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**GROWING DIVIDES:
Historical and Emerging Inequalities
in Arts Internships**

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Foreword

“Growing Divides: Historical and Emerging Inequalities in Arts Internships” is the 11th major research report commissioned by the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project. The report, authored by Alexandre Frenette, Gillian Gualtieri and Megan Robinson of the Curb Center at Vanderbilt University, is a revealing deep dive into the efficacy, popularity and growing inequities that are reshaping what they call the “intern economy.”

Over the last ten years the gold standard of postsecondary accountability has shifted decisively toward gainful employment measures. It is no longer enough that colleges provide affordable access to a demographically diverse student population or achieve high yields of timely degree completion. Colleges increasingly must demonstrate that they are achieving acceptable returns on public investments in higher education as measured by graduates achieving acceptable earnings.

Our curricula have become increasingly professionalized in response. And students’ educational efforts, as revealed in this research, have become increasingly motivated by career aspirations or, perhaps, employment anxiety. This is nowhere more evident than in the rapid growth of internships as an integral and transitional feature of art and design curricula. The authors quote a 2013 graduate saying, “My internship...opened the door to my entire career” and students and parents and arts school faculty and administrators are beating a path through that door.

Frenette et al. discover in the SNAAP data that internship participation has nearly doubled among arts and design school students among the cohorts graduating before and after 2003. Their research also reveals that internships, especially paid internships, have proved impressively effective at transitioning students into first paid employment in the arts and predicting durability in those careers. But they also observe that since the Great Recession of 2008, “the transition from internship to employment has become increasingly tenuous.”

“Growing Divides” exposes important emerging trends that deserve greater attention and proactive energy from arts schools:

- Competition among students for internship opportunities, especially the best of these opportunities, is becoming greater.
- A growing percentage of all internship opportunities are unpaid and, prove to be less rewarding and less professionally preparatory for interns.
- Schools are not doing enough to originate and place students in well-designed and carefully curated internships.
- Schools are doing a better job of reducing the tuition cost of for-credit internships, but need to do more to underwrite non-paying or low-paying internships for students without the personal or family resources needed for an internship.
- Most urgently—but not surprisingly—white, affluent, non-first-generation students garner the most and best internship opportunities exacerbating intramural inequities in educational opportunity.

Arts school executives and faculty need to understand the evolving dynamics of the intern economy in order to implement educationally sound, vocationally effective and socially equitable internship programs:

... Pre-pandemic evidence from SNAAP data suggests that the current conditions will continue to pose particular challenges for women, people of color, and first-generation college graduates. Arts schools’ leadership and policymakers must consider how to ensure a more robust and equitable arts economy for arts students and alumni in a post-COVID-19 context.

“Growing Divides: Historical and Emerging Inequalities in Arts Internships,” derived from several years of SNAAP data, provides exactly the insights we most need.

Douglas Dempster
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Executive Summary

Drawing on data from the SNAAP internship module fielded in 2015-2017, this report offers several key findings related to historical changes and emerging forms of inequality in the intern economy:

- Arts graduates are increasingly likely to do multiple internships during their undergraduate studies.
- Recent graduates are more likely to indicate that they interned for career-oriented reasons, whereas graduates from earlier decades are more likely to indicate that they interned for educational reasons.
- Recent arts alumni are more likely than earlier cohorts to find internships through personal resources as opposed to school resources.
- First-generation college graduates are significantly less likely to support themselves during their internship through private wealth or family support than are non-first-generation college graduates.
- Recent graduates are increasingly more likely than prior graduates not to intern because they cannot afford to do so.

In addition to illuminating these findings, this report offers an important addendum to the 2015 SNAAP report about differences between paid and unpaid internships. While the 2015 report showed that paid internships are tied to positive career outcomes and unpaid internships are far less beneficial in terms of career trajectories, this report suggests two key explanations for this divide:

- Paid interns are more likely to report higher satisfaction with mentorship and assigned duties that involved creative input or judgment than unpaid interns.
- Interns who were satisfied with the mentorship they received and who reported being assigned more creative duties were significantly more likely to get hired at the internship site.

In their own words, over 1,000 undergraduate SNAAP alumni provided feedback which helps to articulate

challenges and provide solutions for the ever-changing and expanding intern economy. Alumni primarily call for more resources—a key theme in this report and a pressing challenge—in terms of finding quality internships and financial support during their internships. The call for more clarity, including the challenge of clarifying the goals, policies, and expectations across parties involved in internships, is also crucial to make sure these experiences meet their educational potential.

3. Introduction

SNAAP's 2015 special report "The Internship Divide" (Frenette et al., 2015) highlighted the rise of internships over recent decades as well as important differences between paid and unpaid internships in the arts. The report found that arts alumni who completed a paid internship were significantly more likely than other graduates to find a job quickly after graduation, work a job that closely matches their field of study, and report higher levels of current job satisfaction. Conversely, an unpaid internship in the arts will likely not provide as much of a career boost (a finding consistent across non-arts fields; Crain, 2016). The 2015 report also identified pervasive inequalities, notably that women are disproportionately more likely than men to complete unpaid internships, and first-generation college graduates are less likely than more privileged alumni to intern at all (regardless of pay). To better understand how internships impact the educational and career pathways of arts alumni, in 2015-2017 SNAAP fielded a module with additional questions about these student experiences to a subset of participating institutions. This report presents findings from the module with the goal of informing how higher education institutions design and support internships.

The rise of internships as part of higher education has brought opportunities for work-based learning, which enable students to expand on what they encounter in the classroom and test out future careers. Research using SNAAP data found that doing an internship while pursuing a bachelor's degree is linked to a higher likelihood of remaining in the arts immediately after graduation, as well as several years later (Frenette,

Dowd, Skaggs & Ryan, 2020; Martin & Frenette, 2017). However, with the increasing prevalence of internships has also come a series of challenges for higher education institutions, notably related to access (who can procure an internship and make the most of these experiences?) and alignment of educational goals between schools, interns, and host organizations. How can schools efficiently ensure educational experiences for students with varying goals, expectations, and resources while host organizations also operate with a multiplicity of aims (e.g., some organizations appear to want inexpensive labor while others provide thoughtful training and mentoring)?

Challenges related to oversight on the part of higher education institutions are made clearer by considering how internship programs compare to another common form of experiential learning: study abroad programs. Much like internships, study abroad programs have grown considerably in recent decades (Redden, 2018). Among 2015-2017 SNAAP respondents with a bachelor's degree, 12% of alumni who graduated in 2002 or before had completed a study abroad experience, compared to 25% for 2003-2017 graduates. Within this same group of respondents, slightly more than a quarter (27%) of alumni who graduated in 2002 or before completed an internship while enrolled at a SNAAP institution, compared to 48% among 2003-2017 graduates (54% for 2013-2017 graduates). While both forms of experiential learning have grown considerably, internships present unique challenges given their role in positive career outcomes and the increasing reliance on intern labor for host organizations.

