Barriers to Recognizing Arts Entrepreneurship Education as Essential to Professional Arts Training

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BARRIERS TO RECOGNIZING ARTS ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AS ESSENTIAL TO PROFESSIONAL ARTS TRAINING

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Abstract

While many professional arts training programs prepare students to excel at the practice and performance of the arts, evidence suggests that many professional arts training programs may be failing to prepare students to be professional artists. A total of 11.1% of all recent college graduates with undergraduate arts degrees are unemployed (Carnevale, Cheah, & Strohl, 2012, p. 7). Fifty-two percent of arts undergraduate alumni reported being dissatisfied with their institution's ability to advise them about further career or education opportunities (SNAAP, 2012, p. 14). Eighty-one percent of all arts undergraduate alumni reported having a primary job outside of the arts for reasons of job security (SNAAP, 2012, p. 19). Many arts higher education administrators address the situation by advising arts students to attend business and entrepreneurship courses. However, these courses are often taught or presented outside of an arts training context. Arts entrepreneurship education can serve as contextual business/career/technology education for arts students; however, barriers make it difficult for administrators to create adequate curricular room for arts entrepreneurship education. Furthermore, the teaching and learning of contextual business/career/technology education in professional arts training programs may often be thought of as helpful but not essential, as evidenced by the National Office of Arts Accreditation (NOAA) classification of these types of courses as general education units. This essay supports the need for arts entrepreneurship education, and discusses key barriers to recognizing arts entrepreneurship education as essential to professional arts training.

Introduction

In 2011, more than 36,000 arts alumni responded to the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) survey from 66 institutions (8 arts high schools and 58 postsecondary institutions) in the United States and Canada. The average institutional response rate was over 20% (SNAAP, 2012, pp. 4-5). The results were released in the 2012 annual report, and served as indicators for arts graduates' perceived value of their degree. While the data generally indicates positive educational outcomes, the study also indicates certain measures of dissatisfaction and distinct professional challenges - the most relevant appearing below:

> Arts alumni of undergraduate and graduate programs were somewhat or very dissatisfied with: career advising or information about further education options (50%), opportunities for degree-related internships or work (46%), opportunities to network with alumni and others (41%). (SNAAP, 2012, p. 14)

> 81% of all alumni surveyed, reported having a job outside of the arts for reasons of job security. (SNAAP, 2012, p. 19)

Based on the 2012 findings, SNAAP conducted a secondary analysis that same year, and published a special report entitled Painting With Broader Strokes: Reassessing the Value of An Arts Degree. This secondary analysis served as an expansion of the 2012 report. Some relevant findings in this report include, but are not limited to the following:

Arts alumni still face significant financial obstacles to engaging in art professionally. Almost a third (30%) of former professional artists and those who wanted to be artists but did not do so pointed to debt, including student loan debt, as a reason to find other work. (Lindemann, et al., 2012, p. 22)

Fifty-two percent of those who stopped working as a professional artist did so because of better pay in other fields. (Lindemann, et al., 2012, p. 22)

While arts alumni generally give their schools high marks when it comes to imparting elements of artistic training such as creativity and critical thinking, when it comes to elements of professional training such as business and entrepreneurial abilities, there are large gaps between the skills these alumni say they have acquired at their degree-granting institutions and the skills they indicate are important for their working lives. (Lindemann, et al., 2012, p. 28)

In 2011, Anthony Carnevale (Director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce) chaired a relevant study entitled *What is It Worth: The Economic Value of College Majors*, which found "Those most likely to be unemployed are in the Arts group (8 percent)." (p. 31) Using 2009-10 data from the American Community Survey, Carnevale also conducted and released a similar study in 2012 (*Hard Times: College Majors, Unemployment and Earnings*), which reported the unemployment rates for recent (aged 22 to 26) and experienced (aged 30 to 54) college graduates in various majors. Key findings include:
Unemployment for students with new Bachelor's degrees (across the board) is an unacceptable 8.9%. (p. 3)
While this news is discouraging, the same report also indicates that recent arts undergraduates had an even higher unemployment rate of 11.1% (p. 7). These statistics suggest that the financial cost of pursuing professional arts degrees may be outweighing the degrees' benefits. Pujol and Dempster previously addressed this trend and suggest a call for arts higher education reform:

