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From Theory to Practice in the Ivory Tower: How Degree Programs in Arts Management Contribute to Professional Practice

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in Arts Management contribute to professional practice.

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Abstract

Amid public criticism about the academic nature of degree programs in Arts Management, the authors illustrate how degree programs contribute to professional practice and the financial impact of that practice through off-campus and on-campus internships. More importantly, this article offers Arts Management educators a new way for viewing experiential education in Arts Management by highlighting undocumented professional practice.

KEYWORDS

Arts Management education, Arts Management practice, Arts Management theory, Experiential Education, and Internships.

INTRODUCTION

Arts Management educators aspire to balance academic rigor and professional relevance in preparing the next generation of arts leaders. For students in Arts Management degree programs, this learning translates into an introduction to management theories combined with the opportunity to practice their application of theories to address current and critical issues practitioners face daily. This learning extends beyond the classroom in the form of experiential education required to complete degrees (Jeffri 1983; Hutchens & Zoë 1985; Baker 1989; Martin & Rich 1998a; Rich & Martin 2010b). Nonetheless, some practitioners have argued that several degree programs are too academic in their approach to educating future arts managers. Many believe on-the-job learning is more important than learning in the classroom.

Michael Kaiser, President of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and former adjunct faculty member in Arts Administration at New York University (2009) stated that, “Arts management is a young field. While wonderful impresarios have operated for centuries, serious codification of the rules of arts management began less than fifty years ago. And while we have a number of academic programs offered by universities across the nation, there are simply not enough of them, and several are too academic in their approach. Arts management, after all, is a practical field, like medicine, and must be taught through real-time, real world experiences.”

When Rich & Martin (1998a; 2010b) asked Arts Management professionals, how well positioned are degree programs to serve professional performing arts organizations, most responded “neither well or not well positioned.” One respondent stated, “Academic training carries less value than on-the-job training, and having worked with mostly new graduates I have found that a formal education, even at some top management schools rarely equates to skill, and ability to apply that knowledge, or understanding.”

While these comments may place Arts Management educators on the defensive, they also provide an opportunity for serious consideration of the question, how do degree programs in Arts Management contribute to professional practice? Therefore, we argue that Arts Management degree programs contribute to professional practice through off-campus and on-campus internships. Through case studies of two different degree programs, this study documents how significantly internships, a required curricular component of most degree programs, contribute to professional practice. However, the authors first contextualize internships in experiential education and learning.

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION & LEARNING

The Association for Experiential Education (2012) defined experiential education as a philosophy in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities. Although Confucius, Immanuel Kant, Maria Montessori, John Dewey, and Paulo Freire, all contributed to the development of experiential education and learning as viable means for professional preparedness, the authors believe Kolb's experiential learning theory best supports how faculty use experiential learning in the Arts Management curriculum (Experiential Learning Toolbox 2012).

In 1984, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory described experiential learning as "the process whereby learners create knowledge through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results

from the combination of grasping and transforming experience." Kolb's theory presents a four-stage cycle that includes: (1) concrete experience, (2) reflective observation, (3) abstract conceptualization, and lastly (4) active experimentation. The cycle begins with an experience that the student has had, followed by an opportunity to reflect on that experience. Then students may conceptualize and draw conclusions about what they experienced and observed, leading to future actions in which the students experiment with different behaviors (Kolb 1984). Essentially, without the experience of practice, students cannot learn.

Faculty create the place for experiential learning and practice in the Arts Management curriculum through apprenticeships, case studies, cross-cultural experiences, fellowships, fieldwork, group projects, internships, open-ended projects, research projects, role-plays, service learning, and study abroad. However, it is imperative that faculty, practitioners, scholars, and students reach a consensus about the definition and nature of practice. As DeVereaux (2009) argued, a discourse of practice should examine the institutionalized ways of thinking about the practices of a field and allow for critical examination of practices to understand the epistemological, ethical, and conditioned assumptions that underpin them. Additionally, a discourse of practice might facilitate a discussion about how faculty introduces students to the practice of specific Arts Management skills in the classroom.

For example, faculty might ask Arts Management students to develop a business plan for a nonprofit arts organization in teams. By interrogating an assignment like this for its practical educational value, we propose that students begin developing and practicing a plethora of hard and soft skills including conceptual and critical thinking, interpersonal relations, strategic planning, verbal and written communication, and multi-tasking among others. However, the importance of experiential learning in Arts Management, particularly when it comes to internships, is that it enhances teaching and learning, helps to increase professional preparedness, socializes students to their future roles as professionals, and provides professional practice to arts organizations.

