

The Arts at Michigan

A Benchmarking Report

A joint project of

M | ARTS INITIATIVE

M | ARTS ENGINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

 **a2ru**
CREATE • CONNECT • CHANGE





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Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Context and History	8
Insights	8
Connecting the Arts Across Campus	8
The Origins of Arts Units, Consolidating on North Campus	12
Arts Integration at the 21st Century: Strong and Decentralized	12
Role of the Arts at U-M	15
Insights	15
Students	16
Faculty	22
Staff	24
Assets, Needs, and Challenges	27
Assets	28
Insights	28
Needs and Challenges	36
Insights	36
The Student Experience	43
Introduction	43
Demographics 2023-24	44
Insights	46
Student Artist Identities	47
Impacts on Students	48
Student arts involvement: The “why” and “how”	72
Climate and Barriers to Student Arts Engagement	85
Recommendations	96

Faculty and Staff Experience	98
Introduction	98
Definition of the arts	99
Personal engagement with the arts	100
Insights.....	100
The arts and U-M	103
Insight.....	103
The arts and belonging	104
Insights.....	104
Arts assets	109
Arts gaps: Needs and desires	110
Insights.....	110
Recommendations.....	112
Arts-designated faculty: Teaching and research	113
Insights.....	113
Recommendations.....	118
Non-arts-designated faculty teaching and research	118
Insights.....	118
Recommendations.....	123
Arts Research at the University of Michigan	126
Introduction	126
Insights	128
Increasing the Legibility of Arts Research	128
Increasing the Visibility of Arts Research at U-M	136
Recommendations.....	142
Arts Research Examples	143
Arts-integrated Research Examples	144

Case Study: Interview with arts researcher Catie Newell	148
The Arts and Culture Beyond Campus	151
Insights	151
Context and Background	151
A vision for the arts in the Ann Arbor region: University and regional arts organization partnership	152
The role of the university	154
Culture of Collaboration	156
Challenges	157
Pathways Forward through Convenings	157
The Arts at Dearborn	159
Introduction	159
Overview of the The Arts at Dearborn	163
Opportunities for Growth	165
The Student Experience	171
Recommendations.....	183
Enrollment	183
Credits and Acknowledgements	189
The Arts at Flint	190
Introduction	190
A Tradition of an Arts-Forward Campus	191
Arts as a Career Path	194
In-depth: Arts & Culture Research Cluster	194
Opportunities for Growth	198
The Student Experience	204
Enrollment	217
Conclusion	226

Credits and Acknowledgements	226
Institutional Research	227
Volume of research at U-M	227
Existing U-M surveys and the arts	228
Enrollment trends in the arts in higher education	229
Internal Perspectives: Benchmarking for the Arts Initiative	250
Appendix A: Faculty/Staff Survey	257
Methodology	257
Appendix B: U-M Dearborn	261
Methodology	261
Enrollment Trends	262
Appendix C: U-M Flint	281
Enrollment Indices	281
Endnotes	298

Introduction

The Arts at the University of Michigan: A Benchmarking Report provides a picture of the Arts at the University of Michigan (U-M). Over the course of a year and a half (2024-2025), the Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities (a2ru) and ArtsEngine staff partnered with Arts Initiative (AIM) staff to illustrate the arts ecosystem at U-M.

Nationally, the arts tend to be data poor and uniquely difficult to quantify. This paucity of comparable information results in the arts often being undervalued on campus. This project endeavors to:

- provide a landscape analysis of the arts at U-M, establishing benchmarks for longitudinal analysis
- make clear the value of the arts, as well as the unique set of skills students who engage with the arts acquire, and how those skills benefit their lives, careers, and communities
- contribute to metadata standards that benefit the arts in higher education as a field, specifically: a model protocol for both quantifying and describing the arts landscape across higher education, thus enabling deeper arts impacts research and informing best practices for “accounting” for the arts on campus

This report represents a second phase of the project, augmenting an initial report [“Arts Data Pilot for the University of Michigan”](#) completed in 2023.

For the initial quantitative study represented in that 2023 report, a2ru and a seasoned advisory team of arts researchers and evaluators as well as U-M staff and students endeavored to map the university’s considerable arts assets—including both formal and informal arts experiences. The purpose of the project was to understand “what we have” in order to inform strategic planning around arts gaps and needs, as well as to prevent the duplication of arts efforts. The pilot explored existing data on a series of indicators, such as gallery and performance spaces, degrees offered, funding for arts faculty, course offerings, partnerships with arts organizations, student groups devoted to the arts—anything we could find to quantify the arts on campus. Challenges identified in the pilot project generated questions for this current report, such as how to contend with the lack of available, uniform, quantifiable data.

Embarking on Phase 2, we looked for climate surveys that included arts questions we might draw on. We found that existing campus-wide surveys (such as ASSET and UMay) touch on areas AIM also addresses, such as feelings

of mental wellness, inclusion, and belonging. However, they rarely have arts-specific questions we could pull out in the way that the National Endowment for the Arts creates their Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) from census data.

As a result, this second phase expands the scope of the project, utilizing surveys, focus groups, and interviews to provide a more comprehensive picture, beginning to fill gaps that could not be covered with the available data. For example, in Phase II we do a deep dive into student engagement with the arts through the lens of student groups; more importantly, we partner with the Arts Engagement Project, an ongoing, longitudinal survey of a cohort of students from Freshman to Senior year.

This report augments insights from the pilot work, expanding evidence of the “how and why” of the value of the arts. For example, we demonstrate that the arts are crucial for students, and we offer support

for the importance of the arts for the university’s reputation. We also begin to unpack how the arts units and organizations at U-M are not only nationally recognized for their leadership; they are also pillars of the arts experience locally.

The report includes sections such as the student experience, staff experience, and the landscape of arts research. The sections are grounded in different questions, represent diverse scopes and methods, and were written by various contributing teams. They are presented here in full to best convey their insights. A Summary Report is available.

With this report, we hope to demonstrate the depth and breadth of the arts at the university. In turn, we hope this information will not only help university leadership here and across higher education to understand the full picture of the arts on campus, but also inspire them to support and strengthen these invaluable assets.

Context and History

Insights

1. The arts have always been important to U-M, both as professional training ground and as opportunity for all students.
2. Decentralization at U-M has been a challenge as well as an asset to the growth of the arts.
3. The Arts Initiative, established in 2019, builds on numerous previous organized efforts to support the arts at U-M.

Connecting the Arts Across Campus

The Arts at the University of Michigan is a rich ecosystem, with inflection points in its history building towards today's more connected and comprehensive story.

One of those major inflection points is the \$20M presidential Arts Initiative, launched in 2019. The campus-wide investment had predecessors in the early 1990's with the provost-backed Arts at Michigan initiative, the Public Goods Council in the early 2000's, a subsequent Arts Consortium meeting from 2016-2019, and many other councils and convenings. Notably, the North Campus deans organized their arts integration activities around the Arts on Earth collaboration in 2007—which was renamed ArtsEngine in 2009.

The history of the institution is punctuated by the founding of schools, colleges, museums,

galleries, and performing arts units over the course of more than 150 years, illustrated in the timeline below. Difficult to illustrate but no less important is the story of all the students, faculty, and staff who animate this history. The arts asset mapping team has endeavored to tell that story with faculty and staff interviews, artistic research reports, and the Arts Engagement Project, which measures and chronicles the experiences of students and their connections to the arts. The arts at U-M has storied strengths, but there is a historical push and pull between centralization and fragmentation.

The current Arts Initiative elevates and coordinates the arts assets across a very large and decentralized university. This focused collaboration at the highest level of the university is new, reflecting a trend at other research-intensive institutions across the country such as Stanford Arts, UVA Arts (University of Virginia), Harvard Arts, and the University of Maryland's Arts for All, among many others.

This report was written by Veronica Stanich (a2ru), Maryrose Flanigan (a2ru), and Deb Mexicotte (ArtsEngine), with contributions and guidance from Alison Rivett (Arts Initiative).

Two student teams—including Krithika Balaji (survey design, statistical analyses and interpretation, data visualization and synthesis, and report design) and Umang Bhojani (survey design, distribution, and synthesis) for the Arts Initiative and Mya Dobbs, Nathaniel Liganor, Sarosh Manzur, and Cindy Ye (survey design and distribution, statistical analyses and interpretation, and data visualization and synthesis) for the Arts Engagement Project—were integral to the project. All students are graduates of U-M's School of Information.

Gabriel Harp, now Director of Research and Creative Practice at Taubman College, was co-investigator for the first iteration Arts Engagement Project 2010-2015; with Jack Bowman and Mengdan Yuan, graduate researchers who contributed significantly to the 2010-2015 AEP analysis reported here.



Figure 2.1. A timeline of the arts at U-M.



Figure 2.1. cont. A timeline of the arts at U-M.

The Origins of Arts Units, Consolidating on North Campus

Making the arts a priority was evident from U-M's early history—the arts have been an integral part of the University's identity and the student experience nearly since it began awarding degrees in the 1840s. Literature, Science and the Arts (LSA) was the first college founded, reflecting the value that engagement with the arts was considered part of a well-rounded education. By 1905, LSA students were able to have music classes count toward their degree. The first department of fine arts was founded in 1910 and the arts were broadly included in the curriculum. The School of Music was founded as a stand-alone entity in 1929, though music classes were available since the 1880s. Meanwhile the arts were accessible to a wide segment of the student body and Ann Arbor community as a social organization and convening force; for example, the Civic Theater was a feature at the Union in the 1930s.

By mid-century the university was headed to a professionalization of the arts. The School of Music

moved out of LSA and formed its own unit in 1964. Dance (1974) and Drama (1984) followed to consolidate in the School of Music, Theatre, and Dance (SMTD) on North Campus. With the move of the arts units, an “arts district” was created on North Campus. In a recent interview, former Provost Lester Monts noted that when many arts activities migrated to North Campus, central campus lost a lot of the look and feel of the arts—one would rarely see students walking across central campus with a cello case, for example. However, members of the U-M community adapted; they created additional avenues for making and viewing the arts, which led to more overall arts activity and greater interdisciplinary approaches. For example, the Residential College established a robust music, performing, and visual arts program to fulfill its mission to serve as a small liberal arts college within the larger university. Each unit, from the International Institute to the School of Dentistry, eventually established a gallery.

Arts Integration at the 21st Century: Strong and Decentralized

The decentralization of the arts at U-M positively led to strong, albeit unconnected, components which have an opportunity to be synthesized with the holistic nature of an arts initiative. Arts leaders past and present know it's

important at U-M to harness the power of decentralization for the collective. (“Could Michigan Medicine’s [Life Sciences Orchestra](#) really have been founded in a top-down structure?” observed Provost Emeritus Paul Courant). And, the decentralized entities are strong. For example, The University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA) and the University Musical Society (UMS) are world class, contributing not only to the university’s culture but to the entire region.

Even more, the 21st century has brought efforts to intentionally integrate the arts across teaching and research. ArtsEngine, an institutional commitment to bringing the arts and engineering into active conversation, exemplifies these integration efforts.

“‘Arts Integration’ has been the byword of these initiatives from the beginning; demonstrating the myriad ways the arts are intertwined with other areas of research and practice, with which research universities are richly, almost ridiculously endowed, seemed the best path to establishing the arts’ centrality. Integration seemed the best path to stimulate appreciation and support for arts programs. Of doubtless inherent value, then, arts integration is also a means to the end of buoying the arts’ fragile place at research universities and thereby, aspirationally, in society.”

-[Former SMTD Dean Christopher Kendall](#), upon establishing ArtsEngine with Dean David Munson (Engineering), Dean Bryan Rogers (Art & Design), and Dean Douglas Kelbaugh (Architecture & Urban Planning).

2010 brought a proposal to convene a Michigan Meeting (a series of annual interdisciplinary meetings sponsored by the Rackham School of Graduate Studies that provide a visible and viable venue to address topics of interdisciplinary and global importance) on the topic of the arts in the context of a research university. Its stated purpose was “to establish the University of Michigan as a leader in the emerging national conversation about better integrating art-making and the arts into the research university – not as decoration or amenity, but as an essential means of understanding, analyzing, and envisioning.” Having already established the on-campus arts-integration mechanism ArtsEngine, the outcome of that meeting was the national organization the Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities (a2ru), signalling the university’s commitment and leadership role in the arts in research.

With Lester Monts as the first Vice Provost for the Arts until he retired in 2014, and Sara Blair named Vice Provost for Academic and

Faculty Affairs, Arts, and Humanities in 2023, the 2000s brought several movements to integrate the arts more broadly into the life of the campus. Student organizations based on the arts proliferated, from glee clubs to film appreciation societies with more than 240 student groups devoted to arts topics—16% of the 1500 registered groups (Arts Data Pilot, 2023). By the time the Arts Initiative received its charge in 2019, to “determine what an arts initiative at the University of Michigan should be,” the arts had become abundant, dispersed, and varied, extending well beyond the limits of the highly ranked arts units.

Within the campus context of the current Arts Initiative there are both strong professional offerings and a desire to serve all students with arts classes and opportunities for arts experiences. We know that 70% of all students across campus at U-M engaged in the arts in some manner (data from Student Life Research, 2025), and may choose U-M because they know they can continue engaging with the arts to learn, support their wellbeing, form deep connections with other students, and explore ways to improve society. This represents an opportunity for U-M to leverage its reputation as an arts-centered, comprehensive university, and indeed, today the university’s mission includes achieving “preeminence in creating, communicating, preserving and applying knowledge, art, and academic values.”

Leading up to the establishment of the Arts Initiative, there have been numerous coordinated efforts to understand, articulate, and advocate for the value of the arts at U-M. Since the 1990s, these efforts have included:

- The Provost’s Advisory Council on the Arts (and Humanities)
- The U-M Advisory Council on Humanities and the Arts
- The U-M Council on Engaged Learning and the Arts
- Council for Engaged Learning, Teaching, and the Arts
- Council on Arts Engagement (for Students and Faculty) at U-M
- U-M Arts Council
- Very Important Group of Arts Leaders at U-M (VIGALUM)
- U-M Working Group on Arts and Arts Integration
- Provost’s Working Group on Arts and Humanities
- The Arts Consortium

By Maryrose Flanigan and Alison Rivett

Timeline: Krithika Balaji

Data visualizations: Krithika Balaji

Role of the Arts at U-M

U-M's Look to Michigan recognizes the arts as essential, and [commits the institution](#) to: establishing the university as a leading institution for the arts, encouraging greater arts participation, inspiring arts-focused research and curriculum, and developing the service mission of the arts.

Across the various populations in the U-M community, we find different perspectives on the role of the arts, echoing those different aspects that Vision 2034 articulates. What unites these perspectives is an affirmation of the arts' importance; there is broad agreement that the arts are integral not only to teaching, learning, and research, but also to being human.

Insights

1. The arts have a range of self-reported impacts on students; these include providing more and better social connections, a sense of expanded possibilities, and relaxation. Students also report improved communication, time management, and critical thinking skills along with a host of other increased capacities as a result of their engagement with the arts.
2. Faculty and staff report that arts participation has positive intellectual, aesthetic, spiritual, emotional, and social impacts for them.
3. The arts enhance students' social lives through greater involvement, more and better social connections, and stronger bonds with others. The arts can be a wellness mechanism for students, providing them opportunities to connect, reflect, and restore.
4. Long-time campus arts staff and directors understand the arts at U-M as a vital avenue for student development, a site for engaging in challenging subject matter, a venue for shared communal experiences including connection to the surrounding community, and an engine for creativity and innovation.

Students

U-M students report that the arts play a vital role both in their college experience broadly and in their personal, academic, and social development.

The Arts Engagement Project, a longitudinal online survey study of precursors, behaviors, identities, activities, and expectations of undergraduate students engaging in the arts at U-M Ann Arbor during their time in college, was first implemented between 2010 and 2015. A second round of the study, launched in 2023, enables us to draw on those earlier conclusions about the role of the arts for students with a degree of confidence, despite a relatively smaller (but growing) sample size in the second round.

Two questions directly asked about the role the arts played both in their college experience and in their personal development:

1. *What role did the arts play in your college experience, both positive and negative?*
2. *What role did the arts play in your development as a person, friend, colleague, and student during college?*

College Experience

In response to the first question, “*What role did the arts play in your college experience, both positive and negative?*” students largely reported the positive role the arts played in their college experiences. The major topic areas, **Expanded Possibilities and Relaxation** and **More and Better Social Connections** comprised about 85% of responses. In addition, some students engaged in the arts primarily through their classroom experience (**Educational**), while some indicated that the arts played, at best, only a **Small Role** in their college experience. Responses to the question are represented in a “topic tree” (see Figure 3.1).

While there were some negative comments about engaging in the arts in college, these comments were often part of a more overall positive response or were used as point-counterpoint in a response. This ambivalence is present in the responses to a few different questions, suggesting that there is a diversity of experience. When students did indicate a negative role for the arts, it typically stemmed from frustration at not achieving as good grades or outcomes from their arts endeavors, the time the arts required adversely affecting their other coursework grades or focus, or that arts participation steered them to consider or choose what they perceived to be potentially less secure or lower-paying jobs in an arts field. Students also expressed regret about being unable to engage in the arts in college as much as they wanted, for any number of reasons.

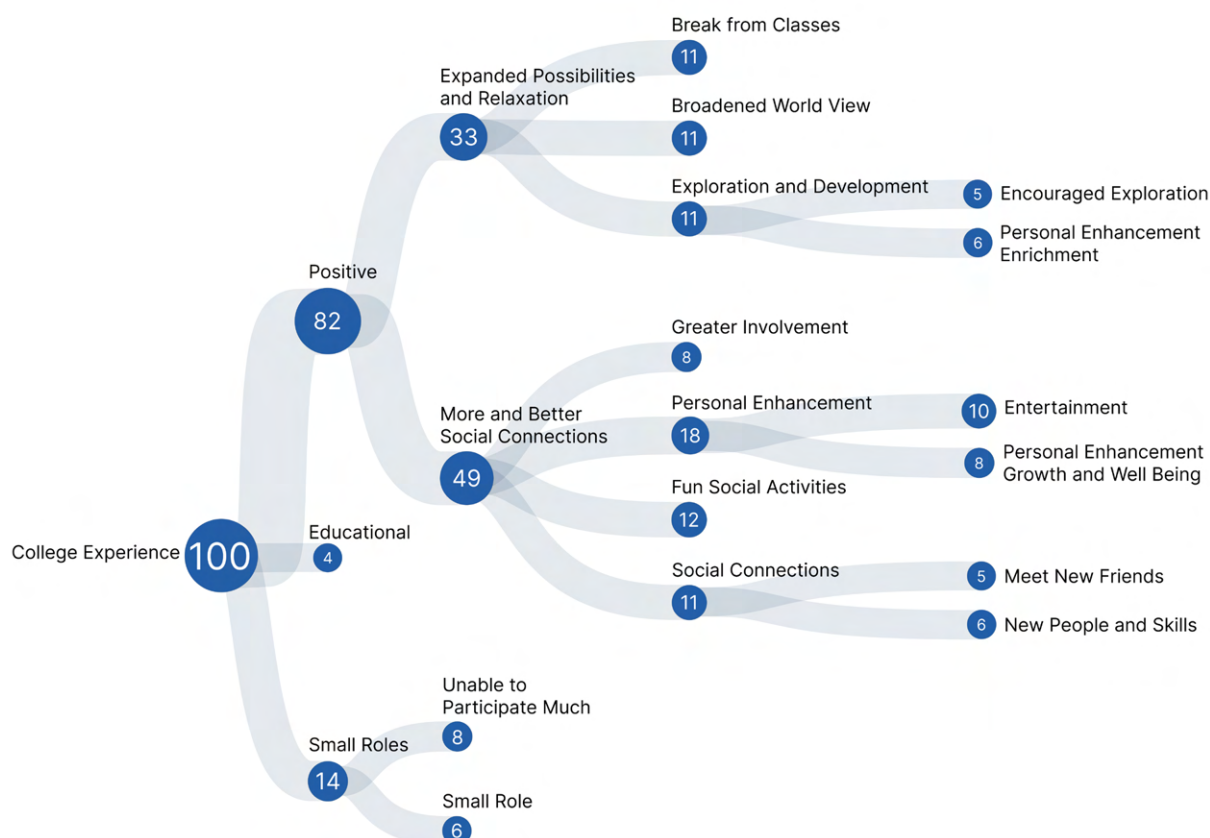


Figure 3.1. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-25 student survey: Tree visualization of the College Experience topic model. The four main topic branches remain the same as the 2010-2015 round of the study: Expanded Possibilities and Relaxation, More and Better Social Connections, Educational, and Small Role. Compared to the 2010-15 topic tree, responses in the More and Better Social Connections subcategory increased from 43% to 49%, causing an increase in the total percentage of Positive responses.

In one of the largest topic response areas, students reported that the arts **Expanded Possibilities and Relaxation** by offering needed breaks from classwork, broadening their worldview, encouraging exploration and creative expression, and personally enriching their lives.

“The arts provided a space for sanity and creative problem solving. A nice escape from academic and business-related works, while still building professional, positive, and useful life skills.”

“The arts were always a good balance from the very intense science courses I had to take for my major. I have always felt that creativity was completely necessary for life and Michigan has reinforced this with its encouragement.”

“It helped me learn more about different cultures. For example, I have attended a lot of cultural dance performances during my time here.”

“The arts provided a relief from academic responsibilities, but also an outlet for creativity when there was no space for it in the classroom.”

In another large topic response area, **More and Better Social Connections**, students reported that engaging in the arts was an avenue to fun social activities, entertainment, personal growth and well-being, and greater involvement with their peers and the university overall. They also reported new social connections through meeting people and developing friendships, as well as personal enhancement because of new skills acquired.

“I enjoyed the performances I got to go to, and I was also able to sing in a choir for my sophomore year. That was a good experience, since I had been part of choir all throughout high school and was missing it.”

“They were often a way for me to meet and connect with others who shared the same interests, which was important to me since most people in my department (that I’ve met) aren’t nearly as involved.”

“Without my arts experience, my resume would be empty and I would probably be medicated. Though it is sometimes frustrating to work with others under the pressure and demanding schedules of college, my arts experiences keep my life together.”

“The arts have helped cultivate me into a well-rounded, experienced, and learned young person who feels confident about going out into the world and using the skills that I learned from the arts to help others.”

Student Development

In response to the second question, “*What role did the arts play in your development as a person, friend, colleague, and student during college?*” students wrote about the arts in relational terms – to self, and to self in interaction with others. Broadly, these impacts around self-development fall along two main branches: **Different Perspectives** and **Social Identity** (Figure 3.2). Students reported growth or change in sub-areas like **Social Connections**, **Personal Identity**, **Skill Acquisition**, **New Perspectives** and **Cultural Understandings**, **Better Life Balance**, and, as might be expected, a **Deeper Appreciation of the Arts**. Taken together, this array of topics suggests a significant pro-social role for the arts in both social and skill development.



Figure 3.2. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-25 student survey: Tree visualization of the Student Development topic model. The responses reflect the same two main topic branches, Social Identity and Different Perspectives, as the 2010-15 study, but Social Identity is now the more frequent response whereas Different Perspectives was more frequent in the 2010-2015 study.

Different Perspectives

There are three subtopics derived from students responses under **Different Perspectives**: development of new social connections and skills, acquiring a deeper appreciation of their own learning and the arts, and becoming more open-minded by developing greater cultural understanding through connections to a more diverse set of people and ideas.

“Helped build my confidence, make friends, build relationships, developed my leadership skills, organization, and time management.”

“The arts helped me develop a strong work ethic, creativity, and time management skills.”

“It helped me explore my own beliefs and contemplate new knowledge and perspectives I gained from other people and their experiences. Art helped me become a more open-minded, thoughtful, and well-rounded person.”

“The arts have been a mechanism through which I have learned many important lessons in many of my classes. It has made me realize that art can move me, and can move others. It has made me appreciate others more, and made me appreciate my own creativity and desire to inspire creativity in others.”

“The Arts helped me understand different peoples’ perspectives (and the different perspectives of people from different cultures than myself) in a way that a textbook never could. This new understanding helped me develop into a more caring, compassionate, and socially aware person. This new understanding also fueled my desire to pursue a career in immigration law.”

“It’s so corny, but they helped me grow as person and see the world from different point of views.”

Social Identity

In the major subtopic areas under **Social Identity**, students reported strengthened social connections because of attending arts events with friends, supporting friends who themselves were engaged in arts events or activities, or gaining or maintaining friendships (social bonds) through mutual interests centered around the arts. They also reported a change in the way they viewed themselves as the arts became part of their identity. Finally, they reported that engaging in the arts led to developing specific skills and abilities (played a developmental role) or, conversely, had little or no effect on their development in college (didn't play a role).

“Attending art events was something I did with my friends, and (it) brought us closer together.”

“The arts helped me grow as a person and a student. I developed much better time management skills as well as effective organization skills. I also became better at communicating and handling conflict between others. Additionally, my involvement in the art(s) led to some of my closest friendships during college.”

“The arts have improved my critical thinking skills, as I have said before. The arts allow me to be more astute to my surroundings, and to critically analyze certain aspects of society that I may have otherwise overlooked. It does not allow me to be brainwashed into one way of thinking, and it taught me to analyze the details of certain societal situations so I can develop my own opinions.”

“I found the arts to play an enormous role in my psychological and social well being. Art is what has made me who I am today.”

[Read more about the results of the 2010-2015 Arts Engagement Project.](#)

Read in-depth analysis of Arts Engagement Project research in the Student Experience section, below.

Faculty

In some instances, it is important to distinguish which units are dedicated to the arts—units where the arts are explicitly part of the mission; faculty’s professional profiles; and the content of teaching, learning, research, and creative practice. However, we understand that the arts permeate the lives of many faculty and staff, and we recognize that creativity, and even arts-based approaches and practices, are present in every domain and profession. To describe the distinction, we use the terms “arts-designated” and “non-arts-designated,” and trust the reader will accept these reductive words in the limited context in which they are used.

The arts play an important role for many faculty at U-M. We administered a survey to faculty and staff in the spring of 2024, exploring experiences of and attitudes toward the arts (see “Faculty and Staff Experience” below). Of those surveyed for this report, most faculty

say that *viewing, listening to, or attending* the arts is moderately or very important to them (see Figure 3.3). This is true for faculty in arts-designated and non-arts-designated units alike. *Active participation in the arts* is also moderately or very important to many faculty.

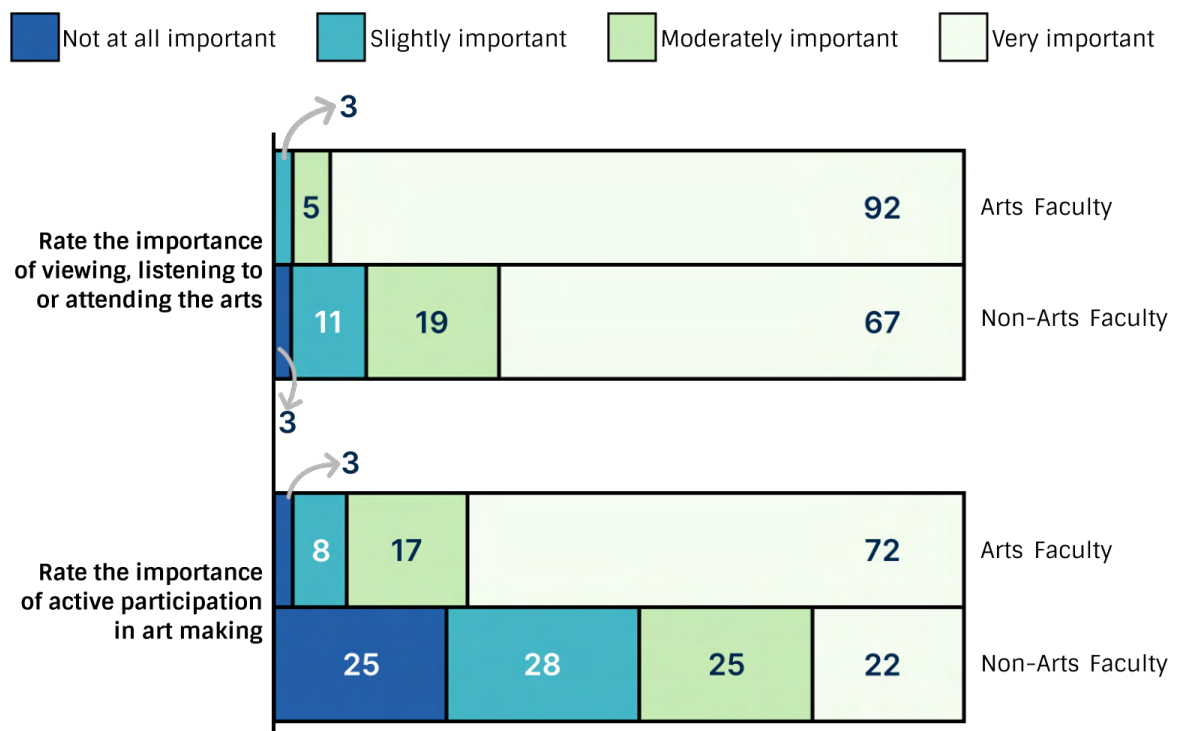


Figure 3.3. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Importance of the arts for U-M faculty. Values are represented in percentages.

Faculty also see the importance of university investment in the arts. Faculty in arts-designated and non-arts-designated units alike are largely in agreement that U-M investment of money, time, or resources in the arts is important for students (Figure 3.4).

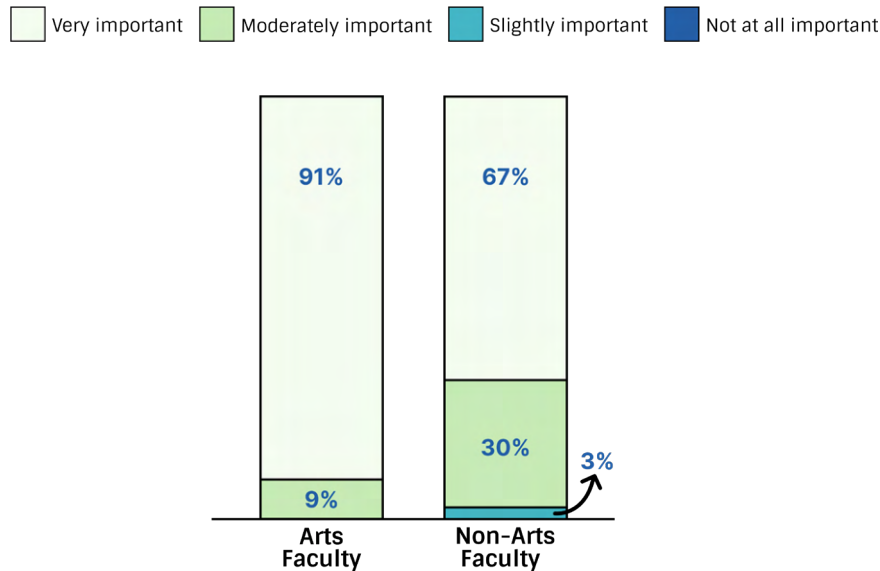


Figure 3.4. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Faculty perceptions of the importance for students of U-M investment in the arts.

Indeed, most faculty who teach non-arts-designated courses say that the arts are important for their students' intellectual, social, personal, and professional development. (Faculty who teach arts courses were not asked this question.)

In addition, most faculty believe that U-M investment of money, time, or resources in the arts is important for *the broader U-M campus community*, for *the public's engagement with the university*, and for *U-M's presence in the state, nation, and world* (Figure 3.5).

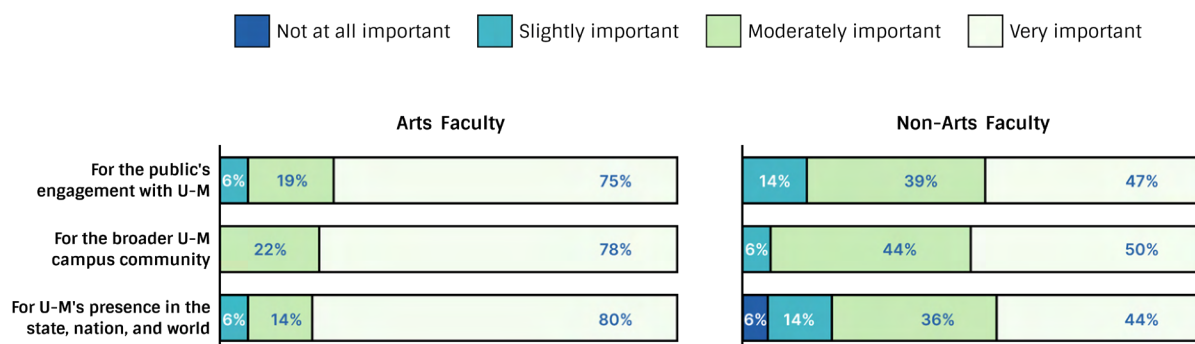


Figure 3.5. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Faculty perceptions of the importance of U-M investment in the arts beyond the campus walls.

Read more in the Faculty and Staff Experience section, below.

Staff

Our 2024 Faculty/Staff survey also shows that the arts play an important role for many staff at U-M. Most staff say that *viewing, listening to, or attending* the arts is moderately or very important to them, and many staff say that *active participation in the arts* is moderately or very important to them (Figure 3.6).

Whether through taking in the arts or actively participating in them, the most frequent reason given for engaging with the arts (across faculty and staff) is “because they make me feel good.” Additional impacts of faculty and staff engagement with the arts include intellectual stimulation, inspiration, emotional resonance, aesthetic challenge or pleasure, social connection, spiritual impact, and connection to a particular culture.

Most staff also believe that U-M investment of money, time, or resources in the arts is moderately or very important for *students*, for the *broader U-M campus community*, for the *public’s engagement with the university*, and for *U-M’s presence in the state, nation, and world*.

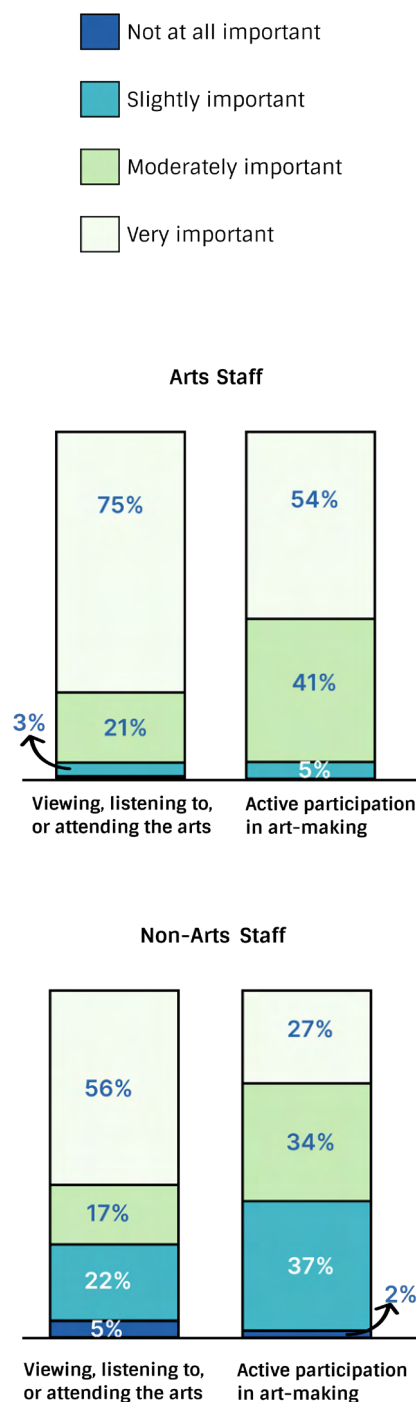


Figure 3.6. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Importance of the arts for U-M staff.

Arts Administrators: the “insider’s” perspective

In addition to our Faculty/Staff survey, we also interviewed a group of thirteen U-M arts administrators (Read more about this interview cycle and its results in the Internal Perspectives Benchmarking section below). Notably, this group has a collective 100+ years of experience leading arts programming, serving as standard-bearers for the arts at the University of Michigan over a period of decades. While they identified many important roles of the arts at U-M, they most frequently defined the role of the arts as:

- a platform for thinking, feeling, expressing, knowledge creation, inquiry and research, risk-taking, creative practice, and cultural perspective. They provide the opportunity for new ideas and help us make sense of the world.
- an important way to engage challenging subject matter and diverse cultural perspectives.

“The...scholarship, creative practice, research, and teaching around the arts is also fundamental to our mission. absolutely essential in creating that new knowledge, that new creative practice that... new understanding of who we are as a culture, as a society, as a global community through the arts and culture.”

“The arts’ job (is) to push the university, to challenge the present...through subject matter. (To) Imagine and develop projects that expand and stretch people’s understanding and to inform U-M.”

- a support system for shared communal experiences, promoting social cohesion and providing a connection to the community in and around Ann Arbor.

