) say that it was “very important” to update or acquire new skills for their careers since the pandemic began.
 - Recent graduates report a significantly higher rate (49%) of needing skills in artistic or design techniques than all other graduates.

The Creative Workforce & The COVID-19 Pandemic

Empty venues, canceled gigs, shifting to online classes and programming, and time spent isolating at home characterize the arts and culture sector during the initial, acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic as it began in mid-March 2020. Our own experiences and amassing scholarship on arts, creativity, and culture mark the pandemic era as one that has been challenging for sustainability in cultural fields (e.g., Comunian and England 2020, Haynes and Woodward 2021). The impact of the pandemic on the creative economy in the United States as a whole has been described as disastrous: an early report projected a loss of 30% of all jobs in the creative economy and 15% reduction in total monthly wages (Florida and Seman 2020) and retrospective analyses showing the number of jobs in the ‘Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation’ sector¹ dropped from 2.5 million to 1.2 million within just the first two months of the pandemic (Americans for the Arts 2022). Self-employed and part-time workers in the creative economy have experienced further negative impacts (Khlystova, Kalyuzhnova, and Belitski 2022), and the performing arts were hit especially hard by the pandemic, both in terms of the work it took to adapt work to online modalities (Brilli, Gemini, and Giuliani 2023, Vandenberg and Berghman 2023) and in terms of the economic impact of closed venues and events (OECD 2020). While employment in this sector has shown progress toward recovery, it has been slower than progress in the U.S. labor market as a whole (Americans for the Arts 2022).

Within the arts, the impacts of and recovery from the pandemic have been unevenly distributed across socio-demographic groups. Throughout the pandemic, more women artists left the labor force, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) artists and disabled artists experienced higher unemployment rates and lost a larger portion of their income from creative work compared to White, able-bodied artists (Americans for the Arts 2022, Fonner et al 2021). In the wider labor market, trends in precarious work were magnified throughout the pandemic. More workers were in precarious situations in their work and their wellbeing alike, with frontline workers emerging as particularly challenged and exposed in terms of health risks and with the highest burden of the pandemic falling along historic socio-demographic lines (Mai et al 2023). Family caregiving also intensified during the pandemic,

¹ NAICS code 71, as defined in federal data made available by the U.S. Census Bureau, which includes: “Performing Arts, Spectator Sports, and Related Industries: NAICS 711”, “Museums, Historical Sites, and Similar Institutions: NAICS 712”, and “Amusement, Gambling, and Recreation Industries: NAICS 713” (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2023).

as daycares and schools closed or limited their hours. Research shows that women disproportionately shouldered the extra work in this area and felt the impact of the additional responsibility by cutting back more paid working hours compared to men (Collins et al 2020). Additionally, gendered self-ratings of job satisfaction and productivity diverged after the onset of COVID-19 (Feng and Savani 2020), further indicating potential aspects of the unevenness with which the pandemic was experienced by individuals based on their identities and life circumstances.

Even while experiencing these outsized and severe impacts, there have been creative workers who were able to innovate or improve their creative working lives during the pandemic. Creative economy workers adopted digital modalities (Khlystova, Kalyuzhnova, and Belitski 2022), which took significant efforts when access to essential contexts, spaces, communities, collaborators, audiences, equipment, and materials was severely limited (Brilli, Gemini, and Giuliani 2023, Skaggs, Hoppe, and Burke 2022, Vandenberg and Berghman 2023). The increase in digital programming and working options has also been touted as having a positive impact, particularly for disabled artists (Lee, Rentschler, and Pinto 2023) and early-career arts graduates (Skaggs 2023), though these increases in accessibility and inclusion are not without caveats or problems.

Arts and creative work is precarious (Lingo and Tepper 2013, Menger 1999), so a shock like the pandemic may have had especially negative impacts on an already disadvantaged group of workers. However, creativity is linked to innovation and opportunity-spotting, and workers in the arts, design, and creative roles may already have the skills needed to shift their work during difficult times (Godart, Seong, and Phillips 2020, Wohl 2021, Wyszomirski and Chang 2017), meaning that members of the arts and creative workforce may be well-situated to weather an event like the pandemic. As such, it is likely that many artists, designers, and creative workers were negatively impacted at the onset of the pandemic, while others may have been able to use their creativity and skills to innovate, shift their work, or persist in the face of the initial phase of the pandemic and later social, economic, and labor market changes that were initiated by the pandemic. Changes like social distancing and working online also led arts and design alumni to need new and updated skills. Qualitative research about arts alumni during the first year of the pandemic showed that arts and design alumni still needed skills in finance and business management, entrepreneurship, and networking, which are frequently at the top of needed skills lists in this field. However, they also needed technological skills and skills related to interpersonal relationships and working collaboratively (Skaggs, Hoppe, and Burke 2021), skills which are linked to the specific changes in the ways people worked during the first year of the pandemic.

Emergent research about the impact of the pandemic on the U.S. labor force shows that different groups of people were impacted in different ways

and with differing severity. Because of the known heterogeneity and diversity of artists and creative workers as a group (Hénaut, Lena, and Accominotti 2023, Lingo and Tepper 2013, Menger 1999), it is important to understand how different aspects of individuals' working and professional lives, as well as their backgrounds, affected their experience of the pandemic. Throughout this report, we examine differences across socio-demographic identity, years since graduation, occupation, and experiences with self-employment as key areas where nuance is needed in analyses.

WHO IS CONSIDERED IN THIS REPORT?

The 2022 SNAAP survey includes arts and design graduates, regardless of whether they currently work or have worked in the arts. However, for questions related to the pandemic, we examine alumni whose professional lives are related to art, design, or creative work.

This report is focused on providing insight into arts and design graduates whose work is—or before the pandemic was—in the arts, design, or creative realm. We identify these workers in three ways:

- First, those who report that they currently, at the time of the survey in September 2022, work in an arts or design occupation, including in positions as a teacher or manager within these fields.
- Second, if they worked in any artistic occupation in early March 2020, inclusive of a wide range of arts occupations (see Question 65 in 2022 SNAAP Questionnaire for full list; Novak-Leonard et al 2023: 18).
- Third, if their current work roles included any arts- or design-related duties as part of their regular work (Novak-Leonard 2024).

Together, this threefold approach to capturing alumni whose work is broadly related to the arts or design gives us a multidimensional way to understand what creative work looks like for these alumni. Throughout the report, when we refer to arts and design alumni, arts and design graduates, alumni, alums, or graduates, we mean to refer to the sample as described here.

Our motivation for undertaking this particular study is to understand how the impact of the pandemic was felt by people doing arts, design, or creative work as part of their job or occupational roles. These choices mean that this report examines the experiences of a subset of over 40,000 graduates, which is a portion of the survey's full sample size of arts and design alumni².

2 We use weighted data in these analyses, and reporting in figures is presented with 95% confidence interval bars; please refer to the 2022 SNAAP Technical Report for further details (Novak-Leonard et al., 2023).

