

FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE ARTS CAREERS

ATTITUDES TOWARDS ARTS ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A CORE COMPONENT OF COLLEGIATE ARTS TRAINING

Kristen Hoverman, BM

Jonathan Kuuskoski, MM, MBA

Emily Weingarten, BM

Nathaniel Zeisler, DMA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine student need for integrating arts entrepreneurship education into tertiary arts training. Two investigator-developed surveys were created; the first was distributed to public (x=17) and private (x=11) college and university arts programs across the country, the second was sent to arts professionals. The student (n=196) participants were asked to answer questions based on their concepts of arts entrepreneurship, to gauge whether tertiary training that incorporates arts entrepreneurship would be attractive. The professionals (m=55) were also queried about their knowledge of arts entrepreneurship, and how further training would have impacted their professional trajectory. The aggregated results show a basic understanding of arts entrepreneurship, as well as an overwhelming need for incubating arts entrepreneurship within curricular and co-curricular arts training programs.

Background

Arts students have largely been left out of the discussion of arts entrepreneurship as a potential component within tertiary arts training. Following in the footsteps of Alyssa Murphy's groundbreaking student-focused survey we are pleased to report that in this follow-up study, students are again overwhelmingly supportive of incorporating arts entrepreneurship – in several forms – within their training.¹ Cross-referencing this with the feedback from dozens of professionals in the field corroborates the students' tendencies, and offers a glimpse at some potential avenues for building curricular and co-curricular support for entrepreneurship within arts training.

In addition to fortifying previous research, the purpose of this current study is to determine whether there is student need for arts entrepreneurship education as part of arts training. The problems investigated appear below:

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- 1) Do college and university undergraduate and graduate students possess a definition or perception of arts entrepreneurship?
 - 2) Has the awareness of arts entrepreneurship, if there is one, translated into action/participation in arts entrepreneurship training (curricular or co-curricular)?

¹ Murphy, A. R. (2009, March) From Low, Silent, Faceless Places: Articulating Student Need for Creativity Education, Entrepreneurial and Leadership Skills through Arts Entrepreneurship Programs. Paper presented at the annual National Symposium on Creativity, Wake Forest University, NC.

- 3) Is there a consensus among students and professionals regarding what outcomes they would like to gain from an opportunity to leverage arts entrepreneurship within their education?
- 4) If so, which avenues of study are perceived to be the most effective? If not, why do students feel there is no need for incorporating arts entrepreneurship within the curriculum?

Methodology

196 college students from across the United States participated in this study, of which there were undergraduates (n=114), graduates (n=73) and others (n=8) who were not working towards terminal degrees. These participants studied at both public (x=17) and private (x=11) colleges and universities. Students were matriculated in 22 arts degree programs, including: art education, studio art, art history, other art, music education, musicology/ethnomusicology, music performance, music composition, music theory, music other, theater acting, theater other, and miscellaneous (chamber music, arts administration, arts management, jazz studies). Four respondents were also pursuing another major or cognate, and ten were pursuing a major outside the arts. (*see Appendix 1.0*)

Professionals represented six general fields, defined this way: College/University faculty; Private arts teacher; Part-time professional artist who earns primary income from a field unrelated to the arts; Professional freelance artist; Multiple job holder, some of which are in the arts (my trained field of study); Multiple job holder, none of which are in the arts (my trained field of study). In addition, over 25% elected to describe their career in more detail. Current professions within this segment included teaching (K-9 and High School), off-Broadway prop design, military band, internship within a music school, arts administration, academic advisors, and two were former artists now in other non arts-related professions (finance and development professional). Much of the pool had attended more than one institution (42), and many earned more than one degree (44), with a majority of terminal degrees being MM Music Degrees (20, or 36.4%). (*see Appendix 1.0.1*)

The participants responded to an investigator-created survey (based on a series of non-bias questions) that measured the perception of and need for higher education arts entrepreneurship programs. This methodology was designed to test the potential importance and relevance of arts entrepreneurship education for today's arts students.