“(The arts) Create a space for thinking, feeling, and problem-solving. Is a safe way to navigate societal ideas as a community with disparate points of view.”

“... It is where the community engages with the U. Like football, the arts are the cultural “glue” and the front door to U-M...”

- **an engine for creativity and innovation**, interdisciplinary initiatives, experiential learning, and collaborative team skills, fostering curiosity and excitement and catalyzing new ways of thinking and partnering in interdisciplinary problem-solving.

“The arts are uniquely able to be integrated into events, programs, research projects—to provide a unique perspective, much like the humanities.”

- **a vital avenue for students’ development**—broadening their viewpoints, presenting them with different perspectives, giving them access to supportive communities, creating improved wellness and belonging, expressing themselves creatively, exploring curricular objectives, developing new skills, and finding their place in the world.

“The arts are absolutely essential to the Michigan experience for students... (for) the cultural fabric, the social interactions, co-curricular learning - ... an essential student experience at the university.”

*By Deb Mexicotte and Veronica Stanich
Data visualization: Krithika Balaji*

Assets, Needs, and Challenges

Part of the work of the Arts Asset-Mapping project is to paint a full picture of the “what” of the arts at U-M, and to provide a gap analysis. In this section, we review the arts assets on campus and explore the arts needs and challenges.

Phase 1 of this project enumerated the following assets at U-M’s main campus based on existing quantitative data sets:

- Events
- Spaces
 - Studio spaces
 - Rehearsal spaces
 - Gallery spaces
 - Performance spaces
 - Public art
- People
 - Student arts organizations
 - Arts faculty
 - Arts staff
- Curriculum
 - Courses in the arts
 - Enrollment in arts courses
 - Degree programs

With this second, qualitative phase of the project, we seek not only to reveal what may have been missed in Phase 1, but also to identify which assets are used most and to articulate the value of these assets across the campus ecosystem. One group whose voices are not represented in this report is visitors—prospective faculty and staff, prospective students and their families, school groups, and area residents. What impression does the public art on campus make on these visitors? How does the presence of a range of arts engagement opportunities influence decisions to visit, attend, or work at the University of Michigan? While anecdotal evidence suggests that the arts on campus are a strong attractor for many, further research could better describe and evaluate that phenomenon.

In addition, we extend this inquiry into questions about obstacles to engagement with these arts assets, and perceived gaps or needs in the arts landscape.

Assets

Insights

1. U-M has unique assets to support student engagement with the arts, including access to discounted theatre tickets, exhibition and performance spaces, and funding for and practical assistance with art-making.
2. The Arts Initiative represents the promise of support and connection for long-time arts program staff who have contended with isolation and a lack of sustained and secure funding.
3. U-M faculty and staff appreciate both the work presented by large arts organizations such as UMS and UMMA as well as the many smaller arts gems across campus.
4. Even as U-M brings world-class arts events to the Ann Arbor community and can be a resource for local artists and arts entities, many at U-M and in the surrounding arts community also seek to grow a dynamic, collaborative relationship with shared goals.

Assets: Students

U-M students have access to an array of arts experiences, from courses, performances, and exhibits to student organizations, workshops, and studios. Long-time institutional experience acknowledges the great value and regard with which students hold the following university efforts, programs, and opportunities.

I. Free or Reduced Ticketing Programs

1. Arts Initiative - Passport to the Arts

[Passport to the Arts](#), a program of the U-M Arts Initiative, is designed to encourage students to explore the arts on campus and around Ann Arbor by offering free student tickets to select events. In each of the two most recent academic years for which the program has complete data (2022-23 and 2023-24), students redeemed more than 4,000 of these tickets. This is an increase of 1,000 tickets compared to pre-pandemic student use of the program. As of January 2025, Passport to the Arts had already given out almost 1,000 more tickets than it had at this time in the previous two academic years, indicating both

a growing awareness of the program and an appetite among students to have arts experiences.

2. University Musical Society (UMS) [Student Ticketing Programs](#)

Bert's Tickets – U-M alumnus Bert Askwith's gift to UMS gives all first and second-year students a free ticket to any UMS performance (some performances have limited availability) and provides a discounted second ticket for a friend for only \$10.

Discounted UMS Tickets for Students—all high school and college students may purchase up to two tickets for \$12-\$20.

II. U-M Living/Learning Communities

1. Living ArtsEngine

[Living ArtsEngine \(LAE\)](#), a program of ArtsEngine, is a creative interdisciplinary Michigan Learning Community housed in Bursley Hall on U-M's North Campus. LAE brings together 80-100 first-year and returning student leaders in the arts, architecture, engineering, information, and other creative fields to explore innovation, creativity, and collaboration.

2. Lloyd Scholars for Writing and the Arts (LSWA)

[Lloyd Scholars for Writing and the Arts \(LSWA\)](#) is a living/learning community focused on creative expression of all kinds. Students from any academic major live in Alice Lloyd Hall with other first- and second-year students who have similar passions. Together, they take small writing and studio arts classes, and attend events such as art exhibits, theatre performances, live concerts, and poetry readings.

III. Makers Space and Performance/Exhibition Facilities

1. Student Theatre Arts Complex

[The Student Theatre Arts Complex \(STAC\)](#), is a facility dedicated to the support of co-curricular student theatrical and performance organizations. It consists of a scenery shop and costume shop, as well as three rehearsal spaces with a piano in each. Student groups renting the facility receive technical support,

access to tools and materials, use of stock scenery, drafting facilities, and other resources.

2. University Library [Book Arts Studio and Design Lab Workshop](#)

Book Arts Studio

Students can experiment with hand set type and book-making supplies in the Book Arts Studio in the Duderstadt Center, which includes more than 175 drawers of metal and wooden type and a few hundred pictorial ornaments.

Design Lab Workshop

At the [Design Lab Workshop](#) in the Shapiro Library, students can get hands-on access to equipment such as a letterpress, soldering station, 3D printers, and other hardware and materials.

3. [Duderstadt Center](#) Ground Connections/Media and Studio Arts/Emerging Technologies

Ground Connections

This program supports courses and provides a wide range of learning opportunities in the Fabrication Studio, Design Lab 1, Groundworks, and Gallery. Services include consultation, mentoring, instruction, and project management. Programmatic offerings include public events, grants, fellowships, and special projects.

Media and Studio Arts

This consists of the fully staffed Video Studio (performance space), Audio Studios, Personal Studios, Multimedia Rooms, and the Visualization Studio/MIDEN (XR, AR, VR).

4. Residential College [Keene Theatre](#) and [Gallery](#)

The Keene Theater

This performance venue is located within East Quad Residence Hall. The space is operated by the [Residential College](#) (RC), which hosts events in the theater throughout the semester, including performances by the student organization RC Players.

RC Art Gallery

RC Art Gallery hosts three professional art exhibits every year along with two Student Showcases. Exhibitions and receptions are open to the public.

IV. Major Performance Venues/University Productions

Hill Auditorium, Rackham Auditorium, the Power Center for the Performing Arts, the Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre, and the Arthur Miller Theatre are all managed under the auspices of University Productions. Students organizations regularly rent those facilities and technical director support when they are not in use by SMTD or other prioritized groups to present theatre, dance, cultural shows, concerts, guest artists, and other performance-centered events. Student organizations pay reduced, but still substantial, fees for these venues. The large capacity of these venues allows student performances to reach a greater audience and have a broader impact than they would otherwise.

V. Funding Programs

Funding programs for students and student organizations engaged in the arts are administered through a variety of sources. These are a few of the main sources of arts funding at U-M:

Arts Initiative

The Arts Initiative offers grants for both undergraduate arts projects and graduate arts research. Arts at Michigan, formerly a separate unit and now part of the Initiative, provides a good list of 25+ funding programs most used by students. Many of these are specifically focused on the arts or arts integration.

project grants across 20-25 projects (with ~33% of applicants awarded) and \$10,000-\$15,000 per year in interdisciplinary graduate research grants.

EXCEL LAB

EXCEL Lab funding provides \$100,000 annually to students as micro grants, fellowships, prizes, and other support for entrepreneurship and leadership in the performing arts. Some funding programs are available to all U-M students while others are for SMTD students only.

ArtsEngine

ArtsEngine awards ~\$20,000 per year in student interdisciplinary

VI. Information, Marketing, and Events

1. Maize Pages

[Maize Pages](#) is the Ann Arbor campus-wide online platform for finding registered student organizations of all kinds, including the ~250 student

organizations directly engaged in the arts. It has key word and categorical search functions, such as Creative & Performing Arts, as well as a searchable student organization events calendar.

2. Newsletters/Websites

[Arts Initiative - Arts Info Newsletter](#)

This weekly student newsletter features campus arts attendance opportunities, select student arts efforts, arts programming and funding opportunities, and student arts organizations. The current subscription list of 12,000+ is primarily focused on undergraduate students on the Ann Arbor Campus.

[ArtsEngine Newsletter](#)

This semi-monthly student newsletter features both ArtsEngine and campus-wide interdisciplinary opportunities across the arts, design, engineering, information, and technology in funding, research, coursework, programs, and events. It also lists projects that may be joined through the “Find A Collaborator” tool on the ArtsEngine website. The current subscription list reaches 6000+ graduate and undergraduate students.

3. Calendars

Happening at Michigan is the campus-wide events calendar, utilized by student organizations, staff, faculty, and administrators to get the word out about happenings

on campus through user-friendly search engine tools and graphically appealing program listings.

4. Marketing/Outreach Support

Student Organization Resource Center (SORC)

The Student Organization Resource Center (SORC) provides low-cost advertising resources to University of Michigan student organizations and departments. They get the word out about student organization recruiting, membership, and events through their accessible network of Diag boards, banners, digital advertising, and other media.

Info Fairs/Fests

Student Information Fests (Festifall and Winterfest) are held on North and Central Campus in Ann Arbor at the beginning of the main academic semesters, giving student and campus organizations the opportunity to recruit members and showcase their offerings to the student community. These fests, hosted by the Center for Campus Involvement are critical to student arts organizations; a section of the fests are devoted to the arts, performance, and groups otherwise engaged in creative endeavors.

VII. Arts Courses

While U-M does not have an undergraduate arts requirement, there are a range of arts courses offered to arts majors and non-arts majors. In Phase 1 of the Arts Data Project, we illustrated the trends for non-arts majors to enroll in arts courses; the most popular courses were Marching Band and Introduction to Dance. However these sections filled quickly or were “by audition only” and we recommended more opportunities be made available. Subsequently, the 2023 Arts Initiative program increased availability of Guitar Instruction for non-music majors; under this program, the number of sections of Guitar Instruction increased from two to fifteen.

Assets: Faculty and Staff

Of all the arts experiences available at U-M, we wanted to know which ones resonated for faculty and staff. In our survey of faculty and staff, we asked respondents to list three arts experiences at U-M that stood out to them.

Two responses were tied for most frequent among this group: performance (either broadly understood, or with a specific genre like “music concerts” or “theatre performances”) and UMMA. Student and faculty performances at SMTD, performances at UMS, and exhibitions (broadly understood) were also frequently mentioned. Nearly twenty additional categories of response to this question emerged, including participatory activities like workshops, art in the hospitals and other public art, and programming by Stamps, the Duderstadt Center, the Arts Initiative, and several other units on campus. (See Figure 4.1.)

Arts Assets in Ann Arbor

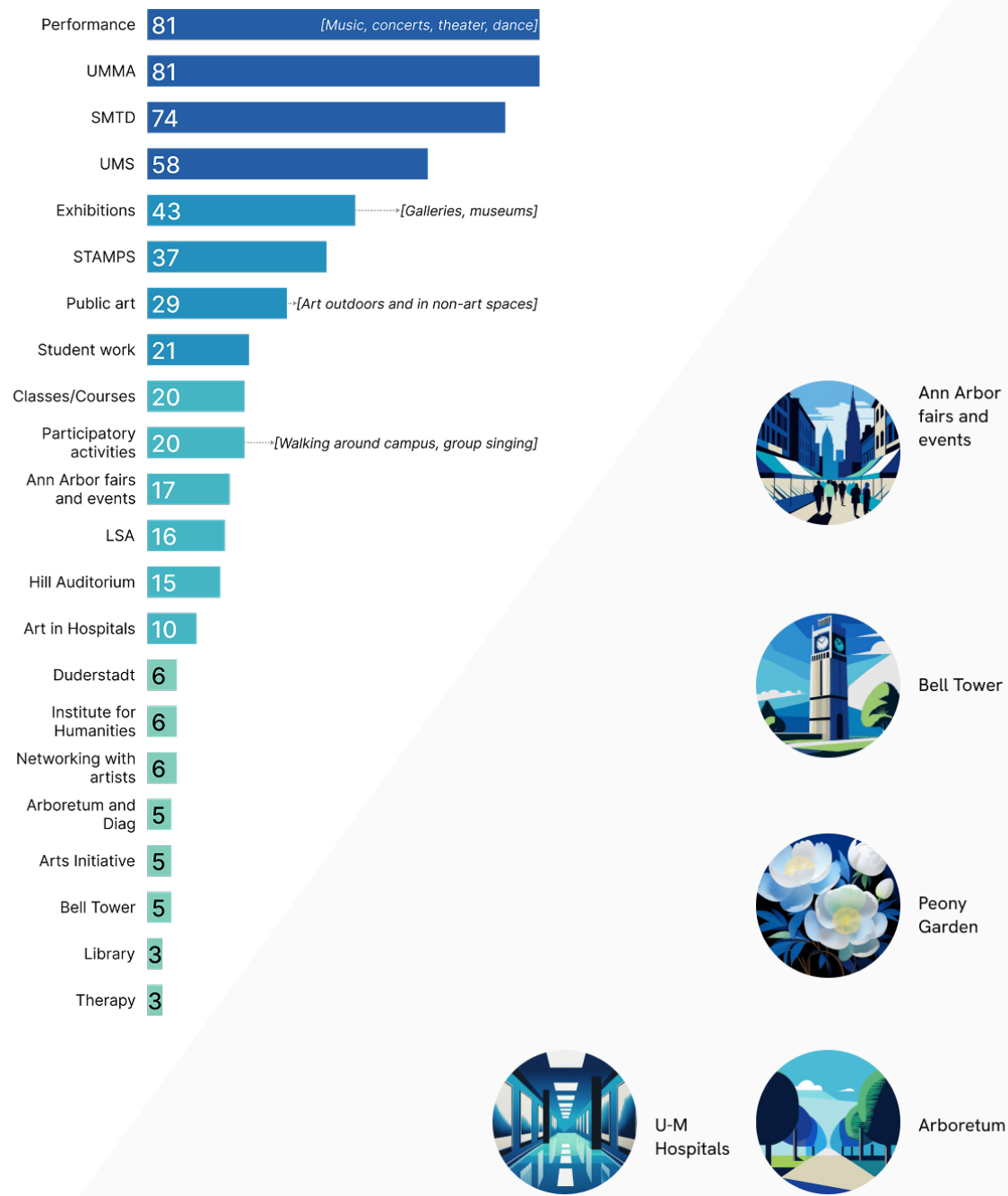


Figure 4.1. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Arts experiences at U-M that stand out to faculty and staff.

The responses to this question identify the assets on campus that faculty and staff value most. Even more, they reveal an alignment with the broad and inclusive definition of the arts provided at the beginning of the survey; responses included the Arboretum and peony garden, daily carillon concerts, “walking past rehearsal spaces,” “impromptu activities on the quad,” and “self care using art in the lobby of the nursing school.” That is, Faculty and staff are having arts experiences in small, daily, “below the radar” ways as well as in formal, “official” ways.

In addition, faculty in arts-designated units recognized the following U-M resources as particularly valuable for their teaching and research:

- **The Duderstadt Center** and other North Campus facilities
- **Funding** such as that for research (e.g., Research Catalyst and Innovation Program), and to host guests
- **Arts venues** such as UMMA, the Power Center, Hill auditorium, and others
- **Facilities**, including general departmental facilities and studio/work-spaces
- **University libraries**
- **Helpful support staff**, especially at the Duderstadt Center, Arts Initiative, and UMMA
- **Campus programs** such as (for teaching) the Arts Initiative, performance and lecture series, ArtsEngine, Course Connections, and other programs that center on engagement, student success and identities, and wellness. Also campus programs such as (for research) UMMA, ArtsEngine, ADVANCE, and the Center for Academic Innovation.

Faculty and staff are having arts experiences in small, daily, “below the radar” ways as well as in formal, “official” ways.

Independent Local Arts Ecosystems

In a discussion convened by the Arts Initiative and regional arts advocate Creative Washtenaw in August 2024, a group of seventeen cultural leaders from Ann Arbor arts and culture organizations, as well as independent artists, shared ideas about how the university could optimally work with the broader local arts community. A recognition of unique and shared assets emerged from that discussion.

The world-class arts at U-M are an asset for the surrounding community in that residents attend university arts events. However, the culture of the arts beyond campus is as rich and varied as what the university has to offer, and many organic relationships have matured into efforts shared between the university and the surrounding

community. These include the A2 Summer Festival that takes place on campus and performances of local musicians at Hill Auditorium. Local arts entities and artists continue to engage with the university, bolstering current connections and building new ones to elevate the experience beyond audience and venue opportunities.

Needs and Challenges

Each of the different populations we spoke to in the course of this project articulated the gaps they experience in the U-M arts landscape: challenges, obstacles, needs, and wishes.

Insights

1. Long-time arts program staff still contend with uncertainty and instability because of a lack of sustained and secure funding.
2. Faculty and staff would like to have more free and low-cost arts experiences and the time to take advantage of them. They also would like opportunities to make or experience art together with others.
3. Faculty in arts-designated units voice the desire for funding, materials, and space.
4. Students enrolled in non-arts-designated programs face challenges enrolling in arts courses, and many students find that lack of time is a barrier to participating in or attending arts activities and events.
5. Many in the arts ecosystem around Ann Arbor would like to partner with the university to work toward shared goals.

Arts Administrators: the “insider’s” perspective

A group of thirteen U-M arts administrators who were interviewed for this report identified the persistent needs and challenges that arts programs face:

- Individuals and organizations doing arts work at U-M face **structural challenges**; individual units and the campus ecosystem broadly are not set up in ways that help the arts to thrive. Internally, some contend with troubled business models or organizational challenges. Across the ecosystem, there is a sense of competition for scarce resources, and all organizations are not equitably positioned.
- There is a **lack of sustained and secure funding** for ongoing, systemic arts work (as opposed to funding for one-off events).
- A cross-cutting desire voiced by those working in the arts is to **connect their diverse and isolated programs**. Some of this is ideological or conceptual: to convene and cooperate rather than to be in competition. Some of it is practical: the need for a central hub or resource or map that locates all the players, including related relevant ones like tech and student success efforts, and for matchmaking potential partners.

As a result of these factors—structural shortcomings; a lack of sustained secure support for ongoing work; and a large, decentralized and disconnected group—arts staff experience scarcity of resources. They need money, they need space, they need practical and administrative support, they need help with marketing and communications. One arts administrator noted that the scarcity they experience is fundamentally different from that in any other unit on campus. Characterizing it as “an ecosystem of uncertainty,” she observed that only the arts programs don’t know from year to year whether they will be able to continue their mission.

As a result of these factors—structural shortcomings; a lack of sustained secure support for ongoing work; and a large, decentralized and disconnected group—arts staff experience scarcity of resources. They need money, they need space, they need practical and administrative support, they need help with marketing and communications.

Arts workers are tapped out. Of all the scarcities, scarcity of human capacity is the most widespread; most organizations are understaffed for the amount of work they do.

“We have four and a half full time equivalents. And I always recount the story of [meeting with leadership] and I presented what I thought the program should be doing, how we were doing it, what we were thinking of, and they said, ‘Wow, this is really great and really ambitious. It’s the kind of thing that I would expect a department of ten to twelve to do.’ And that has really stuck with me because he actually put a number on it. So I would say that the challenge is that our ambition outruns our human capacity.”

Challenges: Students

Students at U-M can engage with the arts through their coursework; through co-curricular participation in the arts, including student arts organizations; and through attendance at performances, events, exhibits, and other activities.

We find one set of challenges to this involvement in the Arts Engagement Project data. The Arts Engagement Project is a large-scale longitudinal survey 2010-15 at U-M, followed by a second round of largely the same survey begun in 2023. Survey responses reveal the following main challenges to student arts participation:

1. Pressure on time

The need to fulfill degree requirements without prolonging a college career often precludes the possibility of taking an arts class, and the demands of coursework can mean that there’s no time left for co-curricular activities. Many students indicate simply and directly that their academic course loads are too great (sometimes in conjunction with other more highly prioritized activities like a job) to be involved in the arts at college. They also report that while they fully appreciate their

engagement in the arts, it sometimes requires so much time that it negatively impacts their coursework and GPA.

2. Difficulty taking arts courses

Many students report difficulties in taking art courses outside their majors because there were few courses open to non-arts majors, those that were had too few seats, or they can only find a few “general” arts options. They

were unsure how they might fit arts courses into their schedule, and commented on needing to prioritize activities that more closely aligned with their career goals. And many students found that, as a non-arts major, there was simply no time in their course schedule to take desired arts courses – even if there were seats available.

3. Negative social climate

For some students who are new to the arts, feelings of inferiority and awkwardness among more experienced or “expert” students prevented their beginning exploration. Some students who are new to an arts activity, less skilled, less committed, or simply pursuing a non-arts major see those who are already skilled and passionate as unwelcoming or unhelpful. For some of these students who enroll in arts courses, the social isolation of being one of the only “outside” students in an arts course is uncomfortable. In general, the expected level of engagement in arts activities often seems too high for a casual participant looking to learn or just have fun.

4. Lack of awareness and information

U-M’s large decentralized campus environment makes it difficult to find and access publicity about arts events, frustrating

students who missed out on arts opportunities because they lacked the necessary information to attend or participate. Having to actively look in multiple places for information, not receiving information in advance of events, and the sheer number of activities and events to sort through hampers student participation. Some students cite a lack of information flowing between North and Central campuses; they perceive that many arts events occurred on the campus (North or Central) they are less likely to frequent.

5. Logistics

Travel to arts events and activities—again, sometimes across the “split” campus—involves distance, travel time, availability of transportation, and relative convenience, all of which can be barriers to participation. Cost is also a factor for some students.

In addition to these challenges that emerge from the Arts Engagement Project data, structured conversations with members of student arts organizations reveal persistent needs for those groups:

- funding
- access to appropriate space and facilities
- a central place for collaboration, organizing events, and improving connections to resources
- simplified systems for booking spaces and applying for grants

Challenges: Faculty and Staff

In our survey of faculty and staff, open-ended responses to the prompts “It would be great if U-M could provide the following resources, services, or accommodations to support the arts in my life...” and “How might the arts at U-M be improved for the campus community at large?” revealed a range of needs and desires around the arts, which we categorized into types. Response categories here are listed in descending order of frequency.

1. Free and low-cost arts experiences, and time to take advantage of them

This category of response is far and away the most frequent, almost three times more frequent than the next-most frequent category. Money and time are barriers to faculty and staff participation in the arts. Faculty and staff want discounted, free, or low-cost arts classes, or discounted, free, or low-cost exhibits, performances, and other experiences. Faculty and staff also point out that they don’t have enough time to participate in the arts; time off for the arts, scheduling arts events around typical work time, and integration of art and work are some suggested remedies.

2. Easier logistics and access

Faculty and staff need better methods for finding out about arts happenings (calendars, communications, and other resources). They also cite challenges in getting to arts venues and parking

there, and in physically accessing spaces. Some faculty and staff request remote or virtual options.

Faculty and staff also point out that they don’t have enough time to participate in the arts; time off for the arts, scheduling arts events around typical work time, and integration of art and work are some suggested remedies.

3. More art

Faculty and staff want to see and experience art across campus, including outdoors and in public spaces. Art contributes to well-being; faculty and staff want more opportunities to experience art for wellness, and even to have the arts incentivized along the MHealthy model. Some want to see the arts integrated across disciplines.

4. Space and materials

Faculty and staff, in both arts- and non-arts-designated units, want more access to art-making spaces, supplies, and resources

such as studios, supplies, tools, and materials. This is related to the larger call for more space: for making art, exhibiting art, rehearsing, performing, and collaborating. As with the next category, money for the arts, many of the faculty and staff who have this response work in an arts-designated unit, so their personal desires are entwined with their professional desires. These needs for funding, space, and materials recur among arts faculty who were asked what they need to support their teaching and research. (See the Faculty and Staff Experience section below for in-depth information about arts faculty's specific needs for teaching and research/creative practice).

5. Money for the arts

Faculty and staff see many areas that could be better supported financially, including exhibitions, the work of SMTD faculty and students, and individual artists.

6. Community and conversation

Faculty and staff also want arts for families and programming that brings together the community across themes and audiences. Additionally, faculty and staff want to bring people together within the arts in terms of relationship-building, e.g., connecting university artists to area arts presenters, connecting faculty with students, connecting isolated university art-makers to each other.

The arts have a role in bringing people together. We see that where faculty and staff want opportunities for art-making with others, e.g., book clubs, writing groups, and communal music-making opportunities.

Independent Local Arts Ecosystem

In a discussion convened by the Arts Initiative and regional arts advocate Creative Washtenaw in August 2024, a group of seventeen cultural leaders from Ann Arbor arts and culture organizations, as well as independent artists, shared ideas about how the university could optimally work with the broader local arts community. Some gaps and challenges emerged from that discussion.

The arts at U-M have a complex and nuanced relationship with artists and arts entities in the Ann Arbor area. On one level, the university serves as a source for information, resources, partnerships, and expertise for Ann Arbor artists. This is in keeping with its status as a public institution with a broadly defined obligation to serve the state and nation. As such, many in the surrounding community desire a clear “front door” entry to the university

and its complex systems, through which they can form relationships and access things like space, funding, and information.

While a lack of connection and access is one reality, there is another in which the arts beyond campus are as rich and varied as what the university has to offer, and the arts ecosystems in Ann Arbor and on campus overlap and interact

dynamically. There is a desire across both communities to work together, and many members of the university who focus on outreach have begun to redefine what “working with the community” looks like. They, and their counterparts in the local Ann Arbor arts scene, strive for collaboration wherein all members contribute to shared goals.

Overcoming Challenges: Recommendations

1. Establish clear pathways for any student to include creative arts electives, combined with clear messaging that arts coursework enhances the educational experience.
2. Offer additional courses in the arts that fulfill a creative arts requirement. These courses would include ample seats for non-majors and be flexible in ways that encourage low-risk participation (pass/fail, half semester courses, online courses, etc.).
3. Subsidize blocks of free or deeply discounted faculty/staff tickets to performances and exhibitions.
4. Collaborate with community partners to build effective channels of communication and engagement.
5. Explore establishing a student arts center space to address rehearsal, performance and exhibit needs for non-arts students.

By Maryrose Flanigan, Deb Mexicotte, Alison Rivett, and Veronica Stanich

Data visualization: Krithika Balaji

The Student Experience

Introduction

From 2010-15, the Arts Engagement Project sought to collect both current and longitudinal data on undergraduate students' experience in and through the arts during their time at U-M Ann Arbor. This effort was started, in part, to provide a tool for the university to better understand the importance and impact of student arts engagement – especially in the co-curricular realm – and for arts staff to better advocate for support and improvements to the student art experience.

ArtsEngine, a unit at U-M and the current lead on this project, designed student arts engagement surveys, tailored to respondents in each of the four years of the college experience. The surveys had a wide range of questions, addressing precursors to arts engagement in college; the frequency of or change in personal artist identities; what kinds of arts experiences might lead to which personal, developmental, or professional outcomes for U-M Ann Arbor students; and more. The surveys also asked about the overall climate for arts engagement at U-M Ann Arbor, including access, costs, or

other barriers that might have kept students from engaging in the arts as much as they would have liked.

The 2010-15 study engaged 4000+ individual students, and surveyed a small subset (~200) every year throughout their undergraduate experience at U-M Ann Arbor. This dataset is publicly housed in the [National Archive of Data on Arts and Culture](#) (NADAC). Analyses of this initial student data may also be found at <https://artsengine.github.io/ArtsEngagementJupyterBook-Build/intro.html>.

A relaunch of this project that surveys students at all three U-M campuses—Dearborn, Flint, and Ann Arbor—has been undertaken with a 2023-24 pilot, and a second year's data collected for 2024-25. Preliminary analysis of this new data is underway, looking to either validate the findings of the previous project for our post-pandemic student population, or to discover how responses may differ from the 2010-15 research or amongst the newly included Flint and Dearborn campuses data from 2023-25.

Demographics 2023-24

A common question regarding the demographics of participation in the Arts Engagement Project is “How does participation by those students studying in arts majors perhaps skew the data toward a more positive perception of the arts?” While there may be some bias for arts majors to more often accept the invitation to fill out a survey about the arts, the participant demographics indicate a broadly representative group of respondents, allowing us some confidence in more universal data interpretation. (See Figure 5.1.) Likewise, participants are fairly evenly spread across all four academic years. (See Figure 5.2.)

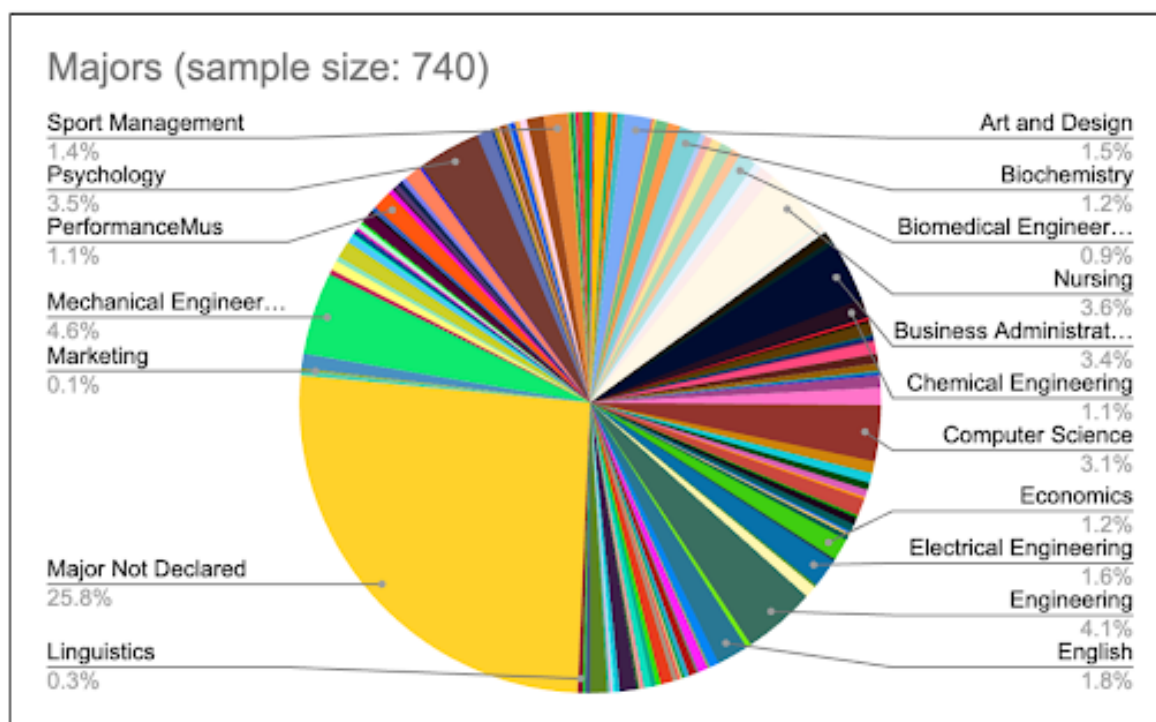


Figure 5.1. Participants in the relaunch of the Arts Engagement Project (2023-24) represent a wide range of majors across all three U-M campuses (n=740).

Academic Level Distribution

Sample Size: 740

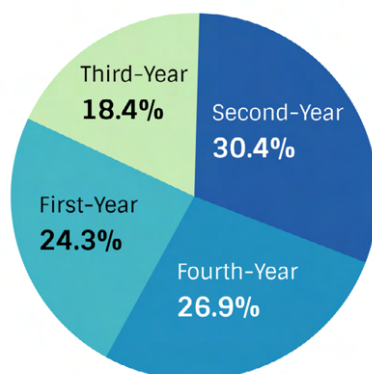


Figure 5.2. Participants in the relaunch of the Arts Engagement Project (2023 - 24) represent all four academic years fairly evenly, with slightly higher participation from sophomores and slightly lower participation from juniors (n= 740).

A much higher number of participants identify as female than identify as male, which is typical of self-reported student surveys. The disparity is more pronounced in the 2023-25 survey than in the previous one, going from 66% female and 31% male (2010-15 survey) to 72% female and ~28% male (2023-24 survey). The smaller sample size in the 2023-24 survey may account for some of this increased disparity, as may the increasing percentage of students identifying as female in the overall college population. (See Figure 5.3.)

Distribution of Sex

Sample Size: 740

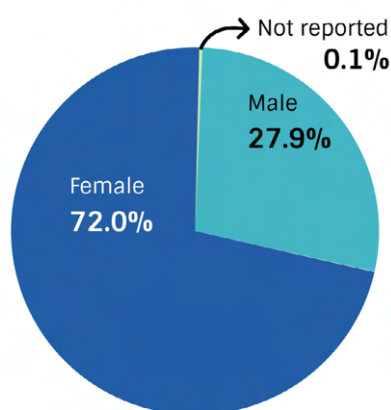


Figure 5.3. More participants in the Arts Engagement Project, both its first and second rounds, identify as female than as male.

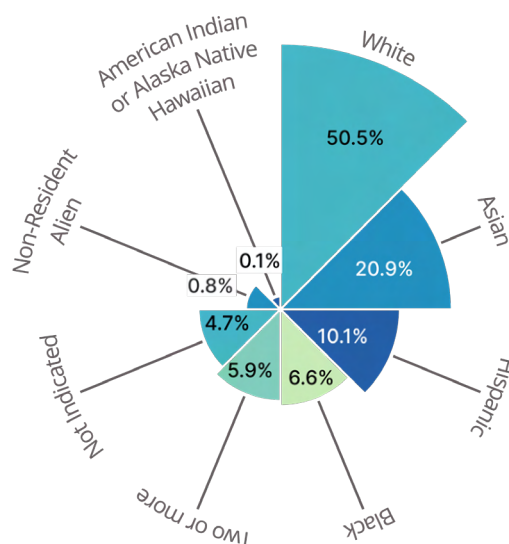


Figure 5.4. Participants race/ethnicity in the 2023-24 Arts Engagement Project. Sample Size=740.

Insights

1. The arts play an important role in U-M students' sense of self; three out of four surveyed students consider themselves an artist of some sort.
2. The arts increase students' social connections, broaden their worldview, impart valuable skills, and support their wellness.
3. Students directly ascribe the development of a wide range of skills and attributes to their arts involvement. Students report gaining different skills and attributes depending on the arts practice with which they engage. Students involved with the arts consistently report strengths in having a set of personal values, communication, leadership, teamwork, organization, and social responsibility.
4. Student arts organizations are an important avenue of involvement.
5. Since the pandemic, more students engage in the arts online or remotely and more attend in-person arts events and activities as viewers or audience members. However, fewer students actively participate or play leadership roles in the arts.
6. Students report that while all three campus climates at U-M encourage participation in the arts, this finding is lower than the 2010-15 survey results for the Ann Arbor campus, and is lower in Dearborn and Flint compared to the main campus.
7. Barriers to student arts participation continue to be reasonably stable in all AEP surveys; students commonly report academic workload, time, cost, availability and competitiveness of opportunities, and social isolation among the reasons not being engaged as much as desired.

Student Artist Identities

Do students consider themselves artists? In the survey, students were asked whether they agreed with statements such as “I am a musician,” “I am a filmmaker,” “I am a member of a student organization that primarily engages in the arts,” etc. Across campuses, about 75% of U-M student survey respondents indicate at least one arts identity (See Figure 5.5), which is a substantial increase in the previous study’s results (~50%).