The Impact of the Pandemic on the Working Lives of Arts and Design Graduates

One area of particular interest since the onset of COVID-19 has been the question of whether arts and design alumni who were in the arts workforce at the start of the pandemic have had to change their occupation or otherwise pivot their work. When asked whether they were doing the same kind of work or were in a similar occupation as in March 2020, 81% of arts and design alumni doing arts, design, or creative work as part of their job or occupational roles answered that they were. Though four fifths of these alumni still were doing the same kind of work as before the pandemic, there are many variations in their experiences of the pandemic and its impacts on their paid work, including experiences like job loss or furlough, cutting back or quitting work due to family responsibilities, starting new work or gigs, changes in their creative work, and many other ways they were impacted. Likewise, changes in paid work often have implications for income, and while some alumni experienced loss in this area, many more experienced stability or growth.

EMPLOYMENT

Like other workers, arts and design alumni doing arts, design, or creative work experienced changes, pivots, and shifts in their work in a variety of ways during the pandemic. The 2022 SNAAP survey asked arts and design alumni who reported being in the work force at the start of the pandemic, “How, if at all, was your paid work affected between mid-March 2020 and February 2021?” (Table 1). The most frequent response from alumni was that their paid work was not affected (36%), but this means that almost two thirds of arts and design graduates’ paid work was affected in some way during the first year of the pandemic. The most common impact was losing a job, experiencing a furlough, or otherwise being out of work (22%). Additionally, 6% of alumni stopped or cut back their paid work specifically because of family caregiving responsibilities during the first year of the pandemic³.

3 While the proportion of alumni who stopped or cut back paid work due to family caregiving may seem low, this figure does not include caregivers for whom work was especially difficult or challenging but who did not cut back or stop their work. It also does not include those who stopped or cut back paid work after the first year of the pandemic. More generally, we find that those alumni who had any children in the home under 18 years old had better outcomes across a number of dimensions. For example, they were less likely to have had their paid work affected by the pandemic, less likely to have been furloughed, and were less likely to report that their paid work was less related to arts and design compared to before the pandemic. These findings suggest that alums with children in the home are in work that is less precariously situated than those who do not have children in the home.

Though just over one fifth of alumni who do arts, design, or creative work were in some way out of work during the first year of the pandemic, many started new gigs or employment during the same period. Some picked up new gigs or project-based arts or design work (12%) or started a new full-time or part-time job in arts or design (7%). Others started a new full-time or part-time job not related to arts or design (7%) or picked up new gigs or project-based work not related to arts or design (5%).

Table 1. Responses to the question "How, if at all, was your paid work affected between mid-March 2020 and February 2021?"

	Percentage
Paid work was not affected	36%
Lost a job, was furloughed, or otherwise was out of work	22%
Other	14%
Picked up new gigs or project-based arts or design work	12%
Started a new full-time or part-time job in arts or design	7%
Started a new full-time or part-time job not related to arts or design	7%
Stopped or cut back work specifically for family caregiving	6%
Picked up new gigs or project-based work not related to arts or design	5%

n = 42,660

Fourteen percent of alumni who had been working in an arts or design occupation at the start of the pandemic reported “Other” ways that their paid work was affected. Their text responses were wide-ranging, yet several themes emerged: adapting; applying for new opportunities; pivots; increased work; decreased work; intensification of work; and burnout. Table 2 illustrates these themes with direct quotes from survey respondents.

The first three themes shown in Table 2 contain examples of how alums adjusted to the changes of the pandemic within their existing roles and businesses (adapting), sought out new education and funding sources (applying for new opportunities), and began new business ventures or changed to new artforms (pivots). The next two themes provide examples of how alumni work increased or decreased. The final two themes show how some of the impacts of the changes to paid work affected alums’ perceptions of work; intensification of work reflects additional responsibilities alongside sentiments of low pay relative to workload and burnout reflects feelings of exhaustion or diminished satisfaction in work.

Table 2. Other ways that alumni said that paid work was affected by the pandemic

Adapting	<p>“Adapted to entirely new teaching modalities”</p> <p>“adapted to online events after brief furlough”</p> <p>“Changed Business model due to limitation of travel”</p> <p>“Shifted to WFH; was an absolutely insane process”</p>
Applying for New Opportunities	<p>“Applied for PhD”</p> <p>“applied for grant funding”</p> <p>“Applied for EIDL and PPP loans”</p> <p>“Received emergency funding from arts council”</p>
Pivots	<p>“Change medium for more affordable arts in ceramics”</p> <p>“Closed my business, took on full-time employment”</p> <p>“Went full time in my side photo biz”</p> <p>“Started a business selling my art online”</p>
Increased Work	<p>“began working through zoom and my career thrived”</p> <p>“Client list for my teaching business grew ~35%”</p> <p>“I worked a TON more through pandemic”</p> <p>“Made 50% more in 2021 than 2020”</p>
Decreased Work	<p>“Ceased most freelance and production activities”</p> <p>“Closed our fledgling product design partnership”</p> <p>“I lost music income, but non-music remained steady”</p> <p>“My career disappeared”</p>
Intensification of Work	<p>“Additional work responsibilities due to layoffs”</p> <p>“Additional responsibility, same pay”</p> <p>“Added a 2nd full-time design job & freelanced”</p> <p>“Got more and more work but less pay.”</p>
Burnout	<p>“Burnt out. Tired of teaching in public school”</p> <p>“Everything was Zoomed. It was exhausting.”</p> <p>“I lost interest in my job. No creativity.”</p> <p>“Quit my job due to burnout/conflict of principles”</p>

Note: Multiple themes may exist within any one alum’s answer.

Self-employed arts and design alumni were more likely than other alums to have their paid work affected during the first year of the pandemic. They were also more likely to have lost a job, been furloughed, or otherwise be out of work and more likely to have experienced a pay cut during the first year of the pandemic. These findings reflect broader impacts of the pandemic on self-employed workers in the United States where self-employed workers were more likely to have their work impacted and were slower to recover (Mindes and Lewin 2021), and those who were more reliant on gig work were more impacted (Reynolds and Kincaid 2023) and felt especially uncertain (Ravenelle and Knoble 2023) during the pandemic.

Despite the particular hardships faced by many self-employed workers, some alumni started self-employment after the onset of the pandemic⁴. Approximately 10% of alumni for the first time became self-employed, and these alumni were more likely to have graduated less than three years ago and to either have an income between \$0 - \$40,000 or to have an income above \$100,000. While there is no difference by gender in who started self-employment after the onset of the pandemic, alumni who are Asian Indian or are of two or more races were more likely to take this path compared to White alumni. Alumni who hold a Master's degree were less likely to take this career path compared to arts and design graduates who only have a Bachelor's degree. These findings reflect recent scholarship that suggests that artist entrepreneurs are pushed to entrepreneurship because of precarity or labor market difficulties (Feder and Woronkovicz 2023).