While there is a diversity of experiences in both study abroad and internships, the structure of study abroad usually relies on a smaller, relatively consistent set of partners (e.g., a faculty member or firm; Vande Berg, 2007) whereas there are far more potential internship hosts, which can lead to more heterogeneous student experiences. The wide range of rapidly changing intern hosts, compared to the relatively stable structure of study abroad programs, creates particular challenges in ensuring rich, consistent educational experiences. To provide more oversight and guidance for students, higher education institutions need better data about

their students' experiences in order to address the inequalities that have historically characterized the intern economy. In addition to differences related to pay as discussed in the 2015 report, the sections below show how internships vary widely based on general characteristics (hours, sector, type of school, and intern demographics), how students find them, how interns support themselves, and how these varying experiences impact the transition from college to career. The challenges of navigating the intern economy—for students/alumni and higher education institutions alike—are already evident in data collected pre-pandemic. While more research is needed to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis are reshaping the arts economy, including how arts graduates are navigating a changing intern economy, pre-pandemic evidence from SNAAP data suggests that the current conditions will continue to pose particular challenges for women, people of color, and first-generation college graduates. Arts schools' leadership and policymakers must consider how to ensure a more robust and equitable arts economy for arts students and alumni in a post-COVID-19 context.

SNAAP internship module

Alumni from 14 institutions participated in the SNAAP internship module. Similar to the 2015 SNAAP report, these analyses mostly focus on the experiences of undergraduate alumni. Within our subsample of undergraduate alumni, 1,838 had interned while enrolled at a SNAAP institution and 3,745 had not. For the qualitative section of this report ("In Their Own Words"), we analyzed 1,080 written responses from undergraduate arts alumni in order to capture their feedback and recommendations.

Table 1 includes more information about the sociodemographic and educational characteristics of alumni who received the internship module. While the report includes straightforward percentages (frequencies and crosstabs) a series of logistic regression analyses, controlling for sociodemographic characteristics and educational variables, served to confirm the statistical significance of the results. Moreover, it should be noted that due to the very small proportion of people of color

Table 1. Sociodemographic and educational characteristics of undergraduate alumni who received SNAAP internship module, by whether they interned while enrolled

Variables Used in Analysis	Interned	Did not intern
First-generation college graduate	25%	32%
Gender: Woman	66%	62%
Race/ethnicity:		
White	77%	84%
Black or African American	3%	3%
Hispanic or Latino	6%	4%
Asian (including Indian subcontinent)	4%	2%
Two or more races	7%	5%
Other	2%	2%
Cohort:		
1987 and before	15%	33%
1988-1997	15%	16%
1998-2002	11%	10%
2003-2007	14%	13%
2008-2012	21%	16%
2013-2017	24%	12%
Field of study:		
Architecture and design	23%	10%
Art education, history, or administration	11%	4%
Fine or studio arts	11%	26%
Media arts	26%	12%
Performing arts	30%	47%
Institution type:		
Public college/university	54%	61%
Research one institution	55%	44%
Total sample size	n = 1,838	n = 3,745

Note: “Interned” refers to alumni who indicated that they completed an internship while enrolled at their institution (paid or unpaid).

and alumni who selected “another gender identity” in this sample, race/ethnicity and gender were binary variables in our analyses (woman/man and white/non-white). Also, there were few alumni in arts administration, craft, creative writing, and dance in this sample, so for regression analyses we used the major groupings in Table 1.

4. Internship characteristics

The 2015 SNAAP report noted the rise of internships in the arts and, most recently, the substantial growth of unpaid internships. Beyond the findings on the

educational and career outcomes contained in the 2015 report, however, many questions remain: did arts graduates typically receive academic credit for their internships? How frequently were these experiences requirements vs. electives? Moreover, by asking alumni about their “most significant” arts-related internship, the SNAAP module yielded insights regarding who received pay, how many hours alumni spent as an intern, and characteristics of host firms (number of employees and sector).

In addition to summarizing these general characteristics of arts internships below, the two following sections highlight notable historical changes: the rise of “multi-interns” as well as changing perceptions of internships, as illustrated by how alumni described their main reason for undertaking these experiences.

General characteristics

Academic Credit and Requirement: Based on the totality of their arts-related internship(s) while enrolled in undergraduate studies, alumni were asked whether they had received academic credit for any of their internship(s) and whether such experiences were required by their program or major.

Approximately three-quarters (76%) of arts graduates who completed an internship also received academic credit for the experience. Until 2007, nearly four out of five (79%) interns reported receiving academic credit for their experience, but this number went down to 75% for individuals who graduated between 2008 and 2012 and decreased further to 68% among most recent alumni (2013-2017). The recent changes appear to reflect the rise of “zero-credit” internships, which enable students to benefit from the institutional support of higher education without paying tuition to intern.

There was very little variation by major and sociodemographic characteristics, except fine & studio art majors (62%) were slightly less likely to receive academic credit for their internship than other majors, and women (77%) were more likely to receive academic credit for their internship than men (72%).

Half (50%) of arts graduates reported that their program or major required an internship, though responses varied by graduation year, major, and type of institution:

- Alumni who graduated most recently (between 2013 and 2017) were least likely to say their program required an internship (45%), down from 51% for 2008-2012 graduates, and a combined average of 53% for all previous alumni. This finding might be surprising considering the growing prevalence of internships, but it possibly reflects how student demand for internships has outpaced its inclusion as an academic requirement.
- Internships were more frequently required among architecture (70%) and design (64%) majors and least likely to be required of fine & studio art (29%), media arts (34%), and theater (36%) alumni.
- Less than half (43%) of alumni from “R1” doctoral universities indicated that an internship was required, compared to 60% of graduates from other higher education institutions.

Pay: Nearly one-third (32%) of respondents indicated that their “most significant” arts-related internship was paid at least minimum wage or higher. Men (+4%), non-first-generation college graduates (+2%), and white (+4%) arts alumni were all slightly more likely to report that their most significant internship experience was paid, compared to women, first-generation college graduates, and non-white graduates. These findings align with trends previously highlighted using SNAAP data (Frenette et al., 2015).

Hours: Most alumni (56%) interned for 6 to 20 hours per week, though almost one-quarter (23%) of arts graduates interned 31 hours or more per week.

Number of employees: Most alumni (71%) indicated that they interned at a firm with 50 or less employees.

Sector: The majority of arts graduates indicated that their most significant arts-related internship was in the for-profit or commercial sector (59%), one-third (34%) of alumni selected nonprofit (including schools), and a smaller group of alumni interned in the government

sector (1%) or an organization that is a “mix of the above” (6%). There were some notable trends by major and type of higher education institutions:

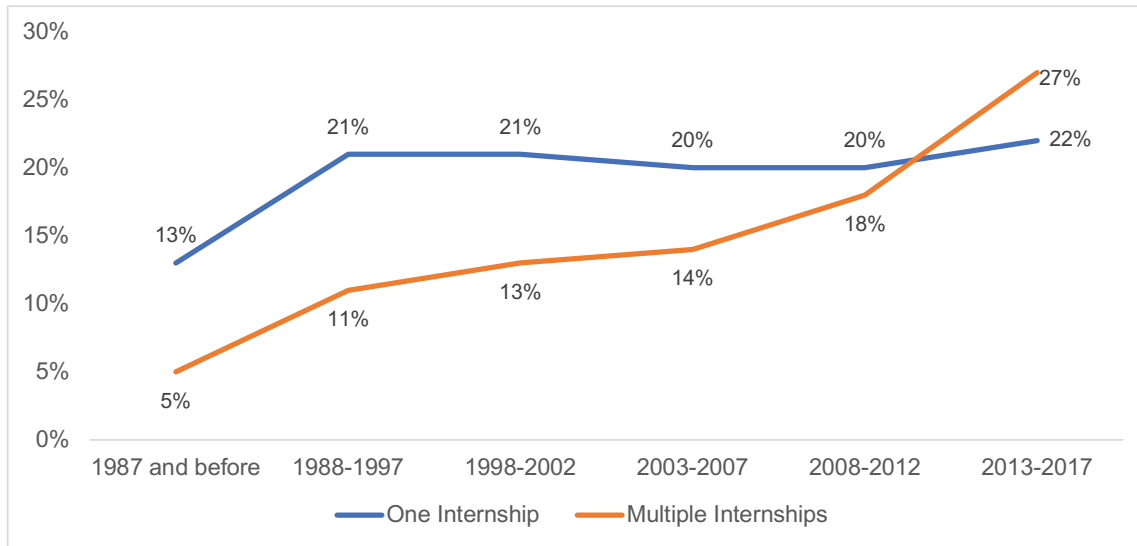
- Architecture (92%), media arts (83%), and design (83%) majors were especially likely to intern in the for-profit sector.
- Alumni from “R1” doctoral universities were especially likely to intern at for-profit (68%) rather than nonprofit hosts (25%). By contrast, graduates from other higher education institutions were equally likely to intern in for-profit or nonprofit sectors (46%).
- Alumni from private and public institutions interned at nonprofits nearly equally (34% and 35%) but slightly more graduates from private institutions (62%) interned at a for-profit host than did public university alumni (56%).

The rise of multiple internships

The 2015 SNAAP report noted significant divides between those who do and do not intern, and especially between alumni who completed paid versus unpaid internships, but the SNAAP internship module data suggest another potential divide to consider—*how many* internships students complete. As Figure 1 shows, the percentage of arts graduates who did one internship as part of their undergraduate education has been relatively stable over recent decades. Rather, the proportion of students who completed multiple internships has steadily increased over time. Among arts alumni who graduated between 2013 and 2017, slightly more (27%) indicated that they had completed multiple internships rather than one (22%). The increasing prevalence of “multi-interns” during arts graduates’ enrollment in undergraduate studies reflects the growing role of work-based learning in higher education, but also may reflect a strategy graduates used to navigate the transition from college to career.

The 2015 SNAAP report described significant sociodemographic divides—particularly by gender (women were more likely to do unpaid internships) and socioeconomic status (first-generation college graduates were less likely to intern)—and while there are no significant differences by gender and race/ethnicity for

Figure 1. Percentage of alumni who completed one or multiple arts-related internships while enrolled in undergraduate studies, by graduation year



multi-interns, parents’ education is a strong predictor. First-generation college graduates not only were less likely than non-first-generation college graduates to intern, they were also less likely to complete multiple internships (see Table 2). The resources necessary to intern, including financial support and social networks to help secure such positions, shape who has access to doing one or several internships.

It should also be noted that the multi-intern percentages could be much higher than indicated above if they included the totality of arts graduates’ internships—while approximately half (54%) of recent undergraduate alumni (2013-2017) indicated that they interned while enrolled in school, more than two-thirds (68%) of recent alumni said they had ever interned, including such experiences completed during high school, after graduation, or internships completed without enrolling at an academic institution.

Why intern?

Based on the totality of their arts-related experiences, alumni were asked: “*What is the main reason you completed an internship(s)?*” This SNAAP question was designed based on prior research which found that students intern for a wide variety of reasons, including testing a career, building up one’s résumé, and networking (Frenette, 2013). Since internships are commonly understood as *educational* experiences which allow students to connect classroom learning to the “real world” of work, the expectation was that “expand on what I learned in the classroom” would be the most commonly selected answer. Paired with “fulfill a graduation requirement,” these two educationally-focused answers were selected by slightly more than one third (37%) of arts graduates (see Table 3). Most alumni, however, stressed the career-oriented outcomes of their internship experience: building up a résumé (25%), testing out a potential career (16%), developing a professional network (10%), and potentially getting hired by the intern host (9%).

Table 2. Percentage of undergraduate alumni who completed zero, one, or multiple arts-related internships while enrolled, by parents’ education

Parents’ education level	Did not complete internship	One internship	Multiple internships
First-generation college graduates	73%	17%	9%
Non-first-generation college graduates	65%	19%	15%
Total (all alumni)	67%	18%	14%

Table 3. Main reason why undergraduate alumni interned, by graduation year

Main reason for completing internship(s)	1997 and before	1998-2007	2008-2017	Total (all cohorts)
Build up my résumé	14%	24%	33%	25%
Fulfill a graduation requirement	29%	20%	17%	21%
Expand on what I learned in the classroom	23%	15%	12%	16%
Test out a potential career	15%	17%	16%	16%
Develop a professional network	7%	9%	13%	10%
Possibly get hired by the intern host	9%	11%	8%	9%
Some other reason	3%	3%	2%	3%

ty of reasons for interning, as selected by alumni, is instructive in that it highlights how internship programs are by definition ambiguous because they allow for individuals with diverse needs and motivations to meet their respective educational and career goals. The most striking finding, though, is the way alumni from varied graduation years describe their internship experiences quite differently. Recent graduates were significantly more likely to select career-oriented reasons for interning (“build up my résumé” and “develop a professional network”) than earlier graduates who were, in contrast, significantly more likely to select educational reasons for interning (“fulfill a graduation requirement” and “expand on what I learned in the classroom”). These trends do not mean that arts programs are dramatically eliminating internship requirements for graduation—the evidence on the rise of internships would suggest the opposite—but rather that arts graduates are increasingly likely to intern even if not required by their program and more likely to emphasize the career-oriented reasons for pursuing such experiences.

Graduates’ main reasons for completing internships also varied by gender and major. Analyses suggest a few differences by gender: men were more likely than women to select “expand classroom learning” (19% to 14%) and “develop a professional network” (12% to 9%), whereas women were more likely than men to select “build up résumé” (27% compared to 22%). In terms of differences by discipline:

- Media arts (30%) and design (29%) majors were slightly more likely to select “build up your résumé.”