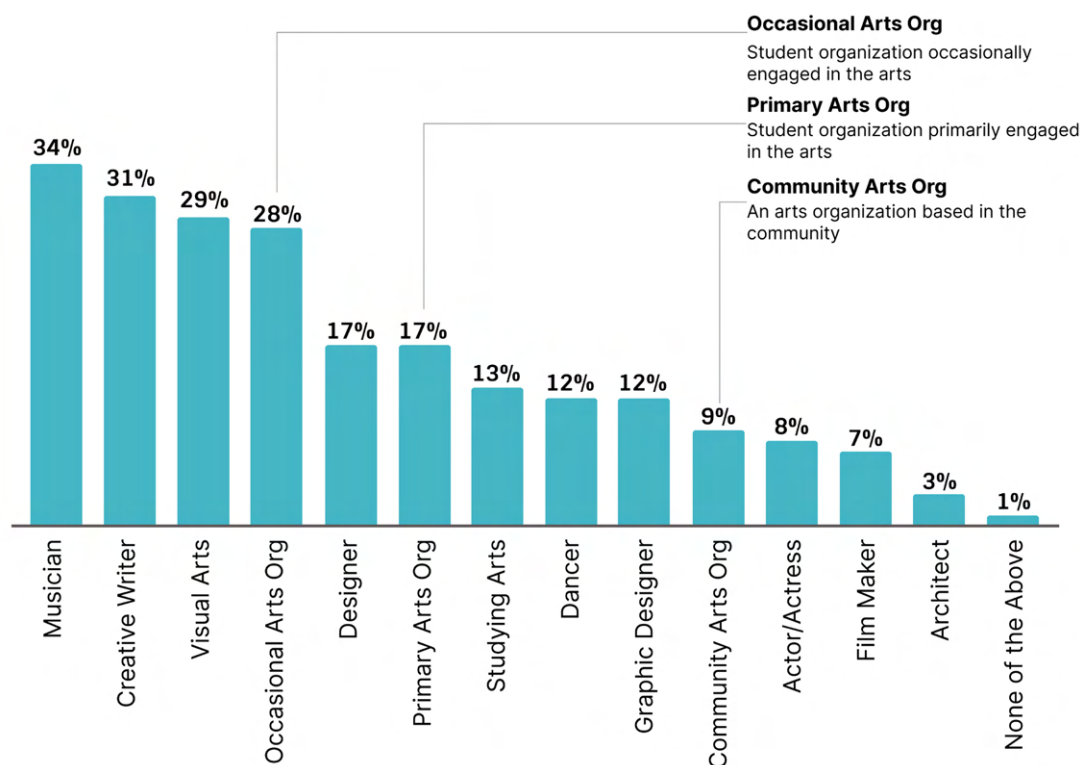


Figure 5.5. Participants in the relaunch of the Arts Engagement Project (2023-24) identify as artists across a wide range of disciplines, claiming “I am a musician,” etc (n=740).

Identifying as an artist implies not only holding a space for a particular avenue of expression within a demanding life, but also a conscious acknowledgement of arts-related values like creativity, collaboration, aesthetics, and curiosity. It is still possible to maintain an arts identity even if a student doesn’t pursue an arts major or arts career; while there may be reduced time and commitment, those arts perspectives and values continue to impact experiences and choices.

Impacts on Students

Two questions in the Arts Engagement Project survey directly asked about how the arts impacted students' college experience and their personal development:

1. What role did the arts play in your college experience, both positive and negative?
2. What role did the arts play in your development as a person, friend, colleague, and student during college?

Responses to these open-ended questions afford us an understanding of how the arts are at work (and at play) in students' lives at U-M, in their own words. They reveal that the arts touch almost

every part of student experience and development; we feel confident saying that the arts are integral to students' lived experience in college at U-M.

Responses to these questions were analyzed and coded. Here, we explore the types of response in the initial round of surveys (2010-15) with a visualization of the responses as a "tree" and ample supporting quotations from student surveys. Analysis of the second round of the survey (2023-24) follows, allowing us to begin to chart how the student experience has changed since the pandemic.

Arts Engagement Project 2010-15

College Experience

In response to the first question, "*What role did the arts play in your college experience, both positive and negative*?", students (n=840) largely reported the positive role the arts played in their college experiences. The major topic areas, **Expanded Possibilities and Relaxation** and **More and Better Social Connections** comprised about 76% of responses. In addition, some students engaged in the arts primarily through their classroom experience (**Educational**), while some indicated that the arts played, at best, only a **Small Role** in their college experience. Responses to the question are represented in a "topic tree" (see Figure 5.6).

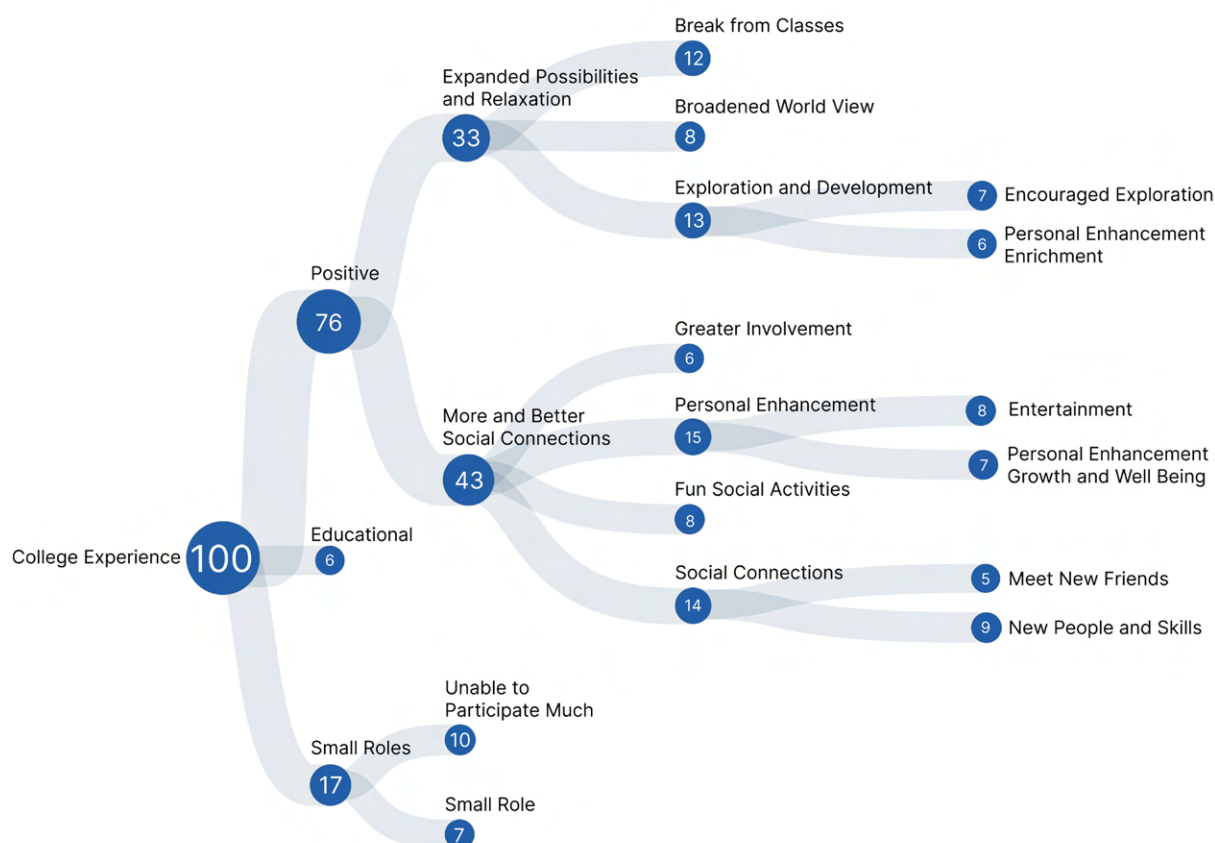


Figure 5.6. From the Arts Engagement Project 2010-15 student survey: Tree visualization of the College Experience topic model representing 840 student responses. The responses comprise four main topic branches: Expanded Possibilities and Relaxation, More and Better Social Connections, Educational, and Small Role. [See the interactive College Experience Topic Tree.](#)

There were some negative responses about engaging in the arts in college —though these comments were often part of a more overall positive response or were used as a point-counterpoint in a response. This ambivalence is present in the responses to several survey questions, suggesting that there is a diversity of experience. When students did indicate a negative role for the arts, it typically stemmed from frustration at not achieving as good grades or outcomes from their arts endeavors, time spent on the arts adversely affecting their other coursework grades or focus, or arts participation that steered them toward what they perceived to be potentially less secure or lower-paying jobs in an arts field. Students also expressed regret about being unable to engage in the arts in college as much as they wanted, for a number of reasons.

In one of the largest topic response areas, students reported that the arts **Expanded Possibilities and Relaxation** by offering needed breaks from classwork, broadening their worldview, encouraging exploration and creative expression, and personally enriching their lives.

1. Break from Classes

“The arts provided a space for sanity and creative problem solving. A nice escape from academic and business-related works, while still building professional, positive, and useful life skills.”

“The arts are an outlet for other academic stress. It is a relief to attend a dance class for credit hours instead of going to math and science classes.”

2. Broadened Worldview

“It helped me learn more about different cultures. For example, I have attended a lot of cultural dance performances during my time here.”

“Often an opportunity in and out of class to expand my understanding of art and other ways of thinking.”

3. Encouraged Exploration

“The arts provided a relief from academic responsibilities, but also an outlet for creativity when there was no space for it in the classroom.”

“Architecture served as a possible career path, and exploring it really opened my eyes to new ways of thinking about the physical world.”

4. Personal Enhancement/Enrichment

“...kept me goal-oriented, disciplined, fit and focused. Takes up a lot of time, affects my schoolwork.”

“The arts were always a good balance from the very intense science courses I had to take for my major. I have always felt that creativity was completely necessary for life and Michigan has reinforced this with its encouragement.”

In another large topic response area, **More and Better Social Connections**, students reported that engaging in the arts was an avenue to fun social activities, entertainment, personal growth and well-being, and greater involvement with their peers and the university overall. They also reported new social connections through meeting people and developing friendships, as well as personal enhancement because of new skills acquired.

1. Greater Involvement

“Without my arts experience, my resume would be empty and I would probably be medicated. Though it is sometimes frustrating to work with others under the pressure and demanding schedules of college, my arts experiences keep my life together.”

“I think it has added great balance to my experience. While I haven’t been involved too intensely, I treasure the memories I have had engaging in the arts.”

2. Social Connections

“It was a good outlet for my own artistic expression; however, being involved in women’s glee club was pretty time consuming and stressful at times. Overall, I’m happy I did it; my college experience would not have been the same without it...if anything, it just helped with my time management skills. It was also good socially!”

“They were often a way for me to meet and connect with others who shared the same interests, which was important to me since most people in my department (that I’ve met) aren’t nearly as involved.”

3. Fun Social Activities

“It helped me make a lot of friends who are a lot like me. I think it may have been what got me through a tough academic schedule; it gave me something to look forward to every day.”

“I enjoyed the performances I got to go to, and I was also able to sing in a choir for my sophomore year. That was a good experience, since I had been part of choir all throughout high school and was missing it.”

4. Personal Enhancement

“The arts have helped cultivate me into a well-rounded, experienced, and learned young person who feels confident about going out into the world and using the skills that I learned from the arts to help others.”

“My involvement in the arts was mostly for enjoyment. Sometimes, though unintended, it opened my mind to new perspectives.”

In the two smaller categories of responses, **Educational** focuses on the role the arts had in learning—enrolling in arts courses, majoring in the arts, or otherwise engaging in the arts through academic work—while **Small Role** speaks for itself in that students reported they were unable or uninterested in participating in the arts in any larger way.

“The arts was my major in college and it let me experience many opportunities including participat(ing) in the Ann Arbor Film Festival, many galleries on campus, and such.”

“I took an art history class that I enjoyed very much. I did little else related to the arts besides visit museums occasionally.”

Student Development

In response to the second question, *“What role did the arts play in your development as a person, friend, colleague, and student during college?”* students (n=971) wrote about the arts in relational terms—to self, and to self in interaction with others. Broadly, these impacts around self-development fall along two main branches: **Social Identity** and **Different Perspectives**. (See Figure 5.7) Students reported growth or change in sub-areas like **Social Connections**, **Personal Identity**, **Skill Acquisition**, **New Perspectives** and **Cultural Understandings**, **Better Life Balance**, and, as might be expected, a **Deeper Appreciation of the Arts**. Taken together, this array of topics suggests a significant pro-social role for the arts in both social and skill development.

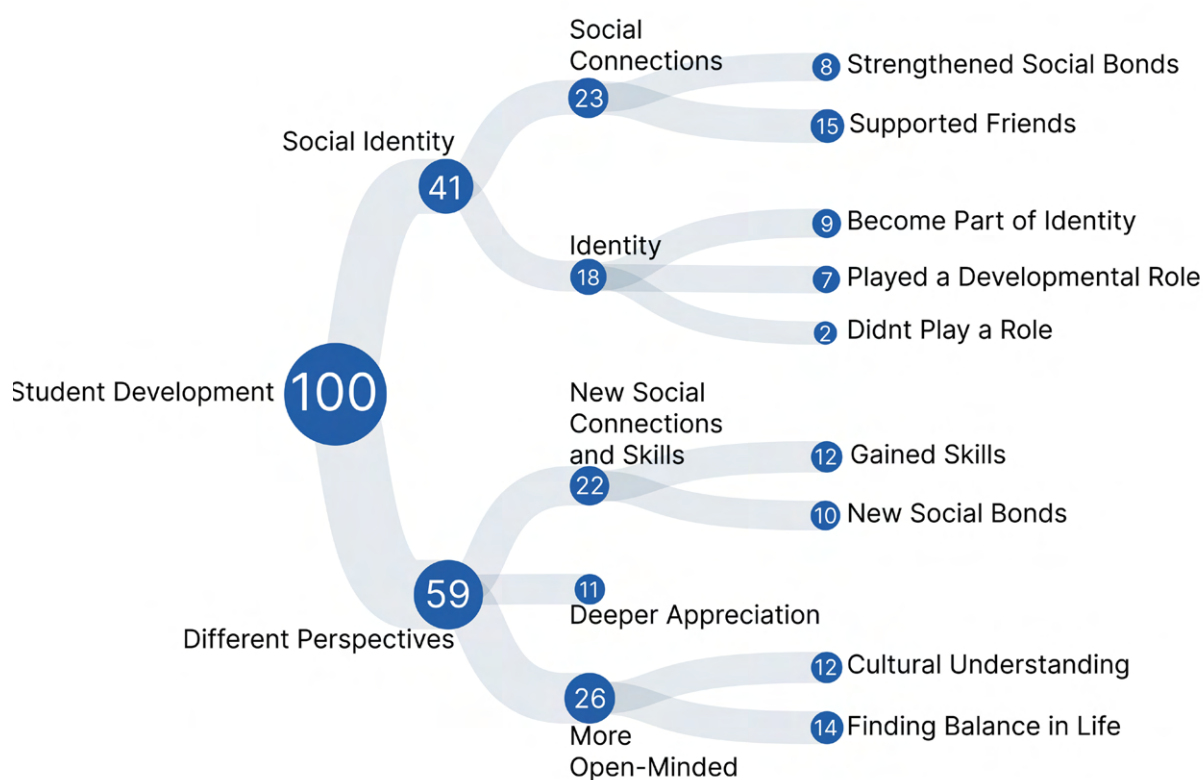


Figure 5.7. From the Arts Engagement Project 2010-15 student survey: Tree visualization of the Student Development topic model representing 971 student responses. The responses comprise two main topic branches: Social Identity and Different Perspectives. See [the interactive Student Development Topic Tree](#).

Social Identity

In the major subtopic areas under **Social Identity**, students reported strengthened social connections because of attending arts events with friends, supporting friends engaged themselves in arts events or activities, or gaining or maintaining friendships (social bonds) through mutual interests centered around

the arts. They also reported a change in the way they viewed themselves as the arts became part of their identity. Finally, they reported that engaging in the arts led to developing specific skills and abilities (played a developmental role) or, conversely, had little or no effect on their development in college (didn't play a role).

Social Connections

“Attending art events was something I did with my friends, and (it) brought us closer together.”

“The biggest role is personal appreciation for the arts and appreciation for beauty. As a friend, I have attended many arts events simply to support my friends that are involved.”

Became Part of Identity

“I found my true self. I became a better friend.”

“I found the arts to play an enormous role in my psychological and social well being. Art is what has made me who I am today.”

Played a Developmental Role

“The arts have improved my critical thinking skills, as I have said before. The arts allow me to be more astute to my surroundings, and to critically analyze certain aspects of society that I may have otherwise overlooked. It does not allow me to be brainwashed into one way of thinking, and it taught me to analyze the details of certain societal situations so I can develop my own opinions.”

“The arts helped me grow as a person and a student. I developed much better time management skills as well as effective organization skills. I also became better at communicating and handling conflict between others. Additionally, my involvement in the art led to some of my closest friendships during college.”

“The same role it played while growing up. It taught me discipline, respect, and opened my mind to so many different cultures and beliefs that I wouldn’t have otherwise received.”

Didn’t Play a Role

“It played more of a role for me in high school, I genuinely appreciate the arts but found that during college I diverted my attention elsewhere due to the need to acquire a job after college.”

“Did not play as much of a role as I would have wished due to time constraints.”

Different Perspectives

Students responses under **Different Perspectives** relate to the development of new social connections and skills, acquiring a deeper appreciation of their own learning and the arts, and becoming more open-minded by developing greater cultural understanding through connections to a more diverse set of people and ideas.

New Social Connections and Skills

“It gave me time management skills to include all the practice time and competition time etc. communication skills to discuss with my partner all the various aspects of our dancing relationship.”

“Helped build my confidence, make friends, build relationships, developed my leadership skills, organization, and time management.”

“The arts helped me develop a strong work ethic, creativity, and time management skills.”

“My love for and tastes in music and film have certainly grown and developed over the past four years, in part due to my friends and in part to the university and the opportunities that were provided. I think my friends have come to know me as a person who loves music and movies, and they rely on me for honest reviews and recommendations. Even when they don’t ask for it, I love to show people new artists I’m into or discuss classic films or the newest releases.”

Deeper Appreciation

“The arts have been a mechanism through which I have learned many important lessons in many of my classes. It has made me realize that art can move me, and can move others. It has made me appreciate others more, and made me appreciate my own creativity and desire to inspire creativity in others.”

“I wouldn’t say the arts contributed to my development too much per say, but it did offer me some insight into the subject that I wouldn’t have had before. It also improved my mood since I enjoyed spending time with the arts.”

More Open Minded

“The Arts helped me understand different peoples’ perspectives (and the different perspectives of people from different cultures than myself) in a way that a textbook never could. This new understanding helped me develop into a more caring, compassionate, and socially aware person. This new understanding also fueled my desire to pursue a career in immigration law.”

“It’s so corny, but they helped me grow as person and see the world from different point of views.”

“If I weren’t a reader and writer, I wouldn’t appreciate the different ways that people see the world and be able to better understand them.”

“The arts have helped my continue a balanced lifestyle (by helping to relieve stress), and they have also helped me become a more “cultured” person by viewing art from different cultures.”

“Being surrounded by creative people has given me a much fuller and broader appreciation for what beauty and creativity look like, and how they can be manifested in different forms. This has helped me better understand the way different people see and experience the world and the different things they appreciate. Visual arts, graphic design, and architecture have immensely strengthened my communication skills - both verbal and visual.”

“It helped me explore my own beliefs and contemplate new knowledge and perspectives I gained from other people and their experiences. Art helped me become a more open-minded, thoughtful, and well-rounded person.”

[Read more about the results of the 2010-2015 Arts Engagement Project.](#)

Arts Engagement Project 2023-24

In a recent re-launch of the Arts Engagement Project, surveys with current U-M students from Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint allow us to compare the 2010-15 cohort with students enrolled at U-M 2023-25. As of Spring, 2025, findings from this second round of the study will be added, creating a more robust certainty of findings as small numbers of respondents can have a large effect on reported percentages.

College Experience

What role did the arts play in your college experience, both positive and negative?

Comparing the responses to this question in the 2010-15 study with the current study, **the similarities are both striking and reassuring as to the stability of the role of the arts in students' college experience.** The data appear consistent, with most of the small differences trending generally in a positive direction in assessing the role of the arts. Again, the smaller sample size may be having an effect in the current data. The inclusion of data from Dearborn and Flint, which was not included in the 2010-15 study, may also have an impact .

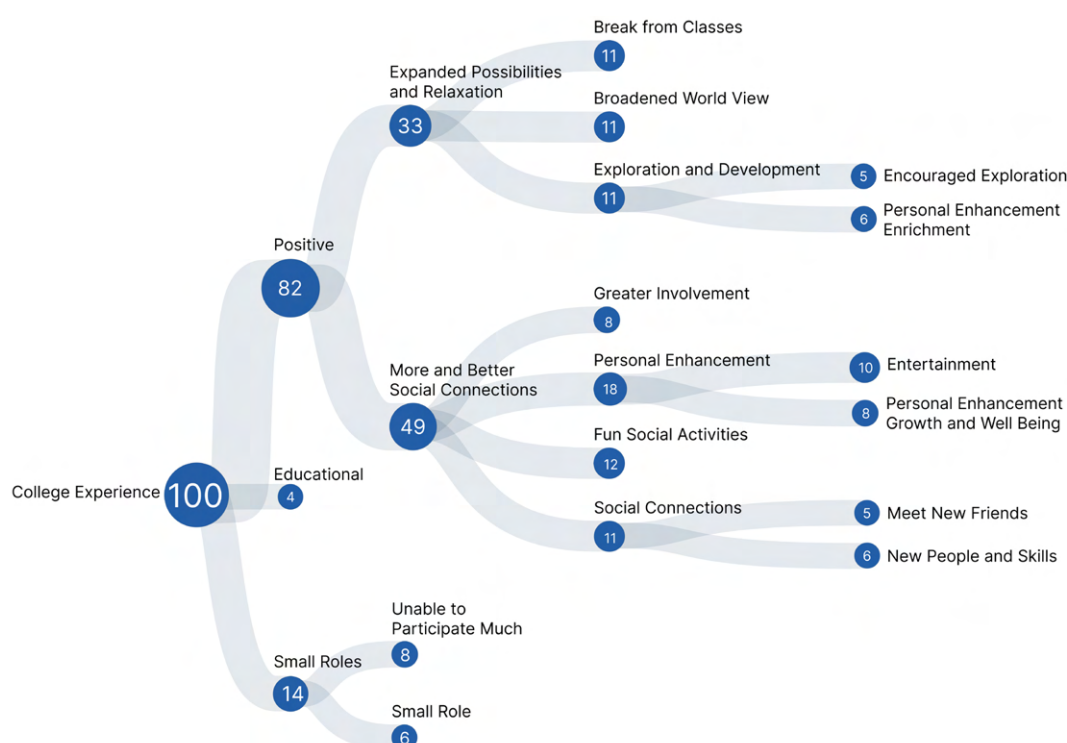


Figure 5.8. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-25 student survey: Tree visualization of the College Experience topic model representing 94 student responses. The four main topic branches remain the same: Expanded Possibilities and Relaxation, More and Better Social Connections, Educational, and Small Role. Compared to the 2010-15 topic tree, responses in the More and Better Social Connections subcategory increased from 43% to 49%, causing an increase in the total percentage of Positive responses.

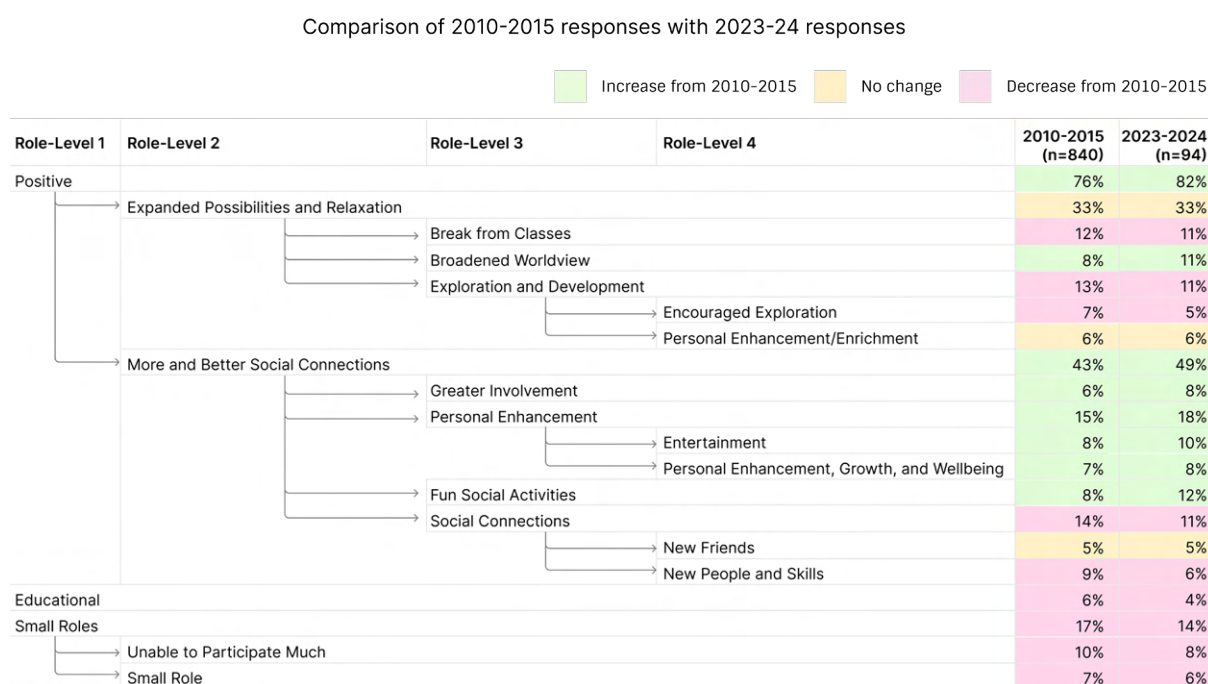


Figure 5.9: Comparison of 2010-2015 responses with 2023-24 responses

Student Development

What role did the arts play in your development as a person, friend, colleague, and student during college?

Comparing the responses to this question in the 2010-15 study with the current study, we find that the major nodes of Social Identity and Different Perspectives seem to have switched places in terms of frequency (Social Identity is now the most frequent type of response). Perhaps this is due to increased individual participation in the arts during pandemic isolation (online engagement, fewer collaborative or group performance arts activities), or because students do not see as direct a pathway through the arts to skill development, broader engagement with the world, or life balance. Evaluating data to examine pandemic effects on the individual cohorts may add some additional evidence to these hypotheses.



Figure 5.10. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Tree visualization of the Student Development topic model representing 126 student responses. The responses still reflect two main topic branches, Social Identity and Different Perspectives, but Social Identity is now the more frequent response whereas Different Perspectives was more frequent in the 2010-15 study.

Comparison of 2010-2015 responses with 2023-Present responses

			<div></div> Increase from 2010-2015	<div></div> Decrease from 2010-2015
Role-Level 1	Role-Level 2	Role-Level 3	2010-2015 (n=812)	2023-2024 (n=126)
Different Perspectives			59%	41%
<div></div>	More Open Minded	Cultural Understanding	26%	14%
		Finding Balance in Life	12%	6%
	Deeper Appreciation		14%	8%
			11%	8%
	New Social Connections and Skills		22%	19%
		Gained Skills	12%	7%
		New Social Bonds	10%	12%
Social Identity			41%	59%
<div></div>	Identity	Became Part of Identity	18%	33%
		Didn't Play a Role	9%	16%
		Played a Developmental Role	2%	5%
			7%	11%
	Social Connections		23%	27%
		Strengthened Social Bonds	8%	14%
		Supported Friends	15%	13%

Figure 5.11: Comparison of 2010-2015 responses with 2023-Present responses

Arts-related personal characteristics and skill development

We assume that students who play the flute, work on a film crew, or make comics get better at flute-playing, film-making, and comics-writing, but we also sense that their involvement in the arts imparts other skills and characteristics as well. This hunch is born out in the AEP data.

We found differences across the art forms as well as across degrees of involvement. All of these differences are important for recognizing the experiential outcomes for U-M students through the arts, as well as for understanding and articulating personal attributes and skills that may be transferrable or desirable for career and higher education goals. We can likely attribute these differences to both “nature” (the inherent traits that lead a student to choose an art form and a degree of involvement) and “nurture” (the traits that are developed and reinforced through involvement in a particular art form).

Arts Engagement Project 2010-15

In the first round of the AEP, we did a deep dive into the responses of students involved in a number of art forms and practices. We have included the analysis from four of those practices—Dance, Music Performance, Visual Arts, and Creative Writing—as examples of the diversity of response between students engaged in these areas. We provided students with a list of characteristics and skills and asked, “Which of the following did you feel you got out of your involvement with the arts?” We find significant differences in reported personal characteristics and skills when we compare responses from students who did engage in that art form and those who did not. We also see different responses among students who are involved in the same art form, but to different degrees—Leadership, Participation, or Attendance. This analysis gives us a detailed look at

those four art forms, and enables us to infer how art forms that are similar to each other (e.g., those that are performance-based or those that have visual and design aspects) might share common attributes.

Understanding how engagement with various art forms influences or reinforces students’ skills and personal development allows us to help them articulate those skills – transferring them to other fields of work and study. It also shows us deficits in how students think about their skills versus what skills we know they possess through other measures and methods. Finally, it reinforces the important role engagement in the arts continues to play in student development even at the college level, helping to build the case for maintenance and expansion of current arts supports

and offerings.

Dance

Students involved with dance in leadership roles showed very strong positive correlations with most of the skills and attributes we queried, with creativity, organization, personal expression, working with others, and networking most strongly indicated. Like Leadership, participation in dance has a notable positive impact on personal expression, working with others, and networking, and includes goal setting, suggesting that active engagement

in dance fosters personal and collaborative skill development. Attendance alone has some smaller effects, with slight positive correlations in arts appreciate and expanded worldview, indicating that passive presence can still contribute to broadening personal perspectives. Other areas where we see significant differences across all levels of dance engagement are personal values, time management, art skills, creativity, and networking.

Dance

Outcome Comparison of Coefficients for Dance: Attendance, Participation and Leadership

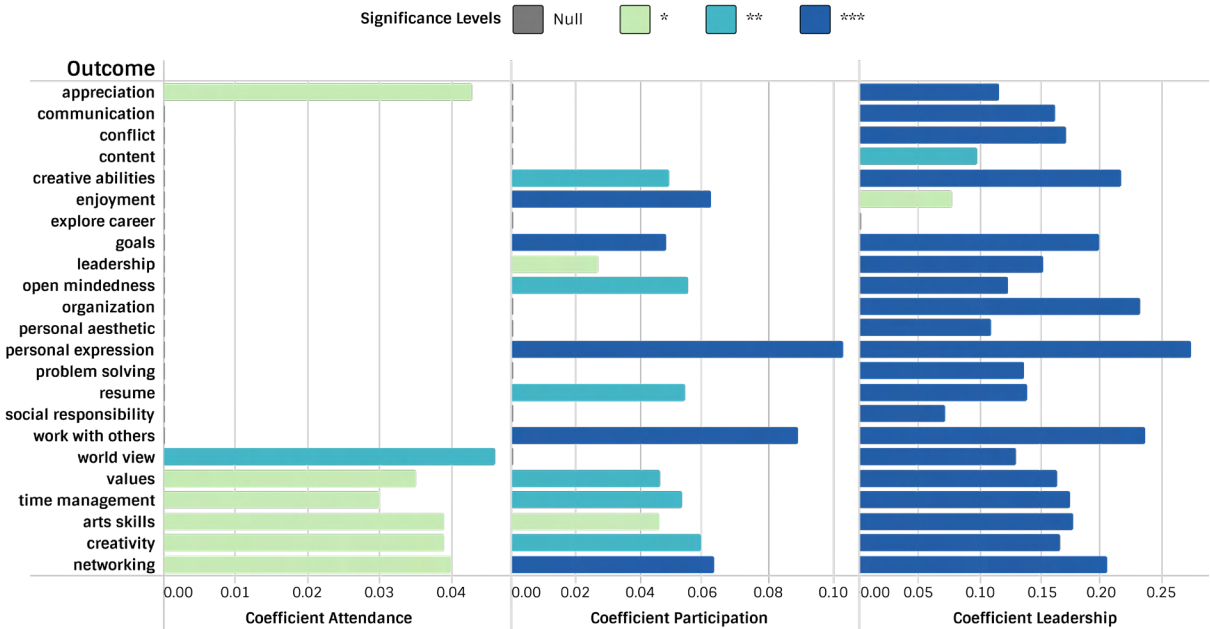


Figure 5.12. From the Arts Engagement Project 2010-15 student survey: Skills and attributes associated with Attendance, Participation, and Leadership in Dance.

Music Performance

By contrast, although their practice is similar to dance as a performing art, students engaged in music performance report much stronger impacts across all levels of engagement (attendance, participation, leadership). Leadership roles display strong positive correlations with a wide range of skills and attributes, with highest emphasis on resume building, technical arts skills, creativity, time management, personal expression, and working with others. Participation also has

a large number of positive impacts, with personal expression, working with others, enjoyment and arts appreciation most significant. Attendance demonstrates positive effects on open-mindedness, creativity, and content understanding—with expected high correlations with enjoyment and appreciation—indicating that simply being present at music performances may impart broadened perspectives and creative thinking as well as deeper appreciation for the art form.

Music Performance

**Outcome Comparison of Coefficients for Music Performance:
Attendance, Participation and Leadership**

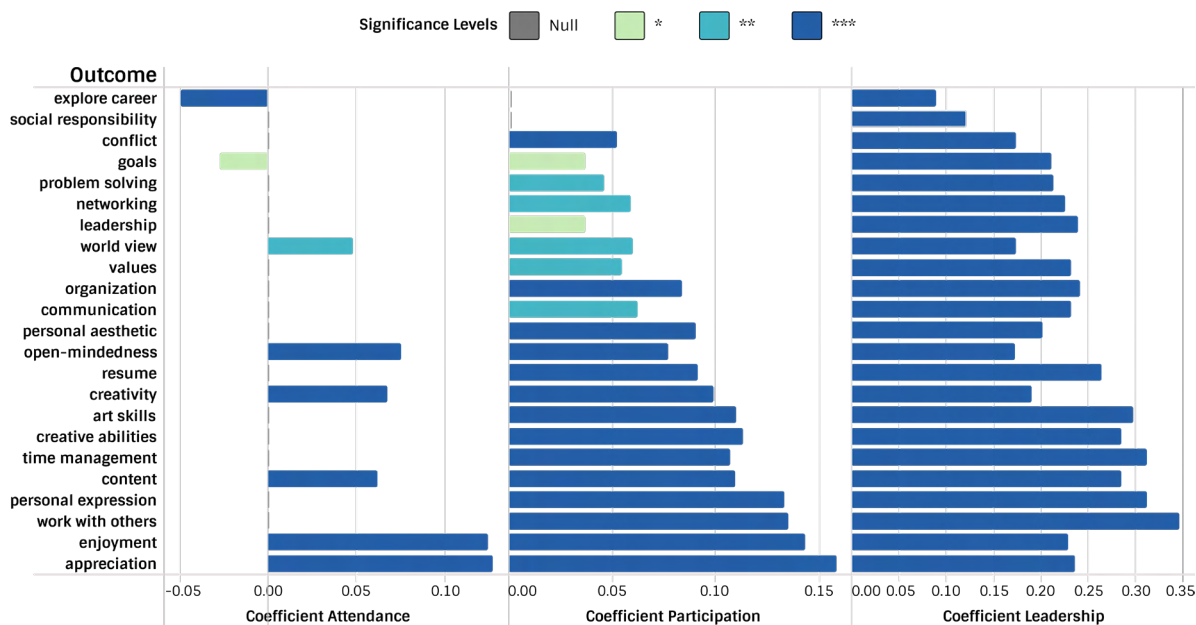


Figure 5.13. From the Arts Engagement Project 2010-15 student survey: Skills and attributes associated with Attendance, Participation, and Leadership in Music Performance.

Visual Arts

Reports from students involved in visual arts show much weaker correlations with personal skills and characteristics, compared with the previously described examples. This may be exacerbated by the reporting methodology itself and by differences between students in different art forms; students who present themselves regularly through the performing arts may be better prepared to articulate their skills. Understanding this difference could be relevant to helping students in the visual arts develop the ability to articulate and translate transferrable skills in pursuit of their career goals.

Nevertheless, leadership in visual arts provides strong benefits, particularly in enhancing career exploration, personal expression, networking, resume building (portfolio), and communication, indicating those who choose leadership roles in the visual arts are strongly focused on their life after college. Participation (art-making) shows very positive correlations with content knowledge, social responsibility, networking, and technical arts skills. Attendance also plays a significant role, especially in fostering enjoyment, appreciation, and the development of arts content knowledge.