NATURE OF WORK

Did the nature of creative work change during the pandemic? On average, 62% of arts and design alumni doing arts, design, or creative work as part of their job or occupational roles reported that the creative content or nature of their work has remained the same, 20% say that less of their work is related to arts or design, and 18% say that now it is more related to arts and design since the onset of the pandemic.

When comparing those alumni whose work is more related to art or design than it was before the pandemic to those whose work is less related or as related to art or design as before the pandemic, a number of differences emerge⁵. These differences paint a picture of those alumni who were doing more artistic work as also being those alumni who were more precariously situated in the workforce. Alumni whose work is more related to art or design than it was before the pandemic statistically have lower levels of education and graduated more recently. They are also more likely to be BIPOC individuals, but there are no significant gender differences. Occupationally, they are more likely to be self-employed and to have begun self-employment after the onset of the pandemic, which, as discussed above, reflects a story of both artistic work and self-employment being a refuge for workers experiencing precarity.

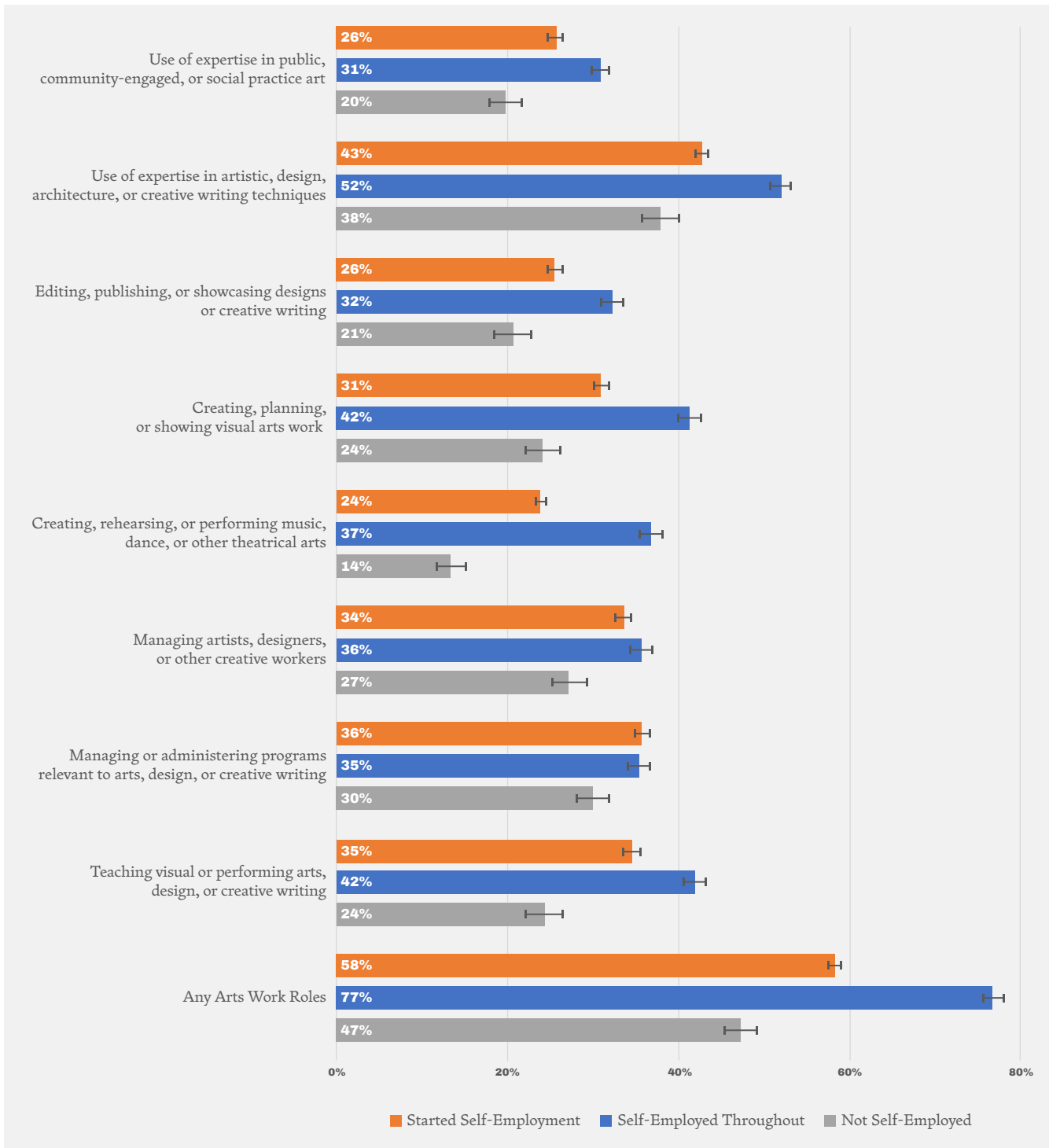
Self-employment status also had a significant impact on whether alums' work regularly included arts- or design-related duties. Alumni who were self-employed throughout the first year of the pandemic are most likely to perform these duties. The next most likely were those who started self-employment after the onset of the pandemic. Finally, those who were not and

4 The findings presented in this section stem from a logistic regression model where the binary "started self-employment after the onset of the pandemic" is the dependent variable.

5 The findings presented in this section stem from a logistic regression model where the binary "work is more related to art or design since before the pandemic" is the dependent variable.

are not self-employed are the least likely to perform these duties in their paid work. For two duties (managing artists, designers, or other creative workers; managing or administering programs relevant to arts, design, or creative writing), both types of self-employed alumni are as likely to hold that role, but in these cases, self-employed alumni and alumni who became self-employed after the pandemic began are still significantly more likely to hold these roles than those who are not self-employed.

Figure 1. Alumni Arts and Creative Work Duties by Self-Employment Status



INCOME

With changes in jobs, gigs, and career paths comes the potential for changes to income. In addition to the need for understanding how the working lives of arts and design alumni doing arts, design, or creative work as part of their job or occupational roles changed during the pandemic, so too is it important to examine the ways that their economic lives changed during this period. During the first year of the pandemic, 25% of alumni lost personal income or experienced a pay cut and 17% utilized unemployment benefits or other government assistance.

Beyond the findings above that are only about the first year of the pandemic, we look to these alumni's experiences since the beginning of the pandemic to see how their incomes were affected. We find that those with the lowest incomes were most likely to lose income since the start of the pandemic. We also find that those with the highest incomes were to most likely to increase their incomes during the pandemic. These findings are consistent across personal and household income.

Overall, 23% of alums that were in the creative workforce at the onset of pandemic report that their personal income decreased during the pandemic, 37% had their personal income remain about the same, and 39% had an increase in their personal income. In terms of household income, 22% experienced a decrease in their household income during the pandemic, 37% had their household income remain about the same, and 42% experienced an increase in their household income. Figures 2 and 3 show the proportion of alumni, within their income brackets, whose personal and household income decreased, stayed the same, and increased during the pandemic, respectively.