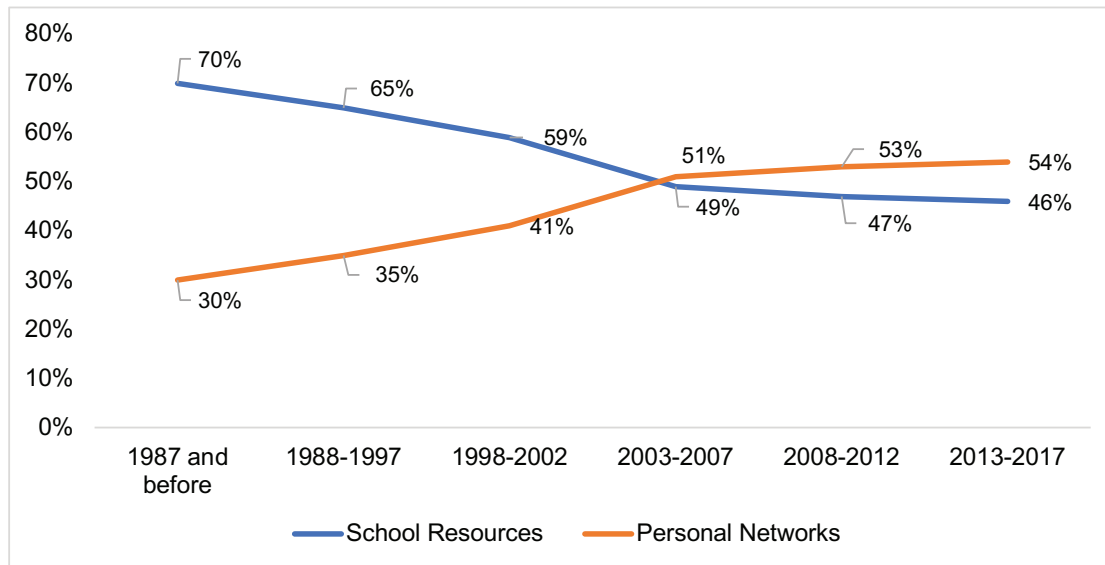
- There were significant differences in the selection of “fulfill a graduation requirement” between design (29%) and architecture (28%), on one hand, and media arts (8%), theater (14%), and fine & studio art (15%) on the other.
- “Test out a potential career” was fairly consistent across majors, but least frequently selected by design (2%) and architecture (8%) alumni.
- Theater (19%) and media arts (15%) majors were most likely to select “develop a professional network.”
- The main outliers for “possibly get hired by intern host” were media arts (13%) and architecture (12%), compared to fine & studio art (3%) and music (4%).

Again, these differences suggest that internship programs in the arts are not “one size fits all,” in part, due to variations between students’ goals. Moreover, the reasons for interning vary by field and, especially, they are changing over time.

5. Support: Finding and Affording Internships

While prior research shows that less privileged alumni are less likely to do internships, many questions remain: how do students find internships, support themselves, and why did alumni (especially first-generation college graduates) *not* undertake an internship? The three sections below answer these questions and expand our knowledge about the role of socioeconomic inequalities in the intern economy.

Figure 2. How students find internships, by graduation year



Note: School resources include “faculty connection,” “career development office,” and “alumni network” whereas the personal networks category combines “personal research” and “through friends/family.”

How do students find internships?

Alumni were asked how they found their most significant arts-related internship (“How did you find out about the internship?”) and selected among two personal and three school-related options. In general, a slight majority (54%) of graduates selected a school-related option (faculty connection, career development office, or alumni network) rather than a personal option (personal research or through friends/family). However, historical patterns highlight the growing importance of personal resources in finding an internship (see Figure 2).

While approximately two-thirds of arts alumni who graduated in 2002 or before found their most significant internship through school resources, recent cohorts were significantly more likely to do so through personal networks (especially “personal research”). Despite the increasing formalization of internship programs at higher education institutions, which has often included hiring internship coordinators and advisors, these findings are not surprising—these numbers suggest that the rise of internship demand has outpaced the ability for higher education institutions to act as “connectors” between students and organizations. It should also be noted that this transition has occurred during the proliferation of internet listings for internship opportunities, perhaps making it less necessary for higher education person-

nel to connect students with internships. Nevertheless, if students are increasingly responsible for seeking out these experiences on their own, this raises concerns about access since not every student has equal personal connections, background knowledge, and time.

Responses to this question yielded other interesting patterns by type of school, major, and demographic characteristics:

- Design graduates (57%) were the most likely to report finding their internships through personal networks, while architecture (55%) and fine & studio art (56%) were most likely to select school resources.
- There were no significant differences between private and public higher education institutions, but more alumni from R1 universities (49%) selected personal networks than graduates from other doctoral universities, master’s colleges, and baccalaureate colleges (41%). Additional analyses confirm that attending an R1 university was linked to a 40% increase in the odds of finding an internship through personal networks. These differences might be linked to demographic differences between those who attend the more research-intensive universities and those who do not.
- Women, non-white, and first-generation college graduates were slightly more likely than men,

white, and non-first-generation college graduates to indicate that they found their internships through personal networks. These findings were not significant, however, once tested using more sophisticated statistical analyses (controlling for other demographic variables and educational experiences) yet are mentioned here as an area worthy of further consideration—it remains to be fully examined whether schools have historically better served the internship needs of the most privileged groups, whether institutional partners systematically selected certain applicants based on demographic characteristics, or perhaps simply that arts schools have gotten more diverse over the last 20 years (as students have increasingly found internships through personal networks).

Primary means of support

Debates about the fairness of the intern economy often frame these experiences as the domain of the privileged—only a select few with personal or family wealth can afford to do internships (Perlin, 2011; Shade & Jacobson 2015; Brook, O’Brien & Taylor, 2020). In order to better understand how students support themselves during internships, arts alumni were asked: “*What was your primary means of financial support while you were an intern? (Select the option that best applies).*” Slightly more than half (53%) selected one of the two “personal/family finances” options to this question (either “savings” or “family support”) whereas other alumni said they primarily supported themselves via scholarships/fellowships, student loans, the internship itself (when paid), or another paid job. Responses varied by sociodemographic characteristics, internship type, school type, and graduation year:

- White (56%) arts alumni and women (55%) were more likely than non-white (45%) graduates and men (50%) to name personal/family finances as their main source of support. This gap was more pronounced between first-generation (38%) and non-first-generation (59%) college graduates; additional analyses show that first-generation college graduates were 60% less likely than non-first-generation college graduates to support themselves primarily via private/family financial support.
- 48% of alumni whose internship was paid at least minimum wage supported themselves primarily through personal or family finances, compared to 56% among unpaid interns. This finding further supports the assertion that unpaid internships are most accessible to individuals with personal means of support.
- Alumni from private institutions (62%) were far more likely to support themselves via personal/family finances during their internship than arts alumni from public higher education institutions (47%). More sophisticated analyses controlling for sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., parent’s education) and educational experiences found that alumni from public institutions were 44% less likely than private institution alumni to support themselves during their internship via personal/family finances.
- More alumni (60%) who graduated in 1997 and before selected personal/family finances as their primary form of support than did more recent graduates (50%); the rise in student loans over the recent decades partly explains this shift.

Table 4. Main reason why undergraduate alumni did not intern, by graduation year

Main reason for not completing internship	1997 and before	1998-2007	2008-2017	Total (all cohorts)
Internship not offered or not available in my field	42%	26%	21%	32%
Unaware of opportunities for an internship	35%	35%	26%	32%
Could not afford to do an internship	6%	12%	16%	10%
No time because of required courses	4%	13%	21%	10%
No interest in an internship	9%	8%	9%	8%
Other reason	6%	6%	9%	7%

Why not intern?

In order to better understand why some arts alumni *did not* complete an internship while pursuing their undergraduate degrees, the SNAAP survey asked: “*What is the main reason you did not complete an internship?*” 3,745 alumni answered this question and disproportionately selected “internship not offered or not available in my field” (32%) or “unaware of opportunities for an internship” (32%). Since internships were far less common in previous decades, the results are presented by graduation year (see Table 4) in order to highlight changes over time.