Visual Arts

Outcome Comparison of Coefficients for Visual Arts: Attendance, Participation and Leadership

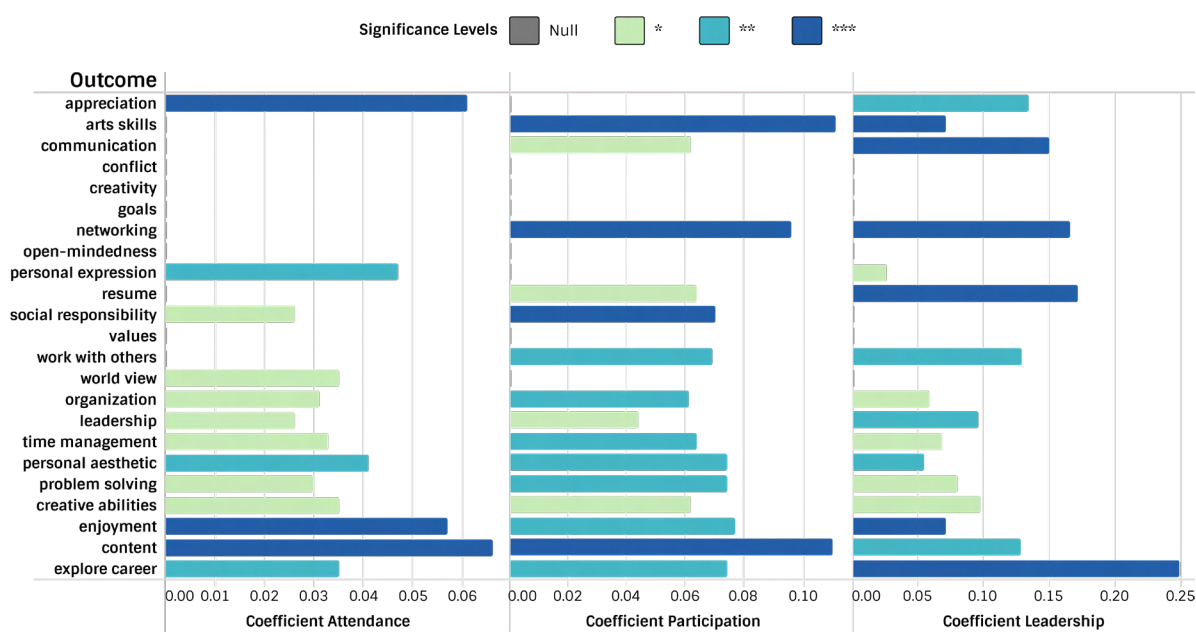


Figure 5.14. From the Arts Engagement Project 2010-15 student survey: Skills and attributes associated with Attendance, Participation, and Leadership in Visual Arts.

Creative Writing

As a final example, creative writing participants differ in their reported skills and personal attributes from the previous examples, with leadership, participation, and attendance in creative writing showing some unique impacts on skill development. Leadership roles demonstrate significant positive correlations with personal expression, communication, career exploration aesthetic development, and creativity, suggesting that guiding creative writing projects may be as much about developing publishing

industry skills as the craft of writing. Participation has strong positive effects on creativity and creative abilities, open-mindedness and personal values—again pointing to the interactions between writing and exposure to ideas and technical craft. Attendance—which in this context could be book readings, clubs, or, speakers, or clubs, shows a slight positive influence on personal expression, creativity, and open-mindedness, highlighting that even just exposure to authors and writing can still foster self-expression and broadened perspectives.

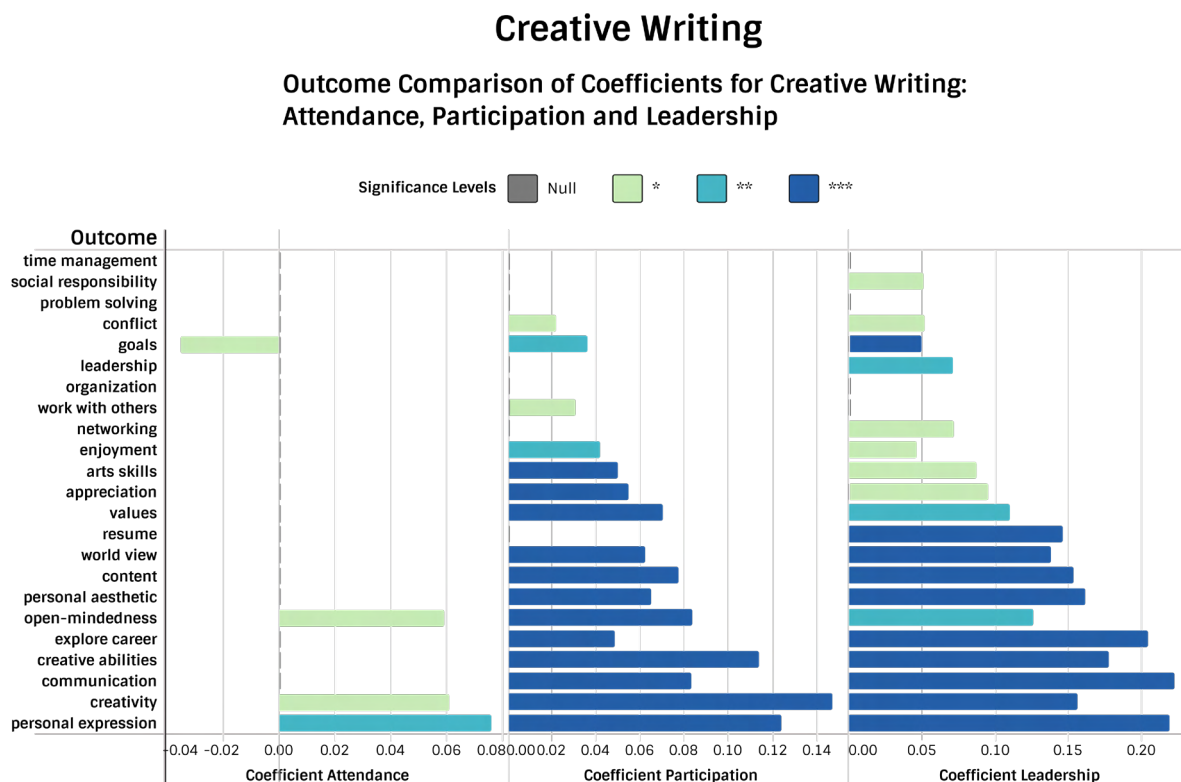


Figure 5.15. From the Arts Engagement Project 2010-15 student survey: Skills and attributes associated with Attendance, Participation, and Leadership in Creative Writing.

A full listing of these reported skill and personal characteristics, broken down by specific arts practice, is available at [the Arts Engagement Project 2010-15 website](#).

Arts Engagement Project 2023-24

The previous analysis has not yet been performed on the 2023-24 data. Instead, we have looked at what personal characteristics or skills are more broadly reported by those who engage in any of the following grouped arts categories, and noted the differences as areas for additional study. Again, these findings have implications for how we counsel students about the relationship of their arts experiences to their career ambitions, how we support arts experiences as part of student life, and how students understand and articulate their own arts experiences.

Arts categories

- **Performance-Based Arts:** Dance, Choreography, Music Performance, Theatre, Comedy/Improv. This category includes art forms that emphasize live expression, physicality, and interpersonal collaboration. Performance-based arts often require participants to work closely in teams, adapt to dynamic environments, and express themselves creatively in front of audiences.
- **Visual and Design Arts:** Animation, Architecture, Graphic Design, Visual and Fine Arts, Comics/Graphic Novels. These art forms focus on visual creativity and the transformation of ideas into tangible, aesthetic expressions. They require skills in planning, design, and execution, often relying on individual or collaborative innovation.
- **Literary and Narrative Arts:** Creative Writing, Comics/Graphic Novels, Playwriting, Storytelling, Narrative Arts. This category includes art forms centered on storytelling, written expression, and narrative construction. These arts emphasize imagination, language, and the power of words to convey ideas and emotions.
- **Crafts and Applied Arts:** Fiber Arts, Woodworking, Fashion Design, Culinary Arts, Handwork. This category involves the creation of functional or decorative items, blending artistic creativity with practical applications. Crafts often require fine motor skills, patience, and an eye for detail.

- **Media and Film Arts:** Film, Multimedia, New Media. Media and film arts focus on audio-visual storytelling and production, blending technical expertise with artistic vision. These art forms often involve complex teamwork and technical precision.
- **Musical Composition:** This category focuses on the creation of original music, emphasizing theoretical knowledge, creativity, and a deep understanding of musical structure.
- **Other/Unclassified:** This category encompasses any art forms that do not fit neatly into the previous classifications. It provides flexibility for capturing unique or interdisciplinary practices.

In this round of the study, we asked students whether some skill or personal characteristic described them “extremely well,” “very well,” “slightly well,” or “not at all,” with most students picking the extreme ends of the scale more frequently. We analyzed their responses according to the category or type of art in which they were involved (e.g., performance-based, visual and design) as well as to their degree of involvement—Leadership, Participation, Attendance, or Engagement. This analysis does not

compare those who are involved with, for example, dance participation with those who are not (as in the 2010-15 analysis). Rather, it takes the degree of involvement as a starting point, exploring the differences between those who, for example, have leadership roles in dance and those who have leadership roles in media and film arts.

Certain skills and characteristics emerge repeatedly across this matrix: having a set of personal values and beliefs (“personal values” in the graphics here), communication, leadership, teamwork, organization, and social responsibility. Their consistent recurrence allows us to be confident in the role that the arts play in student development in these areas.

The inconsistencies across any degree of involvement (Leadership, Participation, Attendance, Engagement) also become important; we note the few places where otherwise prevalent skills and characteristics are not present, the relative frequency with which certain skills and characteristics appear, and the instances when an unusual characteristic pops up. These differences raise questions to which we can hazard speculative answers but which will require further research to resolve.

Leadership

Students engaging in Leadership in all types of arts (i.e., in a position of authority like president of an organization, dance captain, or director) frequently report that they are strong in gaining personal values through the arts, suggesting perhaps that this is the foundation from which they understand their leadership role. Where student leaders in all art forms except one strongly claim a given skill or characteristic, it raises questions about why that one art form might be different. For example, the frequency of reported aesthetic appreciation is unsurprising from students who lead in the arts, and begs the question: how come students who lead in Performance-based art forms (the one category where this attribute does not show up) *don't* think they are strong in aesthetic appreciation? Why and how does their understanding of “aesthetic appreciation,” or of their own arts experience, differ from that of their peers who lead in other art forms?

Student leaders in most types of arts claim the skill of communication (although not as frequently as other characteristics), but student leaders in Crafts and Applied Arts don't. However, those same student leaders in Crafts and

Applied Arts most frequently claim the skill of organization, whereas organization shows up less frequently or not at all for other student arts leaders. As Crafts and Applied Arts are often more solitary pursuits, or involve less coordinated efforts, communication may not play as big a role for student leaders in this art form. Similarly, student leaders in Performance-based forms report teamwork most frequently, but student leaders in other arts forms report it less frequently or not at all. We can conjecture that the co-creation with an audience in real time that is inherent in the performing arts creates a sense of teamwork in a way that creating something to be seen or heard later, in a different time and place, doesn't.

Among a group of students that is defined by the fact that they *lead in the arts*, why do only those involved in Literary and Narrative Arts or Media and Film Arts claim leadership as an attribute? And of that same group, why do only those involved in Visual and Design fields or Crafts and Applied Arts claim arts knowledge? Many of these anomalies may be further explored through focus groups or will emerge as more or less important with additional survey respondents.

	Visual and Design	Literary and Narrative	Media and Film Arts	Performance-Based	Music Composition	Crafts and Applied Arts
Personal Values	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Aesthetic Appreciation	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Teamwork		✓	✓	✓		
Social Responsibility		✓	✓	✓		
Organized	✓				✓	✓
Open Minded				✓	✓	
Arts Knowledge	✓					✓
Leadership		✓	✓			
Punctual	✓					
Artistic	✓					

Figure 5.16. Leadership. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: These are the skills and attributes that students strongly associate with Leadership in the arts.

Participation

Participation in the arts refers to actively engaging in arts practice or activities—the doing and creating of art as dancers, writers, musicians, sculptors, etc. Students who participate in the arts unanimously claim personal values and open-mindedness among their top three attributes, regardless of in what type of art they participate. (In all of these analyses, “personal values” is shorthand for “having a set of personal values and beliefs,” the actual text students chose in the AEP survey.) Because personal values is so ubiquitous across art forms and degrees of engagement, it merits additional research through focus groups or interviews. While open-mindedness was present, but not prevalent, among students in

arts leadership roles, it is universal across art forms for students who participate, attend, or engage in the arts on-line. Given the current cultural polarization in the US, the arts’ capacity to engender open-mindedness bears investigation, as does the relative scarcity of open-mindedness reported among those in leadership positions. Teamwork, communication, and social responsibility are strongly represented across students who participate in all art forms. We can speculate about instances where there is deviation from this; perhaps teamwork doesn’t show up for students participating in Music Composition because it’s a highly individualized pursuit.

	Visual and Design	Literary and Narrative	Performance-Based	Crafts and Applied Arts	Media and Film Arts	Music Composition
Personal Values	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Open Minded	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teamwork	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Social Responsibility	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Communication	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Aesthetic Appreciation	✓				✓	✓
Organized		✓		✓		

Figure 5.17. Participation. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: These are the skills and attributes that students strongly associate with Participation in the arts.

Attendance and Engagement

Students who report Attendance or Engagement with the arts are audience members, listeners, viewers, and readers, either in person or online. Personal values and open-mindedness are again at the fore for these students, universally reported across all types of arts for both in-person Attendance and online Engagement. Teamwork and communication are also universally claimed by students who engage online, and by almost all students who attend the arts in-person. Social responsibility is strongly present as well.

	Visual and Design	Crafts and Applied Arts	Music Composition	Performance-Based	Literary and Narrative	Media and Film Arts
Personal Values	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Open Minded	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teamwork		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Communication	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Organized	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Social Responsibility	✓		✓	✓		
Global Perspective	✓					
Punctual		✓				

Figure 5.18. Attendance. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: These are the skills and attributes that students strongly associate with Attendance in the arts.

	Visual and Design	Performance-Based	Crafts and Applied Arts	Music Composition	Literary and Narrative	Media and Film Arts
Personal Values	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Open Minded	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teamwork	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social Responsibility	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Organized	✓				✓	

Figure 5.19. Engagement. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: These are the skills and attributes that students strongly associate with Engagement in the arts (online or remote).

These findings indicate what skills and capacities are claimed by students involved in the arts, but we consider them preliminary in that:

1. The student survey did not provide definitions for terms, allowing for a broad range of interpretations of what, for example, “communication” might entail.
2. While students report they have these skills and capacities, external verification such as observations from an instructor or mentor would lend additional credibility to their claims.
3. Additional research, ideally through interviews and focus groups, can substantiate our interpretations of this data.

However, our understanding of how involvement with the arts

influences or reinforces students’ skills and characteristics allows us already to help students themselves understand and articulate those skills, which in turn promotes transference to other fields of work and study.¹ Importantly, many of these skills and characteristics are highly valued across an array of fields and professions—a reminder for students who may choose not to enroll in arts courses or participate in arts activities because they see them as a detour from their path to success. Our understanding of the relationship between arts involvement and student development also underscores the important of engagement in the arts at the college level, strengthening the case for the maintenance and expansion of current arts supports and offerings.

Student arts involvement: The “why” and “how”

Given that three out of four U-M students claim an arts identity, and that the arts play a strong role in students development and overall college experience, arts involvement emerges as an important part of student life. Understanding motivations for (why) and modes of (how) student involvement in arts activities enables the university to better strategize how to support this involvement.

Arts motivation (the “why”)

Going to college affords students increased autonomy, and most students take on a greater role in decision-making. They have more latitude to choose what matters to them, who they will hang out with, and how they spend their money and time. Exploring why they engage with the arts in college, as opposed to why they did in high school, reveals useful information about why the arts matter to young adults.

In both the 2010-15 and 2023-24 Arts Engagement Projects, we asked students to select from a multiple-choice menu their motivation to engage in the arts in both high school and college. This was a very blunt list: Entertainment, Class Requirement, Skill Development, Monetary, Other. “Other” emerged as a powerful motivator for arts engagement *in college*; while the “Other” response only accounted for 2-10% (depending on the type of arts activity) of student responses about high school arts motivation, it accounted for 13-72% of student responses about college arts motivation (See Figures 5.20 and 5.22).

High School Arts Motivation

Indicate your motivation in arts activities during high school

The view is filtered on Exclusions (Questions, Ratings), which keeps 75 members

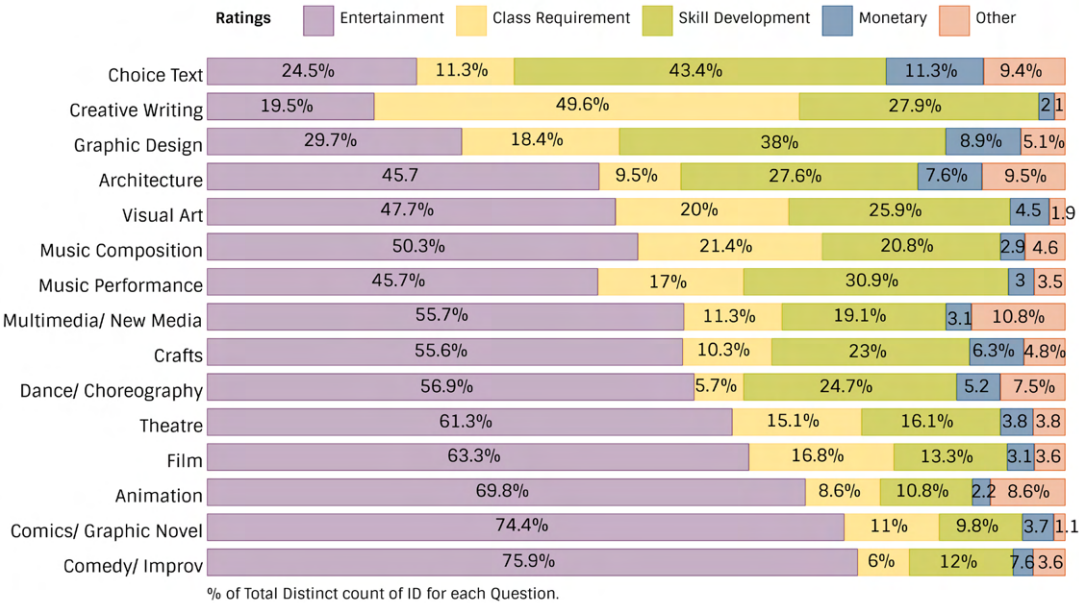


Figure 5.20. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Student-reported motivations for engaging in arts activities in high school.

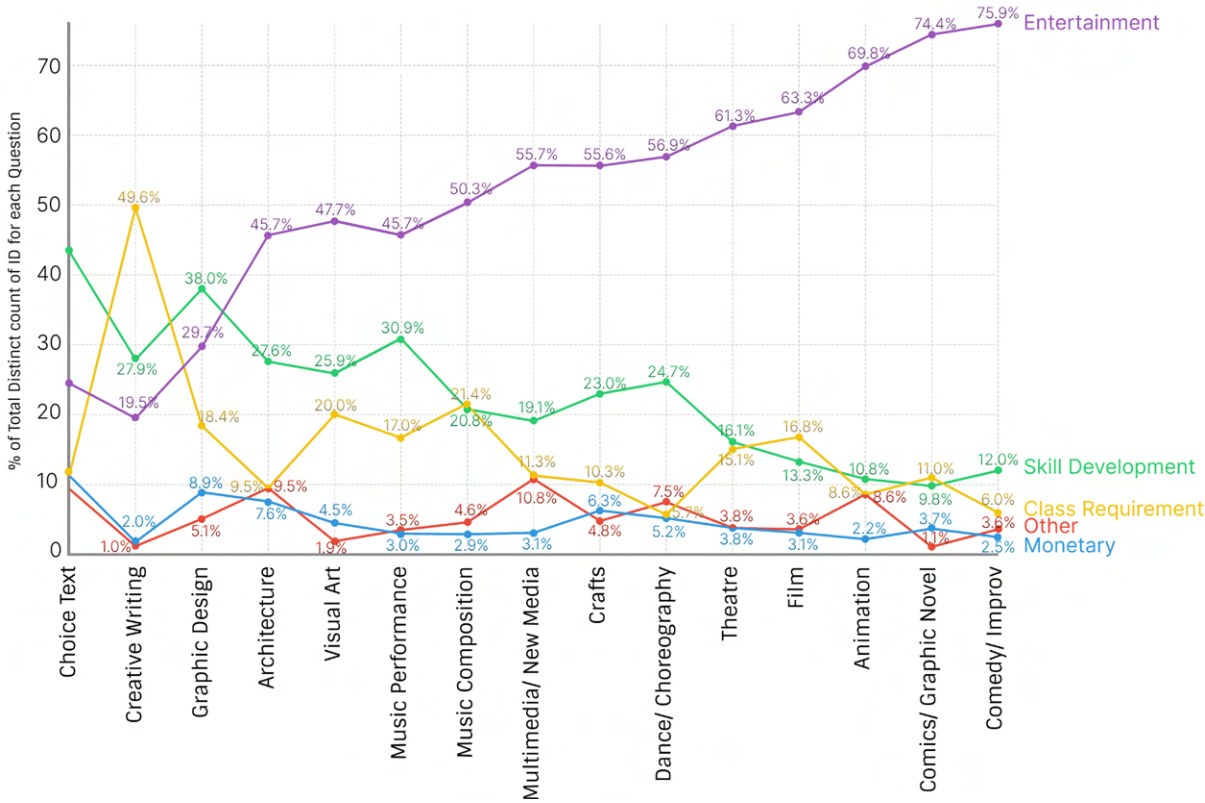


Figure 5.21. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Student-reported motivations for engaging in arts activities in high school.

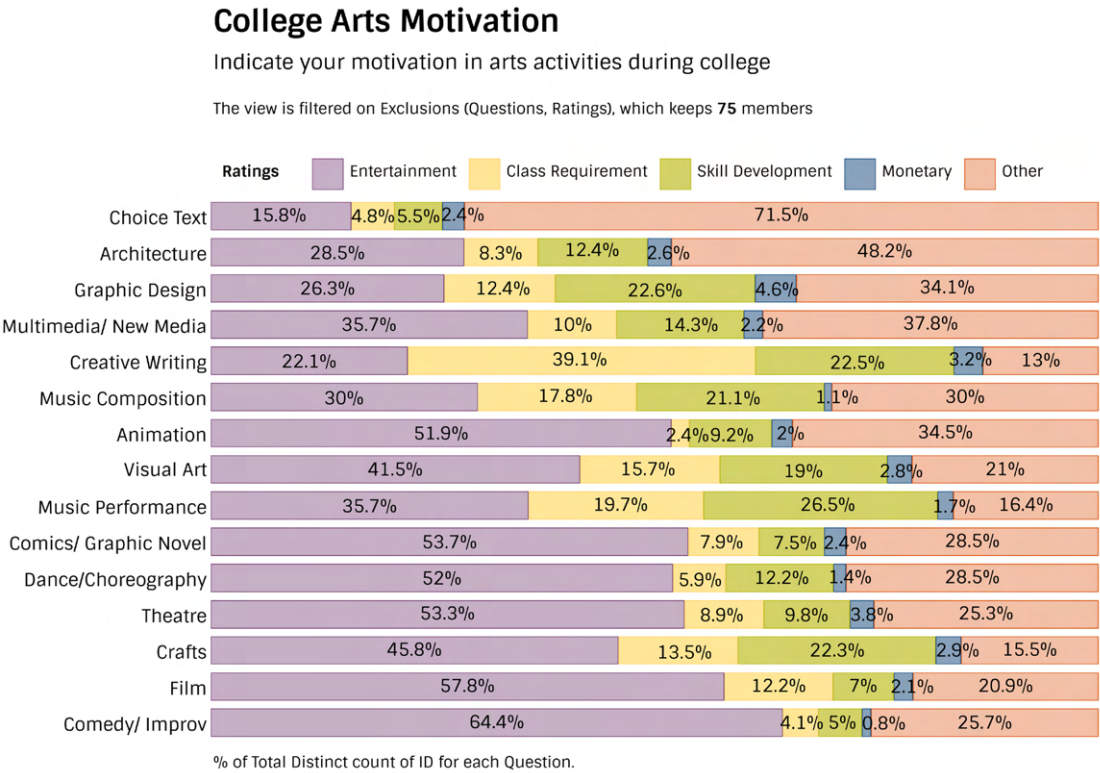


Figure 5.22. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Student-reported motivations for engaging in arts activities in college.

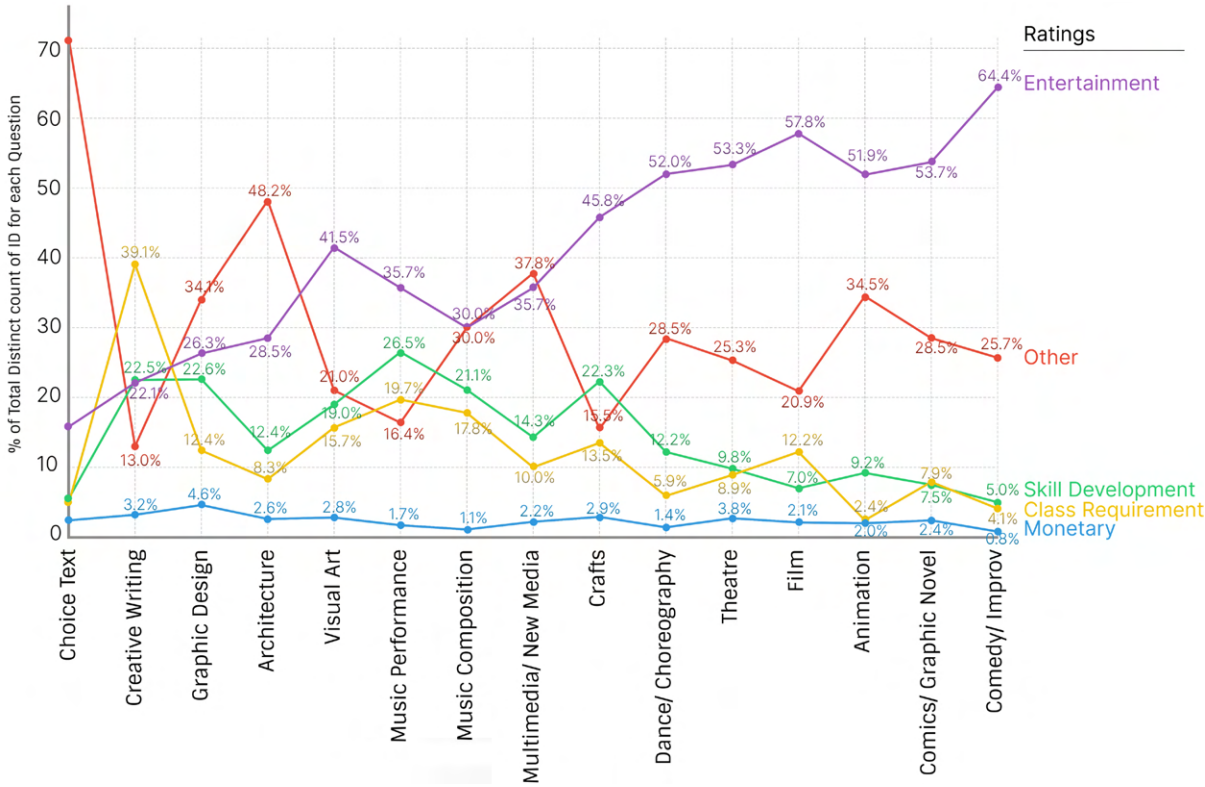


Figure 5.23. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Student-reported motivations for engaging in arts activities in college.

The “Other” category remains undefined in this question, but we infer that “Other” might include the very impacts that students articulate in their descriptions of the role the arts play in their personal development and experience in college (see Role of the Arts, above). These impacts include More and Better Social Connections, Relaxation, Broadened Worldview, Different Perspectives, and Deeper Appreciation of Aesthetics and the Arts: things that were not listed in this question about motivation, but which likely came to mind for students reflecting on reasons for engagement in the arts at college.

Thus we conclude that whereas in high school students engaged in the arts mostly for entertainment and to build arts skills (e.g., dance lessons, school orchestra), once they

come to U-M they engage in the arts mostly for entertainment and for social connections, relaxation, broadened worldview, etc. (“Other”). This profound shift in student reporting of “Other” as a motivation for engaging in the arts is the most intriguing finding in this section, as it likely speaks to the intellectual and developmental growth students undergo in college to become self-directed thinkers and learners. It might imply that with the increased autonomy of college, they discover that the arts fulfill different needs than they did in high school—needs that are critical to their wellbeing and development, and that the U-M attends to with a range of available arts experiences (see the Climate section, below, for more on the university’s role).

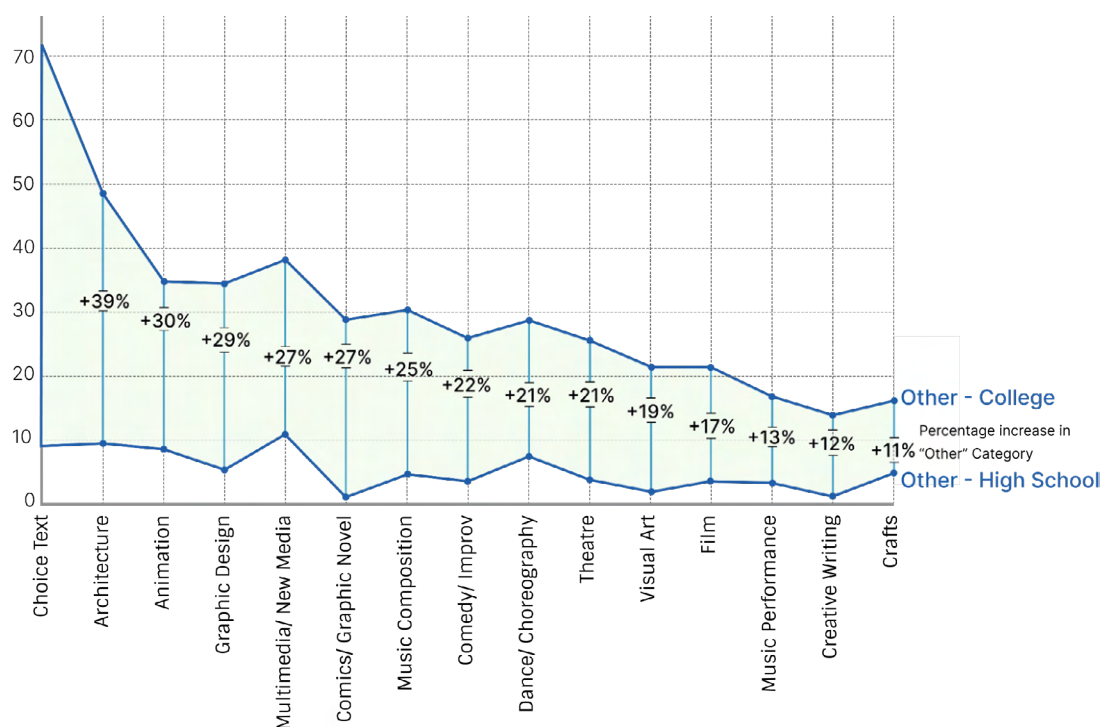


Figure 5.24. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: The frequency with which students reported “Other” as a motivation for engaging with the arts in college increases across all activities when compared with “Other” as a motivation for engaging with the arts in high school.

Arts Activity	% Change from high school to college for motivation "Other"
Architecture	+39%
Animation	+30%
Graphic Design	+29%
Multimedia/New Media	+27%
Comics/Graphic Novels	+27%
Music Composition	+25%
Comedy/Improv	+22%
Dance/Choreography	+21%
Theatre	+21%
Visual Art	+19%
Film	+17%
Music Performance	+13%
Creative Writing	+12%
Crafts	+11%

Figure 5.25. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: The frequency with which students reported “Other” as a motivation for engaging with the arts in college increases across all activities when compared with “Other” as a motivation for engaging with the arts in high school.

Entertainment

While Other and Entertainment are the biggest motivations in college, Entertainment is the most reported motivation to engage with almost every type of arts activity in high school, ranging from 20% in creative writing to 76% in comedy/improv. The average of the reported overall motivations in this category is 54%, speaking to how our high schoolers seek out the arts for leisure, distraction, stress release, and enjoyment. In college, entertainment as a motivation is less frequent, averaging out to about 40% overall. Again, for many arts activities the drop in Entertainment as a motivator

in college is counterbalanced by a rise in those Other motivations—social connections, life balance, etc.

Class Requirements

Course requirements motivate a fair amount of arts engagement in college—4-40%, depending on the activity. Creative Writing, which fulfills a First Year Writing Requirement, is at 40% while all other activities fall between 5% and 27%. This range includes students who take many arts courses as a requirement for their major as well as students who take an arts course as an elective. There is a similar pattern in high school: 50% of students report Class Requirements as a motivation for taking Creative

Writing, which can be part of the core English curriculum, while the range for all other arts activities is 6%-20%.

Skill Development

Between 10% and 38% of students indicated they were motivated by skill development in their engagement with the arts in high school, with graphic design, music performance, architecture, visual arts, dance and choreography, and crafts being cited in 25%-38% of responses. The numbers drop to between 5% and 27% in college, with only graphic design, music performance, creative writing, crafts, and music composition being reported above 20% (21%-27%).

We can attribute this shift to a number of factors. It may have to do with the increased freedom to choose that comes with college; some students may breathe a sigh of relief that they no longer have to practice the trombone. It may also have to do with the increasingly narrow, career-focused curriculum; the requirements of a non-arts major often leave little time for honing an arts skill. While we might chalk this up to the reality of college life, it implies cultural and environmental forces that bear investigation: Is the joy and satisfaction that comes from honing an arts skill undervalued? Are arts skills and knowledge considered non-transferrable, and undervalued as part of curriculum outside the arts? By extension, are arts skills and mastery perceived as unimportant

for future careers or activities? (See the “Faculty and Staff Experience” section of this report for insights from faculty on the importance of the arts for their students, across disciplines.) More concretely, are there simply not enough seats in elective arts classes to accommodate those who would like to continue building arts skills outside of their major?

Monetary

A Monetary motivation for students to engage in arts activities drops from negligible in high school to virtually non-existent in college. We hypothesize that this is because of a scarcity of viable creative work for college students; there aren’t enough paid arts jobs to lead to a Monetary motivation. In addition, there is a restriction on selling student art-work on the U-M Ann Arbor campus.

Note that the responses offered to students in this question (Entertainment, Class Requirement, Skill Development, Monetary, Other) do not reflect what we now know about the myriad motivations students have for engaging in the arts in college (e.g., Career and Social Connections, Relaxation and Wellness, Expanding Worldview Students—see Role of the Arts, above). However, to allow for direct comparisons with the previous data, we kept the list consistent with the 2015 questions rather than incorporating these new insights.

Arts involvement (the “how”)

For the Arts Engagement Project, we define four levels of arts involvement:

- Engagement (audience member or creator *online*),
- Attendance (audience member or viewer *in person*)
- Participation (actively engaging in arts practice or activities, e.g., as a dancer or painter)
- Leadership (position of authority, e.g., President of organization, dance captain, director)

Engagement is a newer category, added in the second, post-pandemic round of the study, that encompasses online or remote participation (versus Attendance or Participation, which is for in-person engagement), and for which some arts disciplines are better suited than others.

Students were asked to indicate at what levels they were involved in the arts in high school and in college. The transition from high school to college brings increased autonomy—students can choose the arts, or not—as well as a host of other changes. In the 2023-24 data, we also asked about pandemic

arts participation, looking to see how disruptions in how and whether students engaged in the art in high school/college in the pandemic years changed overall engagement levels. By comparing the levels of participation in high school versus college, we see some clear trends that, in conversation with other data from the Arts Engagement Project, help us understand current student involvement with the arts and how the university can support that involvement. The data presented here reflect all campuses for the 2023-24 collected responses, and represent data sets between ~500-700 respondents.

Engagement (Online/Remote)

We see increases in online and remote engagement in the arts across two thirds of arts activities surveyed, and with only minor decreases in the remaining activities (except Architecture, which nonetheless had and still has an extraordinarily high percentage of reported online engagement). (See Figure 5.26) This increase may be due to factors like increased numbers and diversity of peers and communities online, an increase in the number of online assignments given as part of coursework, and the removal of parental limits. It may also reflect a swap with in-person participation; engagement online is an easier choice in the face of social isolation, risk of rejection, scarcity of opportunities, school and work obligations, and the transportation and cost logistics involved in simply getting to

an arts event. There may be subtler factors at play as well in that U-M attracts many students who are highly accomplished in the arts; facing that increased competition in even co-curricular arts activities may cause some students to retreat to an online experience.

Reported Engagement Percentages - High School vs. College			
Arts Category/Type	% High School	% College	% Change in College
Visual Art	22	39	+17%
Theatre	24	36	+12%
Creative Writing	26	36	+10%
Crafts	27	36	+9%
Animation	66	75	+9%
Music Performance	22	27	+4%
Graphic Design	40	43	+3%
Music Composition	48	51	+3%
Comics/Graphic Novel	63	66	+3%
Online Content Creation	52	54	+2%
Other	20	19	-1%
Dance/Choreography	34	33	-1%
Film	50	47	-3%
Comedy/Improv	50	45	-5%
Architecture	75	62	-13%

Figure 5.26. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Most arts activities see increases in online engagement as students transition from high school to U-M.