Figure 2. Change to Personal Income

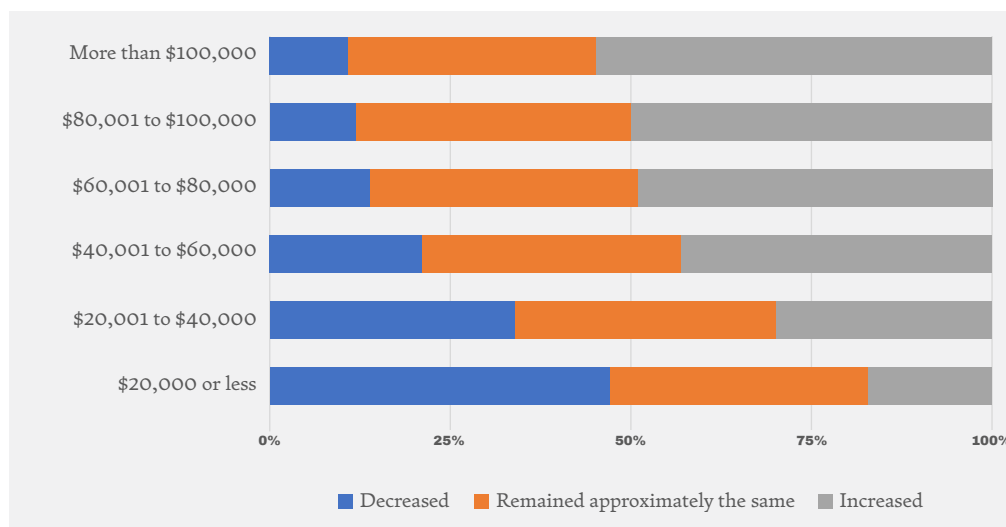
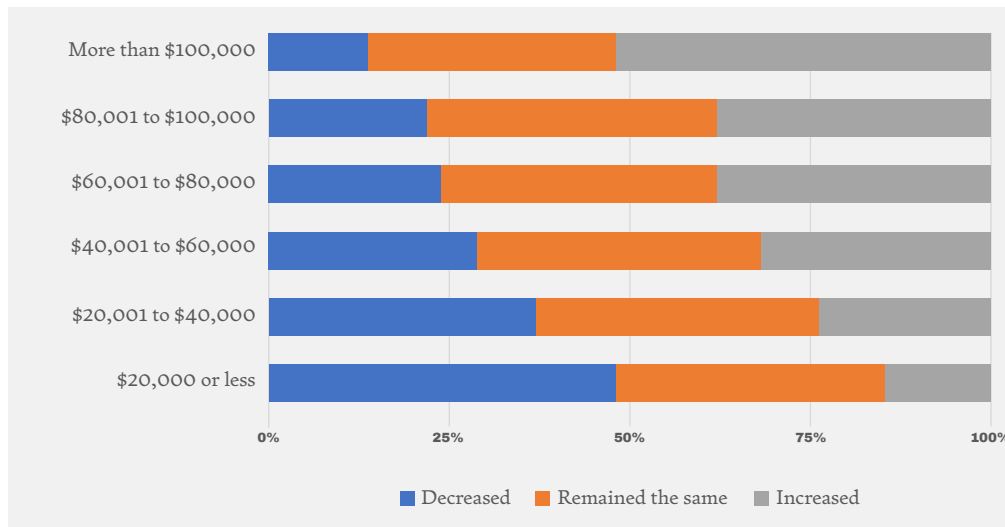


Figure 3. Change to Household Income



DISPARATE IMPACTS

The pandemic did not affect work evenly, and this section summarizes disparities in terms of whose paid work was most and least affected by the pandemic.⁶ The two most frequent responses to the question of how alumni work was impacted in the first year of the pandemic (as shown in Table 1) was that paid work was not affected (36%) and that respondents lost a job, were furloughed, or otherwise out of work (22%). Since these were the most common experiences for alumni whose work or occupational roles include(d) arts, design, or creative work, they are the focus of our in-depth statistical analyses.

Those whose paid work was not affected are more likely to be men, to have children in the home, to hold a doctoral degree, to have graduated more than three years ago, and to have a personal income above \$150,000. Those whose paid work was not affected are less likely to be of two or more races, to have an income below \$50,000, and are less likely to be self-employed. These characteristics show us that occupational stability during the pandemic is related to personal socio-demographic characteristics that are historically associated with being advantaged in the labor market, like higher income and education, longer tenure in the labor market, and being a man. They are likewise negatively linked to other characteristics, like having lower incomes and being self-employed, that suggest that more precariously situated workers were more likely to be affected. In short, those who were already likely to be advantaged or stable in their work remained so despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over one-fifth of alumni doing arts, design, or creative work lost a job, were furloughed, or otherwise out of work. These alumni were more likely to

⁶ The findings presented in this section stem from two logistic regression models, where the binary ‘paid work was not affected’ and ‘Lost a job, was furloughed, or was otherwise out of work’ are the dependent variables.

be of a gender identity other than man or woman, to have graduated 3-5 years before taking the survey, to be of two or more races, to have an income at or below \$50,000, and to be self-employed. These findings suggest that individuals who were out of work in some way during the first year of the pandemic were people whose personal socio-demographic characteristics, income, and status as a self-employed worker make are associated with higher precarity. Those who are less likely to have had their work affected in this way were alumni who have children in the home, graduate degree holders, those who graduated more than 10 years ago, and alumni whose incomes are greater than \$90,000. Again, we see that alumni whose personal characteristics are historically associated with labor market stability were less likely to experience negative work outcomes during the pandemic.

Scholars during the first year of the pandemic questioned whether the impact of COVID-19 would simply expose existing cracks in our existing structures that support arts and creative work (Comunian and England 2020). Our results affirm this prediction. We reported in the income section of this report that those with lower incomes were more likely to experience pay cuts during the pandemic and that those with higher incomes were more likely to get a pay raise. Now we add to this evidence that membership in historically advantaged groups is associated with better labor market outcomes during the pandemic, while membership in disadvantaged groups is associated with poorer outcomes. While the pandemic affected everyone, the impacts and effects were not evenly applied to all members of society.

