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**STRATEGIC
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Does creative coursework predict educational, career, and community engagement outcomes for arts alumni?

This [article](#) featuring SNAAP data was recently published in *Creativity Research Journal*. SNAAP research scientist, Angie Miller, at Indiana University Bloomington, used SNAAP data to explore whether exposure to creative coursework during one's time at their institution was able to predict several different career and arts involvement outcomes for alumni with undergraduate degrees in the arts. This study originated from a presentation in the summer of 2018, at the annual [SOU Creativity Conference](#).

There is considerable evidence concerning the effectiveness of creativity training ([Scott et al., 2004](#)), and studies link the behaviors of teachers or instructors to creative outputs ([Sternberg, 2010](#)). Research with undergraduate students shows that exposure to creative coursework is a predictor of student engagement in various areas, such as academic challenge, learning with peers, experiences with faculty, and perceptions of the campus environment ([Miller, 2018](#)). Given [recent discussions](#) in higher education regarding the return-on-investment of a college degree, it is

important to dive into how different aspects of arts education (in this case creative coursework) might predict career outcomes.

This study explored whether exposure to creative coursework during one's education can influence several different outcomes, including sense of connection to one's institution, time until first job after graduation, relevance of first job after graduation, relevance of training to current occupation, current income, current occupational field, and arts community involvement. Data from over 40,000 undergraduate-level arts alumni from the 2015, 2016, and 2017 SNAAP administrations was used to investigate these potential relationships.

To measure exposure to creative coursework, a set of items was used as a scale. This set of items asked "The coursework at [INSTITUTION] emphasized the following" with response options of *not at all*, *very little*, *some*, and *very much*.

- generating new ideas or brainstorming

- taking risks in your coursework without fear of penalty

- evaluating multiple approaches to a problem

- inventing new methods to arrive at unconventional solutions

A series of regression models found that creative coursework significantly predicted various desired career and arts-related outcomes. These relationships were apparent even after statistically controlling for gender, race/ethnicity, parent artist status, parent education level, major, overall institutional satisfaction, and self-reported acquired creative thinking.

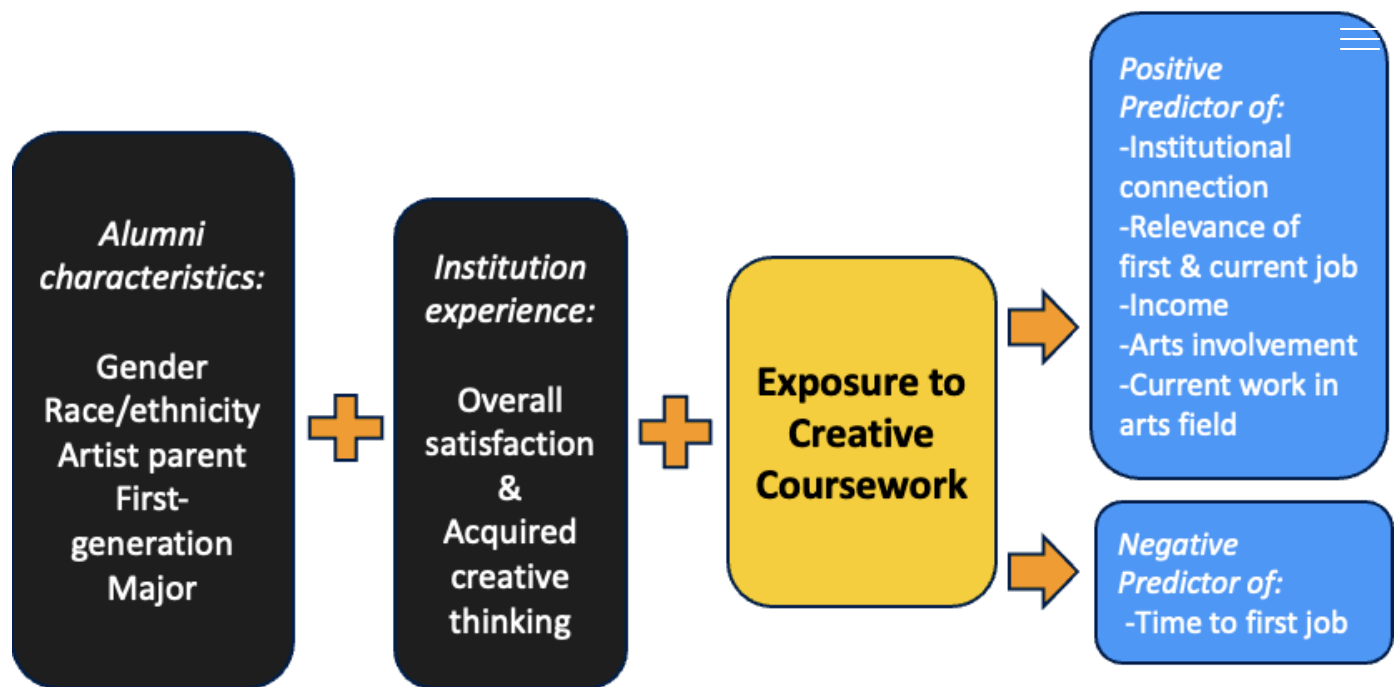


Figure 1 Summary of Regression Results

In most cases, exposure to creative coursework was a positive predictor, meaning that the more exposure to creative coursework during time at the institution, the more likely the outcome. This was the case for feelings of connection to the institution after graduation, the relevance of one's first job as well as one's current job to their arts training, income, currently working in an arts field, and the degree of current arts involvement in one's community.

Exposure to creative coursework was a negative predictor of time to first job after graduation, meaning that those with more exposure to creative coursework took less time to find a job after graduation. However, the strength of all these relationships varied in magnitude, indicating that some of the relationships were more robust than others. For instance, the connection between creative coursework and relevance of training to one's current job was stronger ($\beta=.123$) than the connection between creative coursework and income ($\beta=.034$)

Overall, this study provides valuable insight into the influence that creative coursework can have on many different alumni outcomes. These findings might inspire research for other disciplines as well, discovering the ways in which creative activities can have long-lasting benefits across many different fields. The results also support the importance of gathering alumni data, as it allows us to look beyond the educational experience and delve into both traditional and non-traditional career outcomes along with post-graduate community involvement. Development of creative skills serves

students past graduation and into the future. As one alumnus shared in the final open-ended question on the survey, he holds an enormous appreciation for his institutional experiences:

“The brain is a creative muscle. The more you use it for creative pursuits, the stronger it gets. I feel that being in a creative field has made my life more creative in all aspects and that has brought me happiness. [My institution] started me down this path and I’m grateful.”

This DataBrief was prepared by Angie. L Miller at Indiana University, Bloomington.

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