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VOLUME 8, NUMBER 1



TRACKING THE LIVES AND CAREERS OF ARTS GRADUATES

## SNAAP DataBrief

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

### Which Skills Do Founders and Freelancers Need? Unpacking the Entrepreneurial Skills Gap

Prior SNAAP [DataBriefs](#), [reports](#), [publications](#), and several other studies in the [US](#) and [elsewhere](#) have revealed significant discrepancies between the skills arts students develop during postsecondary education and the skills needed to start and sustain their career. The vast majority of these graduates currently working as artists report an *artistic technique* skills match; they developed such abilities during their schooling and use these skills in their work life, though compared to other skills, alumni are more likely to report an “excess” in artistic technique training (developed more than they use in their work). In contrast, most SNAAP undergraduate alumni report business and entrepreneurial skills gaps: only about a quarter of arts graduates say their higher education institution helped them develop *financial and business management skills* and *entrepreneurial skills*, but most of these alumni say they

need these skills in their work life (see Figures below).

Skills gaps, or the apparent disconnect between arts school curricula and the post-graduation needs of arts alumni, have long been a source of contention, but the current economic landscape has further highlighted the critical need for artists to be entrepreneurial: artistic careers involve identifying and seeking out opportunities, taking risks, and rapidly becoming comfortable with change. The current landscape also underscores the likelihood of artists becoming entrepreneurs: artists are more likely than other professional workers [to become self-employed](#) (as new venture founders or freelancers) and are often pushed into self-employment [during an economic recession](#). SNAAP alumni assume a variety of entrepreneurial roles; working artists fall into three general employment profiles:

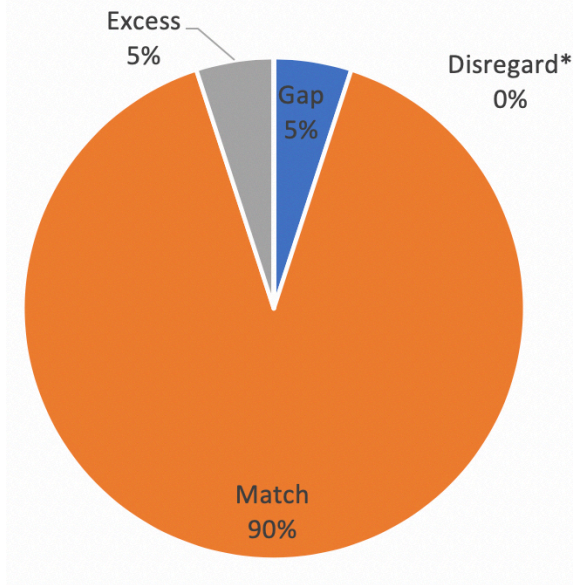
- **Founders:** one out five (19%) alumni have ever founded a nonprofit or for-profit organization.
- **Other self-employed workers:** more than two-thirds (71%) of alumni have ever been self-employed (freelancers, independent contractors) but never founders.
- **Salaried workers:** 10% of working arts graduates have never been self-employed or founded an organization.

In a paper I co-authored with [Rachel Skaggs](#) and [Megan Robinson](#), and recently presented at the Indiana University [Center for Cultural Affairs' Leveraging Creativity](#) symposium, we draw on SNAAP data to further unpack debates about skills gaps by analyzing the skill profiles of founders and other self-employed workers (freelancers and independent contractors). We asked: *How prevalent are artistic, financial/business, and entrepreneurial skills matches and gaps among different kinds of entrepreneurial workers?*

### **Figure 1. Skills Matches and Mismatches**

SNAAP 2015-2017: sample only includes current professional artists who earned undergraduate degrees between 1976-2017 ( $N = 25,691$ )