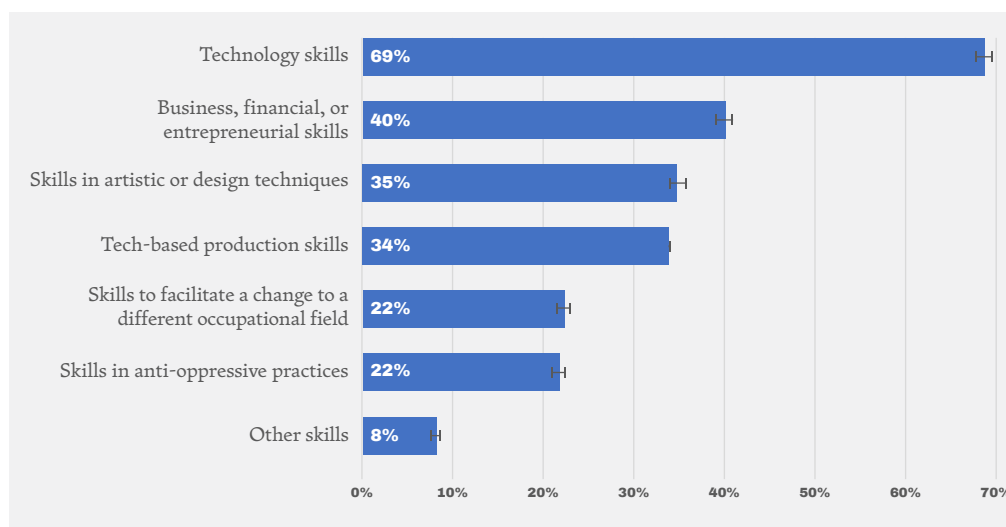
Expanded creative work & new skills

The pandemic was a time of significant change in work opportunities, career pivots, and divergence from the normal way of doing many things. Many arts and design graduates whose work is, or before the pandemic was, in the arts, design, or creative realm sought out new skills and knowledge to improve their circumstances amidst these changes.

Some alumni sought out new collaborators, communities, or professional networks (29%), others changed the content, style, or media of their work (25%), increased their efforts to have their creative work address problems in their communities (13%), or made another change to their creative work (13%).

Two thirds of alumni (64%) said it was ‘important’ or ‘very important’ to update or learn new skills to advance their career since the onset of the pandemic, while approximately a third (36%) said that it was ‘not important’ or ‘slightly important’ to update or learn new skills. The majority (69%) reported needing to update or acquire technology skills (Figure 4); business, financial, or entrepreneurial skills (40%); skills in artistic or design technique (35%); tech-based production skills (34%); skills to facilitate change to a different occupational field (22%); skills in anti-oppressive practices (22%); and other skills (8%).

Figure 4. Proportion of alumni who needed to update or develop new skills in listed areas



The other skills that alumni reported needing span a broad array, and included skills needed to fill in gaps for roles, jobs, or services that they now have to do that others used to do for them, as well as advancing their own work. The most prevalent skills are listed and thematically grouped in Table 3. Many skills identified related to translating existing skillsets into online modalities or otherwise learning tech-based production skills that would facilitate their work in the digital world. These other skills ranged from artistic and design skills to software programs and technical skills to broad mindsets, critical thinking, content knowledge in new domains, and ways of approaching current issues.

Table 3. Other skills that alumni report needing to update or develop since the onset of the pandemic

Artistic and design skills	Animation, art installation and handling, copywriting, curatorial skills, design thinking, digital content creation, editorial skills, graphic design, illustration, photography, video production, voice acting, writing skills
Broad mindsets, critical thinking, business skills, content knowledge in new domains	Academic skills, accounting, adaptability, administrative skills, capital development, classroom management, communication, crisis management, curriculum design, distance learning, entrepreneurial skills, financial skills, fundraising, grant seeking, human resources skills, interpersonal skills, management skills, leadership, networking, online collaboration, online teaching and pedagogy, people skills, project management, PR skills, research, resilience, sales, science and math skills, self-promotion, social and emotional skills, soft skills, teaching skills, time management.
Technical skills and software programs	3d, AI, blockchain, building mobile apps, CAD software, coding skills, data analytics, data science, digital marketing, digital portfolios, ecommerce, metaverse, podcasting, social media, sync licensing, user experience design, VR, website design
Ways of approaching current issues	Accessibility skills and practices, advocacy, art therapy, climate knowledge, climate response skills, community-based engagement, decolonization practices, DEI, equity, intersectional approaches, lobbying, mental health support, mindfulness, public practice, social work skills, sustainability, trauma-informed skills, union organizing

ACQUIRING NEW SKILLS

The proliferation of online options for learning and access to digital conferences, workshops, and classes made access to education and training more accessible for many arts and design alumni, often at a reduced price (Skaggs 2023). During the pandemic, 77% of alumni doing arts, design, or creative work acquired needed-skills by teaching themselves through online tutorials or other resources and 45% tapped into the expertise of existing mentors or friends, while about one-third (36%) enrolled in online courses or other formal trainings, other than college or university programs (Figure 5). Additionally, though less frequently, alums report acquiring new skills or updating skills through employer-provided trainings or resources; new acquaintances or connections made since the onset of the pandemic; college or university degree program; trade associations, unions, or other regional organizations that support creative workers, college or university non-degree program or coursework; and other ways of obtaining or updating skills. Considering these responses on the whole, alumni tended to use less formal and more familiar sources to acquire skills as opposed to formal credentialing. Five percent of alumni listed other ways they acquired new skills, as shown in Table 4.

Figure 5. Where Alumni Updated or Acquired New Skills

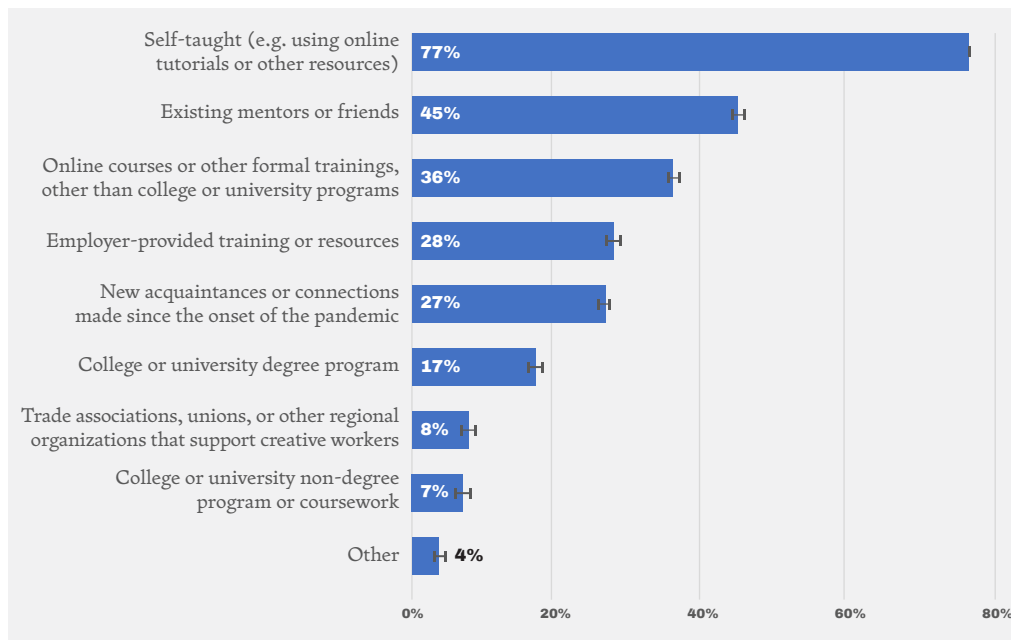


Table 4. Other ways that alumni attained or updated skills since the onset of the pandemic