Analysis

An analysis of the results will assist in constructing a view of attitudes towards incorporating arts entrepreneurship within tertiary arts training. Such an analysis is best separated into four sections:

Section 1: “Definitions of Arts Entrepreneurship”

The first section of questions gauged the relative stickiness of various possible definitions of arts entrepreneurship training. We first asked respondents about their ideal future career. Next, we asked respondents to identify themselves with various potential definitions of arts entrepreneurship. The most popular definitions were: “Arts entrepreneurship is creating new ventures for artists.” (69.4% strongly agreed/agreed with this conception of the field), and “Arts entrepreneurship education prepares students for careers as independent artists, in which they are able to market and sell their own art or talent” (65.3%). (see *Appendix 1.1*)

Professionals mirrored the student response, yet slid more heavily towards the broader concept of “Arts entrepreneurship education prepares students for careers as independent artists, in which they are able to market and sell their own art or talent” (70.5% strongly agreed/agreed), versus 75% for “Arts entrepreneurship is creating new ventures for artists.” (see *Appendix 1.2*) They also indicated a desire to define arts entrepreneurship in new and socially-minded terms. A sample qualitative response:

“Arts entrepreneurship is thinking outside the box and allowing our students to relate to the music field in new and meaningful ways that may differ from previous generations. As educators, we need to honor the creativity and authenticity of our students and nurture their own development as artists and professionals. We need to serve as mentors that are not just interested in creating clones of ourselves, but rather embrace the new visionary models of what it means to be an artist in the 21st century.”

Section 2: “Measure of Interest Level/Reflections on Arts Entrepreneurship”

In this section we measured the awareness of and interest in arts entrepreneurship programming, both curricular and co-curricular, to gauge the current perceptions of arts entrepreneurship among students and professionals. Our questionnaire queried whether students had known of student clubs or course offerings in entrepreneurship and arts entrepreneurship, and, if so, whether students had taken part in those offerings. Professionals were asked the same questions retroactively.

There was general uncertainty among students as to the program offerings both in arts entrepreneurship (40.8% of students did not know if classes were offered, 46.3% did not know if there was a co-curricular club on campus) and entrepreneurship (53.7% were unsure of class offerings, 49.7% did not know if any clubs existed), (*see Appendix 2.1*). Of those who did know of existing courses and/or programs, 61% did not participate in them (*see Appendix 2.2*). While this may seem to show that students are apathetic towards arts entrepreneurship, the fact that 73% of student respondents were interested in learning more about arts entrepreneurship within arts training does show some sort of disconnect between action and interest (*see Appendix 2.3*). It also indicates a willingness to embrace new educational components within already highly saturated tertiary environments.

Professionals, on the other hand, were significantly more aware of arts entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship offerings at their respective institutions, yet were even more reluctant to participate in them. 71% did not participate when they knew their institutions had offerings available (*Appendix 2.5*). At the same time, 70.5% of professional respondents, similarly to the students, indicated an interest in learning more about arts entrepreneurship (*Appendix 2.6*).

Section 3: “Quantitative/Qualitative Measure of Students' Sense of Empowerment”

In this section, we measured how students would prefer to experience their arts entrepreneurship education. Here we reached the most overwhelming response: 81% of students reported that they would like to take an elective arts entrepreneurship class. Based on this response we can infer that, even though students may have seemed apathetic in Section 2, students are in fact interested in learning about arts entrepreneurship.

As expected, students' willingness to participate in arts entrepreneurship opportunities decreased as the required level of commitment or involvement increased. The overwhelmingly high percentages of positive answers, however, indicate a yearning interest in learning about arts entrepreneurship: 60% of students would take an action-based course that involved both curricular and non-curricular work, 48% would take more than one arts entrepreneurship course and 42% would be interested in adding a minor in arts entrepreneurship, for example (*Appendix 3.1*).

Other questions in this section asked students to consider what type of class they would like to take: lecture-based, project-based, or a combination of the two. Although responses were generally inconclusive, results leaned mostly toward taking a project-based course or taking a course that would combine lecture- and textbook-based sessions with project work.

When asked what they would like to learn in an arts entrepreneurship course, most students wanted to (1) learn how to make a difference in their society through their art and (2) build a diverse set of skills that would allow them to achieve a sustainable career in the arts. This finding indicated students' awareness the growing need to have skill sets other than strict performance and the importance of social consciousness in our 21st-century economy and society.