INTERNSHIPS IN ARTS MANAGEMENT

Internships provide students hands-on experiences that bring considerable relevance to the issues they have begun to explore in the academic setting. Internships in turn typically provide low, or no-cost, temporary staffing for the institutions, organizations, and festivals that host them. Internships also advance the professionalization of the field of Arts Management by further orienting students to the profession (Murphy 1977; Rolston & Herrea 2000).

While some scholars have questioned the legality of unpaid internships in Arts Management, many students readily accept placements that provide little or no compensation for the work they perform (Mager 2011). For example, an undergraduate Arts Management major might complete an unpaid summer internship at a for-profit music recording company to learn more about the operations of such a company. Although the student contributes to the company, s/he engages in the internship primarily for the benefits of learning and professional development. Similarly, a graduate student in Arts Administration might receive a paid summer internship at a non-profit summer opera festival where s/he learns about the operations of such a festival (Brindle, 2011). This student's motivations for completing the internship include fulfilling a graduation requirement, practicing Arts Management skills, while earning minimal compensation to defray costs of tuition for the required degree credits. In each case, the opportunity to practice and enhance their skills takes a higher priority in the student's motivation

for accepting the internship than earning money. While interning, students complete tasks and accomplish administrative work similar to that of full-time or part-time employees.

As academic programs have increased since the 1970's, so has the total number of students interning with organizations across the country and abroad. While the number of work hours required for degree credit varies across academic programs, the work hours dedicated to organizations during this 40-plus year time span has been significant. The authors recognize that when internships are successful, outcomes provide many positive rewards for each party; and in the ideal situation may equally benefit each party, the college or university, student, and host arts organization. In some instances, relationships established between the student and the staff person during the internship, continue long past its duration. In other instances, the internship has either proved so valuable, that the host arts organization hires the student post-graduation into a vacant staff position, or into one created because of his/her success.

Despite all of these potentially positive alignments, the typical financial arrangements of internships, both undergraduate and graduate, disproportionately favor the host organization. First, the student must pay tuition for the academic institution's registration fees, often exceeding thousands of dollars. Second, the financial arrangements for the internships vary from organization to organization, and sometimes even within the same institution. This disparity often results in student uncertainty and confusion. For example, "Internship A" may reimburse travel and provide housing, while "Internship B" may provide a food stipend and a modest scholarship. In some cases, often with the most prestigious and nationally recognized cultural organizations, interns must absorb all costs relating to their internships, presumably because of the perceived exclusive value of the host's reputation.

Some professionals submit that the gains made by students in honing their skills in "real time" with "real professionals" at a "real arts organization" represent sufficient reward, particularly at the beginning of a career. Some faculty and practitioners further the argument with references to a stressed economy and tight budgets. Others argue that the academic credit earned by the student is a form of payment. Regardless of such sentiments, we submit that the convention of low and non-paid, student internships has resulted in significant professional practice to many, many arts organizations. Whether the financial arrangements of these internships are either unethical or illegal, or both, are topics for future exploration.

In light of the fallacious criticism, mentioned earlier, that academic degree programs are too academic and lack enough opportunity for on-the-job training, we offer the following cases as contrary evidence. Descriptions of off-campus internships from a graduate Arts Administration program, and descriptions of on-campus internships at an undergraduate Arts Management program demonstrate how, and to what extent, two distinct academic programs currently contribute to professional practice, including specific financial impact.

RATIONALE FOR SELECTION OF CASES

Siggelkow (2007) pointed out three important uses for case research: motivation, inspiration, and illustration (p. 21). Intrinsic case study has unusual interest in and of itself, while researchers focus on an issue or concern, and then select one bounded case to illustrate the issue in an instrumental case study (Creswell, 2013, p. 99; Stake, 1995, p. 4). Each case then serves as a distinct experiment that stands on its own as an analytic unit (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25).

We choose the two cases presented here for three reasons. First, the cases show different perspectives on how a graduate and an undergraduate Arts Management degree program contributed to professional practice (Creswell, 2013, p. 100). The academic programs represent a norm one might expect of an older and more established graduate program and a new and developing undergraduate program. Secondly, as faculty members directly associated with the academic programs presented as cases, we had opportunities for unusual research access (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 27), which proved hospitable to our inquiry (Stake, 1995, p. 4). Lastly, these cases illustrate very well the point that academic programs in Arts Management make considerable contributions to practice and this practice has a significant financial impact.

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY (FSU) OFF-CAMPUS INTERNSHIPS

The Florida State University (FSU) College of Music has offered the M.A. in Arts Administration since 1995. Students fulfill their internships in a range of settings, mostly off-campus. While designed to ensure a reciprocally valuable experience for the student and the host organization, internships add to the College's participation in the university's mission and broader commitment to community and civic engagement. Within this context, Program Director, Anne Hodges, compiled a snapshot of students' internships and their impact over a nine-year period.