…current and new students, at least throughout schools in the United States, are paying fortunes for inadequate art educations and getting into bank-loan debt, which is a huge disservice to them. Therefore, we must not be lazy or afraid of triggering change, no matter how painful, and ultimately we must rely on the growing numbers of our art students who connect the dots on their own and end up with a multidisciplinary education in spite of the institution, not because of it. (Pujol, 2009, p. 3)

It is important to note that not all post-secondary arts education programs share the goal of training students for professional work in arts or arts-related careers. However, the cited data reflects unanticipated - if not poor - professional outcomes for alumni who attended post secondary arts education programs primarily for the purpose of learning to make a living as a creative, visual or performing artist. This essay focuses on professional arts training programs sharing this goal (e.g. those that lead to BFA, MFA or DFA degrees). Participatory evaluation and action research led by alumni of professional arts training programs may be helpful in determining why the outcomes mentioned above occur.

The Decision to Pursue a Professional Arts Degree

There are many factors influencing stakeholders' decisions and actions concerning professional arts training programs. Stakeholders include but are not limited to, arts students, parents, program administrators, faculty members and most importantly, university executives who in their role as arts administrators, participate in developing accreditation standards. Prospective arts students often apply to professional arts training programs believing these programs provide the education, knowledge and experiences needed to become a "professional artist." Perhaps for some students, the perception of intrinsic benefits gained from earning a professional arts degree outweighs certain financial realities and challenges they face in the future. For others whose ambitions lean towards the popular arts, professional arts degrees may be perceived as a one-way ticket to life-long fame and fortune. In either case, these impressions can greatly influence a prospective student's enrollment decision. For example, some institutions may (either knowingly or unknowingly) perpetuate notions of life-long fame and fortune through recruitment materials intended to support programmatic agendas. In cases where this is true, prospective students may often rely on personal assumptions and marketing to make enrollment decisions. If a prospective student chooses to pursue a professional arts degree based solely on these notions, unforeseen and unrealized challenges may position them to accumulate education debt. Upon graduation unforeseen and educational debt challenges may quickly force them to obtain a part-time job, which may further motivate them to obtain an even higher paying full-time job; ultimately they may abandon their professional artistic pursuit because of financial necessity. For those not experiencing student debt issues, unanticipated challenges before and during their post-secondary arts training could position students for career paths that do not meet their pre-professional expectations. Early career feedback from alumni of professional arts training programs may help to better identify and address these types of new student perceptions and assumptions.

Key Barriers

The cited unanticipated - if not poor - professional outcomes for arts students occur for many reasons. However, more research is needed to determine causation and correlation. In an effort to address these types of outcomes proactively, arts entrepreneurship educators have shown promise, developing courses, curricula and programs specifically designed to teach students contextual business/career/technology skills, behaviors and competencies. An informal inventory conducted by Dr. Gary Beckman and Jonathan Gangi in 2013 revealed that there are at least 60 institutions within the United States offering dedicated courses (83) to the study of arts entrepreneurship. Despite growing support for arts entrepreneurship education, barriers to recognizing arts entrepreneurship education as "essential" to professional arts training exist. Suggested barriers include but are not limited to barriers in curricular theory, accreditation and assessment.

Barriers of Curricular Theory

Although there are many curricular/theoretical models for K-12 and collegiate arts education, a framework known to both is Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE), which came to favor in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s. The model is familiar, historic, globally recognized and formalized – in contrast to arts entrepreneurship curricular theory, which is largely unfamiliar, emerging and informal. According to the

Journal of Aesthetic Education, DBAE "focuses on specific skills including techniques, art criticism and art history." In 1987, the journal published the following framework identifying several basic characteristics of DBAE:

A. Rationale

    1. The goal of discipline-based art education is to develop students' abilities to understand and appreciate art. This involves a knowledge of the theories and contexts of art and abilities to respond to as well as to create art.