As internships became more prevalent over the last two decades, it is unsurprising that more recent graduates were less likely to select the “not offered” and “unaware of opportunities” responses. Instead, more recent cohorts became increasingly likely to select “could not afford to do an internship,” with one in six (16%) individuals who graduated between 2008 and 2017 choosing this option. Interestingly, the “no time because of required courses” reason also increased considerably over time. “No time” responses were not patterned by parents’ education—rather, first-generation college graduates (8%) were slightly less likely than non-first-generation graduates (11%) to select this option. However, first-generation college graduates were 56% more likely to select “could not afford” than alumni with a parent who earned at least a bachelor’s degree. These findings regarding why alumni did not intern further confirm the increasing awareness of and prevalence of internships over time, but also the financial and time-management challenges involved in balancing coursework and other responsibilities during college (Arum & Roksa, 2014; Jack, 2019).

6. Experiences and Outcomes

In order to better understand what predicts a positive internship experience and outcome, the following sections consider differences in mentorship and assigned duties, perceptions that an internship experience prepared alumni for work after graduation, whether an internship led directly to a job, and how arts graduates rated their internships.

Mentorship and Creative Judgment

To better understand how internship experiences vary and how, in turn, this variation can explain differences in the educational and career pathways of arts alumni, the internship module included a question about mentorship and another on assigned responsibilities.

Arts alumni answered a question about mentorship at their “most significant” internship: *How closely do you feel you were mentored by staff during the internship?* Overall, arts graduates seemed relatively satisfied with the mentorship they received: 84% (paid) and 78% (unpaid) of respondents said they were “very” or “somewhat” closely mentored by staff. However, paid interns were more likely to report feeling “very closely” mentored, whereas unpaid interns were more likely to feel “not at all” mentored. Logistic regression analysis controlling for major, school, and sociodemographic variables (e.g., gender) further confirms this pattern: paid interns were 58% more likely than unpaid interns to report close (“very” or “somewhat”) mentoring by staff.

The internship module also asked: *To what extent did your internship include activities involving creative input or judgment?* While prior research suggests that internships tend to include at least some low-level work such as clerical duties (Frenette, 2013; NACE, 2017), most alumni reported that their experiences involved at least some creative input or judgment. Paid interns (84%) were more likely than unpaid interns (76%) to indicate that their internship involved creative input or judgment “somewhat” or “very much” (as opposed to “very little” or “not at all”). Controlling for educational and sociodemographic variables, paid interns were 52% more likely to report that their work as interns “very much” or “somewhat” involved creative input or judgment.

Therefore, mentorship and assigned duties can help explain why paid internships lead to more positive career outcomes—these paid experiences are more likely to involve substantive work assignments carried out under close supervision. As educational experiences for newcomers to develop skills, learn about a field, test out career interests, and build a professional network, these results help explain why internships are crucial for early careers, but not evenly so (Frenette et al., 2015; Hora, 2020).

From School to Work

Two questions in the internship module sought to clarify the role of internships in the transition from school to work. One question asked: “How well did your internship(s) prepare you for work after graduation?” Three-quarters (75%) of arts alumni felt that their internship(s) prepared them “fairly well” or “very well” for work after graduation. More architecture (88%), design (83%), and music (83%) alumni felt that their internships helped prepared them for work, whereas art history (67%), media arts (67%), and fine & studio art (72%) alumni had the least positive responses. Paid interns (80%) were more likely than unpaid (71%) interns to respond positively.

Moreover, alumni were asked: “Did your internship directly lead to a future job?” 36% of respondents indicated that their most significant internship led directly to a future job, though this number varied based on the internship’s pay, hours, mentorship, duties, and especially on graduation year:

- Paid interns (40%) were more likely than unpaid interns (31%) to indicate that their most significant internship directly led to a job.
- Spending more time at one’s internship increased the odds that the experience led directly to a job. Specifically, only one in five alumni who interned

10 hours or less per week responded that the experience led directly to a job, compared to nearly half (45%) of graduates who interned for 26 or more hours per week.

- 40% of alumni who felt “very closely” or “somewhat closely” mentored by staff during their internship also indicated that the experience led directly to a job, compared to 20% for graduates who felt they were “not at all” mentored.
- Similarly, more alumni (41%) whose internship “somewhat” or “very much” included activities involving creative input or judgment indicated that their internship led directly to a future job, compared to those interns (20%) who had “very little” creative duties or none at all.

Notably, 50% of alumni who graduated prior to 1988 indicated that their most significant internship led directly to a job, but this percentage declined progressively to 31% among alumni who graduated between 2008 and 2017 (see Figure 3). Therefore, the growing prevalence of internships, paired with an especially challenging job market for new graduates from the Great Recession onward (Arum and Roksa, 2014), suggests that the transition from internship to employment has grown increasingly tenuous.

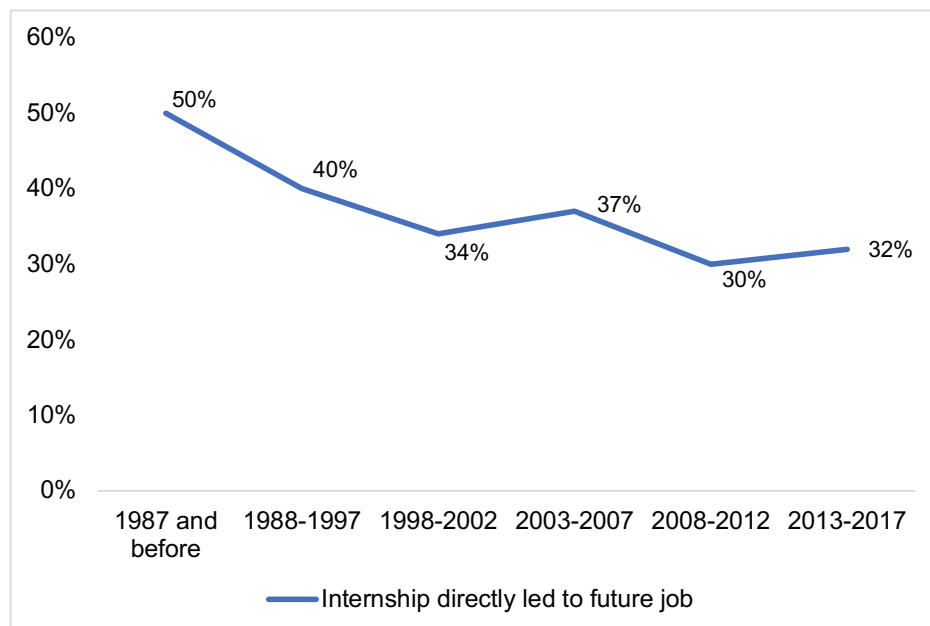


Figure 3. Percentage of alumni whose “most significant” internship directly led to a future job, by graduation year