Attendance (In-Person/On-Campus)

Attendance at arts events and activities increases or is maintained nearly across the board in college, with substantial increases in the performing arts, film, and comics/graphic novels. Again, in college, students have greater freedom to choose how they spend their leisure time, and we understand this increased attendance to indicate that they value the arts. Even more, we see the greatest increase in attendance at events and activities that are public and social: music performance, theatre, dance/choreography, comedy/improv, film (as opposed to pursuits that tend to be more solitary like creative writing or visual arts). There is a social component to this increased attendance in that many students report that they attend arts events to support peers who are involved in the events.

Increased attendance at in-person events may also reflect students' desire to be in social settings post-pandemic.

We see students' increased attendance at arts events as a marker of success for the university, indicating that U-M is providing arts events and activities that are numerous, attractive, accessible (transportation/location), and within reach financially.

The stable numbers in attendance for online content creation, visual arts, and animation are also encouraging; students were able to maintain their involvement despite big changes when they come to college.

Reported Attendance Percentages - High School vs. College

Arts Category/Type	% High School	% College	% Change in College
Other	20	26	+16%
Music Performance	24	38	+12%
Theatre	33	45	+12%
Dance/Choreography	20	31	+11%
Comedy/Improv	28	37	+11%
Film	26	33	+7%
Comics/Graphic Novels	12	19	+7%
Crafts	12	14	+2%
Creative Writing	15	16	+1%
Online Content Creation	28	28	-
Visual Arts	24	24	-
Animation	12	12	-
Music Composition	21	20	-1%
Architecture	22	13	-9%

Figure 5.27. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Student attendance at many arts events and activities increases when they transition from high school to U-M.

Participation

While there are strong increases from high school to college in the Engagement and Attendance areas, we see the reverse in students' reported Participation (personal art-making or performance) or Leadership (taking a position of authority) in the arts. That is, students are better able to take in the arts at U-M than they were in high school, but less able to be active art-makers or arts participants. In all performance categories, visual art making, crafts, and creative writing, as well as anything that students reported as "Other," participation was significantly reduced in college. This may be due to an increase in social pressures, a decrease in available time, lack of opportunities or facilities, or a host of other factors (see Barriers, below). Because we know ~75% of students surveyed indicated at least one arts identity, and that the arts are an important mechanism for student social connections and life-balance, this drop in participation in college is alarming.

The few arts areas where we see growth in Participation at college—graphic design, online content creation, and music composition—tend to be more individual pursuits, accessed through software or online platforms. Thus we posit the same reasons for increased involvement here as with other forms of online Engagement (above): participation online is more flexible to schedule and doesn't entail the logistics of in-person involvement.

Reported Participation Percentages - High School vs. College

Arts Category/Type	% High School	% College	% Change in College
Graphic Design	30	38	+8%
Online Content Creation	22	28	+8%
Music Composition	21	25	+4%
Film	16	17	+1%
Architecture	14	13	-1%
Comics/Graphic Novels	20	19	-1%
Comedy/Improv	18	16	-2%
Music Performance	27	25	-2%
Animation	14	12	-2%
Crafts	55	48	-7%
Dance/Choreography	35	27	-8%
Visual Arts	39	30	-9%
Other	40	26	-14%
Creative Writing	56	42	-14%
Theatre	29	14	-15%

Figure 5.28. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Students' active participation in (as opposed to online engagement with or attendance at) most arts activities drops when they come to U-M.

Leadership

If student Participation in the arts at U-M decreases between high school and college, then Leadership in the arts is likely to decline as well, and we see from this data that it almost universally does (see Figure 5.29). Reasons for this decrease are likely similar to those for Participation. We note that the decreases in Participation and Leadership in theatre and the visual arts are particularly pronounced, pointing to the need to explore shared barriers such as time, lack of non-major curricular offerings, and scarcity of facilities/space, as well as barriers to each of those activities – lack of storage space, lack of work and presentation space, competition, and cost. We do see minor increases

in some areas that may not be particularly significant upon further review.

In addition, reported leadership in student arts organizations dropped more than half from the first round of the Arts Engagement Project to the second, from ~11% to 5%. While the drop may be a reflection of fewer arts organizations with leadership opportunities, this probably does not account for the full difference and further research is needed for a full explanation.

Reported Leadership Percentages - High School vs. College

Arts Category/Type	% High School	% College	% Change in College
Other	20	30	+10%
Architecture	-	3	+1-3%
Comics/Graphic Novels	-	3	+1-3%
Creative Writing	4	6	+2%
Animation	-	-	-
Dance/Choreography	11	9	-2%
Film	7	4	-3%
Comedy/Improv	4	-	-4%
Crafts	5	-	-5%
Graphic Design	14	8	-5%
Music Composition	10	4	-6%
Online Content Creation	12	5	-7%
Theatre	15	5	-10%
Visual Arts	20	7	-13%
Music Performance	28	9	-19%

Figure 5.29. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Students' reported leadership in most arts activities drops when they come to U-M.

Student Arts Organization Participation

Many students who consider the arts to be part of their identity nonetheless choose to major in non-arts fields (see section on Enrollment and Degree Trends in Arts and Humanities, below). The more than 250 student arts organizations on the U-M Ann Arbor campus represent an opportunity for any student, regardless of major, to participate and lead in the arts.

Since involvement in student arts organizations (or any student organization) is co-curricular, it requires a proactive commitment of time and energy on top of the demands of coursework. Given the

inclusive **and** co-curricular nature of student arts organizations, tracking participation in them provides unique insight into student desire to be engaged in the arts—especially for those students who are not pursuing an arts major.

The number of students participating in at least one student arts organization across cohorts ranges from 21% to 32%.

The much larger participation percentages for the Ann Arbor campus are likely a result of the overall larger number of student organizations and the strong

residential program, compared to Dearborn and Flint. These factors are also reflected in the higher percentage of Ann Arbor students who indicate participation in more than one student arts organization. (See Figure 5.30.) Dearborn and Flint

students report lower participation in student arts organizations than Ann Arbor, which may reflect a smaller sample size, fewer student organization opportunities, the smaller residential environment, or a lack of institutional encouragement.

Percentage of students who indicate participation in one or more student arts organizations

By Cohort (21.1% - 32.4%)					
Cohort	Sample Size	Yes	No	Yes=1	Yes=2 or more
Freshman	180	21.10%	78.30%	61.11%	38.89%
Sophomores	142	32.40%	67.60%	60.47%	39.53%
Juniors	119	21.00%	79.00%	86.36%	13.64%
Seniors	145	24.80%	75.20%	76.47%	23.53%

By Campus (12.9% - 28.6%)					
Campus	Sample Size	Yes	No	Yes=1	Yes=2 or more
Ann Arbor	336	28.60%	71.40%	67.27%	32.73%
Dearborn	89	19.10%	80.90%	71.43%	28.57%
Flint	85	12.90%	87.10%	81.82%	18.18%

Figure 5.30. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24: Student arts organization participation.

Student arts organizations are a vital part of the U-M student arts ecosystem; they offer opportunities, ostensibly to all students, to both participate and lead in the arts and add an enormous amount of arts programming on campus. We do see that some arts majors participate in student arts organizations, sometimes because of stiff competition in their own department that limits the number of performance or exhibition opportunities available, and sometimes because it affords a leadership opportunity they wouldn't have otherwise. The presence of these highly skilled students

in student arts organizations sometimes leads to a level of competition there as well, making them less accessible to all.

Climate and Barriers to Student Arts Engagement

Nearly two thirds of all respondents (63%) in the second-round study indicated they were not as involved in the arts as much as they would like to be. Across the three campuses, we see some differences in these metrics, with Ann Arbor closely mirroring the overall results, likely due in part to their larger sample size (See Figure 5.31). Dearborn respondents mirror the overall percentages in how they would like to be more involved in the arts, while Flint respondents were more satisfied with their level of arts participation than those at the other two campuses. The response from the Ann Arbor campus is unchanged from the first round of the Arts Engagement Project.

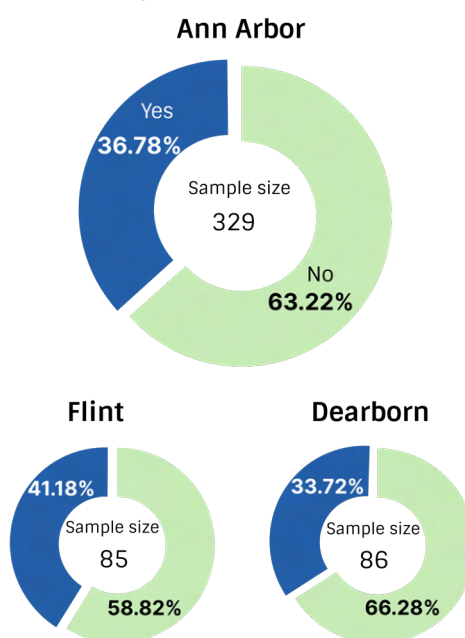


Figure 5.31. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24: Student responses to the question “Do you feel like you are currently involved in the arts as much as you would like to be?”

Given that three out of four U-M students consider themselves an artist of some sort, and that the arts play a large role in many students’ development and experience at U-M generally, it is concerning that more than half of students are not as involved in the arts as they would like to be. Here we investigate what might be preventing their involvement. Survey questions that address how much the university

encourages involvement in the arts (“climate”), as well as questions that explore specific barriers to engagement, reveal elements of the student experience that can stymie arts involvement. Understanding these elements empowers the university to implement (often simple) measures to turn barriers into supports.

Climate

More than three fourths of all respondents (78%) in the second round of the Arts Engagement Project feel U-M encourages their arts involvement. Ann Arbor students closely mirror the overall results and Flint students also give good marks to U-M for creating an encouraging participation climate. However, about 20% fewer Dearborn respondents than Ann Arbor students say that

U-M's climate encourages their involvement with the arts (~62% versus 82%). (See Figure 5.32.) When compared with the first Arts Engagement Project data, we see Ann Arbor students' perception of U-M having a positive arts climate decreased more than 6%, from around 88% to 82%. (There was no data for Flint and Dearborn in the first round.)

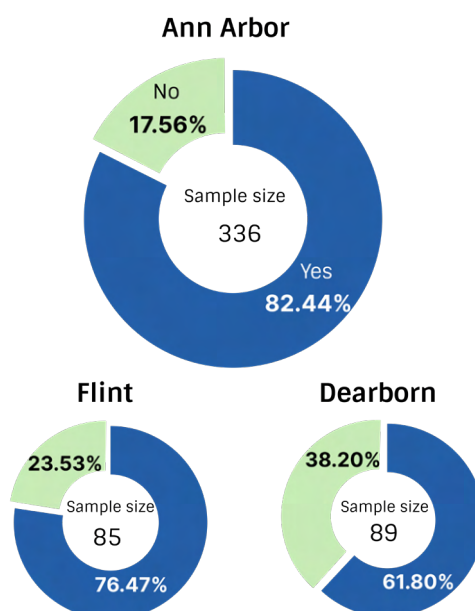


Figure 5.32. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24: Student responses to the question “Do you feel that the overall climate of the University of Michigan encourages involvement in the arts?”

Barriers

While most students on all three campuses believe that U-M encourages their involvement in the arts, nearly two thirds are not as involved in the arts as they would like to be. What stands in their way? We asked students directly about barriers to their involvement in both rounds of the study.

Arts Engagement Project 2010-15

“What do you see as the barriers preventing you from being involved in the arts at the University of Michigan (if you experienced any)?”

We asked students this open-ended question as a way to better understand — from a student’s perspective — what might keep them from engaging in the arts in college. Student responses fall into two large categories: **University Context** and **Priorities and Tradeoffs**. (See Figure 5.33)

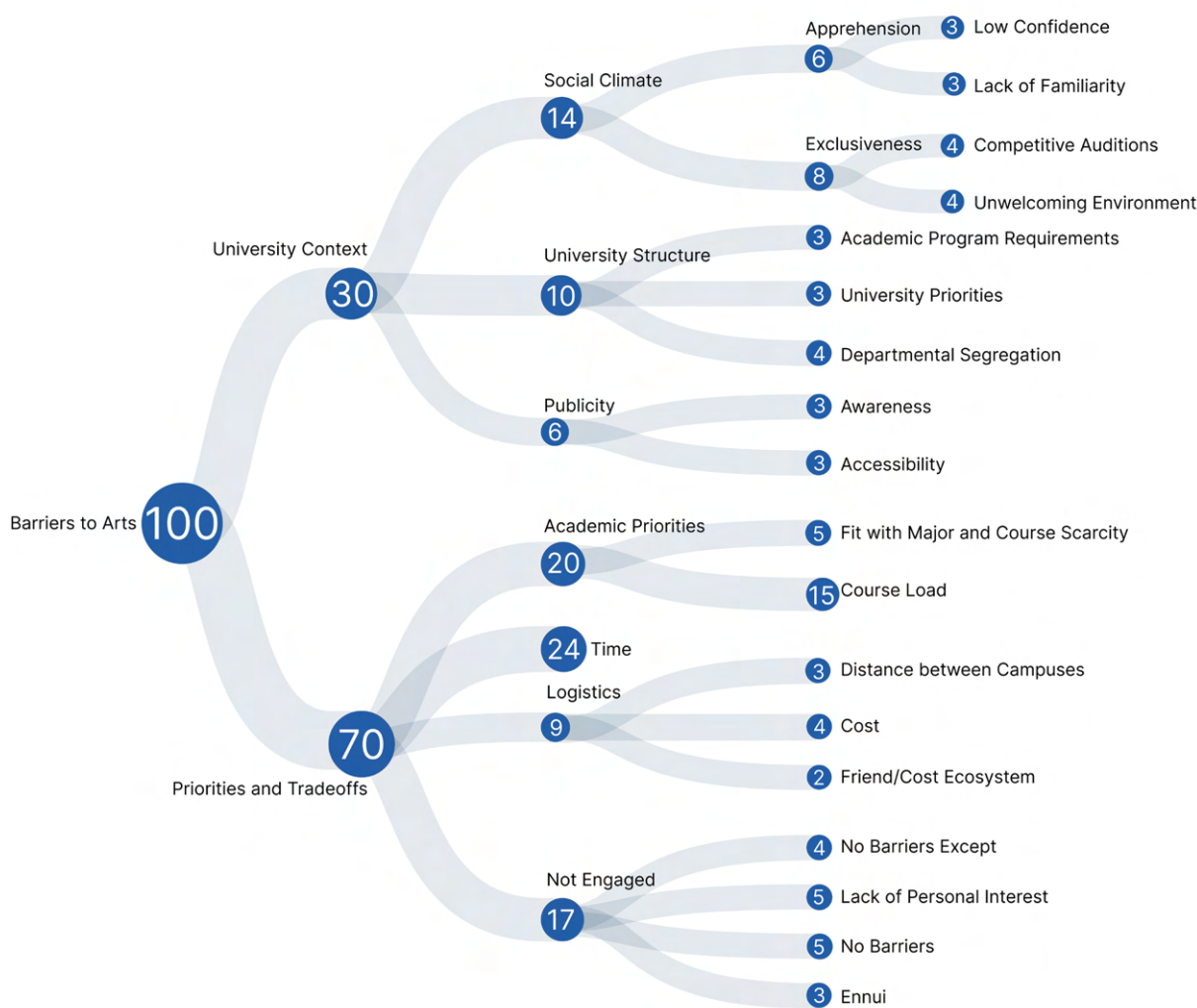


Figure 5.33. From the Arts Engagement Project 2010-15 student survey: Tree visualization of the Barriers topic model. Thirty percent of responses are attributed to University Context and 70% are attributed to Priorities and Tradeoffs.

University Context

Barriers related to **University Context** are those that have a

direct link to the environment at U-M. Responses in this category reveal that social climate is a factor; students reported apprehension over

whether their ability or experience was sufficient to gain access to student arts groups or organizations, or whether the exclusiveness of the audition process, the large U-M student talent pool, or the closed social groupings of student in the arts would conspire to keep them from a successful entry into organized and high level arts participation (primarily through student organizations).

Sometimes this apprehension manifests as low confidence; students perceive that they are not as talented, “artsy,” or experienced as others. As a large and elite institution, U-M draws a pool of talented, arts-focused individuals; as a result, many students would like to participate but believe they will be “out-competed” for opportunities by others. This personal evaluation seems to discourage some students from even attempting to participate.

Other students’ apprehension is related to a lack of familiarity. They would like to try something new in college, but exposing their inexperience, or having it even shut them out of participation, leads directly to anxiety about college arts participation.

Competitive auditions and a generally unfriendly atmosphere can also be part of the social climate of the arts at U-M. Competitive auditions are a fact of life in many arts activities, but students report that in some instances, they present the only option for participation in their desired activity. Factoring in the high ability levels of peers

competing for these opportunities, some students wish there were more informal or broadly accessible opportunities for participation in the arts. Some students also perceive judgment from those already involved in an arts activity. Some students who are new to an arts activity, less skilled, less committed, or non-arts majors see those who are already skilled and passionate as unwelcoming. They reported feeling awkward or intimidated about interjecting themselves into an established “clique” or into arts “territory.” Finally, the expected level of engagement in arts activities was often too high for a more casual participant looking to experiment or just have fun.

“I felt that my talents were not on the same high level as those at the University of Michigan or that my interest in the arts was personal and not as a part of my major, therefore I felt less qualified to participate than others.”

“The great and sad part of U-M is the wealth of talented individuals who go here—makes it hard for me, a moderately talented individual in a number of fields, to try out for a play or musical group and actually make it because I’m competing with, for example, percussion majors for Groove and theatre majors for a part in a play.”

“Very clique-y. Unless you are in the art school/performance school there aren’t too many ways to get involved because of perception. If you say you are an actor people assume you are good. If you say you are a econ major for example, people assume you aren’t talented enough. Majors tend to define people here.”

“I feel like they are only for people who are either really good or extremely passionate about the arts (and) not (for) just those who are looking to experiment.”

“I tried out for so many a cappella groups and didn’t make any of them :(I also tried out for a dance group that I didn’t make...”

The university structure itself also presents barriers to student arts involvement in the form of academic program requirements, institutional priorities, and departmental segregation.

Academic program requirements present barriers on several fronts. First, respondents cite arts-major programs that limit access to non-majors through enrollment restrictions or the limited number of courses offered. Students also reported having to gain acceptance into specialized programs to access lab and studio equipment, which stymied their full arts ambitions. At the same time, non-arts majors often cannot fit arts courses into their schedules because of required coursework, or their required coursework doesn’t leave enough unstructured time to participate in co-curricular arts activities.

In addition, the university does not encourage or prioritize robust arts participation through its limited Creative Expression requirements. Student respondents found little emphasis placed on creativity as a shared value or a desired outcome of their educational journey here. The small number of arts-related course offerings, each with long waitlists, would indicate the need for more

such courses, but are not viewed as a priority. And students find that engaging in arts activities, or anything that is not traditionally regarded as resume-building, is discouraged in programs outside the arts.

Student respondents in non-arts majors also found that departmental segregation kept them from engaging in the arts at U-M. This manifests as difficulty enrolling in arts courses and lack of access to studio space or resources for students not enrolled in specific arts programs or schools. For those enrolled in arts courses, the social isolation of being one of the only “outside” students in an arts course was uncomfortable. Students wanting to explore the arts found few “general” arts options, and without gaining access to highly competitive student arts organizations, some students feared they would not have been able to participate in arts activities at all in college.

Finally, Ann Arbor’s large decentralized campus environment makes it difficult to find and access publicity about arts events, frustrating students who missed out on arts opportunities because they lacked the necessary information to attend or participate. Having to actively look in multiple places for information, not receiving information in advance of events, and the sheer number of activities and events to sort through hampered their participation. They also cited the geographic problems of the “split campus” from an information

flow standpoint, as they perceived that many arts events occurred on the campus (North or Central) they were less likely to frequent. Not being a member of a particular school or college also restricted access to information. Finally, the arts were perceived as being less well-marketed to the students than other types of activities.

“Classes needed for the arts are offered at very specific times every semester, which is fine. However, my involvement [in arts classes] then precluded enrollment in many classes that were options (of very few classes total) to fulfill my degree requirements for Neuroscience. I ended up taking classes I was much less interested in so that I could still be involved in band.”

“Because the School of Music and LSA are separate, and on different campuses, it was hard taking classes as a LSA student within the School of Music because I didn’t have as frequent access to the resources and I rarely knew anyone in my classes.”

“The University of Michigan is not a school that particularly encourages creative development. Every CE(Creative Expression) class has an enormous waiting list within a few days of registration. This should lead to the creation of more CE classes. I wish I could have taken one every semester.”

“The options are almost too specific, I miss the general options in high school that made everyone feel welcome”

“I feel that things either aren’t very well advertised or advertised in such a way that doesn’t feel accessible to someone who is not a member of the coordinating organization.”

Priorities and Tradeoffs

Where students cited **Priorities and Tradeoffs** as barriers to their arts involvement, academic priorities and time were major factors. Students respondents mainly reported difficulties in taking art courses outside their majors because there were few courses

open to non-arts majors, those that were had too few seats, or there was simply no time in their own course schedule designed to fulfill requirements of a non-arts major. They were unsure how they might fit arts courses into their schedule, and commented on needing to prioritize activities that closely align with their career goals. A large percentage of student respondents (15%) indicated simply and directly that their academic course load was too great (sometimes in conjunction with other more highly prioritized activities) to be involved in the arts at college.

The perception that North Campus is too far from Central Campus, where many arts activities occur, was noted as a barrier, and this “split campus” was a factor in learning about arts activities as well. This is a barrier that might be unique to U-M Ann Arbor, though this kind of campus split or geographic barrier to various kinds of participation is not uncommon at other institutions (with arts schools and facilities often placed on the edges of the campus community). Although the regular bus trips between the campuses are relatively short and convenient, weather, commute time, inconvenient activity scheduling, and the poor information flow between the campuses were contributing barrier factors.

Cost was not a large barrier, but an expected one for some students. The arts were sometimes described as a luxury that was hard to justify against the perceived benefit

of participation. Students expressed a desire for access to more free high-quality events and activities, while acknowledging that those events have value and justifiable costs. The idea of a friend/cost ecosystem accounts for students who don't participate in arts events or activities because their friends don't (perhaps due to their own time and cost restraints), and encompasses the desire to have U-M offer subsidies or strategies to work around financial constraints.

“Sometimes it's expensive—I'd like to get more involved in photography but can't afford the equipment and studio fees”

“Science requirements for science majors make it difficult to take classes in the arts, and sometimes to experience extra art activities.”

“Distance—Especially in the winter. I live in Central Campus and the practices were held in North Campus at nights”

“I lived on central campus my first two years and it was difficult to know all of the events that happened on North Campus. Now that I live on North Campus I am much more exposed to the events that are happening.”

“I think cost to participate and attend certain art exhibits and performances can be a barrier to involvement. Arts, for me, is an outlet and a luxury, so if I couldn't afford to participate/attend, then I wouldn't. If things were less expensive/free, I would have participated more.”

“...ticket price, finding friends to attend events with, too much classical music not enough newer options”

“Timing conflicts—literally too busy with school/leadership positions/extra-curriculars to even sleep, let alone attend art events”

“I don’t have time since it doesn’t correlate with my future career goals or major.”

“The course work loads are too demanding to leave free time to go to the arts events”

Arts Engagement Project 2023-24

In the 2010-2015 Arts Engagement Project, which included responses from the Ann Arbor campus only, **Priorities and Tradeoffs** were a major barrier to students engaging in the arts, cited by 70% of student respondents. The other major barrier, **University Context**, was cited by 30% of student respondents.

In the 2023-24 AEP, there has been a strong shift up (about 20%) in the **University Context** category such that now student responses in the two areas—**Priorities and Tradeoffs** and **University Context**—are roughly equal. (See Figure 5.34.)

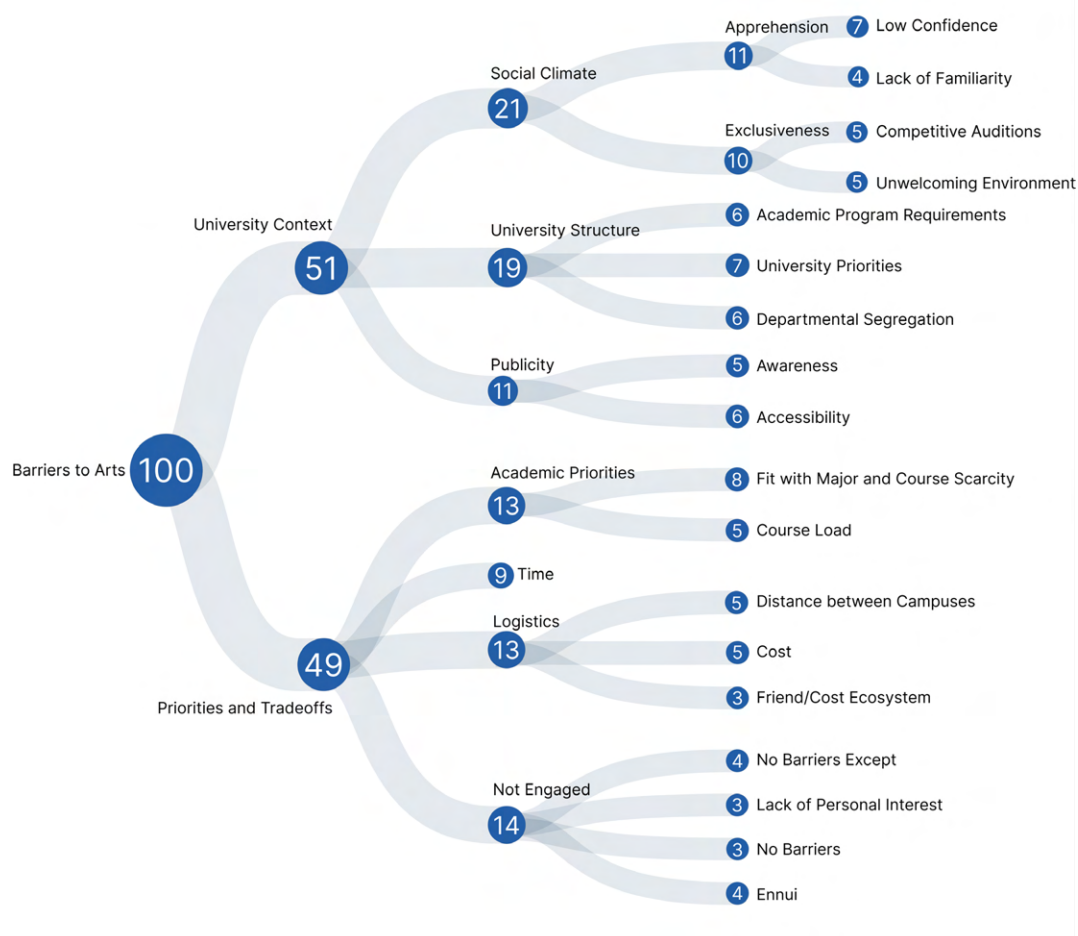


Figure 5.34. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Tree visualization of the Barriers topic model. Barriers to student arts involvement now fall equally into the categories of University Context and Priorities and Tradeoffs, a significant rise in the University Context category since the 2010-15 survey.

Because we see more responses in 2023-24 that especially identify social climate, publicity, and university structure as barriers to student involvement in the arts, we hypothesize that far-reaching impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are responsible for the shift. Hypotheses include:

- a decrease in students' social integration and confidence, crossed with an increased focus on academic priorities and career anxiety. The documented post-pandemic increase in adolescent and young adult mental health issues could extend to apprehension about careers and instability, exacerbating existing concerns that the arts aren't worth spending time on if they don't have career benefits.

- lack of opportunities in high school to prepare for arts participation in college. Understanding that high school arts participation is a predictor of college arts participation, the near-total cessation of some arts activities during the pandemic may have resulted in high school students who were not familiar with, not comfortable with, or simply not in the habit of arts participation when they transitioned to college.
- the loss of traditional or networked mechanisms for finding out information about arts events and opportunities. Informal student channels of communication may have dried up during the pandemic, leaving students more reliant on official arts publicity.
- Conduct specific research on the amount and effectiveness of outreach, marketing, and publicity targeted toward students interested in engaging in the arts – both pre-college and during their time at U-M.
- Disaggregate the campus data to verify the effect, or lack thereof, of the inclusion of the satellite campus responses.
- Conduct focus groups that ask about areas of social connection, competitive arts environment, pandemic effects on pre-college participation, and effective marketing outreach to identify areas of impact and remediation.
- Conduct analyses of pandemic impacted cohorts, focusing on whether certain years of remote learning impacted some groups more than others as it relates to their arts engagement in college.
- Explore the relationships between social connection and wellness through the arts, with a focus on newer Rx and arts prescribing programs.

It may also be that including the Flint and Dearborn campuses has had an effect on the overall data, though these smaller samples would not be expected to create such a pronounced swing in the overall response areas. Suggestions for further research include:

- Explore the number and kind of arts groups for students that have a low barrier to entry (i.e., no competitive auditions); determine whether the university might offer or encourage more such arts groups, in all arts forms or certain ones in particular, to satisfy student interest.

Recommendations

Curricular

1. Establish clear pathways for any student to include creative arts electives, combined with clear messaging that arts coursework enhances the educational experience.
2. Offer additional courses in the arts that fulfill a creative arts requirement. These courses would include ample seats for non-majors and be flexible in ways that encourage low-risk participation (e.g., pass/fail, half semester courses, online courses, etc.).
3. Explore the development of campus-wide recognitions or certifications for arts participation. The Arts Initiative's recent institution of an arts honors cord for graduating students who have meaningfully integrated the arts into their experience at U-M begins to take on this task.

Co-curricular

1. Increase funding for new and continuing student arts organizations.
2. Encourage the creation of student arts organizations with no barrier to entry such as auditions, thereby increasing opportunities for arts participation across the student population.

Resources

1. Enable students to advance and explore their arts identities and proficiency with readily available resources like arts-making and performing spaces, storage, and staff support. A Student Arts Center, with a 300-seat dedicated student theatre, practice rooms, storage, workshop spaces, dance floors, and other collaborative space is recommended ([U-M's own Student Theatre Art Complex](#) and [the Rochester Institute of Technology's Student Hall for Exploration and Development](#) provide models.)

Messaging

1. In recruitment and admissions materials, commit to supporting students' exploration and maintenance of their arts identities, perhaps through dedicated low-bar scholarship funding.²
2. Emphasize the equity for all and inclusion that the arts promote.
3. Add student arts engagement, and the skills and personal attributes they engender, to career advising, planning, and coaching.
4. Examine institutional messaging, marketing, and expectations in the arts for students, emphasizing the arts' value and primacy, as well as acknowledging and removing identified barriers where possible.
5. Leverage and promote the social connectedness and wellness outcomes students report from their arts engagement as an important pillar of student success. The Arts Initiative's proposed arts prescribing program begins to take on this task.

By Deb Mexicotte, ArtsEngine Director and Primary Investigator for Arts Engagement Project (AEP)

Data visualization: Krithika Balaji

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Office of New Student Programs

Faculty and Staff Experience

Introduction

To fully understand the arts on campus, we need to look beyond the student experience. Faculty and staff play a crucial role in the arts community, and their involvement offers valuable insights into the bigger picture. To better understand the faculty and staff experience, we ran a survey in March and April of 2024. Information in this section, as well as in the sections on “Role of the Arts” and “Assets, Needs, and Challenges” (above), comes from this faculty and staff survey. We hope to follow up this survey through focus groups with faculty and staff who indicated their interest in continuing the conversation. In addition, we were not able to extend the survey to the Flint or Dearborn faculty and staff in this phase, but hope to do so in the future. You can see the complete survey methodology in Appendix A.

For this faculty and staff survey, it became important to distinguish which units are dedicated to the arts—units where the arts are explicitly part of the mission; faculty’s professional profiles; and the content of teaching, learning, research, and creative practice. We needed this distinction, first because arts-designated faculty and staff are in the minority, and second, in assembling a sample we wanted to

be sure their voices were heard. In addition, we wanted to surface the unique needs of arts faculty with a set of questions just for them.

This distinction creates a challenge for nomenclature. We understand that the arts permeate the lives of many faculty and staff, and we recognize that creativity, and even arts-based approaches and practices, are present in every domain and profession. As such, we have a level of discomfort with the labels “arts” and “non-arts,” as “non-arts” belies that range of arts identities and practices across the university. To describe the distinction, we use the terms “arts-designated” and “non-arts-designated,” and trust the reader will accept these reductive words in the limited context where they are used.

In addition, we found that survey respondents’ descriptions of their own work did not always match our expectations. For example, a few faculty from arts-designated units responded “no” to the question “Do you teach an arts or arts-related course?” We asked all participants to estimate what percent of their effort is arts-related. Not surprisingly, most of the faculty (82.8%) and staff (80.4%) who work in arts-designated units

report that more than half of their effort is arts-related. However, we also find that in non-arts-designated units, a small percentage—about 2% each of faculty and of staff—report that more than half of their effort is arts-related. As we learned in Phase 1 of this project, only a very limited number of U-M employees' positions have an arts classification (e.g., those who work in theater ticket offices) when in fact many positions entail some arts effort.

In Phase 1 of the arts asset mapping project (focused on what could be measured quantitatively), we endeavored to report the number of staff dedicated to the arts

but found that the classifications for staff we knew worked in the arts were categorized largely as “administrative.” There are designations for arts staff, but those were only applied to staff who worked in production spaces such as galleries. So we tried to show the presence of arts staff by highlighting arts units in a campus-wide organizational chart.

Understanding that some arts effort is going unaccounted for and, given the small sample size of this study, we recommend additional research to identify the “hidden” or unacknowledged arts effort happening on campus.

Definition of the arts

The survey begins with our broad and accommodating definition of “the arts” that includes:

- activities in traditional arts spaces like studios, theaters, and galleries *as well as* informal, creative and cultural activities that happen in non-traditional ways and places.
- experiencing art created by others—live, or mediated by the internet and screen-based technology—*as well as* actively creating or participating in art yourself.
- all of these (but not limited to these):
 - music of all genres including classical, folk, pop, etc;
 - dance;
 - drama;
 - creative writing, including poetry;
 - architecture and landscape architecture;
 - painting, sculpture, photography, graphic art, and other visual arts;
 - design, including industrial design and costume and fashion design;

- craft arts and fiber arts;
- pottery and ceramics;
- television; radio; film and video; tape and sound recording;
- the arts related to the presentation, performance, execution, and exhibition of such major art forms;
- and all those traditional arts practiced by the diverse peoples of this country.

Personal engagement with the arts

Insights

1. The arts are important to most faculty and staff surveyed, either via active participation or via viewing/listening/attending.
2. Across all surveyed units, the arts are somewhat more important to staff than to faculty.

Many faculty and staff actively participate in the arts as doers and makers. They *make* music, act and dance and perform, write creatively, make films or photographs, make fiber arts or other hand-crafts, design things, and take arts classes. They also make recordings, cook creatively, direct theatre, run Dungeons and Dragons games, make art with their children, and produce arts and community events.

Even greater numbers of faculty and staff *take in* art as viewers, listeners, readers, or audience members.



Figure 6.1. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: A sampling of reported personal engagement with the arts.

A majority of faculty and staff say that the arts are important in their lives. More faculty and staff say that *viewing, listening to, or attending art* is important to them than say that *actively participating in art* is important.

Slightly more staff (96%) than faculty (87%) say that *viewing, listening to, or attending* the arts is moderately or very important to them.

Similarly, more staff (62%) than faculty (50%) say that *active participation in the arts* is moderately or very important to them. In non-arts-designated units, hardly any staff (2%) say that active participation in the arts is not at all important whereas close to a quarter of faculty (24%) say that it's not at all important (Figure 6.2).

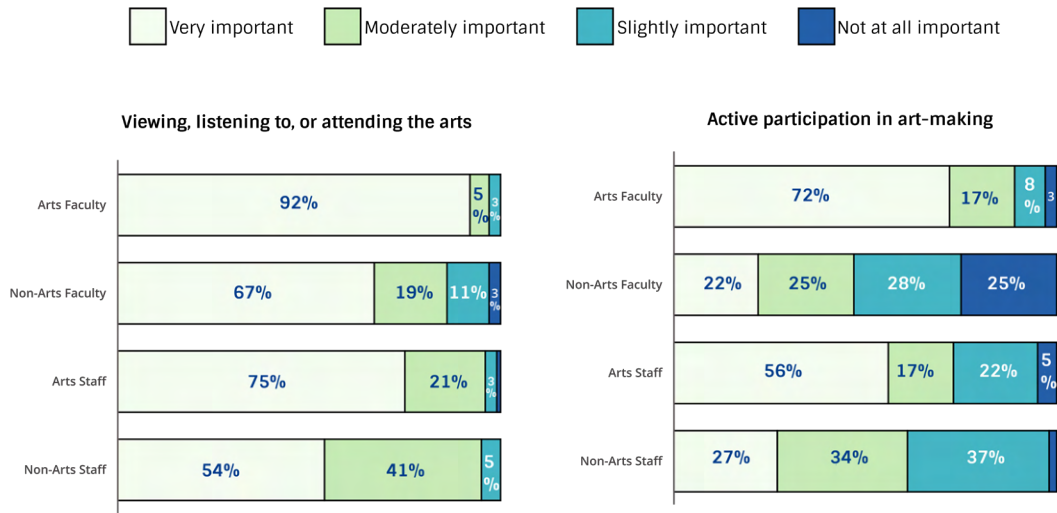


Figure 6.2. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Importance of the arts for U-M faculty and staff.