Advisors	Business or career coaching, hiring consultants, formal mentorship, therapists
Alumni Resources	Alumni programs, career services, alumni webinars
Community Spaces	Local and community arts centers, public libraries, local arts organizations, makers' spaces, museums
Learning Communities	Fellowships, residencies, workshops, bootcamps, retreats, internships, meetups, apprenticeships
Media	Books, articles, podcasts, Google, magazines, YouTube Videos, public television, social media content, apps
Occupational Groups	Professional organizations, unions
Online Education	MOOCs, LinkedIn Learning, online workshops, online software-specific community
Personal Relationships	Connections with peers and colleagues, especially connections to people younger than themselves
Service Groups	Americorps, volunteer programs, serving on boards of directors, other service roles to organizations
Voluntary Associations	Activist groups, mutual aid networks, social media groups

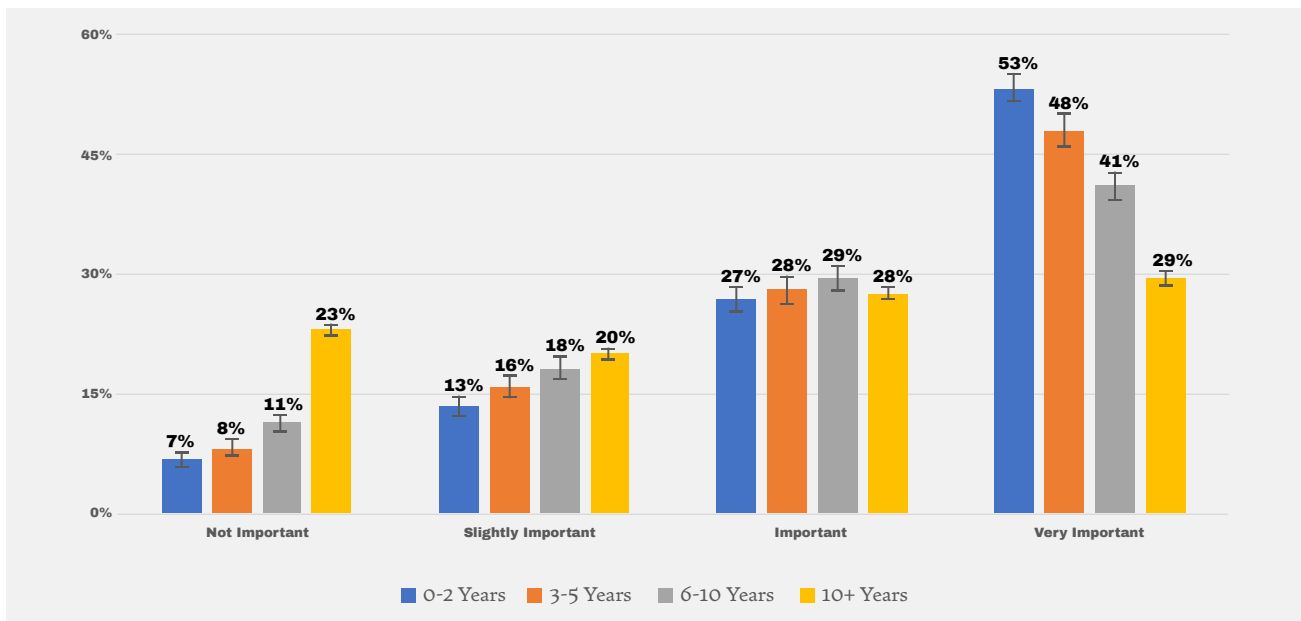
It is not surprising but is noteworthy that many of these spaces existed online and allowed for connection and career resources despite social distancing and the high proportion of work-from-home arrangements that were so common in this time. Within these responses, some alumni shared that faced financial barriers to acquiring skills or that they had not yet found a way to acquire the skills that they need. Even outside of the time since pandemic, we know that members of the workforce, both in and beyond the arts and design, need to update their skills or reskill depending on changes in their occupation or in the wider labor market. Having the time, money, and ability to access new and updated skills is important for building and sustaining a career.

Years since graduation is especially important in understanding which alumni say they most needed to update their skills or acquire new skills for their careers (Figure 6). Across all graduation cohorts, “very important” was the most frequent response. The *most recent graduates*—those who graduated within the two years prior to taking the 2022 SNAAP survey—reported the highest rate of thinking it ‘very important’ to attain or update their skills (53%), while alumni further from graduation selected this answer less frequently

(3-5 years, 48%; 6-10 years, 41%, 10+ years, 29%). Notably, alumni who graduated 10 or more years before taking the 2022 SNAAP survey reported a significantly higher rate of it being ‘not important’ to update their skills (23%), compared to those 6-10 years from graduation (11%) or those 3-5 and 0-2 years from graduation (8% and 7%, respectively). The differences were less distinct across cohorts for alumni selecting “slightly important” or “important” when answering this question.

Overall, the levels of stated need for different skills are similar across alumni graduation cohorts. However, there are several notable differences. The most recent graduates (two or fewer years since graduation) report a significantly higher rate (49%) of needing skills in artistic or design techniques than all other graduates. Those who graduated 3-5 years before taking the 2022 SNAAP survey are more likely to say they need skills to facilitate a career change (30%) and alumni of ten of more years ago report a significantly lower rate (18%) of needing this to update or acquire this skill. Finally, those 10 or more years from graduation report the lowest rates of needing to update or acquire business, financial, or entrepreneurial skills (36%) or new skills in artistic or design techniques (29%).

Figure 6. Skill Importance by Years Since Graduation



Though recent graduates who are doing arts, design, or creative work as part of their job or occupational roles have the most up-to-date training and education among members of the workforce, they still need new or updated skills, especially in artistic or design techniques. This is worth considering for institutions of higher education that are trying to balance curricula toward the skills needed by their graduates.

Preparing for Resilient Arts and Design Careers

The majority of arts and design alumni reported that, in terms of their working lives, creative work, and economic lives that they are about as well off as they were before the pandemic if not better off in terms of their income or how related their paid work is to arts or design. However, we find some disparities in outcomes, as those whose incomes were most negatively impacted by the pandemic are also those alumni who are in lower income brackets. That is, we see the rich get richer and the poor get poorer since the pandemic began and find that members of historically advantaged groups, like men, graduate degree holders, non-recent graduates, and those with higher incomes, were more likely to have not had their paid work affected in the first year of the pandemic.