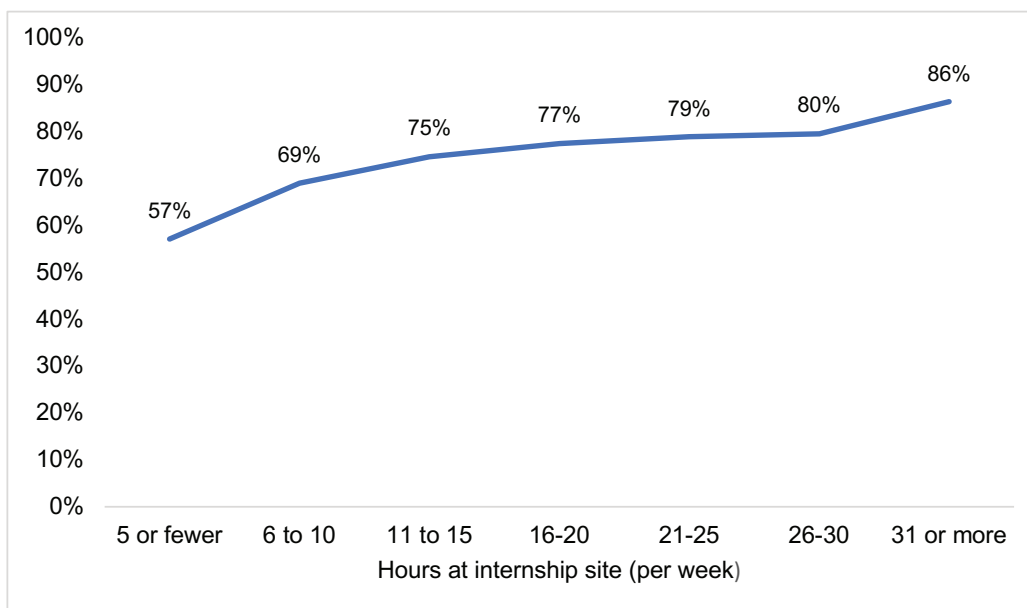


Figure 4. Percentage of undergraduate alumni who rated their internship as “good” or “very good,” by hours per week as an intern

Satisfaction with Internship Experience

The last question alumni answered related to their most significant arts-related internship completed while at their institution asked how they would rate their internship experience. Analyzing responses to this question makes it possible to better understand how satisfied alumni felt about their internship experience and if these ratings varied by sociodemographic characteristics, pay, whether the experience led directly to a job, mentorship, assigned duties, host type (e.g., sector, size), and hours at site.

Arts alumni generally rated their internship experiences very positively. Three-quarters (76%) of arts alumni rated their internship as “good” or “very good,” rather than “fair,” “poor,” or “very poor.” While there were no significant differences in these ratings based on graduates’ sociodemographic characteristics, several factors are linked to satisfaction with internship experience:

- 85% of paid interns rated their experience as “good” or “very good” compared to 72% of unpaid interns.
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, the vast majority (94%) of alumni who indicated that their internship directly led to a job rated their internship positively, compared to two-thirds (66%) among alumni whose experience did not immediately lead to employment.
- 85% of alumni who were mentored “somewhat closely” or “very closely” rated their internship

positively, compared to 40% of graduates who felt they were not mentored at all.

- 86% of graduates who felt their internship involved creative input or judgment (“somewhat” or “very much”) rated their internship positively, compared to 39% of alumni whose intern tasks involved “very little” or no creative input or judgment.
- Alumni who interned at for-profit firms were slightly less likely (73%) to rate their experience positively than those (79%) who interned with nonprofit and government hosts.

Ratings related to firm size and hours at internship site expand on findings previously considered in this report. Alumni (74%) who interned at a firm with 50 or fewer employees were less likely to rate their experience positively than alumni (81%) who interned at larger firms (51 employees or more). While interning at larger firms is tied to slightly less opportunities to do creative work and to receive mentorship, the more positive ratings of internships at larger firms may be linked to the higher likelihood of those experiences leading directly to a job.

Moreover, there is a very strong positive relationship between hours per week at one’s internship and the increased likelihood of satisfaction with one’s experience (see Figure 4). As discussed previously: spending

more time at one's internship likely leads to more opportunities to build trust and receive mentorship from employees, and therefore to be assigned more tasks that necessitate creative judgment.

7. In Their Own Words: Feedback from Alumni

Alumni who completed the internship module were asked to respond in their own words to the prompt: "What, if anything, could [INSTITUTION] do to make internships better for its students?" 1,080 alumni answered this question based on their undergraduate experience, with responses ranging from 1 to 224 words in length. Using thematic coding, we identified five major themes in these responses: (1) concerns about finding internships; (2) guidance and advising; (3) finances; (4) school oversight; and (5) positive internship experiences. These themes are not mutually exclusive, meaning alumni may have referred to one, several, or none of these themes in their written responses. Below, we provide more detail and explanation of each of these five themes, as well as some direct quotes to further illustrate each of the themes.

The most common concern articulated by alumni was related to finding an internship (44%), includ-

ing concerns about creating connections and using school and alumni resources to create opportunities for internships for current students and recent alumni (see Figure 5). The second most common concern (27%) was desiring guidance during the internship experience, including concerns about individualized advising and more general guidance throughout the internship experience. One-fifth (20%) of arts alumni described financial concerns related to pay for their intern labor, tuition, debt, and other paid employment. Many (14%) graduates expressed a desire for more oversight and involvement from the school, offering suggestions for institutional vetting of intern hosts, guidelines and expectations of intern hosts and interns, and advocacy on behalf of student interns on the part of the college or university. Finally, 8% of surveyed graduates reported positive internship experiences. Below, each of these five themes is considered in greater detail, using alumni responses to illustrate the patterns and variation within the larger themes.

Finding Internships

The most common concern articulated by arts alumni was that of finding internships. Some schools have internship and career development programs that assist students in finding internships, and as noted above,

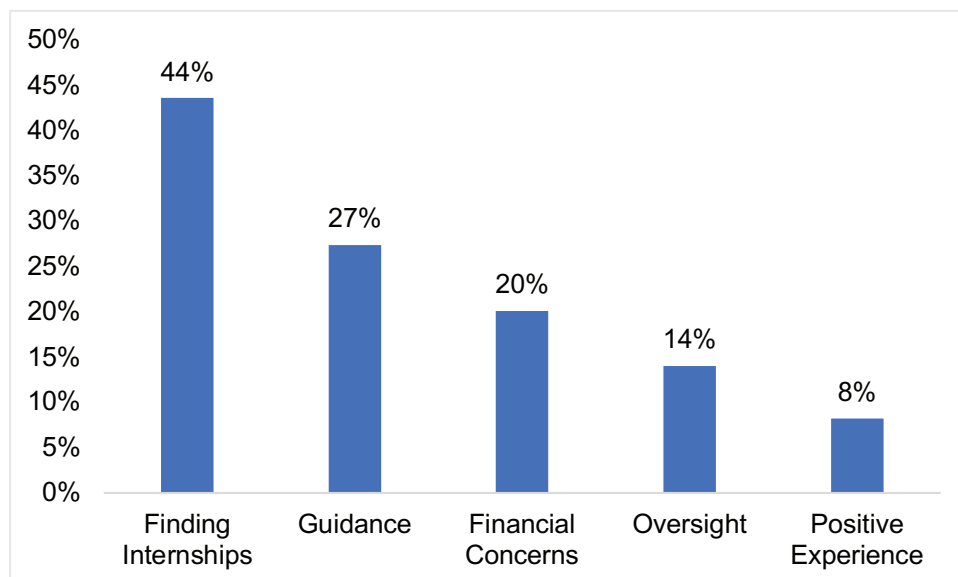


Figure 5. Most common concerns among arts alumni who participated in internships

Note: Percentages add up to more than 100% because alumni responses could fall into multiple categories.

many arts alumni found their internships through school resources, while other institutions expect students to identify these opportunities independently, which many respondents found frustrating. A 2009 theater major suggested that schools offer “More support for searching for and getting internships...I needed more help from faculty to prepare and search. I needed better information to search from...I needed more help with the whole process.” This graduate described how difficult and overwhelming the internship search process can be, requesting the school provide general information about how to search for internship opportunities along with individualized guidance.