Perhaps the more interesting question is *why*? Why are the arts important for faculty and staff? What do they get from their engagement with the arts—as doers or as consumers? The arts provide faculty and staff a range of known benefits (the labeled spokes in the wheel graphic (Figure 6.3)).

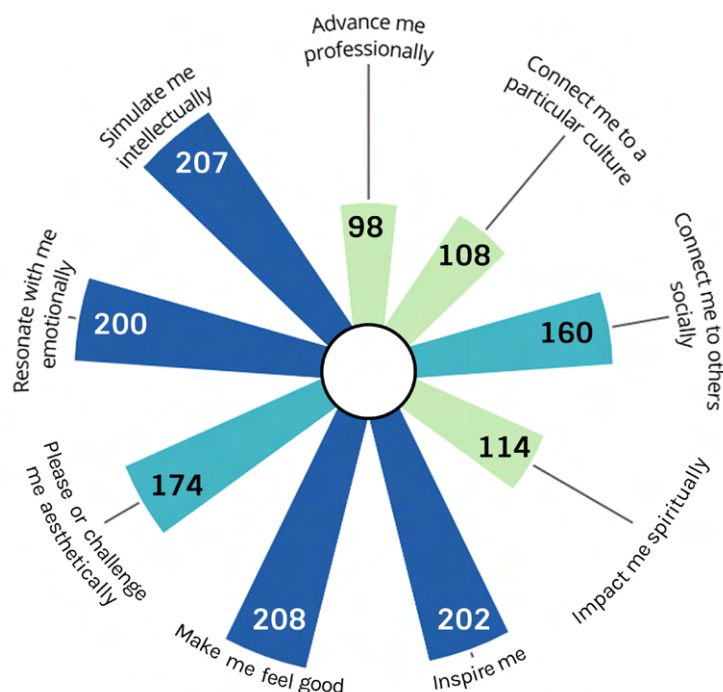


Figure 6.3. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Faculty and staff reasons for engaging with the arts.

In addition to these known benefits offered in the survey, faculty and staff wrote in their own unique ones. These write-in reasons for engaging with the arts speak to mental health, alternative ways of processing the world, and more.

- “Singing is Life!”
- “Allow for meditative mindful reflection and calm my mind”
- “It is a great stress reliever to see or perform arts, and is evidence of a better world, inspires hope”
- “Help with my mental well-being and are important to my mental health (creating things/being creative helps with my depression and anxiety)”
- “Put real things into the world to share in dialogue with others”
- “I can’t stop or my brain will explode.”
- “Inform me about the world and others’ perspectives”
- “Give me time to meditate on life larger than myself.”
- “Because I become very antsy and dissatisfied when I can’t create things.”
- “Help me learn about global cultures past and present; help me critically reflect on crucial issues for our present and future”

The arts and U-M

Beyond their personal engagement with the arts, faculty and staff experience the arts as an important facet of life at U-M.

Insight

- 1. Most faculty and staff surveyed say that U-M investment in the arts is important.

Between 85 and 91% of faculty and staff say that investment of money, time, or resources in the arts is moderately or very important for *students*, for *the broader U-M campus community*, and for *the public’s engagement with the university*. Slightly fewer—78%—say that investment of money, time, or resources in the arts are moderately or very important for *U-M’s presence in the state, nation, and world*.

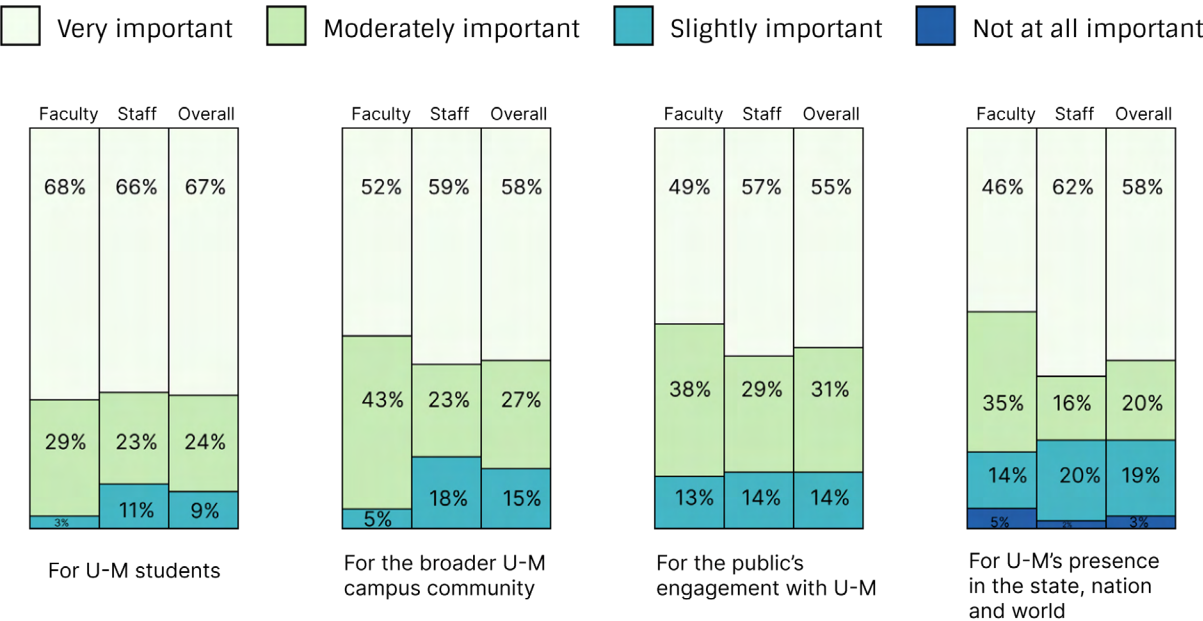


Figure 6.4. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Importance of university investment in the arts for faculty and staff.

The arts and belonging

The arts have the potential to engender a sense of community and belonging, so we asked faculty and staff, “Have you seen yourself (e.g., your interests, perspectives, identity) reflected in the landscape of the arts at U-M?”

Insights

1. Many surveyed faculty in both arts- and non-arts designated units see themselves in the arts at U-M, as do many staff in arts-designated units. However, fewer than half of surveyed staff in non-arts-designated units see themselves in the arts at U-M.
2. Art genre and style are important factors for seeing or not seeing oneself in the arts at U-M. People who *do* see *themselves* in the arts at U-M mentioned classical music, jazz, world music, and experimental art, among other genres. People who *don't* see *themselves* in the arts at U-M mentioned popular music, electronic art, and crafts, among other genres.
3. Identification with a particular identity marker, present either in art's content or its creator, is also an important factor for seeing or not seeing oneself in the arts at U-M. Those who *do* see *themselves* in the arts at U-M mentioned BIPOC, white, and LGBTQ identity markers, among others. Those who *do not* see *themselves* in the arts at U-M mentioned BIPOC, Latin American, and LGBTQ identity markers, among others.

Among faculty in both arts and non-arts designated units and among staff in arts designated units, about two thirds of respondents replied “yes,” they see themselves reflected in the arts at U-M. For staff in non-arts designated units, less than half replied “yes.”

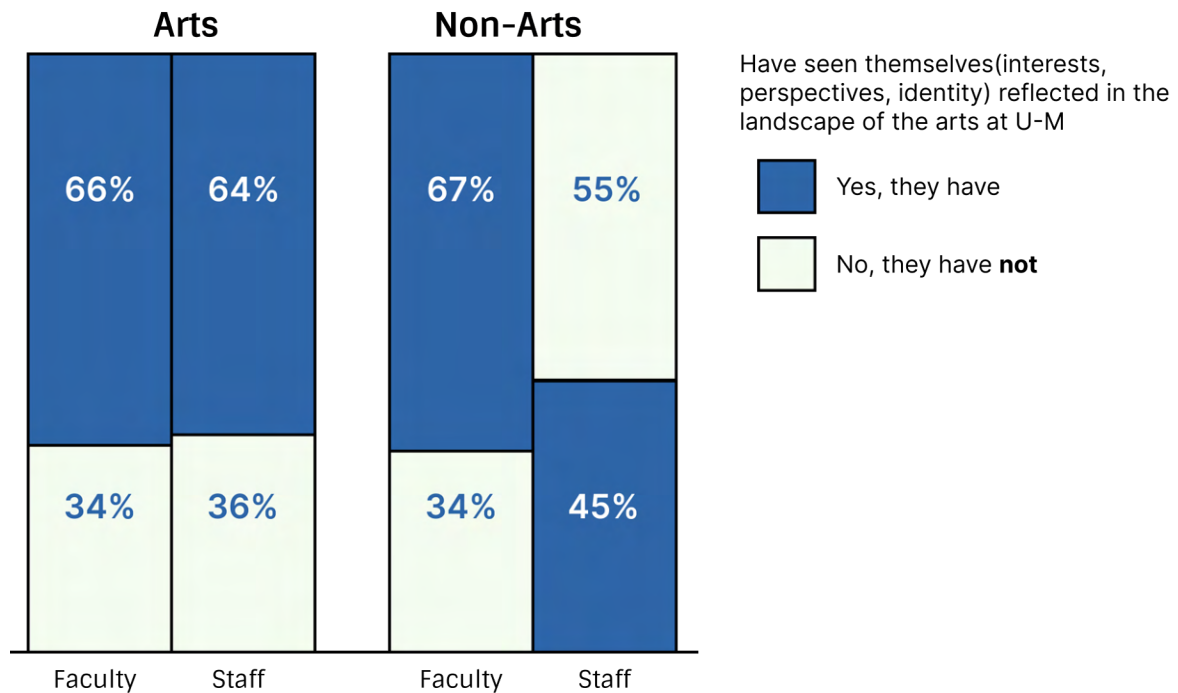


Figure 6.5. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Some faculty and staff see themselves reflected in the landscape of the arts at U-M.

Across both the positive and negative responses, a small number of people questioned the question itself, saying that seeing oneself reflected in the arts is not the goal. Instead they spoke of the value of the arts to learn new things or have their perspectives challenged, e.g.,

- *“I do not require to have myself reflected in the arts. I prefer to learn something about others through them”*
- *“It opens my eyes to other perspectives which I enjoy.”*

Yes, I see myself reflected in the arts at U-M

Of those faculty and staff who replied “yes,” many responded to the open-ended follow-up question, “Please share a few examples of how you have seen your interests, perspectives, or identity reflected in the arts at U-M.” Most named specific events, exhibits, or performances; those at UMMA, UMS, SMTD, and Stamps were most frequently cited, but many other campus programs were also mentioned. Respondents also offered these responses for how they had seen themselves reflected in the arts at U-M, likely indicating a sense of belonging:

- **genres or styles of art**, especially classical music, world music, jazz, outdoor art installations, ceramics, and sculpture
- **art that is defined by identity**, either in its content or its creator, e.g., sex and gender orientation, race/ethnicity
- **art that champions a cause or has political resonance**, e.g.,
 - *“I’m especially drawn to the connection between arts and activism”*
 - *“Exhibits focused on social and political issues I am interested in at UMMA and Taubman College”*
 - *“I see sustainability related exhibits and classes”*

Faculty and staff, particularly those in Michigan Medicine and the

School of Medicine, expressed their appreciation for the art displayed around campus, in non-gallery settings.

- *“I love seeing art in random places as I walk through campus and through campus buildings. I do not often take the time specifically but as I walk it is always wonderful to see art displays. This is particularly true in the hospitals”*
- *“‘Convergence’ statue outside of ISR reflects social change and innovation which is what everyone at ISR works towards”*

Faculty and staff in arts-designated units also responded that their arts work is supported by the institution, or that they feel themselves to be part of an arts community here, e.g.,

- *“Interest in and attendance at art exhibitions and theater performances I am working in.”*
- *“I perform here at school, and the university encourages and publicizes my discipline”*

No, I don't see myself reflected in the arts at U-M

Of those faculty and staff who replied “no” (they do not see themselves reflected in the landscape of the arts at U-M), many did not respond to the follow-up open-ended prompt “What would you like to see included in the landscape of the arts at U-M to better reflect your interests, perspectives, or identity?” Of those who did, their responses were similar to those who replied yes, but with different emphasis or inflection. They would want to see more of the following at U-M:

- **art that is defined by identity**, either in its’ content or its creator, e.g., BIPOC, women, size-inclusive
- **art at its intersection with nature**, e.g., gardens and landscapes
- **genres or styles of art**, including popular music, electronic art, glass and mosaic, craft, sculpture, experimental, “non-traditional forms like table-top role-playing games”
- **particular content**, e.g., political, historical or heritage-related

Many responses to this follow-up question expressed a desire for the same sorts of things that came up in response to a later question about gaps and needs, indicating that these particular gaps detract from a sense of belonging: better communication about arts events,

more ways to participate in the arts, and art for health or mental health.

Responses from several faculty in arts-designated units indicated a dissatisfaction with institutional priorities and choices regarding the type of art that is presented on campus or emphasized in the curriculum, e.g.,

- *“The arts faculty at the university have no presence in UMMA. I would like to see rotating shows of artists who are professors at the university. Why does the main arts institution/museum only exhibit the work of artists from outside the university and have no interest in the work being produced by professional practicing artists on campus? It makes the campus seem very exclusive and unfriendly.”*
- *“The music priorities of UMS and SMTD favor orchestral classical music (USO, The Philadelphia Orchestra...) and this does not reflect the interests or identity of me, my family, and my students. Even though I work in “Classical Music,” it is our duty as an institution to take big swings that look to the future instead of spending large resources on institutions of the past.”*

- *“Art exploration should be respected without the required DEIJ lens”*

Faculty in arts-designated units also expressed a desire for better professional support, such as opportunities for collaboration or better promotion of their work. A few staff members in arts-designated units ask for more support specifically for staff art-making.

Arts assets

Having mapped U-M’s considerable arts assets in Phase 1 of this project, we asked faculty and staff to name three that stand out to them, keeping in mind our broad and expansive definition of the arts. Responses to these questions provide a picture of how faculty and staff engage with the arts on campus, adding detail and nuance to the Phase 1 asset-mapping. Here, faculty and staff named specific performances, works of art, exhibitions, and events, as well as institutional presenters such as UMS and UMMA and broad categories of experience such as “performances.”

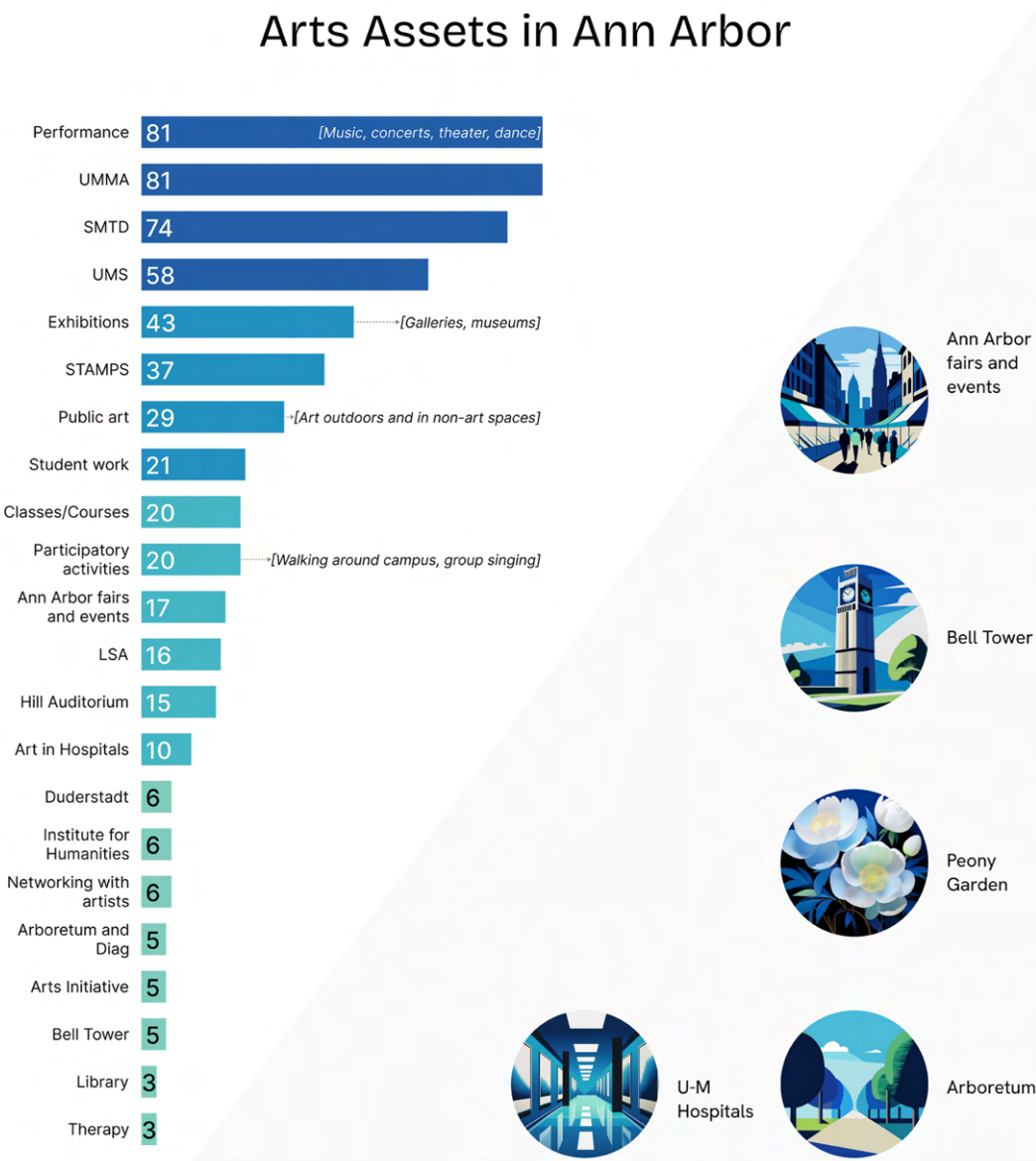


Figure 6.6. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Arts experiences at U-M that stand out to faculty and staff.

Arts gaps: Needs and desires

In our survey, faculty and staff gave open-ended responses to questions about what would make the arts at U-M better for them personally, and for the U-M community at large.

Insights

1. Faculty and staff are eager to participate in the arts, both as makers and as audience members or visitors. Barriers include cost, time, communication about events, and logistics such as parking or transportation.
2. Faculty and staff ask for more space, materials, and funding for the arts.
3. The arts provide a means for faculty and staff to connect to others.

In their open-ended responses to the prompt “It would be great if U-M could provide the following resources, services, or accommodations to support the arts in my life...” participants surfaced a range of desires around the arts, which we categorized. Response categories here are listed in descending order of frequency.

Faculty and staff want free and low-cost experiences, and time to take advantage of them

This category of response is far and away the most frequent, almost three times more frequent than the next-most frequent category of response (easier logistics and access). Money and time are barriers to faculty and staff participation

in the arts. Faculty and staff want discounted, free, or low-cost arts classes, or discounted, free, or low-cost exhibits, performances, and other experiences. They also point out that they don’t have enough time to participate in the arts; time off for the arts, scheduling arts events around typical work time, and integration of art and work are some suggested remedies.

Easier logistics and access

Faculty and staff need better methods for finding out about arts happenings (calendars, communications, and other resources). They also cite challenges in getting to arts venues and parking there, and in physically accessing spaces. Some faculty and staff request remote or virtual options.

More art

Faculty and staff want to see and experience art across campus, including outdoors and in public spaces. Art contributes to well-being; faculty and staff want more opportunities to experience art for wellness, and even to have the arts incentivized along the MHealthy model. Some want to see the arts integrated across disciplines.

Space and materials

Faculty and staff, in both arts- and non-arts- designated units, want more access to art-making spaces, supplies, and resources such as studios, supplies, tools, and materials. This is related to the larger call for more space: for making art, exhibiting art, rehearsing, performing, and collaborating. As with the next category, money for the arts, many of the faculty and staff who have this response work in an arts-designated unit, so their personal desires are entwined with their professional desires. These needs for funding, space, and materials recur among arts faculty who were asked what they need to support their teaching and research (see section “Arts-designated faculty: Teaching and research” below).

Money for the arts

Faculty and staff see many areas that could be better supported financially, including exhibitions and individual artists.

Faculty and staff also point out that they don't have enough time to participate in the arts; time off for the arts, scheduling arts events around typical work time, and integration of art and work are some suggested remedies.

Community and conversation

The arts have a role in bringing people together. We see that where faculty and staff want opportunities for art-making with others, e.g., book clubs, writing groups, communal music-making opportunities. Faculty and staff also want arts for families and programming that brings together the community across themes and audiences. Additionally, faculty and staff want to bring people together within the arts in terms of relationship-building, e.g., connecting university artists to area arts presenters, connecting faculty with students, connecting isolated university art-makers to each other.

Professional development and career advancement

Faculty and staff in arts-designated fields have professional and career needs related to the arts. These include professional development opportunities, changes to job status, and funding

opportunities.

Productive outliers:

- Four respondents want recognition and support for the arts work of “non-arts” faculty and staff.
- *“More intentional professional development using the arts for cultural conversation, critical thinking, communication, etc.... Rethink and recast buildings for aesthetic as well as functional purposes. Consider the aesthetics and enlivening of spaces, including hallway and classroom spaces, as well as functionality.”*

In their open-ended responses to the question “How might the arts at U-M be improved for the campus community at large?” faculty and staff echoed the same categories of desires that surfaced in the question about the arts in their own lives,

above. When thinking about the community at large, however, the following categories emerged as most important (based on frequency of response):

- **more opportunities to participate in the arts,** particularly for non-experts and as a means to connect to others;
- **better visibility of and communication about arts events;**
- **easier access to arts events,** both financially and logistically.

The arts have a role in bringing people together. We see that where faculty and staff want opportunities for art-making with others, e.g., book clubs, writing groups, communal music-making opportunities.

Recommendations

1. The university might institute a version of MHealthy for the arts. Like MHealthy, this program would offer classes and experiences (e.g., book clubs, making music together), and incentives for participation. Alternatively, the MHealthy program itself might add an arts “petal” to its flower, folding arts activities in among its other programming. The cognitive and well-being benefits of arts participation are documented and justify this programming.

2. The university might subsidize blocks of free or deeply discounted faculty/staff tickets to performances and exhibitions.
3. The university might build on recent student-focused Arts Initiative efforts for social prescribing, leveraging “arts interventions” to mitigate faculty stress and isolation.

Arts-designated faculty: Teaching and research

The needs of faculty in arts-designated units are distinct from those of faculty in other disciplines. In the survey, faculty (including tenure-track, clinical, and adjunct) who teach an arts or arts-related class were asked additional questions about what resources they *have* for teaching and research, and what resources they *need*. Most of these faculty teach in Stamps School of Art and Design (Stamps); Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning (Taubman); the School of

Music, Theatre, and Dance (SMTD); and the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA).

Arts faculty teaching impacts both students with professional aspirations in the arts and students seeking an elective experience in the arts. Their research contributes to their respective fields and to the university’s reputation in these fields. As such, the needs they articulate here have broad-ranging implications.

Insights

1. Arts faculty place a high value on campus resources such as the Duderstadt Center, libraries, and campus programs that support both their teaching and research/creative activity.
2. Arts faculty express the need for space and infrastructure/materials to support their teaching.
3. Arts faculty express the need for funding and space to support their research/creative activity.

4. Space—for teaching and for research/creative practice—is top-of-mind for the many arts faculty who repeated their need for space in these targeted questions and in their responses to the questions asked of all faculty and staff.

Teaching

These faculty were asked what resources they currently have that support their teaching in the arts, and what resources they need.

Assets: Current resources for teaching that arts faculty value

We categorized participants' open-ended responses to the prompt "What university infrastructure or resources are particularly helpful for you in teaching the arts?" into types. Response categories are listed here in descending order of frequency.

- **Campus programs** such as the Arts Initiative, performance and lecture series, ArtsEngine, Course Connections, and other programs that center on engagement, DEI, and wellness.
- **The Duderstadt Center** and other North Campus facilities.
- **Funding** such as that for research, and funds to bring guests.
- **Arts venues** such as UMMA, the Power Center, Hill auditorium, and others.
- **Facilities**, including general departmental facilities (75% of this category of response) and studio/work-spaces (25% of this category of response).
- **University libraries**
- **Supporting Staff**, such as the Converging Technologies Consultant at the Duderstadt Center, the Director of Student Engagement at the Arts Initiative, and the Curator for University Learning and Programs at UMMA.

Needs: Resources that arts faculty need for teaching

Likewise, we categorized participants' open-ended responses to the prompt "What university infrastructure or resources do you need to teach more effectively?" into types. Response categories here are listed in descending order of frequency.

- **Space:** Teachers say they need exhibition space, studio or lab space, performance space, teaching space, and tech space. There are nearly twice the number of these responses citing the need for space as there are to the next-most-frequent response (infrastructure and materials) to this question.
- **Infrastructure and material:** These needs range from software licensing, better internet connection, and smoother processes for arranging field trips to tangibles like teaching equipment, musical instruments, and digital technology.
- **Support or help:** Faculty need assistance with teaching and learning strategies, marketing and setting up events, and understanding certain university processes.
- **Collaboration opportunities:** Among instructors, there is an interest in collaborating, and in finding student opportunities to collaborate, with other units on campus and with artists and institutions outside the university. There is also a desire for community partnerships.
- **Funding:** Increased funding for things like scholarships and bringing in guests would help faculty teach more effectively.
- **Coordination of existing resources.**

Productive outliers:

Some faculty expressed needs that couldn't be categorized or lumped in with others. These statements provide insight.

- *"All of the Arts Initiative projects and events should be promoted ON CAMPUS or via talks or online resources. So many projects happen off campus or in other countries, and it is a wasted opportunity not to have a UM-community-facing outcome or grant requirement."*
- *"Ann Arbor used to have multiple art supply stores. They are all closing one by one while Amazon deliveries are flooding in on an hourly basis. Can the university open its eyes to the environmental impact of such economic decisions?"*

Research/creative practice

Defining the work

We asked faculty whether they call their non-teaching arts professional work “research,” “creative practice,” the hybrid term “research/creative practice,” “service/for the community,” or something else. Across SMTD, Taubman, and LSA, research and creative practice go hand in hand for most faculty; the hybrid term “research/creative practice” is preferred. For every ten arts faculty, six of them would say their work is both research and creative practice. Two would call it purely creative practice, one would define it as research, and one would say it’s about community service.



Figure 6.7. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Preferred terms for research and creative practice for faculty in SMTD, Taubman, and LSA.

Responses in the Stamps school differed from those in SMTD, Taubman, and LSA. In Stamps, “research/creative practice” and “creative practice” are preferred equally. No respondents from

Stamps characterized their professional work as “service/for the community.”

In this report we use the term “research/creative practice” because it is most commonly preferred, but recognize that not all faculty define their work that way.

Assets: Current resources for research/creative practice that arts faculty value

Faculty who teach an arts or arts-related course were asked what resources they *have in place* to support their research/creative practice and what resources they *need*.

We categorized participants’ open-ended responses to the prompt “What university infrastructure or resources are particularly helpful for supporting your work in the arts?”—that is, what do they already *have in place* for their research/

creative practice—into types. Response categories here are listed in descending order of frequency.

- **Departmental facilities and infrastructure**
- **Financial support**, especially RCI (Research Catalyst and Innovation Program)
- **Campus programs** such as the Arts Initiative, UMMA, ArtsEngine, ADVANCE, and the Center for Academic Innovation
- **The Duderstadt Center**
- **University libraries**

Gaps: Resources that arts faculty need for research/creative practice

Likewise, we categorized participants' open-ended responses to the prompt "What additional support do you need for your work in the arts?" into types. Response categories here are listed in descending order of frequency.

- **Funding:** Some faculty stated this as a broad, non-specific need (e.g., "funding for making work") while others zeroed in on the particular needs of their research/creative practice such as "funding to carry out multi-genre performances with international scope."
- **Space:** As with their teaching, faculty restated the need for studio space and exhibition or performance space.
- **Time:** Arts faculty say they need time, sometimes stated broadly and sometimes defined as paid leave or course release.
- **Different relationship with university:** Some arts faculty say they need things like engaging with the university in conversation about campus matters that intersect their expertise, or being included and aligned with other disciplines (such as those in the humanities) to advance their research or creative practice.
- **Collaboration opportunities,** both within and beyond their unit.

Recommendations

1. In order to carry out their teaching and research/creative practice, arts faculty need additional studio space, tech suite space, rehearsal space, and performance space. This is a basic need in any discipline, but particularly in the arts where spaces are uniquely tailored to the work.
2. Arts-designated units might arrange informal social events as opportunities for faculty to meet potential collaborators from a range of disciplines.

Non-arts-designated faculty teaching and research

Respondents to this set of questions teach at U-M, but not an arts or arts-related course. This is an especially important group as they offer a glimpse of how faculty who are not career artists understand the role and value of the arts. They help us see that the arts do matter for students who are not on a professional arts track, and give us perspective on the *why* and *how* of arts experiences for these students.

Note that throughout our analysis of the Faculty/Staff Survey, we have relied on the survey classifications of individuals as “arts designated” or “non arts-

designated,” and as “faculty” or “staff.” However, in this section of the analysis we turn to individuals’ self-reporting as to whether or not they teach an arts-related course.

The schools of Dentistry, Medicine, and Nursing, and Michigan Medicine, taken as a group of healthcare-related fields, were especially well-represented in this section of the survey. This tracks with the strong relationship between arts and health nationwide. Faculty from LSA and those who teach through the libraries were also well-represented in the cross-university sample.

Insights

1. Most respondents to this set of questions think that the arts are moderately or very valuable for their students’ intellectual, social, personal, and professional development.
2. Sixty-three percent of these respondents think that having arts experiences is moderately or very valuable for their students in non-arts-designated courses.

3. Close to two thirds of these respondents incorporate the arts into their teaching in some way. Many of those who don't incorporate the arts into their teaching think that the arts are not relevant to their field.

4. Those respondents who do incorporate the arts into their research largely do so by drawing on their own arts experiences (43%). Some also collaborate with artists in their research processes.

Value of the arts for student development

“How valuable do you think the arts are for your students’ intellectual/social/personal/professional development?”

Responding faculty see the arts as moderately or very valuable for their students’ development. An average of nine out of ten surveyed faculty members believe that exposure to the arts is moderately or very valuable for students’ personal, social and intellectual development. Eight of those ten believe that it is moderately or very valuable for students’ professional development.

When we separate the responses of “very valuable” from those of “moderately valuable,” we see an even lower assessment of the value of the arts for students’ professional development. Only 41% of responding faculty see the arts as very valuable for students’ professional development, whereas more than 60% see it as very valuable for the other areas of student development. That is, among these respondents in non-arts-designated units, many instructors don’t perceive the skills, approaches, and mindsets of the arts as offering a great advantage in the job market.

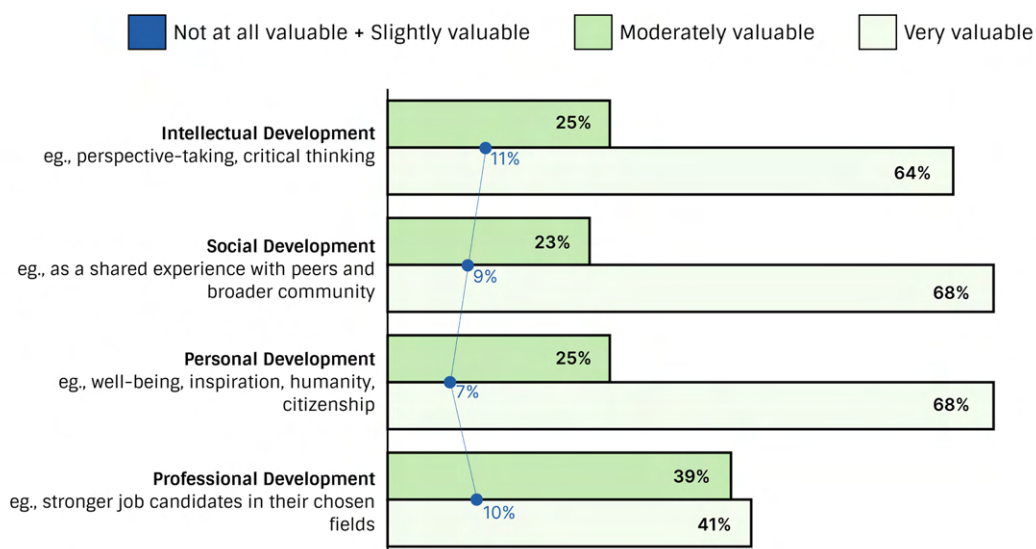


Figure 6.8. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Faculty teaching non-arts-designated courses assess the importance of the arts for their students’ development.

Importance of providing arts content and experiences to students

“How important is it for your students to take courses with arts content at U-M? To have arts experiences that directly relate to their non-arts course of study?”

Many responding faculty recognize the value of the arts for their students broadly, and some are enthusiastic about embedding the arts into their curriculum. About 55% of responding faculty think it's

moderately or very important for students to take courses with arts content at U-M, while 64% think it's moderately or very important for students to have arts experiences that directly relate to their non-arts course of study. Further studies might investigate how these faculty would provide the arts to their students, either in class or extracurricularly.

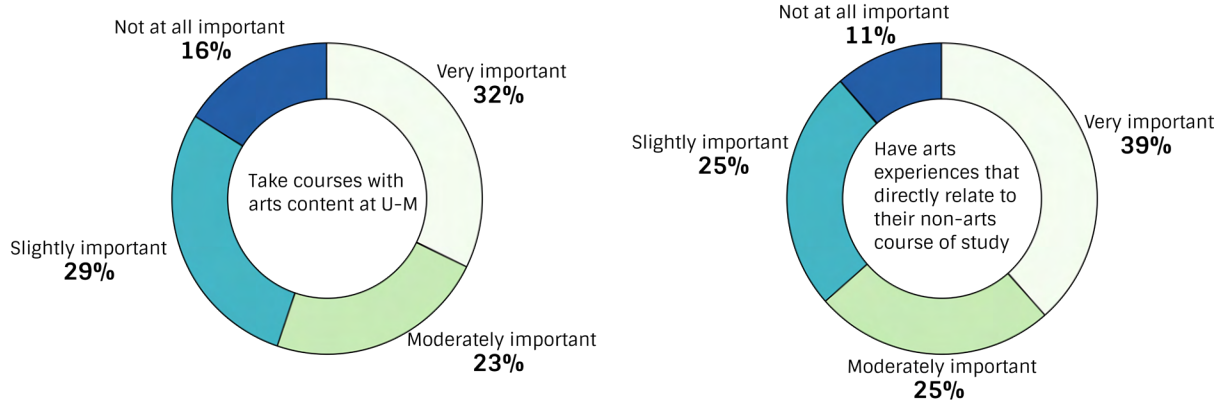


Figure 6.9. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Faculty teaching non-arts-designated courses assess the importance for their students of taking courses with arts content, and of having arts experiences that directly relate to their course of study.

Arts in teaching

“How do you incorporate arts experiences into your teaching, if at all?”

Noting that faculty who engage with the arts are likely more inclined to respond to our survey, close to two-thirds of the responding non-arts faculty (64%) incorporate the arts into their teaching in some

way. Most do this by encouraging arts-based practices and approaches (e.g., open-ended inquiry through making, improvisational mindset, theme and variations) and by allowing students to fulfill an assignment in an arts medium (e.g., poetry, drawing, music composition). Some also require their students to draw on arts skills like drawing, assign arts

experiences or bring them into the classroom, or co-teach with an artist or arts faculty member. Faculty write-in responses for the choice “other” include discussing arts activities in

class, adapting theater techniques as classroom activities, and inviting artists to class. One respondent states that they understand their own field as an art.