It is worth noting that the arts and design are not the only workforces that are impacted by precarity in the contemporary labor market. Work outside of the arts and design is also increasingly precarious and gig-based, with job pivots, career shifts, reskilling, and upskilling being increasingly the norm across individuals' working lives, though COVID response policy and funding were not directed at all types of career changes that happened due to the pandemic (Gowayed, Mears, and Occhiuto 2022, Ravenelle, Kowalski, and Janko 2021, Ravenelle and Noble 2023). In an era of work that was already described as precarious, nonstandard, or "post-bureaucratic" before the pandemic (Cornfield 2015, Lingo and Tepper 2013), the constraints of COVID-19 isolation measures, like lost jobs and the need to work from home sped up trends in precarious work, working from home, and virtual work.

Beyond the acute and immediate changes of the pandemic, higher education leaders are considering how to leverage this period of change into their educational and administrative practices, how institutions address the educational debt burden borne by alumni, and in responding to new gainful employment rules that link federal financial aid funding with alumni outcomes.

In a series of structured conversations with college and university leaders in the arts and design in January of 2021, these leaders emphasized considerations about what the pandemic means for the future of collegiate arts and design education. Their concerns ranged from practical needs in the classroom to reform-minded ambitions for the sector as a whole. COVID-19 did not have a singular impact on higher education in arts and design, rather, it has exacerbated existing issues and concerns about career pathways, diversity, equity, and inclusion issues, and the value proposition of an arts and design education.

Considerations of the COVID-19 pandemic on the arts and design should be understood in terms of both the acute and chronic nature of the challenges that have emerged and continue to persist. As one higher ed leader said in these conversations, the challenges of the pandemic have made chronic challenges more acute. These chronic issues, like enrollment trends, accessibility, belongingness and inclusion, levels of student debt, online education, and curricular reform toward emphasizing career skills, are important considerations as higher education institutions continue to make decisions about how to move past the pandemic. These concerns are met with related accreditation standards, which increasingly require that institutions meet the standard of gainful employment and loan repayment ability. Just as in society at large, measurement is of increasing concern in higher education. The return on investment that universities promise for students, states, and regions is important, particularly for public schools and schools with community-driven missions.

Higher education in the arts and design has invoked the concept of resilience since the onset of the pandemic. There is a general sense that individual resilience is a key characteristic of people that will be able to successfully weather challenges and adapt to changes in society and particularly in their individual careers (Gonithellis 2018). A number of past findings from SNAAP have highlighted the need for adaptation in arts and design careers toward resilience, the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and better career outcomes. They point to high-impact curricular and co-curricular practices, like internships, completing a portfolio, and working with an artist in the community (Frenette, Miller, and Robinson 2023, Miller, Martin, and Frenette 2021) as well as career strategies like multi-disciplinarity (Frenette, Martin, and Tepper 2018) as ways to achieve these aims. Though the COVID-19 pandemic is no longer designated as a federal state of emergency, its impacts linger, and higher education leaders in the arts and design should continue to consider how to shape curricular and co-curricular offerings toward promoting resilient careers for their graduates.

References

- Americans for the Arts. 2022. "COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on The Arts Research Update: January 19, 2022" Retrieved November 1, 2023. (<https://www.artsactionfund.org/sites/artsactionfund.org/files/COVID-19%20Pandemic%20Impact%20on%20the%20Arts%20Research%20Update%20%201-19-2022.pdf>).
- Bariola, Nino, and Caitlyn Collins. 2021. "The Gendered Politics of Pandemic Relief: Labor and Family Policies in Denmark, Germany, and the United States During COVID-19." *American Behavioral Scientist* 65(12):1671–97. doi: 10.1177/00027642211003140.
- Brilli, Stefano, Laura Gemini, and Francesca Giuliani. 2023. "Theatre Without Theatres: Investigating Access Barriers to Mediatized Theatre and Digital Liveness during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Poetics* 97: 1-12.
- Buchholz, Larissa, Gary Alan Fine, and Hannah Wohl. 2020. "Art Markets in Crisis: How Personal Bonds and Market Subcultures Mediate the Effects of COVID-19." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 8(3):462–76. doi: 10.1057/s41290-020-00119-6.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2023. "Industries at a Glance: Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation: NAICS 71." Retrieved December 16, 2023 (<https://www.bls.gov/iag/tgs/iag71.htm#workforce>).
- Collins, Caitlyn, Liana Christin Landivar, Leah Ruppanner, and William J. Scarborough. 2020. "COVID-19 and the Gender Gap in Work Hours." *Gender, Work, and Society* 28(51): 101-112.
- Comunian, Roberta and Lauren England. 2020. "Creative and Cultural Work Without Filters: COVID-19 and Exposed Precarity in the Creative Economy." *Cultural Trends* 29(2), 112–28.
- Comunian, Roberta, Jonathan Corcoran, Alessandra Faggian, Sarah Jewell, and Jenn Webb. 2022. *Gender and The Creative Labour Market: Graduates in Australia and the UK*. Scott Brook (Ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cornfield, Daniel B. 2015. *Beyond the Beat: Musicians Building Community in Nashville*. Princeton University Press. Princeton, NJ.
- Feder, Tal, Siobhan McAndrew, Dave O'Brien, and Mark Taylor. 2022. "Cultural consumption and Covid-19: evidence from the Taking Part and COVID-19 Cultural Participation Monitor surveys." *Leisure Studies* 42(1): 38-55.
- Feder, Tal and Joanna Woronkovic. 2023. "Reluctantly Independent: Motivations for Self-Employed Artistic Work." *Journal of Cultural Economics*. 47: 589-607.
- Florida, Richard, and Michael Seman. 2020. "Measuring COVID-19's Devastating Impact on America's Creative Economy." 32.
- Fonner, Daniel, Rebecca Johnson, and Cullen Keeter. 2021. "The Impact of COVID-19 on Employment: Arts & Culture Sector." Retrieved November 1, 2023. (<https://culturaldata.org/pages/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-employment-arts-culture-sector/>).
- Frenette, Alexandre and Timothy J. Dowd with Rachel Skaggs and Trent Ryan. 2020. *Careers in the Arts: Who Stays and Who Leaves?* Strategic National Arts Alumni Project Special Report. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, Strategic National Arts Alumni Project.
- Frenette, Alexandre, Gillian Gualtieri, and Megan Robinson. 2021. "Growing Divides: Historical and Emerging Inequalities in Arts Internships." Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, Strategic National Arts Alumni Project.
- Frenette, Alexandre, Nathan D. Martin, and Steven J. Tepper. 2018. "Oscillate Wildly: The under-Acknowledged Prevalence, Predictors, and Outcomes of Multi-Disciplinary Arts Practice." *Cultural Trends* 27(5):339–52. doi: 10.1080/09548963.2018.1534709.