General Support and Guidance During the Search

Process: A 2013 graduate echoed these concerns about the difficulty of pursuing internship opportunities without support: “Help us find internships that we would qualify for and be interested in. Having to do it all on your own is incredibly difficult and it can really hinder success if a student can’t find a fitting internship simply because they don’t know where or how to look.”

Targeted Guidance for the Arts: A 2013 theater major frustratedly reported the lack of guidance within their discipline, suggesting that it would have been useful to meet with support staff knowledgeable about their career area: “When I looked for internships, [school] Career Services had absolutely no understanding of my field, and no way to help me find related internships. They seemed to take the approach that any internship was good enough.” A 2015 alumna with a degree in music emphasized the importance of arts-specific internships and resources to support these opportunities: “Make more arts-related internships and jobs available. Provide more support for the many, many arts students on campus.”

Potential Practices for Providing Internship Search

Support: A 2015 alumna with a degree in design offered more specific suggestions for how to “create opportunities” for interns: “Provide support to get one, job postings, connections to firms or corporations. Help with creating a desirable portfolio so that the student can get an internship.” This alumna advocated that schools create internship opportunities by better

publicizing opportunities (other alumni suggested creating searchable lists), establishing formal connections with internship hosts and/or enacting alumni networks to facilitate internship experiences for students associated with a school or program, and providing support for interns as they apply for opportunities, coaching students on professional skills, such as interviewing, and helping applicants prepare materials, such as portfolios or cover letters.

Guidance and Advising

In addition to suggesting support in the internship search process, many alumni reported wanting more support and advising when preparing for, choosing, and completing internships, as well as leveraging internship experiences to enable future career opportunities.

General Guidance: Many graduates suggested more guidance and support from their educational institutions during their internships would have improved their internship experiences. A 1994 graduate suggested, “better communication with students about what to expect at an internship, what the ‘real world’ is like.” A 1998 graduate with a fine arts degree proposed, “a meeting before it began to get an idea of how to relate it to my work at school and potential work after graduating.” A 2011 art history graduate advised that schools simply, “share more information” and “walk applicants through the process.”

Individualized Advising: In addition to requesting general guidance about navigating the internship experience, other arts alumni advocated for individualized advising. A 2015 theater major wrote, “I had no one to tell me how to be in a professional environment...[I needed someone to] see how I was handling things, what my goals were, helping me to see them realized.” A 2001 media arts graduate proposed, “have a career counselor, professor, or mentor who would ask periodically how things were going and offer ideas.” In order to ensure that the internship is a meaningful experience for arts students, many suggested requiring a designated, individualized conversation about goals and experiences.

Careers and Professionalization: Additionally, many alumni wanted guidance around translating internship experiences into employment outcomes. A 1996 media arts graduate suggested that schools should “guide students on what would be best practices for continuing relationships with companies and staff” after completing an internship. A 2008 theater major proposed a space for students “to process the experience and apply to my own career path.” These alumni agreed that providing a venue for reflecting on how internships serve individual and collective career goals in the creative economy would contextualize their internship experiences and help them develop professional skills and long-term plans.

Financial Concerns

One out of five (20%) of alumni wrote about financial concerns related to completing an internship while an undergraduate student. Some expressed concerns about pay (and, relatedly, exploitation) and establishing funding structures to support arts internships. Others described struggling to complete internships with school and paid employment, debt, and tuition.

Pay and Exploitation: Many alumni described the challenges of unpaid internships. A 2014 fine arts graduate quite simply suggested, “Make sure students working at these internships are paid for their hours working... Internships should not be free labor.” Concerns about pay are even more prescient for those interns who engaged in creative labor while interning. A 1981 media arts major wrote, “I worked a 50-hour week and actually wrote host copy and produced segments... they got an awful lot of work out of me and they certainly had the money to pay minimum wage for that kind of effort.” These alumni suggested that schools play an active role in supporting paid internship opportunities by collecting lists of paid opportunities, putting pressure on intern hosts to compensate interns, and by thinking creatively about how to fund unpaid internship opportunities, especially in the arts, where funding is especially limited.

Funding Internships and Equity in the Arts: Some arts graduates acknowledged that not all intern hosts

may be able to pay interns for their work, but this does not mean that such an experience was not valuable for a student. Instead, these alumni suggested ways that schools might subsidize unpaid intern experiences. A 2002 art history major advised that schools “pay students to have internships with artists or organizations that cannot afford to pay interns themselves.” A 1992 art history graduate suggested offering, “Stipends to pursue unpaid internships, as many are unpaid in the arts field.” A 2004 media arts graduate wrote about equity concerns and suggested leveraging the power that schools might have to ensure an equitable arts internship experience was available to all students when they advised: “promote paid internships or pay internships directly... I’ve come to believe that the tradition of unpaid internships hurts diversity, which makes us weaker and less agile as an industry.”

Extracurricular Employment as a Constraint: There are financial realities that may constrain students’ ability to participate in unpaid internships, which take time away from hours that can be spent earning money they need. A 2007 arts education alumnus explained, “It was very difficult to survive working an internship for free. Miserable actually.” A 2016 graduate wrote about the challenge of students on financial aid, who took on “less desirable internships” in order to keep paid jobs, juggling, “classes and work with no pay, with no time to work a paying job as well.” Some students had financial needs that made unpaid internship responsibilities nearly impossible to meet, thus constraining their ability to participate in programmatic requirements and/or the creative labor market.

Educational Debt: Internships may also exacerbate students’ educational debt. A 2007 graduate explained, “all internships completed were unpaid and 40+ hours/week, [so I] was unable to work. This made for very difficult economic times, especially when you do not simply want to rack up educational loan debt.” A 2014 arts education graduate described, “even though I learned a lot from [my unpaid internships], I could have taken less money in student loans had there been more money” in the forms of paid internships, time for paid employment, or more scholarship aid.

Tuition and Paying for Internship Credits: Finally, many alumni frustratedly wrote about the seemingly common practice of paying tuition for internship credits. A 2013 art history graduate proposed, “stop requiring students to pay you tuition money for an internship...It’s absurd in the arts sector to expect that the student will not only work for free as an intern, but that you have the gall to charge them three credit hours of tuition.” A 2007 media arts alumnus echoed this frustration: “Drop the cost of an internship credit...it cost me somewhere around \$2,000 for me to work for free for 12 hours a week.”

From concerns about exploitation to funding practices that exacerbate student debt, the financial system of internships was frustrating and, indeed, harmful to many arts alumni. Given the centrality and increasing popularity of internships in the arts in higher education, it may be time to revisit policies and practices around financing internships in the arts, especially considering the substantial proportion of students who relied on family support to fund their internship experiences.