    2. Art is taught as an essential component of general education and as a foundation for specialized art study.

B. Content

    1. Content for instruction is derived primarily from the disciplines of aesthetics, art criticism, art history, and art production. These disciplines deal with: (1) conceptions of the nature of art, (2) bases for valuing and judging art, (3) contexts in which art has been created, and (4) processes and techniques for creating art.

    2. Content for study is derived from a broad range of the visual arts, including folk, applied, and fine arts from Western and non-Western cultures and from ancient to contemporary times.

C. Curricula

    1. Curricula are written with sequentially organized and articulated content at all grade levels.

    2. Works of art are central to the organization of curricula and to integration of content from the disciplines.

    3. Curricula are structured to reflect comparable concern and respect for each of the four art disciplines.

    4. Curricula are organized to increase student learning and understanding. This involves a recognition of appropriate developmental levels.

D. Context

    1. Full implementation is marked by systematic, regular art instruction on a district-wide basis, art education expertise, administrative support, and adequate resources.

    2. Student achievement and program effectiveness are confirmed by appropriate evaluation criteria and procedures. (Journal of Aesthetic Education, 1987)

Rationale section (A) states, "The goal of discipline-based art education is to develop students' abilities to understand and appreciate art." This suggests that the primary goal of DBAE is not vocational, but aesthetic. A question emerges: if arts entrepreneurship education is perceived as vocational, traditionalists who hold authority in institutional arts policy may rationalize arts entrepreneurship education as a non-essential component of the traditional DBAE approach.

Other barriers may exist within or originate from traditional curricular/theoretical models. For example, in alignment with the goals of traditional DBAE theory, facilitators of DBAE programs rightly rationalize the performative aspects of the arts as essential to professional arts training. However, commentary from proponents of arts entrepreneurship education (such as

Dempster, below) suggest that arts students need to focus on mastering skills, competencies and behaviors beyond artistic practice and performance:

> We are naturally concerned about our students graduating into a hyper-competitive, winner-take-all marketplace without the skills and knowledge that could give them the competitive edge needed to succeed. (Dempster, 2011, p. 244)

> What makes little sense is expecting that we can drive students through four or five or six years of a highly regimented curriculum that affords few choices and asks for little individual initiative, and then expect them to flourish in a world that rewards creativity, opportunism, experimentation, and distinctiveness more than anything else—in short, an entrepreneurial world. (Dempster, 2011, p. 250)

Unanticipated or poor professional outcomes can occur when arts students graduate with skills, competencies and behaviors that are not in significant demand. For example, economist David Throsby identified the artistic workforce as a hypercompetitive winner take-all lottery (Throsby, 2010). Throsby's view suggests that for the best chance of arts and arts-related career success, arts students may benefit from learning skills, competencies and behaviors outside their discipline. If intellectual diversity in professional arts training curricula is a goal, arts faculty and administrators may help facilitate this by structuring curricula in a way that encourages students to explore alternative arts and arts-related career-paths throughout the creative sector. Why should the actor who finds out in his second year that he also loves dance, be forced to choose between the two? Why should the musician who wants to be a music executive, be forced to wait four years in order to learn about the music business? Why should an arts student be limited to studying the practice and performance of the arts? Pujol supports this point when he says:

> Art students need access to training in other disciplines, combining what we may identify as the very best of historical and contemporary drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, and installation art with conservation, ecological, and environmental efforts; ethics; cultural anthropology; urban sociology; behavioral psychology; global political science and economics; robotics; and media theory, among other fields. Nevertheless, the challenge is not just to open old boxed-up departments and bring in this challenging and refreshing intellectual diversity; it is also to not set this in stone. (Pujol, 2009, p. 5)

In summary, even if arts entrepreneurship education courses are adopted in higher education arts degree plans, barriers in curricular or programmatic theory may keep arts entrepreneurship education from being perceived as essential to professional arts training. These barriers may be re-enforced by perceived theoretical differences between arts educators across the institution. In many institutions, arts education curricula may be theory-driven instead of student-driven, thus re-enforcing theoretical barriers. To address the issues above, these and other curricular/theoretical barriers may be overcome through a renewed curricular focus on student outcomes. If curriculum design in arts education is lead by "what students need to be able to do", and that focus is supported by (instead of led by) diverse art(s) education theory,

facilitators of traditional DBAE and emerging arts entrepreneurship educators may find common ground, and engage in meaningful communication and collaboration.