- Godart, Frédéric, Sorah Seong, and Damon Phillips. 2020. "The Sociology of Creativity: Elements, Structures, and Audiences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46(1): 489-510.
- Gonithellis, Olga E. 2018. *Counseling for Artists, Performers, and Other Creative Individuals: A Guide for Clinicians*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315173566>
- Gowayed, Heba, Ashley Mears, and Nicholas Occhiuto. 2022. "Pause, Pivot, and Shift: Situational Human Capital and Responses to Sudden Job Loss." *American Behavioral Scientist* 000276422110660. doi: 10.1177/00027642211066043.
- Haynes, Jo and Ian Woodward. 2021. "Introduction: Making Sense of Culture and Music Space During and Beyond the Pandemic." in *Remaking Culture and Music Spaces: Affects, Infrastructures, Futures*, edited by Ian Woodward, Jo Haynes, Pauwke Berkers, Aileen Dillane, Karolina Golemo, Routledge.
- Hénaut, Léonie, Jennifer C. Lena, and Fabien Accominotti. 2023. "Polyoccupationalism: Expertise Stretch and Status Stretch in the Postindustrial Era." *American Sociological Review Online* First.
- Khlystova, Olena, Yelena Kalyuzhnova, and Maksim Belitski. 2022. "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Creative Industries: A Literature Review and Future Research Agenda." *Journal of Business Research* 139: 1192-1210.
- Lee, Boram, Ruth Rentschler, and Brandon Pinto. 2023. "Enabling Creative Connections: The Case of Digital Arts Consumption." *International Journal of Arts Management* 25(3): 31-45.
- Lingo, Elizabeth L. and Steven J. Tepper. 2013. "Looking Back, Looking Forward: Arts-Based Careers and Creative Work." *Work and Occupations* 40(4): 337-363.
- Mai, Quan D., Lijin Song, and Rachel Donnelly. 2023. "Precarious Employment and Well-being: Insights from the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Work and Occupations* 50(1): 3-21.
- Martin, Nathan D., and Alexandre Frenette. 2017. "Lost in Transition: College Resources and the Unequal Early-Career Trajectories of Arts Alumni." *American Behavioral Scientist* 61(12):1487-1509. doi: 10.1177/0002764217734273.
- Menger, Pierre-Michel. 1999. "Artistic Labor Markets and Careers." *Annual Review of Sociology* 25(1): 541-574.
- Miller, Angie L., Nathan D. Martin, and Alexandre Frenette. 2022. "Unpacking High-Impact Practices in the Arts: Predictors of College, Career, and Community Engagement Outcomes." *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 1-21. doi: 10.1080/10632921.2022.2029786.
- Mindes, Samuel C.H. and Paul Lewin. 2021. "Self-Employment Through the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Analysis of Linked Monthly CPS Data." *Journal of Business Venturing Insights* 16: 1-8.
- National Endowment for the Arts. 2023. "Online Audiences for Arts Programming: A Survey of Virtual Participation Amid COVID-19." *NEA Research Brief*. Retrieved November 19, 2023. (<https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/GSS-Brief-October2023.pdf>)
- Novak-Leonard, Jennifer L. 2024. "Arts & Design Alumni Perspectives on Employment & Career Outcomes". Strategic National Arts Alumni Project Report. Austin, TX: Arts + Design Alumni Research, SNAAP.
- Novak-Leonard, Jennifer L., Deanna Ibrahim, Lee Ann Scotto Adams, Angie L. Miller, Rachel Skaggs, and Shanita Bigelow. (2023). 2022 SNAAP *Technical Report*, Strategic National Arts Alumni Project Report. Austin, TX: Arts + Design Alumni Research, SNAAP. <https://snaaparts.org/uploads/downloads/SNAAP-Technical-Report-010324.pdf>
- OECD. 2020. "Culture Shock: COVID-19 and the Cultural and Creative Sectors." Retrieved December 16, 2023. (<https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/culture-shock-covid-19-and-the-cultural-and-creative-sectors-08da9e0e/>).

- Paulsen, Richard J. 2021. "Arts Majors and the Great Recession: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Educational Choices and Employment Outcomes." *Journal of Cultural Economics* 46: 635-658. doi: 10.1007/s10824-021-09430-7.
- Ravenelle, Alexandra J. and Sarah Noble. 2023. "'I Could Be Unemployed the Rest of the Year': Unprecedented Times and the Challenges of 'Making More'." RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences 9(3): 110-31. DOI: 10.7758/RSF.2023.9.3.05.
- Ravenelle, Alexandra J., Ken Cai Kowalski, and Erica Janko. 2021. "The Side Hustle Safety Net: Precarious Workers and Gig Work during COVID-19." *Sociological Perspectives* 073112142110054. doi: 10.1177/07311214211005489.
- Reynolds, Jeremy and Reilly Kincaid. 2022. "Gig Work and the Pandemic: Looking for Good Pay from Bad Jobs During the COVID-19 Crisis." *Work and Occupations* 50(1): 60-96.
- Skaggs, Rachel. 2023. "Socially Distanced Artistic Careers: Professional Social Interactions in Early, Established, and Late Career Stages during COVID-19." *Poetics*. Online First.
- Skaggs, Rachel, Molly Jo Burke, and Erin J. Hoppe. 2021. *How COVID-19 Has Impacted the Needed Resources of Arts Graduates*. 9.1. Strategic National Arts Alumni Project. <https://snaaparts.org/findings/databriefs/how-covid-19-has-impacted-the-needed-resources-of-arts-graduates>
- Skaggs, Rachel, Erin J. Hoppe, and Molly Jo Burke. 2021. *How COVID-19 Has Impacted the Needed Skills of Arts Graduates*. 9.2. Strategic National Arts Alumni Project. <https://snaaparts.org/findings/databriefs/how-covid-19-has-impacted-the-needed-skills-of-arts-graduates>
- Skaggs, Rachel, Erin J. Hoppe, and Molly Jo Burke. 2021. "Changing Spaces and Places of Arts-Based Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic." in *Remaking Culture and Music Spaces: Affects, Infrastructures, Futures*, edited by Ian Woodward, Jo Haynes, Pauwke Berkers, Aileen Dillane, Karolina Golemo, Routledge.
- Vandenberg, Femke and Michaël Berghman. 2023. "The Show Must Go On(ine): Livestreamed Concerts and the Hyper-Ritualisation of Genre Conventions." *Poetics*. In press: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2023.101782>.
- Wohl, Hannah. 2021. "Innovation and Creativity in Creative Industries." *Sociology Compass* 16(2): 1-14.
- Woronkovicz, Joanna. 2015. "Artists, Employment, and the Great Recession: A Cross-sectional Analysis Using US Current Population Survey Data." *Cultural Trends* 24(2): 154-164.
- Wyszomirski, Margaret, and WoongJo Chang. 2017. "Professional Self-Structuration in the Arts: Sustaining Creative Careers in the 21st Century." *Sustainability* 9 (6): 1035. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su9061035>.