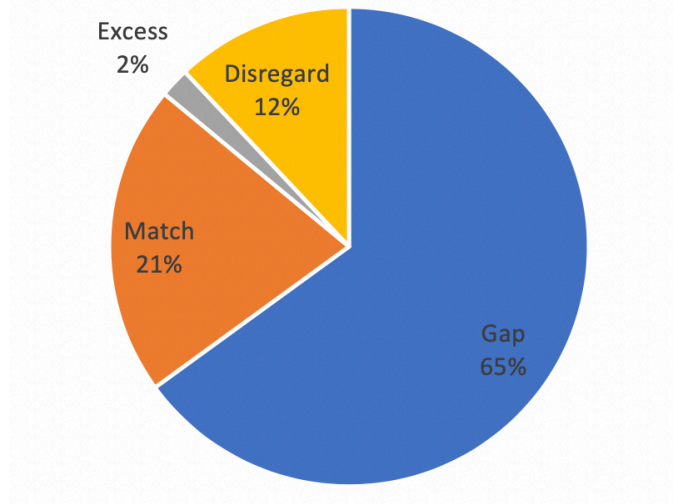
### Artistic Technique

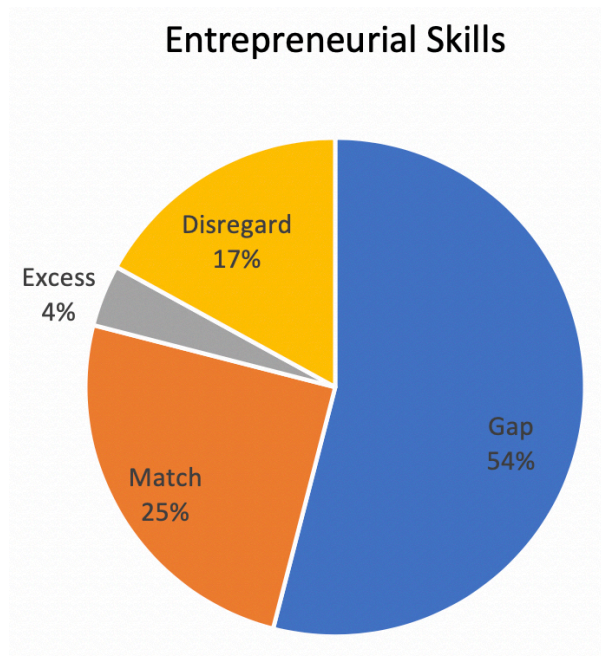


\*Skill disregard: graduates indicated they did not develop and do not need a skill in their work life.

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### Financial and Business Management Skills





Controlling for socio-demographic variables (e.g., gender, race) and educational experiences (e.g., type of school, major) we used logistic regression models to analyze the relationship between skills and entrepreneurial career outcomes. The results show distinct patterns between the skill profiles of founders and other self-employed workers:

**Founders:** Compared to alumni who never founded a nonprofit or for-profit, founders are...

- 56% more likely to report **financial/business** skills gaps
- 26% more likely to report **financial/business** skills match
- 167% more likely to report **entrepreneurial** skills gaps
- 231% more likely to report **entrepreneurial** skills matches
- *Artistic technique: not statistically significant*

**Other self-employed (e.g., freelancers and independent contractors):** Compared to founders and salaried workers, these self-employed alumni are...

- 69% more likely to report **artistic** skills gaps
- 105% more likely to report **artistic** skills matches
- *Financial/business and entrepreneurial skills: not significantly more likely to report gaps or matches*

These findings suggest at least two general “types” of entrepreneurial workers in the arts, which reflect predominant orientations towards—and preoccupations with—business and entrepreneurial skills (founders) or artistic skills (other self-employed). While the entrepreneurial skills gap is a

robust finding within the arts literature, our results suggest that this gap is particularly pertinent to and perhaps driven by—those alumni who become founders of nonprofit or for-profit organizations at some point in their career.

These results have important curricular implications (which we will further explore in the next SNAAP report). In recent years, many arts faculty and administrators have advocated for the addition or embedding of entrepreneurship education in arts schools ([Beckman 2007](#); [Essig 2017](#)). Arts entrepreneurship offerings were relatively rare as recently as the early 2000s, but by 2016, 37% of schools of art, music, or design and 31% of research universities (R1 and R2 comprehensive universities) in the United States offered at least some kind of arts entrepreneurship programming (Essig 2017). As more arts schools incorporate entrepreneurship courses, programs, and co-curricular programming, these results suggest the need to avoid a “one size fits all” model and instead offer options based on various intended career paths. Some students should pursue more extensive preparation for their future business and entrepreneurial needs, but other students—perhaps those less inclined to becoming founders—will gain more from further in-depth artistic technique and exposure to other [art forms](#).

*This DataBrief was prepared by Alexandre Frenette, Associate Director, Curb Center for Art, Enterprise and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University.*



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