Professional responses were similar; they overwhelmingly support establishing arts entrepreneurship education programs in schools of music. (*Appendix 3.2*)

Section 4. "Attitudes Towards Further Arts Entrepreneurship Training"

In Section 4, we queried for qualitative responses to measure students' and professionals' attitudes towards arts entrepreneurship education and how, if at all, taking the survey changed their feelings about the subject. Question 32 asked students what their biggest fears or concerns were as an artist entering the professional world (*Appendix 4.1*). While all other free response sections received less than twenty answers, this question drew almost ninety responses, indicating that students are extremely concerned with their ability to have sustainable careers in the arts. Not surprisingly, most concerns centered around finding a job, being financially viable, and, should one fail to achieve these two goals, the fear of having to leave the arts field. Other students were concerned with not having the proper skill sets—particularly in marketing and self-management.

After taking the survey, most students reported that they would like to learn more about arts entrepreneurship and would like to see more offerings on their campus (*Appendix 4.1*). Based on this information, we inferred that students are highly concerned with their ability to earn fulfilling and sustainable careers in the arts, particularly those that will provide financial stability. It also appears that they would like to find ways of increasing their chances of achieving such arts-based professions after they leave their institutions.

Findings

The following section includes a further breakdown of findings we observed as a result of this survey. The data here indicates four areas the survey team felt the need to unfold within this document.

Finding 1: “There is a disconnect between artists degree training and potential arts jobs.”

We reached the first conclusion by comparing the degree programs and career goals of students with the degrees obtained by and career activities of the professionals surveyed. Of the surveyed students, 67% were in an undergraduate or graduate performance program.

- 36.6% of students indicated a desire to work “as faculty in a University or College setting where they can balance performance, teaching and research.
- 34% indicated their desire to work as an artist who is paid primarily to perform/ create.
- 18% as an independent music or arts teacher (teaching-artist)
- 17.5% as a secondary (K-12) school arts teacher
- 17% as faculty at a music or arts conservatory
- 17% as a freelance artist (Appendix 1.0)

Nearly 100% of student participants wanted performance to comprise the majority of their professional activities. But when asked to define their careers, not one professional respondent had an exclusively performance-driven career.

One participant performed in just one orchestra, but he also supplemented his income with private teaching.

- 32% percent of professional respondents taught at a college level,
- 18% identified as freelancers, and
- 20% defined themselves as having multiple jobs, some of which were not in the arts field. (Appendix 1.0.1)

Students and professionals alike are aware of and concerned about this reality. The survey question related to post-college anxieties drew four times as many free responses (88 in total) as any other question, emphasizing the fears of young artists entering the professional world. This student’s response best captures these concerns:

"[I worry] that I won't be prepared for real life as a working musician outside of the school environment, that I will have to give up my artistic pursuits in order to make a living for myself, and that all of the time I spent preparing to be a performer was not time well spent after all." (Appendix 4.1)

Finding 2: “Lack of awareness/participation in existing arts entrepreneurship offerings”

In the case of professionals, these realities translate into a need for arts entrepreneurship offerings:

"Most music performance students are groomed and prepared only for careers as orchestral players, when in fact very few make a living doing only that. We need to be prepared to understand business, marketing, and community relations to have maximum success in these endeavors." (Appendix 4.2)

Although both students and professionals acknowledge that arts students are poorly prepared for the professional world and affirm the importance of arts entrepreneurship, only 46% of students reported having arts entrepreneurship offerings on their campus and 61% reported to have not engaged in these offerings if they were present. Nearly half of the students surveyed didn't know if their campus had any sort of arts entrepreneurship offering.

- 54% of students surveyed did not know whether a series of courses on Entrepreneurship existed at their college/university. (Appendix 2.1)
- 73.5% of students and 70.5% of professionals said that they were interested in learning more about entrepreneurship in the arts. (Appendix 2.3 & 2.6)
- 81% of students surveyed said that they would be interested in taking one class on Arts Entrepreneurship (Appendix 3.1)
- 41% of students were interested in adding a minor in Arts Entrepreneurship (Appendix 3.1)
- 18% of students were interested in changing the degree concentration to synthesize their skills as an artist and entrepreneur. (Appendix 3.1)
- 63.2% of professionals said that they would have been better prepared to enter the professional workforce, if they had access to entrepreneurship training. (Appendix 4.2)

Finding 3: Participants want an arts entrepreneurship class that combines lecture- and project-based curricular education with a non-curricular arts entrepreneurship student club.