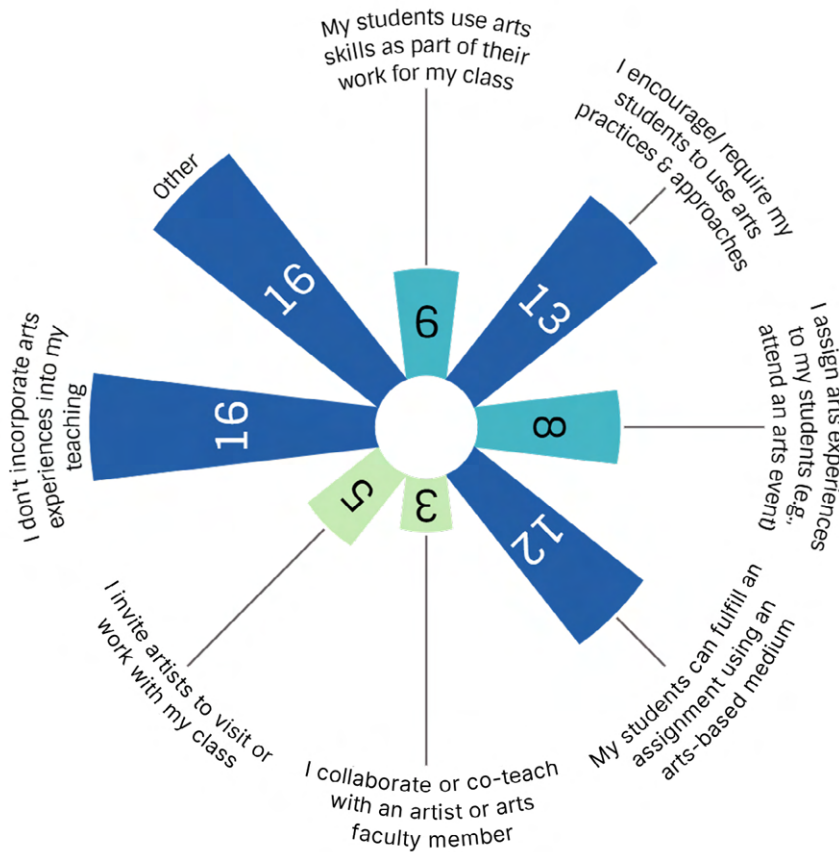


Figure 6.10. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: How faculty teaching non-arts-designated courses incorporate the arts into their teaching.

A little over one third of the respondents (36%) don't incorporate the arts into their teaching at all. Overwhelmingly, the reason for this is that the faculty member considers the arts not relevant to their course content. Write-in responses, all shown here, begin to reveal that the perceived value of incorporating the arts into teaching is low, while the demands of time and degree requirements are high:

- “I’m a [professional in X field], so I teach [X] methods of inquiry and analysis. I’m neither qualified nor have time to teach about art”
- “Teaching at the grad level in a professional school, I think many students would reject it unless specifically tied to professional skill building.”
- “I won’t say that the arts ‘are not relevant,’ yet they take a much lower priority among the activities that I must cover in my courses.”

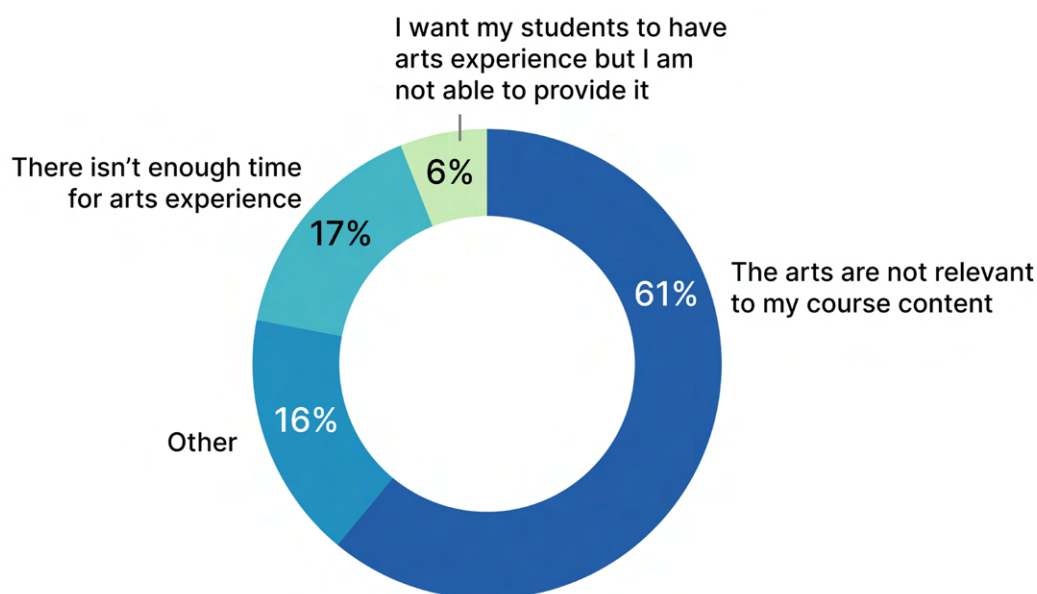


Figure 6.11. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Reasons why faculty who teach non-arts-designated content do not incorporate arts experiences into their teaching.

Arts in research

“How do you incorporate arts experiences into your research, if at all?”

Some of the responding faculty do incorporate the arts into their research, most by drawing on the practices, approaches, and mindsets gained through their own arts experiences. Write-in responses all indicate that these researchers take a creative approach to presenting their work, such as through figures and diagrams. Indeed, non-verbal/

visual iteration supports a different type of cognition on a topic, possibly contributing to research insights.

These accounts of researchers drawing on their own artistry in the presentation of their work outnumber the single account of a researcher employing an artist for that purpose. This evidence might strengthen the case that students in all fields should have some arts experience, as it can inform their understanding of their research, regardless of their field or discipline.

Though rare, some faculty—just a handful in our survey—are taking an even bigger leap by collaborating with artists in their research. This is significant as such arts-integrated research collaborations is not broadly incentivized within the university.

More than half of faculty members don't bring the arts into their research at all, mostly because they don't see its relevance. Many also say they don't know how they would incorporate arts into their research.

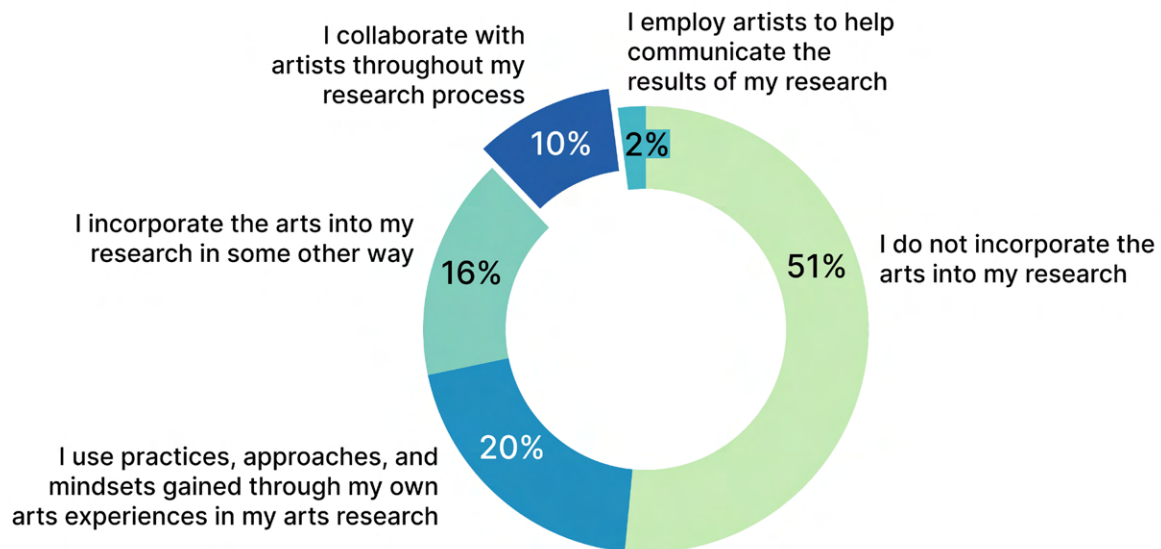


Figure 6.12. From the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff: Responses of faculty teaching non-arts-designated courses to the question “How do you incorporate arts experiences into your research, if at all?”

Recommendations

Although fewer faculty see the arts as important for their students' *professional* development, in fact, faculty draw on their own arts experiences for their non-arts research. This is consistent with professionals across fields who claim that their arts experiences positively inform their current non-arts work. In addition, many faculty see arts experiences as important for their students' *personal*, *social*, and *intellectual* development. As such, incorporating arts experiences for every student, regardless of rank or unit, emerges as a priority.

However, it will be necessary to overcome these barriers:

- restricted time, especially in the context of degree requirements and the need to cover certain material

- the perceived low value of arts methods and approaches for non-arts domains
- a lack of understanding of how the arts can enrich both teaching and research in “non-arts” domains

To support these efforts, we recommend:

1. Fostering a shared culture that recognizes arts experiences enrich teaching and learning, and potentially support students' academic and professional success.
2. Looking to UCLA's Art|Sci Center and Lab, ASU's Synthesis Center, Harvard's MetaLab, Broad Institute at MIT and Harvard, and the Arts Research Center at UC Berkeley for models to leverage the potential of interdisciplinary collaboration with the arts.
3. Looking to Penn State's interdisciplinary general education curriculum for models of integrating the arts into students' academic experience.
4. [UMS white papers on integrating performance into the classroom.](#)
5. The creation of CRLT modules on integrating the arts into teaching.

For information on faculty/staff survey methodology, see Appendix A.

By Veronica Stanich

Data visualization: Krithika Balaji

Surveys and analysis: Krithika Balaji, Umang Bhojani, Deb Mexicotte, Veronica Stanich

Thanks to U-M Human Resources for sampling support.

Thanks to faculty and staff interviewees.

Special thanks to Lisa Holland and Raphael Nishimura at the Survey Research Center at the Institute for Social Research for advising on survey questions and design, sampling, and analysis.

Arts Research at the University of Michigan

Introduction

In this section, we hope to make arts research both legible and visible on campus—*legible* in that the concept of arts research is unfamiliar to many, and *visible* in that the high quality arts research happening at U-M deserves recognition. This section also addresses some of the questions and controversies that are associated with arts research, drawing on the accumulated experience of a2ru and its network and on U-M on-campus interviews. (Note that the U-M Office of Research and many faculty use the hybrid term “arts research/creative practice,” as we do elsewhere in this report. Here, however, we are using “arts research” as we argue for the idea that creative practice itself can constitute research, but recognize that it doesn’t always; some artists reject the label of “research” for their work.)

We only scratch the surface of both aims. “Arts research” covers a rich and varied range of activities, and there is lively international conversation about what comprises it and even what it should rightly be called. At U-M, there is a concentration of arts research in the schools designated for the arts (School of Music, Theatre & Dance, known as “SMTD”; Stamps School of Art & Design, known as “Stamps”; Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, known as “Taubman”; and some units of College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, known as “LSA”) but every semester new arts research and interdisciplinary arts-integrated research emerge across campus. As with arts practice, the U-M arts research ecosystem is vibrant and decentralized.

Four deans and directors of arts research and creative practice

at U-M were interviewed for this section, as was one arts researcher—again, a mere sampling of the many people supporting and doing this work at U-M.

Insights

1. The arts can include both quantitative and qualitative understandings familiar in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. However, an arts way of knowing often extends beyond words and numbers to the aesthetic, sensorial, and subjective.
2. Arts research can take the conventional forms of a scholarly article or book as well as arts forms like a painting, dance, or musical composition. Creative making can be (but isn't always) a research methodology.
3. U-M supports arts research as well as interdisciplinary, collaborative arts-integrated research, but still more support is needed.
4. Researchers are using arts research methods and outcomes not only in LSA, Stamps, Taubman, and SMTD but across U-M's schools, colleges, and campuses.

Increasing the Legibility of Arts Research

Arts research: An introduction

Often, a common understanding of “research” defaults to research in the STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Medicine) disciplines, and the concept of “arts research” is unfamiliar to many people. The [U-M Faculty Handbook](#) refers to the original work of faculty as “research, scholarship, or other creative activities.” While this definition recognizes and legitimizes arts practice, i.e., “creative activities,” it still keeps them separate from research activities. Here, we hope to shed light on the idea that creative

activities can themselves constitute research, and to explain the concept of arts research in general.

Fundamental to this explanation is understanding that the arts offer ways of knowing that include both familiar quantitative and qualitative understandings, but that also can extend beyond words and numbers to the aesthetic, sensorial, and subjective. One interviewee's anecdote illustrates how knowing through the arts can function differently from knowing through (in this example) reading:

When I was an undergrad, I studied [choreographer Merce] Cunningham and I was able to answer questions on a dance history exam about why Cunningham was an important shift in 20th century dance. But I remember seeing The Cunningham Company for the first time a year or two after college....all those things I'd been taught about Cunningham, I suddenly experienced. And I remember sitting in my car afterwards and being like, oh, I suddenly had a new way of seeing... it sounds sort of hokey to say, but I really was like, Oh, I see the world differently. To think about what constitutes indeterminacy—which is a natural phenomenon, a social phenomenon—it was sitting in the audience and watching an artwork that blew my mind.

By acknowledging that not everyone understands the world through narrative and numerical modes, the university moves closer to broad inclusion, as arts ways of knowing overlap with, for example, neurodiverse and indigenous ways of knowing. One interviewee notes that this is one of the contributions of the arts to the university: the assertion and demonstration that there are ways of knowing beyond the quantitative and the verbal. The arts often have different epistemologies, cultures, methods, and outcomes from other disciplines, and can be quite disciplinarily distant³ from

natural and social sciences, law, business, and even from their near neighbor, the humanities.

One way of understanding what makes the arts—and by extension, arts research—unique is to consider what the arts *do*. The intrinsic impacts of the arts have been identified as intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, spiritual, and social⁴. One interviewee added that the arts give us a way of talking about difficult things in our culture. She gave the example of the COVID-19 pandemic: she perceived that the role of medicine, science, and engineering was to mitigate and reverse the virus's impact, while the role of the arts was to provide objects and experiences to help people make sense of the fear, isolation, and anxiety of the time. This is only one of art's many cultural, social, and political functions.

These impacts and functions begin to demonstrate how disciplinarily distinct the arts are; few other fields and disciplines refer to emotional or aesthetic impacts. Because of this disciplinary distance, we expect research methods and outcomes in the arts to look different from research in other fields. For example, research in STEMM fields often happens within a problem/solution framework, and values veracity and replicability. Research in the arts is more often exploratory; trafficking in ambiguity and subjectivity, it involves a layer of the individual's response or interpretation that is usually not

present in STEMM research. (For these reasons, evaluation measures borrowed from STEMM or social science fields are a poor fit for some arts research. One interviewee notes, “I would caution us against using certain metrics that come to us from other fields. I think they limit our understanding of what can be contained within something as open-ended as arts research.”)

So what is arts research? The definition at best has multiple interpretations and at worst is the subject of passionate disagreement. There is agreement, across the literature on arts research and across these interviews at U-M, that it takes many forms. Within the arts, there are subdisciplines whose research practices are different and may not be mutually intelligible, and across this diverse field there are numerous types and purposes of arts research. One interviewee notes, “... there’s not one thing, and it [arts research] needs to be differentiated and defined.” The examples of arts research at U-M given at the end of this section begin to provide a window into individual arts researchers’ motivations and goals.

[What Is Research?](#) and [What Is Arts Research?](#)—a2ru publications grounded in 444 interviews with faculty, leadership, staff, and students at 38 research universities—offer several entry points to understanding arts research. The form of arts research that is perhaps most familiar to other disciplines across campus is “Humanistic

Scholarship and Social Scientific Research about the Arts.”⁵ Here we see familiar methods (e.g., historical or qualitative research) and familiar outcomes (e.g., scholarly books and articles). An interviewee in SMTD describes colleague Patricia Hall’s reconstruction of musical scores found in Auschwitz:

She’s been reconstructing those and...making them legible for performance....So that kind of thing, archival research with an aim to making available things that were not available, things that may have been found in libraries or things that were written in a composer’s hand that were illegible. So, those are the kinds of projects, I think, that really kind of make a splash with people outside the School of Music, Theatre and Dance, who can sort of say, yes, this looks like the kind of research that I do in psychology or in sports medicine or whatever. The topics are different, but what the research yields is something familiar: a book, an article, you know, that kind of thing.

Another interviewee, in the Stamps school, refers to National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Research Labs, noting, “That’s actually how most people would view arts research, and is how the NEA Research Labs utilize it, which is really traditional research *about* the arts in relationship to larger, wicked global problems.” For example, U-M has an NEA Research Lab award supporting

investigation into relationships between public art and firearm injury prevention, building on a pilot study database created at U-M.

Scholarly books and articles about the arts can be arts research, but they also can be an additional, reflective “meta” layer on top of the research itself, which in some cases is expressed in an arts form (e.g., creative writing, music, theatre, dance, visual art, or digital media). Whereas books and articles are recognizable and legible forms of scholarship across the research enterprise, the SMTD interviewee goes on to state, “Where we run into difficulties sometimes is in trying to make a case for performances as research. Or even the creation of musical works or dances as research,” raising the important idea that arts research can result in a written, verbal analysis, but also in an arts form like a dance, poem, or sculpture. These arts forms can be, for many people, unexpected or unlikely vessels for research. For example, U-M faculty members Michael Gould (professor of music) and Aline Cotel (associate professor of civil and environmental engineering) collaboratively research the ecological and cultural consequences of the Kariba Dam on the Zambezi River (“Nyami Nyami-Water Never Lies”). While either researcher may one day write a scholarly article about this work, the project’s primary research outcome is a multimedia art installation.

Understanding that an arts form can itself be a research output,

then creative practice can be a research method. When creative practice is research, it can serve the same functions of professional advancement⁶ and field-building as any other form of research. (Note that not all art and creative practice are research. There are artists who make no claim that their books or plays, musical compositions or dances, paintings or sculptures or digital art are “research.” Creators designate how they want their work to be understood.)

Again extrapolating from the central premise of arts form as research output, we can also see that such research might be disseminated through performances in a theater, exhibitions in a gallery, websites, broadcasts, and many other venues. The reach of these venues far exceeds that of scholarly journals, suggesting arts research’s potential for broad impact.

Arts research: Related to other forms of research

To understand *how* art can be research, we might start with the most common definition of research in higher education: *producing new knowledge*⁷. One interviewee explains, “*By definition, art-making is always a creation of new knowledge....It’s one of the things that’s so important about having the arts in a research university, because researchers are always facing uncertainty, thinking about a question or an idea they’re looking to explore and creating new knowledge from that.*” As such, understanding a work of art as research necessarily builds on that initial idea that the arts are a way of knowing. When we experience a work of art, we—the listeners, viewers, readers, audience members—may understand something we didn’t before, and that new knowledge is co-constructed by us, in those aesthetic, sensorial, and subjective ways. Another interviewee articulates that the arts are research because they enable us to think about things in new ways.

Other common understandings of research apply readily to the arts. For example, a choreographer who plumbs the possibilities of improvisation engages in research as *exploration and discovery*⁸ just as a biologist observing animal behavior under a microscope or in the field does. Similarly, a visual artist who repeatedly renders the same subject in different materials or colors engages in research as *investigation and making*⁹ just as an engineer prototyping and modeling physical mechanisms does.

“*By definition, art-making is always a creation of new knowledge....It’s one of the things that’s so important about having the arts in a research university, because researchers are always facing uncertainty, thinking about a question or an idea they’re looking to explore and creating new knowledge from that.*”

When asked how we might build bridges from a more common (i.e., STEMM) understanding of research to an understanding of arts research, interviewees offered the following parallels or comparisons:

“...all research has some degree of systematicity to it and some degree of creativity to it. What’s interesting is to think about in any given research process, where does the systematicity come to the fore and when does the creativity come to the fore? One of the really interesting things about the arts is the role of creativity is relatively constant throughout...[but] creativity is actually involved in any research process, and helping those in other sectors think about when they’re being creative and when they’re being systematic is just an interesting part of a research ecology.”

“We have a project right now where an artist is working with women Kurdish resistors, to document and photograph. That would be a form of arts research, illuminating that experience in new ways... There are arts research that parallel what social scientists or others would be doing, but come from the perspective of an artist. The open-endedness of arts research, I think, is one of its hallmarks... I think a journalist, a social scientist, and an artist could all enter into the same research project, and some of them would be [doing] arts research and some of them wouldn’t be.”

Arts research: A world apart

Pursuing an understanding of arts research in the context of, and in comparison to, more commonly discussed forms of research can be useful, but also can raise expectations that arts research will be uniformly analogous to other research. In fact, there are many ways in which arts research defies comparison with research in medicine, engineering, and natural and social sciences. Some of these ways are articulated here, with quotations from interviewees.

1. Conventions and standards for arts research require flexibility to accommodate the range of outputs.

“I would say the arts come from fundamentally different ontologies, epistemologies, knowledge systems, and ways of being in the world, that can’t be contained. And this is maybe the difficulty, right? When we think about research, what makes research research is that it can be contained. It can be reproducible. And what makes the arts in general...is that it is a multiplicity of things. To borrow a phrase from the Zapatistas, an indigenous group in Mexico, they talked about creating a new world, kind of, where many worlds could exist within a singularity. That’s for me, the beauty of arts research. It is that larger space that can account for an array of different ways of being, making, and existing.”

“By and large, in most scientific articles, there’s an abstract, there’s an introduction and background and context and literature review framing the history of the question and the challenges, and whether they’re technical or theory-based or empirical, there’s methodologies, there’s results, there’s discussions, and there’s conclusions. And that’s what you get taught and that’s how you assess and frame those articles. I don’t think that arts research, certainly writing and documentation of that, routinely follows that.”

2. Often arts research methods and outcomes have no analogue in other fields.

“I would say as someone who is in the arts, sometimes it [comparing arts research to other research] seems futile because you’re never going to be able to make the comparison. You know, we don’t work in labs, and our research goals are sometimes obscure.”

“Performance, recreating a work that exists and performing it, or performing a new work for the very first time, what is the counterpart or the analogue across campus?”

3. Uncertainty, ambiguity, and subjectivity are hallmarks.

“Arts research, particularly creative practice, is not a closed controlled system, as opposed to, at the opposite end of that spectrum, a medical study. They’re trying to make sure as much as possible is absolutely controlled in order to produce a systematic result. And in the arts I think there’s a really fascinating tension between what it is you want to control and what it is that you absolutely want to allow to evolve, or even something far more radical than that.”

“With arts research, the response of the experiencer, the user, the person going to the installation or the film is relevant in a way it’s not with other forms of research.”

4. The arts’ approach to research can differ from those of other fields.

“First, it’s this social-cultural interaction, and then, that interaction is complex. It’s not a problem-solution model. It’s something else that’s going on. So in that world of the arts, research isn’t going to have a solution to a problem like COVID. It’s going to do some sort of different work.”

Increasing the Visibility of Arts Research at U-M

Arts research in the U-M research enterprise

U-M is recognized as a national leader in the arts, both because of the quality of its arts departments and because of the organizations it hosts such as the University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA), the University Musical Society (UMS), and a2ru.

U-M also leads through its high-level recognition of arts research: generally, in that the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) refers at the highest levels to [“research and creative practice,”](#) and specifically, in that across the institution, arts research roles and arts research funding mechanisms are codified. As of 2023 there is a university-level position designated Director of Arts Research/Creative Practice, supported jointly by the Arts Initiative and OVPR, and a position in the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning designated Director of Research and Creative Practice Development, to name a few. There are now additional internal funding sources designated specifically for arts research: Arts Research: Incubation and Acceleration (ARIA) and the U-M Office of Research and Sponsored Projects offer “Research Catalyst and Innovation (RCI)” block grants

for the Arts and Humanities. ARIA support includes not only faculty research funding for incubation and acceleration but also the Creativity Lab (C-Lab), a summer research development program, and the pilot program Artists in the Archive. ARIA and RCI grants have supported a range of arts research and arts-integrated interdisciplinary research projects. While funding is not the only support needed for arts research (e.g., have RFP’s been disseminated in such a way that eligible faculty are aware of them? Do all faculty get the help they need to submit an application?), arts faculty express appreciation for the funding available through Arts Initiative and RCI grants.

Building these arts research roles and funding mechanisms into the infrastructure of the university signals the institution’s support for arts research and helps make it legible, as the same sorts of roles and mechanisms are familiar in health or sustainability initiatives. The relatively recent creation of a position like Director of Arts Research/Creative Practice and relatively recent institution of ARIA grants also demonstrate that university leaders are thinking in expansive ways about what constitutes research.

Furthermore, one arts dean formerly felt that at campuswide associate deans' meetings "...we were at the dance, but were never asked. We were sort of sitting off on the side and watching... Sometimes what we were talking about was just so, so distant from anything that I would be thinking about or anything that is reflected in the work that's done at [my unit]." Now, however, that dean notes that new leadership at OVPR has keen insight into the arts and is particularly adept at including arts deans in new ways. Another interviewee observes that now creative practice is included in most communications and programs.

There is still untapped potential for cultivating the arts and arts research landscape at U-M. For example, U-M might send a message that the arts are essential by strengthening arts curricular offerings and creating more arts opportunities for non-arts majors. Even more, there is a great opportunity to leverage the catalytic power of the arts in team or convergence research through the university's large-scale interdisciplinary research initiatives.

For example, Bold Challenges themes and programming are aimed at large-scale center grants, which are usually given out by NSF and NIH. These contexts and the Bold Challenges themes—which are often social, scientific, or medical in nature—are not "home turf" for many fine arts faculty in creative writing, digital media, art, design, music, theatre, or dance. As such,

they might not readily see how they could contribute to research on a theme or how they fit into an interdisciplinary team. Proactive measures to more intentionally bring the arts on board might include actively and explicitly including the arts among the expertise sought, describing themes in a way that signals how the arts might have a relevant voice in these conversations, and providing clear pathways for arts research participation. With such measures, U-M has the opportunity to shift common misperceptions of the arts as primarily decorative, and of arts approaches and practices as irrelevant to global problem-solving.

Arts Initiative staff envision an arts-inclusive research scenario where "...anybody on campus would be starting something [interdisciplinary team research project] and would be like, 'You know, we haven't found the artists that we're going to work with yet,' in the same way that someone might say, 'Well, we haven't gotten a good statistician on board.'"¹⁰ Several interviewees described what the arts can bring to or teach the broader research enterprise, such as:

- a resourcefulness and capacity for doing a lot with only minimal support. "People need to recognize that...we do a lot of research on a shoestring budget and are quite dependent on internal sources largely, and a very few external ones. And yet we continue to do it. And we continue to do it at high quality and in great quantities as well."

- the contribution of creative tools for research broadly. “The arts wind up at the bottom of the [university] hierarchy, but I would argue that has left research without some really interesting tools around creativity that could be better deployed”
- the opportunity to reconsider and redefine what constitutes research. “There’s this idea that research has to have certain forms and certain structures linked to it that I think comes to us by way of STEMM fields and assumptions of what research is. It has to be reproducible in certain ways. It has to create new knowledge. At least within higher ed, it has to be distributed using certain means of distribution, peer reviewed articles or peer review as a process. I think those are all crucial, but I think that what’s exciting about arts research, it allows us to actually reconsider some of those embedded assumptions we have about what is research, what are research outputs?”
- an acknowledgement of the questioning nature of research, as opposed to only celebrating research that is “successful” by providing answers (aligned with the [Center for Open Science’s ethical model](#)). “I think in arts research, particularly in creative practice, surprise is welcome. Uncertainty is built into the process; it’s not a trip from uncertain to certain, which I think is a common pathway in the sciences.”
- a model of doing research in conversation with the public. “One of the amazing things about arts research is we do so much of our research in public, for the public, and with the public, and I think that is something that the rest of the research enterprise doesn’t get to do as much. It’s a really exciting part of arts research that a lot of folks in the humanities and social sciences and sciences could learn a lot from.”

Arts research across U-M

Arts research is most common, unsurprisingly, among faculty in U-M units dedicated to the arts (Stamps, Taubman, SMTD, some departments of LSA). In our recent faculty/staff survey, we asked faculty in those arts-designated units what term they use for their research. Twelve percent of faculty in those units refer to their work as “research” while

20% consider their work “creative practice.” However, the majority—about 60%—use the slash term “research/creative practice.” An additional 8% categorize their work as “service/for the community.” (Respondents in the Stamps School reported a different preference from

this larger cohort, with “research/creative practice” and “creative practice” preferred equally.)

One interviewee uses the term “creative practice research”; another uses the slash term “arts research/creative practice” because it helps recognize that “arts research” itself is a capacious term that includes art-making, adding “I always want artists to understand themselves as part of the research enterprise, even if their research may look different than the image that comes to mind when someone says ‘research.’ So it’s a way to signal both.”

These variations in terms reflect the unsettled state of arts research in general. Not all art-making *is* research, some artists don’t think of their work as research, and some artists have to call their creative practice “research” to access certain funds. Internationally, a range of terms, each with subtle connotations, is used. These include arts research, artistic research, arts-based research, creative research, and more, in addition to the ones used by U-M faculty.

And while some researchers in other fields have a hard time thinking of arts as research, arts research is happening beyond the arts-designated units—in health sciences, social work, and engineering, to name a few. Consistent with the multiplicity inherent in arts research generally, this work looks different wherever it appears. One interviewee notes, “Some people are using arts methods towards not necessarily

arts-oriented aims. And in other cases, people are using arts methods, and asking questions more squarely within the arts.” For example, [Rogério Pinto in the School of Social Work has conducted research through visual arts and theatre.](#)

There is a balancing act between policing who can and can’t do arts research on the one hand, and saying that anyone can do it on the other. Not wanting to reify a perceived divide between artists and everyone else; one interviewee says, “I really want us to move away from ‘there are arts people and there are non-arts people,’ because people’s trajectories, and especially because Michigan is so good at interdisciplinarity, there’s a point in people’s careers where divvying them up as to what exactly they were trained in becomes less relevant.” Of Rogério Pinto, this interviewee says, “Would you call them an arts person or a non-arts person? That distinction is less useful. It’s useful that they’ve really been deeply engaged in Boalian Theater of the Oppressed storytelling circle modes of research their whole career.”

Another interviewee takes a different approach, emphasizing the importance of training: “There is an assumption that individuals not trained in the arts can easily make that shift into arts research... there are scholars who will make that move into arts research in ways that wouldn’t be acceptable inversely.” That interviewee continues, “We live in a society where many people think

that you can write something and just distribute it, but there's still a rule for professionalized journalists, and people who do this work. And I'd say maybe there's some parallels in the arts. Why are the arts something we think everybody can do?"

And while there is some agreement that arts training is necessary to do arts research, the exact *type* and *amount* of training—and thus the scholarly degree that provides this training—needed to do arts research with value and integrity is contested.

In the arts, scholarship *about the arts* is expressed in a dissertation and awarded a PhD, while terminal degrees in *arts practice* include DMA (Doctor of Musical Arts), MFA (Master of Fine Arts), and M.Arch. (Master of Architecture). Some funding and academic contexts require a researcher to hold a PhD, but the existence of these other terminal degrees, and competing ideas about the value of arts degrees in general, complicate the picture. For one interviewee, arts expertise is more important than an arts degree:

"Their [person in non-arts-designated unit doing arts research] terminal degree isn't something that has a [capital] letter A in it, but this kind of art-centered work, it's about what you're doing and how you're doing it. Even as, of course, I don't want to minimize the importance of getting trained." For another interviewee, "I think graduate level training [in the arts] and/or collaboration with an artist should be a prerequisite [for doing arts research.]"

These questions of credentialing and degrees have implications for the status of arts research—particularly arts research that is practice-led and has arts outputs as opposed to that which results in a scholarly article or book—in the larger research enterprise. One productive way forward toward credentialing arts research, and having that credential accepted across the university, is to describe rigorous standards of excellence in research *in the context of art's* disciplinary distance from other academic fields. One interviewee summarizes this approach:

"There's a difference in a terminal degree and what we might think of as a more introductory or specialized thing, that is a one-, maybe two-year kind of MA equivalent....I want to make some distinction in graduate training between something that's meant to lay a foundation versus a terminal degree where someone demonstrates an ability to carry out a large-scale research project. For PhDs, that looks like a dissertation; for MFAs, it looks like a thesis performance or thesis exhibition; for architecture students, it actually takes on a whole host of possibilities."

Arts-integrated research at U-M

“Arts-integrated research” is the term a2ru uses for interdisciplinary research that includes both arts and non-arts disciplines. The former Mcubed funding program at U-M supported several arts-integrated research projects such as “Impolite Birth: Theatre Voice Training and The Experience of Childbirth,” collaborative research undertaken by SMTD and School of Nursing faculty. Currently at U-M, ArtsEngine’s [FEAST](#) program offers explicit and visible support for arts-integrated research, bringing together faculty/student teams across engineering and the arts.

See below for several examples of arts-integrated research supported by FEAST.

Funding

There are expenses associated with arts research as with any other research: space, materials, course release, travel, graduate assistants, and more. Across the university, however, there is often limited understanding of arts research needs and their associated expenses, and of the extreme scarcity of funds for the arts. A former Stamps Research Associate Dean who has collaborated extensively with engineering and medical researchers commented (in a separate context) on the shock that a STEMM researcher would feel if asked to work under conditions that most artists, including those in the university, are accustomed to:

“The lack of federal funding in this country for arts research—it’s very hard for people to comprehend what that means. It means there are no labs. None! It means there are no PhD students. It means there are very few materials. It’s like no, there’s no test tubes, mate. Of course you haven’t got that microscope.

Or yes, you have, but you’re paying for it out of your own salary. I completely get why they’re [these circumstances] not understood, because they’re beyond the lived experience of most scientists. They can’t imagine that.”

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grants typically range from \$10,000 to \$100,000 and are extremely competitive, supporting artists both within and beyond academia—with the vast majority of grants going to those outside of academia. The NEA largely supports artistic practice, but it does have a dedicated research arm with moneys available. NEA research grants are fairly traditional in their understanding of arts research, generally funding research *about* the arts with, for example, social science methodologies and a written narrative outcome. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and a few private funders such

as the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) also support similar research about the arts. Given the scarcity of external funding for arts research, grants from the Arts Initiative, ARIA, and RCI are important sources of support for arts research at U-M. In addition, some internal seed and dissemination grants are appropriate for arts research although they aren't "branded" or designated for the arts explicitly.

Like the NEA, most foundation, corporation, and private donor grants support arts production, not arts research. In addition to this scarcity of funding, some arts researchers may find it challenging to frame their work for funders whose priorities are outcome-driven. University-driven collaborative research opportunities that welcome and accommodate arts-integrated research not only support arts research itself; they also set up U-M to meet federal calls for convergent research.

“The lack of federal funding in this country for arts research—it’s very hard for people to comprehend what that means. It means there are no labs. None! It means there are no PhD students. It means there are very few materials. It’s like no, there’s no test tubes, mate. Of course you haven’t got that microscope. Or yes, you have, but you’re paying for it out of your own salary. I completely get why they’re [these circumstances] not understood, because they’re beyond the lived experience of most scientists. They can’t imagine that.”

-Arts researcher

Recommendations

1. The university might proactively seek participation in its interdisciplinary research programs from faculty in music, dance, theatre, visual arts, and creative writing, leveraging the potential of an arts perspective in interdisciplinary research.
2. Researchers in other disciplines might look to arts research as a model for reconsidering embedded assumptions about research processes and output, and for celebrating the question-focused, uncertain nature of research inquiry.

Arts Research Examples

These examples are taken from among the projects awarded ARIA (Arts Research: Incubation and Acceleration) grants. They represent practice-based arts research—research that results in an arts outcome.

Talking Pupils

Who:

- Julie Zhu

Why:

To create an immersive experience that simulates visual impairment and emphasizes self-awareness.

What:

This innovative virtual reality opera, designed to be accessible for the visually-impaired, is based on a 17th-century story focusing on blindness and spiritual awakening. The project integrates specialized acoustics, spatial sound design and haptic feedback.

Detroit at Play — Empowering Communities Through Collective Game Co-Creation

Who:

- Jose Sanchez, associate professor of architecture

What:

Video game design.

Why:

To foster community engagement, specifically targeting high school students in Detroit.

Nyami Nyami-Water Never Lies

Who:

- Michael Gould, professor of music, percussion
- Aline Cotel, associate professor of civil and environmental engineering

Why:

To explore the ecological and cultural

consequences of the Kariba Dam on the Zambezi River.

What:

A multimedia installation that combines sculpture and technology, incorporating the river deity Nyami Nyami as a symbol of nature's resistance against human intervention.

Arts-integrated Research Examples

These examples are drawn from ArtsEngine's Faculty Engineering/Arts Student Teams (FEAST) projects. FEAST invites students across disciplines to engage with North Campus faculty around their research and creative production. ArtsEngine connects the North Campus schools and colleges, providing frameworks for interdisciplinary teaching, learning, research, and community. These include programs and initiatives across the arts, design, engineering, information sciences and technology.

Shadow Catching



Figure 7.1. Shadow Catching. Photo supplied by ArtsEngine.

Who:

- Cynthia Pachikara, associate professor in Stamps School
- U-M students

Why:

Explore and hybridize conceptions of shadows from various fields as a way of mining their artistic potential.