As is typical with similar programs, FSU requires students to devote a semester to the internship. Their work contributes to the management at a host site in such areas as arts advocacy, arts education, artist relations, box office/sales, budget/finance, development, fundraising/patron services, board relations, grant research/writing, marketing, operations, outreach/community engagement, personnel, planning, and evaluation. For each internship credit hour earned, the student must work a minimum of 65 work hours, and pay the university's current tuition and fees.

While most students completed unpaid internships in this case, some received travel, meal, or housing allowances. Host organizations often account for these living allowances as "scholarship award," rather than add to their payroll expense. Students who did not receive travel stipends absorbed those costs in addition to tuition and fees. When students completed two or more internships, their costs increased due to additional travel, and possibly even a graduation delay, while in such cases, two or possibly more, host organizations were the beneficiaries of the student's work. Each student in this study earned a satisfactory written assessment from his/her supervisor, and each subsequently graduated.

Data Collection

From individual student transcripts, dating from spring 2001 to summer 2010, Hodges logged all internship work hours earned by each student for academic credit. She logged and totaled hours using a simple Excel spreadsheet and applied the part-time rate of \$10 per hour (Florida) to calculate the gross, non-taxed payroll represented by these student internship hours. She also recorded and compiled the total number and type of host sites, along with the various departments to which the student interned.

Data Analysis

Hodges calculated student work hours into 40-hour work weeks. The 40-hour work week formula ensured accuracy: student interns typically exceeded the 40-hour standard work week, due to extra hours required to work during evening rehearsals, meetings, and events and/or weekend performances. Hodges then converted the 40-hour work weeks into 50-week work

years. Hodges assumed 50-week, rather than 52-week work years since full-time U.S. employees typically receive a minimum of two vacation weeks per year.

Host organizations were assigned one of six “site types” designated as either (1) a symphony orchestra, (2) a choral group, (3) an opera company, (4) a performing arts center (presenter), (5) a summer music festival/institute, or (6) an arts council/cultural affairs office. These host organizations varied in operational and budget ranges from small, such as the Tallahassee Community Chorus with an operating budget just over \$125,000, to large, such as the Chicago Symphony/Ravinia Festival a multi-million dollar enterprise.

Data Evaluation

From 2001 – 2010, graduate students enrolled in Arts Administration at the FSU College of Music completed 103 internships. These students provided professional-level, administrative work for 68 different host organizations in 16 U.S. states and 4 foreign countries including Korea, China, Czechoslovakia, and the U.K (London).

Students collectively contributed the equivalent of 52,604 work hours in a variety of organizational departments. These hours totaled to the equivalent of 1,315 (40-hour) work weeks, which translated to 26.3 (50-week) work years. At a \$10 per (non-taxed) hourly rate, this represents the gross payroll equivalent of \$500,000.

With students enrolled in over sixty similar Arts Management programs in the U.S. and abroad, this case example represents only a fraction of the total impact of student internship contribution within all graduate-level degree programs during the same time. It also interestingly hints at the full impact of these, as well as, undergraduate internships over the aggregate period of time that these programs have been in existence.

PURCHASE COLLEGE, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK (SUNY) ON-CAMPUS INTERNSHIPS

Purchase College, State University of New York (SUNY) has a bifurcated organizational structure divided into the School of the Arts and the School of Liberal Arts. Four conservatory programs in Music, Theatre, Dance, and Art + Design make up the School of the Arts. Additionally, Purchase hosts two professional arts institutions on campus, the Neuberger Museum and the Performing Arts Center. While this structure is ripe with possibilities, all components act as silos unto themselves.

The Arts Management program at Purchase, still in its infancy, only hired its first two full-time faculty members in 2009. The new faculty began to research ways in which the program could better interface with the rest of the campus community. The campus maintained a tradition of on-campus internships as part of its Career Development Center, but most jobs were not Arts Management related. With a growing program, Arts Management students needed more opportunities to practice their skills on-campus.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of Arts Management, the faculty saw an opportunity to make connections throughout the campus, tackle the management needs of the arts, and establish internships for students, especially since the Arts Management program requires students to complete an on-campus and off-campus internship in order to graduate. Students typically complete internships for 4 credit hours or 150 hours per semester, 10 hours a week. Similar to other degree programs in Arts Management, internships require both site supervisors and faculty advisors to evaluate student’s work over the course of a semester.

Data Collection

To effectively develop the on-campus internship program for undergraduate students in Arts Management, faculty needed knowledge of the campus conservatories and professional arts organizations' needs. During the spring of 2010, students in the Introduction to Arts Management course formed research teams based on their arts discipline of interest. With the range of work produced on campus and New York state budget challenges resulting in reduced staffing and limited funding, it became clear that Arts Management would fill a real need for the college and its internationally famous museum and celebrated performing arts center. Thus, the research teams set out to find where the campus community needed Arts Management's talents the most.

