Who Stays and Who Leaves the Arts: Findings from the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project

Co-presented by Arizona State University, Emory University, and the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project
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Registration is free, but space is limited.
To register, contact Alexandre Frenette: alexandre.frenette@asu.edu

May 4, 2017, 2 p.m. – 4 p.m.
Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ
Dixie Gammage Hall, room 105 (Coffee and light refreshments will be served)

Which arts and design alumni stay in their field after graduation, which ones leave, and why? What matters more in building a long-term career in the arts – is it what you know, who you know, or what you’ve done so far? Artists are notoriously entrepreneurial, but which alumni become entrepreneurs and why? There is an urgent need to extend our collective understanding about diversity (or lack thereof) and career paths in the arts. Drawing on data from the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, scholars from Vanderbilt University, Emory University, and Arizona State University will present findings on these topics. The symposium will be structured as an informal research workshop; attendees will receive insights prior to their publication and will be encouraged to offer feedback to inform analyses in progress.

Schedule

2 p.m.: Introductory remarks by Sally Gaskill (Director, Strategic National Arts Alumni Project)

“Lost in Transition: College Resources and Unequal Early-Career Trajectories of Arts Alumni”
Nathan D. Martin (Arizona State University)

In this study, we analyze SNAAP data to consider how access to college resources shapes early-career outcomes. We find that arts graduates are increasingly likely to be “lost in transition:” over recent decades, the likelihood of experiencing a prolonged job search after graduation, or initial employment in an unrelated field, have significantly increased. We also find that levels of engagement with campus life (e.g., co-curricular activities) and experiential learning activities (e.g., internships) are more important predictors of job market performance than are the skills, knowledge and experience gained through traditional instruction. Other results highlight gender and racial/ethnic inequalities in terms of access to college resources and immediate labor market success. Female and non-white alumni reported less access to college resources and less successful initial job searches, relative to male and white alumni respectively. Further, men saw a “boost” in early-career outcomes provided by career skill development, but such activities had weaker payoffs for women.

2:30 p.m.: “Exploring the Gender Gap in Arts Entrepreneurship”
Rachel Skaggs (Vanderbilt University)

Research at the intersection of the sociology of work, sociology of gender, and social psychology suggests that women perceive themselves as less competent in their ability to be entrepreneurs and subsequently are less likely to become entrepreneurs than their male peers. This study revisits the gender gap in entrepreneurship by using data from the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) to examine the effects of (1) gender and education on self-assessments of confidence in one’s entrepreneurial abilities and (2) subsequently, whether gender, education, and self-assessments of confidence predict who becomes an entrepreneur. In a reversal of established findings, this research finds that women are more confident in their entrepreneurial abilities than are their male peers, but women still become entrepreneurs at lower rates than do men. We also find that having an entrepreneurially focused education does have a positive impact on self-assessed confidence, but it has little impact on who becomes an entrepreneur.
3 p.m.: “Who Stays and Who Leaves? Understanding the Career Trajectories of Arts Alumni”
Timothy Dowd (Emory University) and Alexandre Frenette (Arizona State University)

Discussant: Richard E. Ocejo (John Jay College, City University of New York)

A burgeoning amount of research addresses the careers and lives of artistic workers—those individuals employed in the making of music, paintings, poetry and the like—though such studies primarily focus on currently active artists rather than those who have left these fields. This inattention is troubling because the contributions and challenges of artistic work may be understated when focusing only on those who remain in such lines of work without considering those who have departed. Our project addresses this gap by analyzing data from the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, an unusually rich survey of over 90,000 arts and design graduates over the last 40 years in the US. We focus particularly on the key transitions that those alumni make in subsequent years, such as the transition to leave or stay in a career devoted to artistic work. Among other things, this focus allows us to gauge what types of locales are conducive to “stayers” rather than “leavers.” It also allows us to gauge the factors that predict who will remain active in artistic work long after graduation, thereby showing both the successful paths and “dead-ends” that can mark artistic work. The results will be informative to scholars addressing artistic workers, but also to policy makers interested in the positive impact of arts education to economic development, as well as to arts educators who seek to provide their students with the tools to succeed in the 21st century economy.

**Speaker Bios**

**Timothy Dowd, PhD** is Professor and Chair of Sociology at Emory University. He is a noted scholar in the area of cultural sociology. His research addresses the recording industry and its shifting strategies, the evolving orchestral canon, musician careers, and underground music scenes. He is the former editor-in-chief of the leading cultural sociology journal—*Poetics: Journal of Empirical Research on Culture, the Media and the Arts*—and the past chair of the American Sociological Association’s Sociology of Culture Section.

**Alexandre Frenette, PhD** is a Postdoctoral Scholar at Arizona State University's Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts. His research focuses on the sociology of work/careers and inequality in the creative sector. Using the music industry as his case study, Frenette is currently working on a monograph about the challenges and the promise of internships as part of higher education. 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.

**Nathan D. Martin, PhD** is an Assistant Professor of Justice and Social Inquiry in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University. He earned his Ph.D. in Sociology, with a graduate certificate in Education Policy Research, from Duke University. His current research focuses on inequalities in postsecondary education, and global shifts in class mobilization and identity.

**Richard E. Ocejo, PhD** is an Associate Professor at John Jay College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York. His overall research and teaching interests include urban and cultural sociology, work and occupations, and research methods. Ocejo’s forthcoming book, *Masters of Craft: Old Jobs in the New Urban Economy* (Princeton University Press; 2017), is about the transformation of low-status occupations into “cool,” cultural taste-making jobs. He is also the author of *Upscaling Downtown* (Princeton University Press; 2017), editor of *Ethnography and the City* (Routledge; 2012), and his work has appeared in *City & Community, Poetics, Ethnography*, and the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*.

**Rachel Skaggs** is a PhD candidate in Vanderbilt University’s Department of Sociology and is a research fellow at the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy. She currently serves as the book review editor for the journal *Work and Occupations*. Rachel is conducting her dissertation research on the career pathways of Nashville songwriters and is especially interested in collaboration, social networks, and work in culture industries.