Barriers of Accreditation

In the United States, the National Office for Arts Accreditation (NOAA) establishes specific curricular content standards for undergraduate and graduate arts programs. These standards are determined by several discipline-based administrative branches responsible for assigning accreditation standards to their respective programs. Each branch has its own handbook, outlining content containing both broad and specific standards. Within the section identified as "purpose", located under the principles and policies sections of all four of the 2012-13 NOAA handbooks (National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), National Association of Schools of Dance (NASD), National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST)), it is identified that:

> Students enrolled in professional undergraduate degrees are expected to develop the knowledge, skills, concepts, and sensitivities essential to the life of the theatre professional. (NAST, 2012, p. 91)

> Students enrolled in professional undergraduate degrees in music are expected to develop the knowledge, skills, concepts, and sensitivities essential to the professional life of the musician. (NASM, 2012, p. 98)

> Students enrolled in professional undergraduate degrees in dance are expected to develop the knowledge, skills, concepts, and sensitivities essential to the artist in the field of dance. (NASD, 2012, p. 97)

> Students enrolled in professional undergraduate degrees in arts and design are expected to develop the knowledge, skills, concepts, and sensitivities essential to the professional life of the artist/designer. (NASAD, 2012, p. 91)

Evidence suggests that national and professional accreditation associations have yet to formally recognize contextual business/career/technology education as "essential" to professional arts training. For example, in every NOAA handbook, within sections labeled "recommendations," it is "recommended" that accredited programs teach students to:

- Acquire the skills necessary to assist in the development and advancement of their careers. (NASM, 2012, p. 101)

- Acquire the skills necessary to assist in the development and advancement of their careers, including the development of competencies in communication, presentation, and business skills necessary to engage in professional practice in their major field. (NASAD, 2012, p. 94)

- Acquire the entrepreneurial skills necessary to assist in the development and advancement of their careers. (NAST, 2012, p. 94)

- Student orientation to the nature of professional work in their major field. Examples are organizational structures and working patterns; artistic, intellectual, educational, economic, technology, and political contexts; development potential; and career development. (NASD, 2012, p. 100)

National arts accreditation policy influences regional arts accreditation policy, which in turn, influences institutional arts education policy and curricula. Accreditation language also largely complements and reinforces the mentoring advice that arts students receive as part of their professional arts training. The four NOAA handbooks define the focus of accredited professional arts training degrees as follows:

- The professional degree focuses on intensive work in art and design supported by a program in general studies. Normally, the intent is to prepare for professional practice. (NASAD, 2012, p. 87)

- The professional degree focuses on intensive work in theatre supported by a program in general studies. (NAST, 2012, p. 82)

- The professional degree focuses on intensive work in dance supported by a program in general studies. Normally, the intent is to prepare for professional practice. (NASD, 2012, p. 87)

- The professional degree focuses on intensive work in music supported by a program in general studies. Normally, the intent is to prepare for professional practice. (NASM, 2012, p. 87)

While none of the NOAA handbooks specifically define the word "professional" (perhaps purposely), all NOAA handbooks indicate that accredited professional arts training programs should prepare students for professional practice (NASAD, p. 87, NAST, p. 82, NASD, p. 87, NASM, p. 87). According to the handbooks, at least 50-65% of accredited programs curricula must focus on intensive work within a fine arts discipline:

- Baccalaureate degrees meeting professional degree standards are normally listed as Bachelor of Fine Arts, and normally require that at least 65% of the course credit be in theatre studies. B.F.A degrees in theatre education and certain other combined degrees in theatre require at least 50% of the course credit to be in theatre studies. (NAST, 2012, p. 84)

The phrase "at least" implies that accredited programs may keep more then 65% of their course content/credits focused on artistic mastery if they choose (e.g. an extreme example being a dance program where 99% of the program is focused solely on artistic mastery). The language in the handbooks suggests that all courses specifically unrelated to aesthetic mastery (e.g. contextual business/career/technology education) should support the program as general studies content. The handbooks only broadly identify general studies content, purposely leaving this interpretation to the individual institutions. For example, the NASM handbook indicates,

6. General Studies
    a. Competencies
        <u>Specific competency expectations are defined by the institution</u>.
        Normally, students holding a professional undergraduate degree in
        music are expected to have:

        (1) The ability to think, speak, and write clearly and effectively.

        (2) An informed acquaintance with fields of study beyond music
        such as those in the arts and humanities, the natural and physical
        sciences, and the social sciences.

        (3) A functional awareness of the differences and commonalities
        regarding work in artistic, scientific, and humanistic domains.

        (4) Awareness that multiple disciplinary perspectives and techniques
        are available to consider all issues and responsibilities including, but
        not limited to, history, culture, moral and ethical issues, and
        decision-making.

        (5) The ability to identify possibilities and locate information in
        other fields that have bearing on musical questions and endeavors.
        (NASM, p. 99)

Arguably, there should be nothing "general" about the contextual business/career/technology education taught within professional arts training programs. All four NOAA handbooks expect accredited institutions to help students develop the knowledge, skills, concepts and sensitivities essential to the artist in their discipline-based field of study. Whether it is the language of the individual institution or the national or regional accrediting body, merely recommending that contextual business/career/technology education be taught to arts students, and identifying that content broadly may help to perpetuate the national perception that arts entrepreneurship education is helpful but non-essential to a professional artist.

Barriers of Assessment
While arts entrepreneurship educators may be able to teach arts students in professional arts training programs contextual business/career/technology skills behaviors and competencies, national arts entrepreneurship learning will be difficult to assess and evaluate without consensus on formal student outcomes.[1] Difficulties in the national assessment of arts entrepreneurship learning will only be compounded by stakeholders' inability to agree on what "art(s) education" is. Groys supports this notion when he states:

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[1] Note that at this time, there are no formally recognized outcomes for arts entrepreneurship education by an accreditation organization. Efforts to address this lacuna appear in College Music Society *Committee on Music Entrepreneurship Education* (2012).

Today art education has no definite goal, no method, no particular content that can be taught, no tradition that can be transmitted to a new generation—which is to say, it has too many. (Groys, 2009, p. 27)

Unspecified learning objectives, and immeasurable student outcomes in arts education programs and courses may re-enforce barriers to assessment of arts entrepreneurship learning. For example, Nitko & Brookhart suggest, "Proponents view assessment as an objective way to ensure that all students demonstrate that learning has occurred." (Nitko & Brookhart, 2011, pg. 9) "Students will be able to experience the beauty of the arts" is neither a specific learning objective nor a measurable learning outcome. Although a faculty member may understand exactly what that beauty means to him/herself, as well as how to evaluate the learning of it, the professional evaluator looks at this and thinks, "experience how?" "What type of experience?" "Which art forms?" "How many experiences will the students experience?" "How does the program define the word beauty?" "Who is determining that beauty?"

Though there are many who continue to engage in discourse concerning the increasing demands for more accountability in arts education, given the national educational policy agenda, the concern is here to stay. As it stands, arts entrepreneurship educators are faced with at least two obvious choices: resist accountability or embrace and articulate specific and measurable contextual business/career/technology learning objectives for arts students. If the latter, the arts entrepreneurship field would overcome this barrier.