Most areas desperately needed marketing (especially social media), company management, house management, arts in education coordination, exhibition assistance, and production/event planning. Through interviews with various site supervisors, the research teams produced a list of possible on-campus internships. The Career Development Center and site supervisors wrote on-line job descriptions for students to search for internships. Although site supervisors expressed initial reluctance due to their concern that the interns would require extensive training, the Arts Management program answered their concerns with the support of the Career Development Center.

Because on-campus internships were often students' first internship, the Arts Management faculty added a monthly seminar to monitor students' progress and prepare them for their future off-campus internship. Professor Hauptman based students' grades on the site supervisors' evaluations, a daily journal of their experience, a reflection paper, and attendance at the monthly seminars. She also encouraged students to discuss issues about their on-campus internship for group problem solving in class.

Data Analysis & Evaluation

During the 2010-2011 academic year, 30 Arts Management students, predominately juniors completed on-campus internships with the Conservatories of Theatre Arts, Art + Design, and Music; the Humanities Theatre, the Dramatic Writing Program, the Passage Gallery (a student exhibition space), Project Focus (a community service program), the Neuberger Museum, and the Performing Arts Center. Each intern worked at least 150 hours over the semester in marketing & audience development, social media design & coordination, general management, company management, house management, box office & patron services, arts in education, mentoring & peer leadership, grant research, information technology, scheduling, gallery organization & installation, budget & finance, and facility operations. Students collectively completed between 4,500 – 6,000 hours (many worked beyond 10 hours a week), 15 weeks per semester, 30 weeks per annum.

In one academic year, the financial impact of interns' professional practice totaled \$32,625 dollars, based on the students' hours calculated at \$7.25, the state of New York minimum wage hourly rate. If Purchase had hired part-time staff for these 30 positions at \$7,540 per annum not including benefits, the financial impact would total nearly \$226,200. The on-campus internship has proven successful three fold because students received real time and real world learning experiences bolstered by academic course work, the departments and the professional arts institutions across campus received additional managerial support, and Purchase saved additional staff/operating costs. The students have responded positively and had meaningful managerial "aha" moments as they realized the connections between what they had

learned and practiced. These experiences intensified their Arts Management study while the college produced arts managers with a command of theory and professional practice.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this article, we illustrated how two degree programs in Arts Management contribute to professional practice through off- and on-campus internships. We also documented the financial impact of these internships to the institutions that host them. With more than 100 graduate and undergraduate degree program members of the Association of Arts Administration Educators (AAAE 2011), we hope to inspire an expanded study: one, which draws from all degree programs and add new and interesting data that documents contributions to professional practice made through internships.

The results also point to a more relevant conversation, especially if the internships within these academic programs represent an impact as significant as these results suggest; perhaps it is time to ask in what ways might Arts Management educators meaningfully communicate these impacts to host arts organizations, practitioners, and potential funders of internship programs? Moreover, in what ways might we work together to improve and strengthen these internships for students, host arts organizations, and ultimately, for the field at large? The authors suggest the model provided here for colleagues who wish to articulate the professional practice and financial impact that their programs have through internships.

The DeVos Institute of Arts Management is committed to training Arts Managers. In fact, a content analysis of the institute's website shows the word "train" or "training" listed multiple times in its mission (John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts 2011). Degree programs have a commitment to educating arts managers, which implies a process that goes beyond simply teaching, as DeVereaux (2009) stated, the action-oriented and utilitarian aims of Arts Management. To develop reflective practitioners, educators must commit to having a constant comparative discourse of practice that questions assumptions about best practices and examines the deeper structures of ways of doing and thinking within Arts Management. Arts Management educators have to teach arts managers how to manage the arts, but also how to think about managing the arts. In the ever changing and complex arts and entertainment industry, arts managers cannot afford to simply know that something works. They need to know what works and why it works.

While preparing a presentation on this topic for the AAAE 2011 conference in Boston, a student inspired the authors to consider student's perspectives regarding internship issues in Arts Management. How might students view these issues and what expectations might students have of their internships? We also considered how arts organizations approach designing internships and how much Arts Management could learn from in-depth study of a highly regarded premier internship program in an arts organization. Alas, these are areas where Arts Management could benefit from further study. Still, the authors encourage Arts Management educators to consider how their degree programs contribute to and serve the profession. More, well-placed PR about Arts Management degree programs' real impact through internships will help balance the conversation with professionals in the field while identifying meaningful ways degree programs contribute to professional practice from their seemingly privileged positions in the ivory tower.

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