School Oversight

Some alumni (approximately 14%) described wanting more school oversight and involvement in students’ internships. They suggested that schools could position themselves as student advocates, vetting intern hosts to ensure that students were not exploited or mistreated and that internships serve interns’ and schools’ educational goals. Others suggested this oversight take the form of open information sharing between students and former interns and school administrators. Overall, these alumni requested that schools establish practices of greater involvement in students’ internship experiences.

Schools as Intern Advocates: Many former interns described challenges in navigating the expectations and, sometimes, exploitation of intern labor at their internship sites, and they suggested seeking and receiving support from their educational institutions while they navigated these challenges. A 1996 media arts major wrote, “Be the students’ advocate. Check in with them periodically to make sure they are OK. Some students may not feel like they can discuss with the school any

problems they are having in their internship.” A 1985 media arts major advised, “make sure the business offering the internship realizes there is accountability. They can’t just use students as free labor for the grunt jobs.”

Vetting Intern Hosts: One of the most common forms of advocacy that alumni suggested was “vetting” and “monitoring” internship hosts to ensure both that students are meeting educational goals and not just “free labor” and also to ensure that students were being treated ethically and professionally. A 2003 graduate advised schools, “closely monitor the types of internships being offered. [Establish] stricter rules/criteria for the employers.” A 1983 media arts major encouraged schools, “keep [interns] away from big organizations or corporations that tend to take advantage of them as free labor.”

Sexual Harassment: This role of advocacy is especially salient when it comes to issues of harassment and discrimination (Gualtieri, 2020). A 2009 graduate wrote, “I was sexually harassed at work. I didn’t believe I could leave the internship without messing up my credits and incurring another semester of thousands upon thousands of dollars’ worth of debt.” As interns enter the working world from a position of vulnerability, they need support and advocacy from their educational institutions, and request greater support and oversight from their programs as they navigate these situations of harassment and other forms of mistreatment.

Information Exchange: Some respondents suggested that schools provide opportunities for students to share information and feedback about intern hosts among their peer group as a means of preventing continued mistreatment at known problematic internship sites. A 1994 architecture alumnus requested “a chance to share our experience with fellow students.” Likewise, a 2013 media arts graduate described, “I had a nightmare internship experience and I wish there was a better way to effectively communicate that it was not a place I’d want anyone else to intern at.” For these alumni, schools could provide venues for informal information exchange so students have the opportunity to evaluate internship hosts, and future interns can better navigate or avoid problematic settings.

Positive Internship Experiences

Prior research would suggest that alumni who respond to open-ended survey questions tend to have more negative feelings than those who do not respond (Miller & Lambert, 2014). While most alumni surveyed suggested opportunities for improvement in response to the prompt, it is also worth noting that 8% of respondents described their internship experiences as positive, using phrases such as “it was perfect!,” “I loved it,” and “great mentorship” to characterize their internships. These graduates noted the value of their internship experiences in relation to their career outcomes and the salient, “on-the-job,” “real world” learning that they believed was not possible in the classroom. For example:

- “I had the best internship experience at [museum]. I was offered a fulltime position upon graduation...I loved everything about it!” (Graduated 1990, art history major)
- “I loved my internships. I feel both had the value of a year of classes.” (Graduated 2012, art history major)
- “My internship...opened the door to my entire career.” (Graduated 2013, media arts major)

These alumni reflected positively on their internship experiences, stressing the value and impact internships had on their career outcomes and learning. Internships are an increasingly common and valuable step in many arts careers. However, with so many areas for potential improvement evident in alumni responses to the SNAAP internship module, the results presented in this report offer an ideal opportunity to reconsider how colleges and universities approach and manage internships in the arts.

Recommendations Based on Feedback from Alumni

In their own words, alumni articulated two main areas for potential improvement at higher education institutions: clarity and resources.

Clarity: Generally, the most common concerns arts alumni articulated were those related to information, guidance, and support before, during, and after the

internship experience. Therefore, alumni feedback calls for more clarity in policies, procedures, and practices related to internships. Schools typically list formal policies online (e.g., How many credits are offered for how many hours of work? How are internships assigned and approved?). However, alumni feedback calls for further clarity regarding:

- The purpose of an internship in the context of the curriculum (What is the purpose of an internship?).
- Work expectations (What kind of mentorship can students expect from the internship site? What are the learning goals?).
- The school’s role in the student’s internship (Will the school advocate for the student? When should a student approach the school for help? Who should they contact?).
- Financing internships (Does the school require that interns be paid?).

By clarifying formal policies and procedures surrounding internships, schools can alleviate some of the anxiety surrounding the internship process that alumni articulated.

Resources: Alumni feedback calls for more resources related to the organization and execution of internship programs. These resources include:

- Further supporting students to find internships; consider creating a mechanism (e.g., a student-only database) for former interns to share experiences with potential interns.
- Investing more time, staff, and funds in formal programs, designated offices, or individuals that can support arts-specific internship programs.
- Reconsidering the existing funding structures for internships and internship coordination on campus, especially the practice of charging tuition for unpaid internship experiences.
- Further considering ways to financially support unpaid internships (stipends; corporate partnerships; housing; scholarships; grants and fellowships; funds for living expenses or other internship-related expenses, such as professional attire and transportation costs).

While colleges and universities may already have policies, programs, and practices in place that do some of the things alumni suggested above, we encourage higher education arts leaders to consider whether their support of internship programs match the importance of these experiences in the educational and career pathways of their graduates.

8. Conclusion

Amidst many other pressing financial concerns during and after a global pandemic, higher education professionals should not lose sight of how a tightening job market will shape student internships—during the Great Recession, unpaid internships became more prevalent than paid ones (Frenette et al., 2015), which exacerbated an unequal intern economy, notably in the arts (Sutton, 2019; Walker, 2016). To support educationally ambitious internships with positive career outcomes for its students, higher education institutions must work to ensure a growth (not a decline) in paid internship opportunities.

Addressing the need for more resources and clarity in the intern economy is especially important due to the pandemic and its economic repercussions. Research confirms the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the arts and culture sector; since mid-March 2020, the pandemic has (at least temporarily) cost the U.S. arts economy millions of jobs as well as billions of dollars in lost revenue (Florida & Seman, 2020; Iyengar & Nichols, 2020).

As this report shows, the growing importance of personal resources in finding an internship raises additional concerns about access beyond who gets paid (or not) as an intern, though this issue was likely made worse in times of COVID-19 when internship listings were cut in half (Nietzel, 2020). Interns are always at risk of feeling isolated (Vasel, 2020) during day-to-day, but it remains to be seen how the rise of online internships (Smith-Barrow, 2020) in 2020 shaped mentorship, work assignments, and oversight for paid and unpaid experiences.

Higher education professionals should be particularly vigilant about the impact of the rise of “multi-interns,” since the divide between who cannot intern, who does so once, and who completes multiple internships creates further challenges for equity in the arts. Not only are first-generation college graduates less likely to intern, they are also less likely than more privileged alumni to do multiple internships.

While the intern economy reflects and, sometimes, reproduces systems of inequality, higher education can enact policies and procedures that address and perhaps remedy these inequities. Given the increasing prevalence of internships and a changing economic and working landscape, especially in the arts, post-COVID-19 pandemic, the findings presented here can guide meaningful change in higher education and create opportunities for equity, applied experiential learning, and career development in the future.

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