Conclusion

Although still largely informal and emerging, arts entrepreneurship may be a trans-disciplinary approach for teaching contextual business/career/technology education to arts students. If this is true, "thinking and behaving as an arts entrepreneur" may be a way for students to overcome the limitations of DBAE curricular theory, and also a way for faculty to address the unanticipated or poor professional outcomes of students in professional arts training programs. Certainly, there is hard evidence that arts students desire the contextual business/career/technology education they need in order to create, obtain and sustain their careers. (Lindemann, et al., 2012, pg. 27-30) Arts entrepreneurship educators may be able to help students learn to do this, however, significant barriers keep arts entrepreneurship course content from being perceived as "essential" to professional arts training. Ironically, despite lackluster professional outcomes for alumni of professional arts training programs, there is no shortage of students applying to professional arts training programs. Dempster supports this notion when he writes:

Why worry about reforming our professional training programs for musicians, dancers, and artists? After all, professional arts education is booming in the United States. We have hundreds of thousands of students registered and more applying each year at ever-higher tuition rates. New programs at every level are multiplying daily, and specialized fine and performing arts high schools are proliferating. In fact, I'm regularly stunned to hear about the creation of new doctoral programs in the arts when there are hundreds of disappointed applicants for every vacant college job. Enrollments in college arts curricula by some measures are growing faster than enrollments in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) fields. Perhaps most intriguing of all, many of the most

selective private universities are rushing into the arts in a big way, upping the bidding contest for the country's top students. (Dempster, 2011, p. 121)

Current technology is making the world smaller. Understanding and being able to adjust to the challenges and opportunities of globalization is playing an ever-increasing role in students' decisions to stay as competitive as possible (whether or not that employment is arts or arts-related). Earning a college degree is often a necessity for students, but if earning that degree does not open the professed or perceived professional door, the degree may appear to the student and public as a waste of time, money, and resources. Consider the high stakes implications reported from both the National Center for Educational Statistics, and Lindemann, Tepper and Gaskill:

The average total cost of attendance in 2010–11 for first-time, full-time students living on campus and paying in-state tuition was $20,100 at public 4-year institutions and $39,800 at private nonprofit 4-year institutions. (Indicator 40) (NCES, 2012, p. 98)

Levels of debt over $60,000 significantly decrease the odds of one ever working as a professional artist, but this is not the case for any other level of debt. Amounts under $60,000 may not necessarily impede individuals from becoming professional artists – although it may stop them from remaining professional artists. (Lindemann, et al., 2012, p. 24)

It appears that one of the worst outcomes for all stakeholders of professional arts training programs occurs when a newly graduated arts student abandons the field due to financial necessity. This outcome does not help increase the worth, merit or value of professional arts degrees but rather, devalues and demoralizes the arts student and is detrimental to the field of arts education, the nations' creative and performing arts industries, and of course, the national economy. Beckman supports this notion when he states:

We lose this nation's arts and intellectual arts capital when talented and competent students relinquish their dreams of arts employment. This occurs—in part—because of a recalcitrant arts training infrastructure that has yet to acknowledge the human consequences of an idealized view of art. For every trained artist who cannot afford their child's day care, we are not exposed to their unique view of the world. For every violinist, violist, and cellist who cannot make a car payment and is forced to seek employment outside music, we cannot experience the transcendence of Beethoven's last string quartets. For every playwright who cannot find an affordable venue to premiere his or her latest work, a reflection of our humanity is lost among the piles of private art. As enlightened educators, we have a responsibility, in my opinion, to find new relevance in our students' talent and exuberance about their role in society. (Beckman, 2011, p. 30)

Not all arts degrees lead students to artistic careers, however, students who desire self-employment in the artistic workforce must be better prepared to create and sustain arts and arts-related ventures in addition to recognizing opportunities across arts disciplines. To facilitate this,

arts training program administrators should consider arts entrepreneurship as an approach for teaching their students the contextual business/career/technology education they need to succeed as professional artists. Lastly, both arts education faculty and administrators must develop valid and reliable methods and tools to assess student learning and achievement in a persuasive manner to meet growing demands for program accountability.

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