Despite these unimpressive statistics, the survey results indicate that 73% of students want to learn about arts entrepreneurship, and 81% of students are willing to take a class on the subject. Most of these students want a class that allows them to explore arts entrepreneurship in a variety of formats: through lectures, projects, and in conjunction with a non-curricular arts entrepreneurship club. This format allows students to apply ideas learned in the classroom in a low-risk environment in preparation to enter the professional world in which the consequences of failure are much higher.

- 60% of students said they would take one or more action-based courses through which they could build skills, which would then be implemented through collaboration with a

- student group. (see Appendix 3.1)
- 58% of students surveyed said they would be interested in joining a non-curricular, student led group that develops projects based on their concept of Arts Entrepreneurship (see Appendix 3.1)
 - 69.3% of students surveyed indicated an interest in a class that combines a lecture and reading-based curriculum on Arts Entrepreneurship and includes visits from guest speakers in the arts and business fields, with a project-based curriculum, working independently and in teams to implement entrepreneurial projects in a low-risk environment. (see Appendix 3.1)

Finding 4: Arts entrepreneurship education must be flexible and personalized towards the needs and realities of the post-graduate 21st-century artist.

The fourth conclusion, calling for arts entrepreneurship programs to be flexible and adaptable, is probably the most important. Both students and professionals agreed that arts entrepreneurship education must be personalized towards individual students' needs. Furthermore, they also indicated that the professional realities of the 21st-century artist must be addressed. The following two responses, the first from a student, and the second from a professional, reinforce the need for personalized curricula:

"I enrolled in the [Nonprofit management] certificate as part of my doctoral studies so that I can be a stronger teacher, leader, and organizer in the arts...Many of the classes are inflexible and designed to fit a butts-in-the-seat style of teaching. The teachers cover theory and literature, but are not able to cope with the diverse backgrounds of their students or [their fields of interest]. Entrepreneurship should be more like private coaching so that individual attention can be paid to the specifics of each field."
(Appendix 3.2)

"Arts Entrepreneurship is thinking outside the box and allowing our students to relate to the music field in new and meaningful ways that may differ from previous generations. As educators, we need to honor the creativity and authenticity of our students and nurture their own development as artists and professionals. We need to serve as mentors that are not just interested in creating clones of ourselves, but rather embrace the new visionary models of what it means to be an artist in the 21st century." (Appendix 1.2)

- 86% of professional respondents said that, given their experience, they'd like to see more Arts Entrepreneurship programs offered on college and university campuses. (see Appendix 4.2)
- 74% of student respondents said that they would like to see more Arts Entrepreneurship programs offered on their campus. (see Appendix 4.1)

Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that there appears to be a misalignment between the realities of working artists (expressed by professionals) and the perceptions of future careers by students (overwhelmingly biased towards traditional career-tracks). Strong support exists both retroactively (with experience bias) and among students for incorporating arts entrepreneurship training within tertiary educational environments, most probably through a combination of co-curricular programs and substantial curricular components. The combination seems most attractive to many students as it creates a professionally-oriented context for theoretical discourse, while also fostering action-based learning opportunities. The creation of a pilot arts entrepreneurship “Minor” also seems potentially viable.

The participants strongly implied that a flexible, student-focused, and context-driven curricular design is important both for differentiating this training from many current content-driven programs, and for meeting the diverse needs of those whose work-life may exhibit the qualities of a “portfolio career.” This study indicates the need for further examination, particularly in terms of broadening the potential avenues for new and effective tertiary arts entrepreneurship training models.

These results call for great change in collegiate arts training. Not only do 74% of students and 86% of professionals agree that music schools need arts entrepreneurship programs, but the programs developed must be carefully planned and that student voices must be considered. We have evidence that students see arts entrepreneurship training as valuable to their careers. At the same time, professionals are ready to promote such concepts, and more than 60% attest that such training would have provided them with advantages as they entered the professional workplace. Finding the ways to foster such opportunities for our current and future students will be the next great challenge for U.S. tertiary arts training programs.