What:

Pachikara and students considered how light and shadow are depicted in fields from art and architecture to physics and phenomenology. Outcomes included methods to physically model shadows quickly, and visualizations of length, angle, and intensity of sunlight across the globe with implications for, for example, wayfinding by light.

Sonification of Sleep Data



Figure 7.2. Sonification of Sleep Data. Photo supplied by ArtsEngine.

Who:

- Stephen Rush, professor of music in SMTD's Department of Performing Arts Technology
- Dr. Kara Dupuy-McCauley, Mayo Clinic pulmonologist (and Rush's former student)
- U-M students

Why:

A musical version of patients' sleep studies can highlight breathing anomalies, and the techno format engages technicians' attention differently as they analyze data. The goal is to improve the accuracy and efficiency of diagnosing instances of hypopnea, a hard-to-diagnose pause in breathing that causes a drop in oxygen levels.

What:

Rush composed techno music incorporating sleep data and leveraging techno's use of "the drop" (after an increase in tension, there is a brief pause and then a heavy bass kicks in). Dupuy-McCauley's team experimented with different modulations of the music to determine how oxygen-level drops are communicated most clearly. Plans for further research include the creation of a "sonic phenotype," a characteristic sound that could help distinguish between types of hypopnea.

Visualizing Telematic Music Performance



Figure 7.3. Visualizing Telematic Music Performance. Photo supplied by ArtsEngine.

Who:

- Michael Gurevich, associate professor in SMTD's Department of Performing Arts Technology
- John Granzow, associate professor in SMTD's Department of Performing Arts Technology
- Brent Gillespie, professor in the CoE's Department of Mechanical Engineering
- U-M students

Why:

Telematic performance (real-time music-making by people in disparate geographical locations) emerged as a necessity in the pandemic, but current technology is insufficient for visual coordination among performers and for audience visualization of remote performers. Video has limited ability to

communicate the complex human qualities necessary for performance, and suffers from aesthetic deficiencies. The team sought ways to incorporate visual elements and imitate the presence of multiple musicians rather than relying on video.

What:

The team created robots designed to be on a stage with performers, representing the movements of other performers in a different location. The robots are able to reflect the movements of a musician's body in real time onstage, thanks to a set of code that translates the performer's motions into instructions for the robot to match. In a telematic concert held simultaneously between U-M in Ann Arbor and the University of Virginia (UVA) in Charlottesville, each school hosted their own

performer, wearing a motion capture suit, and a robot representative of the fellow school. Both audiences were able to experience a performance of live duets from the

two musicians. The project leads toward deeper understanding of how musicians communicate non-verbally with their bodies.

Empathy in Point Clouds: Spatializing Design Ideas & Storytelling through Immersive Technologies

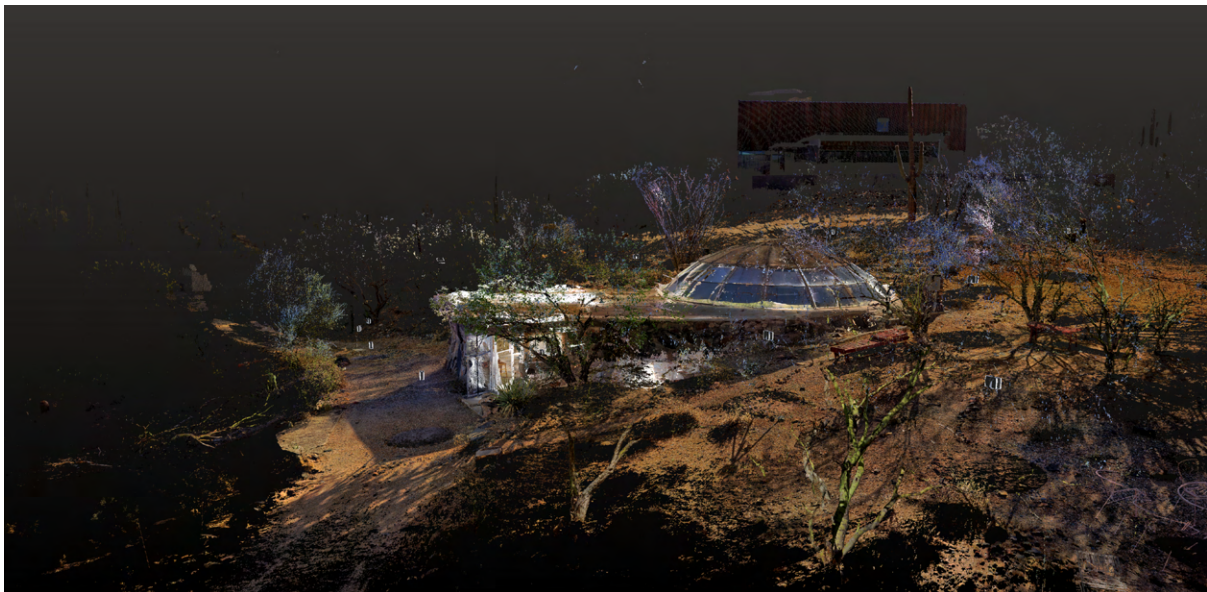


Figure 7.4. Empathy in Point Clouds. Photo supplied by ArtsEngine.

Who:

- Dawn Gilpin, lecturer in Taubman College
- Robert Adams, associate professor in Taubman College.
- U-M students

Why:

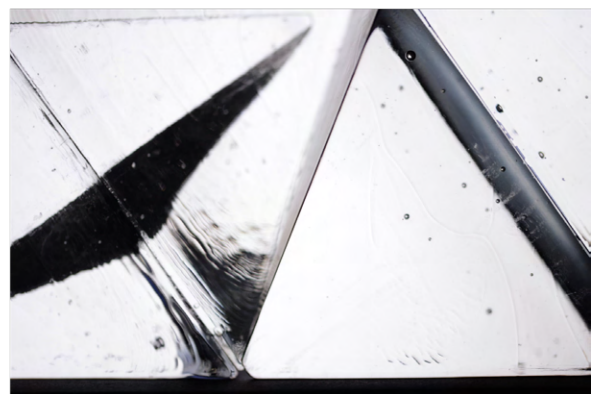
To redefine the terms for creating radically accessible and inclusive architecture.

What:

The project integrates technologies such as LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), live performance motion-capture animation, and photogrammetry, and incorporates 3D point-cloud data captured from artifacts, buildings, urban environments, and landscapes. Using the 3D gaming platform, Unreal Engine, the team develops empathic, inclusive spatial narratives through immersive interfaces.

Case Study: Interview with arts researcher Catie Newell

Catie Newell is a professor of architecture in the A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. She and Upali Nanda, clinical professor of architecture in Taubman College, are recipients of a 2024 Arts Research: Incubation & Acceleration (ARIA) grant for their project *Inhabiting Light* at Nichols Arboretum. a2ru staff spoke with Newell about her arts research.



Inhabiting Light photo credit: Light Forms team

On *Inhabiting Light* and her work in general

If I zoom out, an interest in light and darkness brackets everything I do. I came up through academia in the discipline of architecture, but I think I've operated on the fringes of that discipline and fit more into an art world. My own personal practice has to do with installation, remaking existing spaces—you can think of it as architectural reconfiguration, or as sculptural.

With *Inhabiting Light*, we got lucky in that Nichols Arboretum wanted to partner. They brought the idea to place the work in the magnolia glade, which is a space to mourn and grieve. So the project has been designed with a sense of care, to take care of people. Working with the Arb and C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, they wanted a space where people can sit by themselves, or sit with a family member, and have the opportunity to come back again and again. How do we make a spot that feels really private, even though it's outdoors and public? How do we also accommodate, say, four people who are all strangers?

Our team designed glass geodes with eight or ten sides and an internal void, and they aggregate together to create a space that is within the grove of magnolias. It can be read in a way as a shared bench, with nooks and spaces to sit quietly and privately if desired. Someone can sit within the *Inhabiting Light* space and be optically obstructed;

it has a level of privacy, but it is also not opaque walls. And the glass works as a tessellated geometric module, taking in the light and colors of the surroundings, reflecting and refracting.

Working in this space was a beautiful way to give deeper meaning to my work that is material-based and architectural and aesthetic.

On what she calls her work

"Research" and "practice": both. Thinking about arts research, all my research has an arts ambition underneath it, even if I don't say that word.

On whether she has a research question

I don't have a question in a way that looks like a hypothesis, something you would imagine for some of the national level foundation grants. In a way, the framing of my research has more to do with values than a question. What's its (this thing I'm making) reason for being? It has more of an impact than something that's super practical or logistical; it's an emotional or inspirational impact.

On the research process

I go through every bit of research knowing there are multiple answers—this is a way, this is another way. Often when I'm working on a project, there's a moment that I discover something unexpected, and it becomes the spark for the next project. When I reflect on a project,

it's always teaching me something more: *oh, I want to work with this part of it now.*

I attribute this to taking a lot of photographs. I photograph all my process and the work when it's done, and this leads to a new place. I can't draw light and darkness, so I had to capture it with photos. Photos are a constant reflection and new way of seeing because the camera frames things differently. Photographing my work generates new ideas, even though photographing wasn't the goal. It's a sketchbook that's talking to me. When I'm stuck or burnt out, I go photograph things—it's a joy and a way to figure out things.

On funding for arts research

The way a lot of funding is set up—with grants and research and who gets the money and do you need a PhD—some colleagues frame their work as research into specific topics intended to appease the demands of grants that are out there. To get the funding you need, it changes how you talk about it and what the deliverables are. Sometimes it's slightly off from the true impact of the work, just so it can get funded. This can really take a lot of energy away from the work, and expend time trying to fulfill the criteria that have been set by others.

On the PhD

It can be truly frustrating when a grant locks you into requirements that assume research can only come from the route of taking on a PhD. That's a very locked-down definition of what knowledge could come from. My research is not just on a whim, or self-expression; it's a conscious way of stepping back and constantly asking questions about the world around us.

On who arts research is for

I took some extended family to see one of my installations. They didn't get into it at all, and they didn't know how to talk about it; they were almost frozen in space. That really impacted me. It's on us who make it to figure out how each project can impact more people. For arts research, it would help for viewers to have more information. It's on society too, to teach people how to value and understand art. But I'm okay knowing that not everyone is going to get every single project, but being in a place where it is valued and discussed is key.

By Veronica Stanich

Thanks to faculty and staff interviewees.

The Arts and Culture Beyond Campus

Insights

1. Across both the university and the surrounding community, many artists and arts entities would like to develop a culture of collaboration and reciprocity.
2. Many arts and culture leaders in Ann Arbor are interested in developing clear access points to resources and expertise at U-M.

Context and Background

Ann Arbor and the surrounding area is proportionally rich in arts and culture resources for its size. Ann Arbor and the wider Washtenaw County area contains 167 creative non profits (Creative Washtenaw Counts Report 2023) and many independent artists. The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor contributes significant arts activity, people, and resources to the region, through its highly-ranked schools and colleges in performing arts (SMTD), visual art (Stamps), architecture (Taubman College), and creative writing (Zell), as well as its museums (UMMA) and arts presenters (UMS), among others.

Access to arts is a major draw to and recruitment incentive for the university, and a significant factor in Ann Arbor's frequent inclusion in "best places to live" indices.

The University of Michigan is a public institution, which is supported through state tax appropriations, though these have decreased as a proportion of its overall budget over the years. In addition, the university gains support for its research and infrastructure through the indirect cost support of federal grants (for example, the National Institutes of Health). Because the university receives funding from the government, it has a broadly-defined obligation to serve the state and nation. At the same time, the university is not a foundation, and has a fiduciary responsibility to steward its resources for the benefit of its core mission; namely, education and research. Service to the wider state and community is largely left to individual units and programs

to determine, as long as they align within central guidelines concerning monetary transactions.

However, the University of Michigan, collectively, does work with local, regional, and state arts partners in a variety of ways. The University's Culture Corps internship program places and sponsors student interns at regional arts and culture nonprofits. University venues are bookable by non-university entities, though they may have to wait for open dates after university-affiliated organizations plan their seasons (for example, the Ann Arbor Symphony frequently plays at the university's Hill Auditorium as do local middle and high schools for their spring Orchestra Nights). The Ann Arbor Art Fairs and Summer Festival take place on parts of the university campus. Members of arts units at the university are invited to the Creative Washtenaw Cultural Leaders Forum

along with directors of local non-profits to share updates and ways to collaborate. And individual staff and faculty contribute to local arts events, such as the Ann Arbor Film Festival.

With increasing awareness of power imbalances in institutional relationships, many members of the university who focus on outreach have begun to redefine what "working with the community" looks like, with emphasis on collaboration where all members contribute to shared goals, rather than past models whereby local people were invited to be audience members at university events. In addition, with the inception of the university's Arts Initiative, whose four goal areas include "partnering with communities and the public," the university endeavors to consistently solicit feedback from arts partners about what productive partnership means to them.

A vision for the arts in the Ann Arbor region: University and regional arts organization partnership

In August 2024, a group of seventeen cultural leaders from Ann Arbor arts and culture organizations, as well as independent artists, shared ideas about how the university could optimally work with the broader local arts community. This focus group session was preceded by individual interviews with leaders of local arts organizations. The group also shared aspirational ideas about how collaboration can enhance the region's reputation as a center for the arts. The University of Michigan's Arts Initiative and regional arts advocate Creative Washtenaw co-convened the group discussion. Organizations represented included local museums, arts presenters, performing arts organizations, festivals, arts centers, and youth arts programs.

The cultural leaders suggest these priorities, which represent both actions and attitudes:

1. Funding, marketing help, and a central calendar of regional arts and culture events, are the three “evergreen” needs from arts organizations.
2. Invest in young people, representing broad demographics, as the next generation of artists and administrators, so they can thrive and stay in the area.
3. Celebrate each other by knowing what other arts organizations are doing, and giving them visibility through existing or new channels. Tap the dissemination power of Destination Ann Arbor.
4. Advocate for arts and creative investment to be part of conversations about economic development.
5. Advocate for regional infrastructure (i.e. a transit system).
6. Develop a shared space or building with studios, makers spaces and gallery spaces, where the community and university can meet and create together (precedent: [Logan Center](#) at U of Chicago).
 - Additional functions of such a building: connecting students to community service and internships and programs to take them to arts sites (transportation), connecting educators to curriculum (precedent: [Torpedo Factory Art Center](#), VA).

Some of these represent reciprocity (inviting each other to events); others are shared goals and advocacy to appropriate agencies (regional transit and economic development); yet others are a call for continued and transparent access to future university resources (an arts building). Although some of the ideas imply a special role of the university with its considerable resources (central coordination), many of the suggestions put forward by the group require collective advocacy and thus ways to regularly keep in touch and share ideas.

The role of the university

The cultural leaders generated several pathways to developing arts connections between the university and regional arts organizations, some drawing on existing models:

1. Extend invitations in both directions to arts events, to strengthen understanding of each other's work and gain from rich programs.
2. Develop an arts parallel to the university's Ginsberg Center or Business Engagement Center: a "front door to the arts" for networking and quickly accessing resources, ideas, and problem-solving.
3. Establish and maintain a central database of arts organizations and collaborators, with in-person events to collaboration-building.
4. Work with local entities such as [Ann Arbor SPARK](#) to advance advocacy of the arts contribution to economic development; collaborate with the Ann Arbor Public Library to share effort on high-profile events.
5. Set up a portal to direct donations to local organizations through Wolverine Access (parallel to the university's United Way fund drive).
6. Establish an early-college alliance with Washtenaw Community College for credit transfer to U-M and for-credit internships at local arts organizations.
7. Tap existing communications channels, such as the regional PBS affiliate, to expand access to programming for both university and regional non-profits.
8. Recognize cultural organizations conduct research and deeply understand engaged scholarship, and can provide expertise to university scholars.

These options represent a variety of approaches, only a few of which might move forward based on resource availability and specific goals within the entities involved. Some of these, like a parallel to the Ginsberg Center for the arts, would

require dedicated funding allocation or fundraising; however, planning stages or scoping for these models could be initiated within current structures.

In addition, there are suggestions for specific actions the university might take to make its resources more accessible to the surrounding community:

- 1.** Make clear the channels to access university resources.
 - Compile easy-to-find information about which university resources are available to the public and protocols surrounding their use; recommend parking for events.
 - Centralize the process for reserving spaces in university buildings, performance venues and unions, and set parameters for use by community organizations (for instance, in summers when university activity slows).
- 2.** Create interfaces for access to university expertise and consulting (so each organization does not need to individually figure it out) about:
 - Grant writing
 - Risk assessment
 - Best practices for serving special needs audiences
 - Creating partnership charters

- Data collection and analysis
- Studies of economic impacts of the arts to influence the national conversation
- Master classes: Curricular integration
- Curriculum development: digital media / media literacy

3. Mobilize advocacy and infrastructure for public good.

- Set up Procurement policies to uplift local workers.
 - A certain percentage should be local.
- Embed arts and culture representatives in university units; in parallel to DEI structure, to increase overall capacity.
- Offer residencies so artists and students can stay in the region.
- Work with state and federal agencies to bring in grants and influence policy.

The university is also well-equipped to be the region's central hub for wide arts and culture data gathering and reporting.

Culture of Collaboration

The arts leaders confirmed that working collaboratively must start with a set of shared values and understandings:

1. Partnership should be based on reciprocity—partner organizations should be responsive to each other. Mutual investment with mutual return ensures a balance of power in the partnership.
 - Both partners should have a clear understanding, based on conversation, of what each is bringing to the table. Missions of both organizations should be fulfilled.
 - Everyone has resources—understand and look for the various forms resources can take, including reputation, expertise, energy, and renown.
 - Written agreements, such as charters, help establish clarity and set intentions in the working relationship.
2. Everyone is stretched thin so partnerships should be additive, reducing redundancy.

3. Ideal partnerships turn into relationships, which do not end with any particular project.
4. There is a need to raise awareness of the cultural divide and perceived power imbalance in partnerships between people with PhDs, MFAs, and independent artists.

Challenges

Complexity

The university is large and complex and can be daunting for potential regional partners. Likewise, the overall landscape of arts and culture contributors in the region is also complex and ever-shifting. Ways forward include:

- Establishing an arts help desk.
- Holding “discovery meetings” to introduce community members to the arts at the university.

Bureaucracy

The university’s systems and internal controls can be a barrier to collaboration. Payment processes are slow and, with respect to the suggestion that the university offer expertise to local arts organizations, there are barriers to paying internal employees to do additional work outside of their main job duties.

Pathways Forward through Convenings

Ongoing convenings are a straightforward way to continue this work together. To better understand the wider cultural landscape, the group suggested strategies to increase familiarity with each other’s work and break down the division between university and other organizations:

- Host a TEDx or Pecha Kucha to learn what everyone is working on, and
- Bring along other institutions of higher education, such as EMU.

Ongoing convenings of the arts community that spans U-M and the Ann Arbor area are important for moving toward shared goals, but the mechanism for these convenings

is not clear. The pace and process needs to be agreed upon which will get to the goal of consistent knowledge exchange. The university does not have an established central entity for the purpose of convening regional arts organizations for consulting sessions, hosting a TEDx as suggested, etc. The Arts Initiative has potential to take on this role to some extent, but is still establishing itself.

Creative Washtenaw is the primary convener of individuals who work at arts and culture organizations; however, its structure is undergoing change. Key partners should prioritize a way forward to ensure consistent communication and the Arts Initiative is considering populating an advisory board of sorts to ensure this happens.

By Maryrose Flanigan and Alison Rivett

Thanks to Creative Washtenaw, especially Deb Polich for opportunities for exchange and for all the local artists and arts leaders who have and continue to contribute to this conversation.

The Arts at Dearborn

This section presents an initial overview of the U-M Dearborn Campus. For an overview of U-M Flint, see below; for an overview of the Ann Arbor campus, see the *Arts Data Pilot at the University of Michigan* (2023).

Introduction

As part of the effort to map the landscape of the arts at all three of the University of Michigan's campuses, this report provides an overview and a snapshot of the arts on the U-M Dearborn campus. To report on the arts landscape for Dearborn, we modeled this project on the mapping project for [“The Arts Data Pilot” for Ann Arbor](#) in Phase 1 and included Phase 2 qualitative aspects as well. We conducted interviews and focus groups, analyzed enrollment data, and pulled together information from websites.

For this baseline report, we started with “anchor” interviews with faculty and coded the responses to find trends. Four faculty and three staff were interviewed for this section—a small sampling of the many people supporting and doing this work at U-M Dearborn. We looked at the enrollment data from 2018-2023 in arts courses. The figures and perspectives reported here are meant to serve as a benchmark going forward to help the campus stakeholders work toward the goals for the arts ecosystem surfaced in discussions with faculty, staff, and students. In this section,

we highlight the successes and impacts of the arts programs specific to the Dearborn campus and share stories that showcase how these programs have uniquely contributed to students' career readiness and development of critical skills.

This work was conducted over the course of the 2024-25 academic year. The following report also includes data on student experiences and perspectives on the arts from the first Dearborn-based survey included in a longitudinal study, [ArtEngine's Arts Engagement Project](#). This mirrors an ongoing study from the Ann Arbor campus which began in 2010.

Situated within the diverse and culturally rich city of Dearborn, U-M Dearborn is a vibrant hub of academic inquiry, cultural exchange, and community engagement. Deep local roots foster this connection to the community, and faculty and students actively cultivate partnerships with area organizations, businesses, and community leaders to enrich the educational experience. To support an environment where academic inquiry and cultural

enrichment intersect, those interviewed on the Dearborn campus embrace a commitment to both rigorous scholarship and creative expression.

“Culture and creativity....those components are really core to the campus as a whole.”

—Faculty Interview

It is difficult to separate the story of the arts at Dearborn from its deep connection with the community and students’ critical need to leverage a college degree for financial stability and success. From interviews and institutional research, we found that arts on campus are well-integrated with humanities and there are no separate art schools. Dearborn is a commuter campus that serves a “non-traditional” student population, with students who work and raise families. Reflecting the vibrant surrounding area, strong cultural elements surfaced in interviews; a rich and diverse cuisine culture, the Arab American National Museum, and proximity to Detroit all shape the arts landscape at Dearborn.

“The arts are a critical component of culture and how we communicate with one another and how we share stories. And storytelling is a critical component of both the arts and of culture because it’s how we seek to understand ourselves and how we seek to understand the world around us.”

—Faculty Interview

At U-M Dearborn, professional degrees are paramount. In interviews, we learned students have barriers to arts training. Within its diverse and non-traditional student population, many have cultural pressure to graduate with a degree with the best earning potential. Arts courses are perceived to take up valuable time, and to pose an unnecessary risk to GPA if students don’t have the talent or time to do well, which reflects trends nationally for the professionalization of degrees. Some students feel a need to streamline the college experience because of the pressure of working and parenting. Time is also at a premium because of the need to commute. Because of these elements, the perception is that students cannot “afford” to enroll in arts training.

“We’ve particularly seen enrollment struggles .. throughout the humanities, and [been] grappling with the ways in which the humanities has been seen as not necessary or not a career oriented path by the broader public, but without much of the institution trying to rectify that perspective on that.”

—Faculty Interview

“I do think being a traditionally commuter campus, the physicality of the campus, the fact that so many of our faculty don’t live in the area [are all barriers to in-person events]”

—Faculty Interview

Faculty report a reluctance among students to invest time in humanities courses, such as art history, because of the amount of reading, research and writing required for critical analysis. They also hear that students are wary to enroll in courses that require field trips to museums and other cultural sites because these elements are time intensive compared to other types of classes.

Additionally, interviewees expressed that it is difficult to build a sense of community or camaraderie due to the physical structure of the campus which has “lots of parking lots” and not a lot of opportunity for interpersonal encounters.

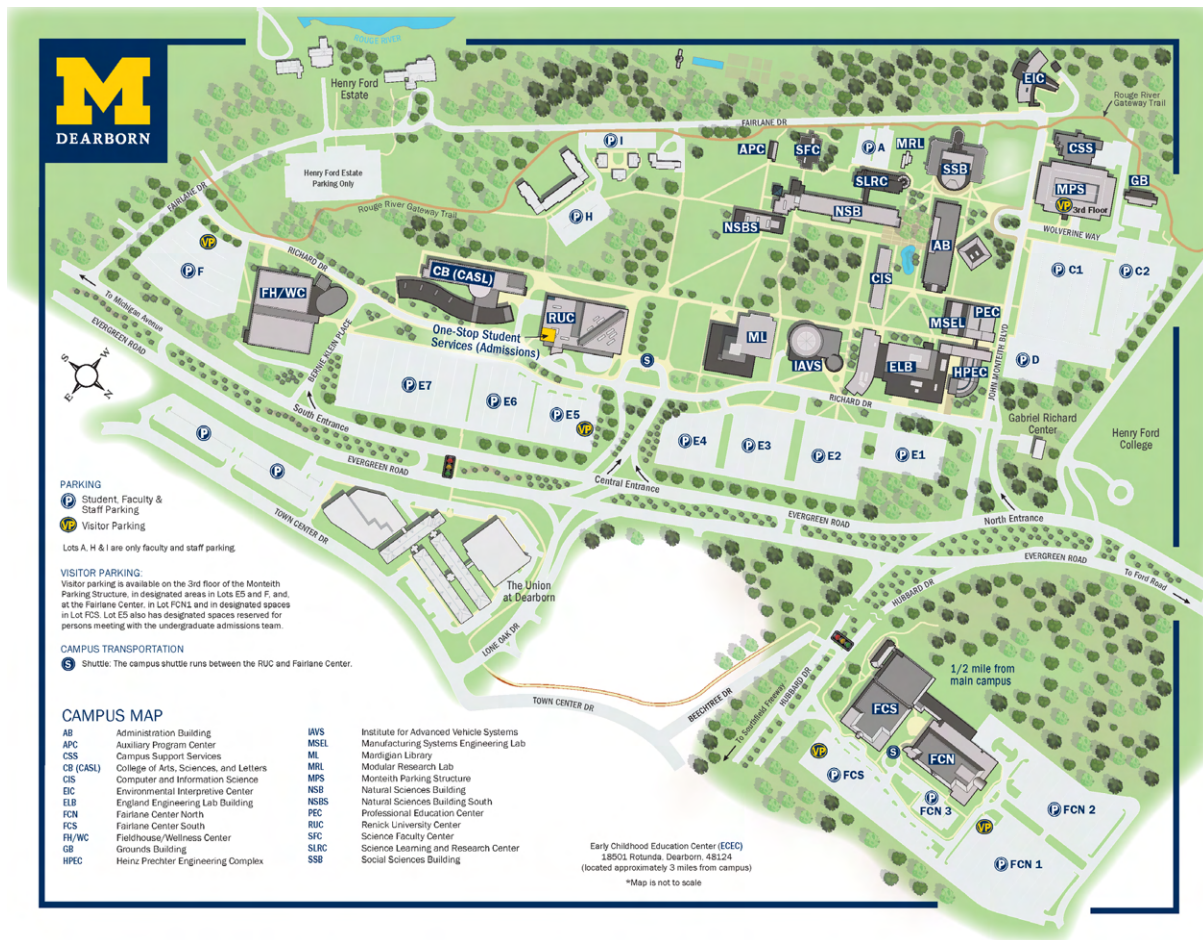


Figure 9.1. A map of U-M Dearborn campus. Its design, with ample parking and road access, caters to a commuting student body.

Through a myriad of initiatives, ranging from collaborative projects with the Arab American Museum to community-focused events and cultural exchanges, the campus serves as a bridge between the university and the communities that surround it, capitalizing on its proximity to Detroit. However, in faculty interviews there are still challenges with community engagement and fully leveraging the location.

“It’s been an ongoing challenge on this campus to either get our students out into the community or get the community to come to us... that’s partly because we’re just geographically isolated from downtown. We’re also a commuter campus and a large portion of our students don’t live in Dearborn. And so they don’t necessarily have a pre-existing connection to the community. So that remains a challenge.”

—Faculty Interview

Despite the challenges to distance, students enrolled in art

history courses, for example, do visit the Detroit Institute of Art and Toledo Museum of Art and participate in sessions with artists-in-residence at the Institute of Humanities on the Ann Arbor campus, among other field trips.

In this report, we delve into the multifaceted landscape of the Dearborn campus, exploring its vision for integrating community activities, the arts, and cultural enrichment into its academic mission. By examining the diverse array of initiatives, challenges, and opportunities that define the campus’s relationship with its community, we aim to showcase the integral role that community engagement plays in shaping the identity and impact of the Dearborn campus.

Overview of the The Arts at Dearborn

At U-M Dearborn, parsing facts about arts offerings automatically leads to the humanities because the arts are strongly integrated and embedded in other disciplines. This structure leads to the arts being diffuse and integrated, presenting a strong opportunity to do cross-disciplinary work. For example, there is a joint course in filmmaking and Arab American Studies. This type of integration is aspirational for many campuses across the country.

“[O]n our campus, the presence of the arts is very small. We’re very STEM and business focused”

—Faculty Interview

There are no separate art schools for this campus and few performing arts options. An Applied Arts minor or concentration is an option for students. Most arts courses are offered through the College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters (CASL). Strengths within CASL include the visual arts, film, and communication. At the time of the interviews (fall 2024), faculty noted that there is a dire need for advocacy for the humanities, as the humanities programs have “taken a hit” in the form of dropping enrollment and funding—an issue further deepening in the time between our data collection and the final copy of this report in the fall of 2025.

“[What] I’m seeing the folks in our applied arts program do is transform the curriculum to some degree to make it more appealing as a job pathway. ... like design is something that we see in the curriculum in our engineering school, but we’re also trying to integrate that into the applied arts because there’s something about that term design that feels... more viable than just the arts.”

—Faculty Interview

U-M Dearborn’s [Undergraduate Catalog Description of Applied Art Courses in CASL](#)

“Among the humanistic disciplines, Applied Art offers great opportunities for interdisciplinary inquiry and teaching. Art is often discussed as a universal form of communication, and the processes of visual interpretation and creation cut across human experience. In an image-centered society such as our own, the objects and critical methods of art creation provide a vital linkage point not only between disciplines, but also between students and the world around them.”

Those teaching and learning in the arts do struggle for resources, which is why leveraging deep connections with cultural institutions, which may have complementary assets, is so important. In terms of exhibit spaces, there is one gallery, the Stamelos Gallery Center, on the first floor of the Mardigian Library; the sole curator is also in charge of all of the public art in the building and on campus. She experiences challenges such as maintaining and diversifying that existing collection with no dedicated funds (a common challenge on campuses). In 2023, the Stamelos Gallery Center gained its first climate controlled storage area, which was a much needed asset. The gallery hosts internships and integrates into the curriculum, giving students research and curation opportunities.

“*Creativity to me is about problem solving...it’s about having to think about something in a different way in order to solve a problem [and] creativity is about creating new connections or new synthesis, seeing connections where it wasn’t obvious before and creating something new out of that... so I very much think of creativity as being alive and vibrant in the sciences. That is what the sciences are all about is seeing things from a different perspective.*”

—Faculty Interview

Opportunities for Growth

Interviewees spoke about many areas ready for growth to improve the arts ecosystem for the campus community and beyond, including visibility for the offerings, leveraging the arts-integration structure, doubling down on community engagement, funding for the arts and humanities, and making the arts more accessible for their non-traditional, commuter population.

Marketing/visibility

The lack of visibility for the arts & humanities is a very specific need identified in the interviews.

1. Highlight the arts in a way that underscores their ability to provide career training and opportunities, as design is valued in the College of Engineering and Computer Science (CECS).
2. Highlight the value of arts training as a holistic approach to education but also as an essential pathway to articulating identities and values essential for thriving in civic life, especially given the current polarized social climate.
3. Leverage the certificate in Digital Photography and Design and Applied Arts in CASL as a professional degree option that would highlight arts training as a transferable skill set for career pathways.

“Transform the curriculum to some degree to make it more appealing as a job pathway.”

—Faculty Interview

“People don’t know my program exists. We have a marketing issue. [Our arts discipline] is growing at other institutions but not ours. If it was more talked about and visible, enrollment would grow.”

—Faculty Interview

“Applied arts students have the opportunity to create works for other campus units such as Math Learning Lab and the Environmental Interpretive Center”

—Faculty Interview

“[For the] Applied Arts minor or concentration as an option for students [we should], alter the arts training for workforce development-show the career pathway...that workforce development angle has not been used in the way that design is seen as a viable pathway to jobs. The engineering school values design, for example, in a way they do not see the arts as valuable.”

—Faculty Interview

Build on Community Ties

1. Leverage culturally rich assets in Detroit. Bridge the gap between city and campus with transportation solutions. Faculty have encountered logistical and funding challenges in creating field trips.

“I don’t think of the arts as being a supplement to everything else we do. I think of them as being an integral part of what we do. But in order to build an audience, you need to communicate with the public and that might be something that we’ve lost the capacity for in recent times”

—Faculty Interview

Leverage Community & Space

Interviewees expressed a desire to better create community. As a commuter school, it sometimes is difficult for students to find a place to “plug in” and to build a sense of camaraderie. One interviewee mentioned a newer Engineering building that has good communal spaces as an example of this type of place. Shared spaces encourage creativity to flourish, allowing individuals to interact in person and support one another. Interviewees wanted a “center of gravity” to gather around, and a compelling reason to go there. They mentioned cultural events prior to the pandemic that provided opportunities to gather. They expressed that the arts can fill this need, as ongoing events like performances and exhibits, and as dedicated arts spaces. This center of gravity also promotes more moments for interaction between the disciplines.

Investment

Interviewees reported a general lack of monetary resources for arts-related endeavors on campus. Interviewees expressed that the allocated budget for the arts doesn't reflect that the campus values the arts. Getting more funding and becoming more strategic with the way that funds are used was considered of the utmost importance.

1. Prioritize external investment to be able to tackle significant projects. If Dearborn is to take on significant arts-related projects, it will need external funding like grants.
2. Bolster funding for capital investment. When arts equipment and tools break, there is no budget for their replacement so faculty are writing grants for basic needs.
3. Invest in gallery space and public art. There is a static budget for these needs; greater investment is essential for upkeep, diversifying collections, and providing more exhibition and meeting opportunities for the campus and community.
4. Increase staffing. Faculty report being overburdened and needing administrative staff support or the funds to hire students in the areas of:
 - Development, to seek and track external funding.
 - Administration, to take funded projects forward (sometimes projects are funded but the activities are beyond the scope of faculty).

“The center used to have its own sort of dedicated staff as a part of these, what we called our college-wide programs, which are interdisciplinary programs. We used to have dedicated staff, we used to have dedicated students, workers to support us. Now all that has disappeared and even our departments, which within the departments we used to have another layer of staff. The departments have lost their staff.... I feel like we're barely hanging on in the classroom and we're doing everything we can to try and recruit more students or retain the students we have. That's all of our energy is going into that right now.”

—Faculty Interview

Reduce Risk

In interviews, we heard that barriers to engaging fully in the arts were not limited to a dearth of spaces or funding. Non-traditional students indicate financial and cultural restrictions around risk. There is the perception that studying the arts is both an unnecessary risk grades-wise as it may jeopardize a good GPA, and a costly detour that can delay a degree. In addition, fear of failure traps some students in predetermined lanes and hinders them from exploring new interests.

Interviewees expressed that there needs to be more freedom for people to explore new areas without feeling like they would be falling behind.

1. Resist the “easy” option of removing grades in arts courses, since taking arts courses pass/fail may devalue arts coursework. Done right, the enrollment and assessment in these courses prepare students for jobs and prepare them to navigate the rewards of creative risks they might otherwise not have an opportunity to take in non-arts coursework.
2. Articulating and activating an artists’ mindset and methodology while teaching. Foster a teaching culture that acknowledges that these methodologies encourage creative risks that reap rewards such as innovation and a novel perspective.
3. Cultivate a culture of experimentation and innovation. There needs to be support for students to explore new areas without feeling like they would be falling behind. (Faculty feel they have effectively met this need by allowing students to re-do assignments again for a better grade, for example, mimicking the mentoring relationship for new workers in the workforce. Faculty might also allow for workdays, offer constructive one-on-one mentoring, and leverage peer mentorship.)

“*[The perception about studying the arts can be] They don’t matter. They’re soft. They’re fuzzy. They’re squishy. They’re something you do for fun. They’re something you do for an easy grade. There’s also a problem when they take an art class, which is really challenging and they don’t get a good grade. So then they get upset when they find that.*”

— Faculty Interview

One strategy to analyze investments in the arts on any campus is to see administratively where the arts reside. In the case of U-M Dearborn, this would entail augmenting the high-level organizational chart to show where the arts, both curricular and extracurricular, are situated. Charting all arts activities, programs, and courses would make it clear they are in CASL and in the library. Comparing an aspirational structure of arts programs to the current organization can help reveal where to invest for best arts culture on campus.

University of Michigan-Dearborn

915200

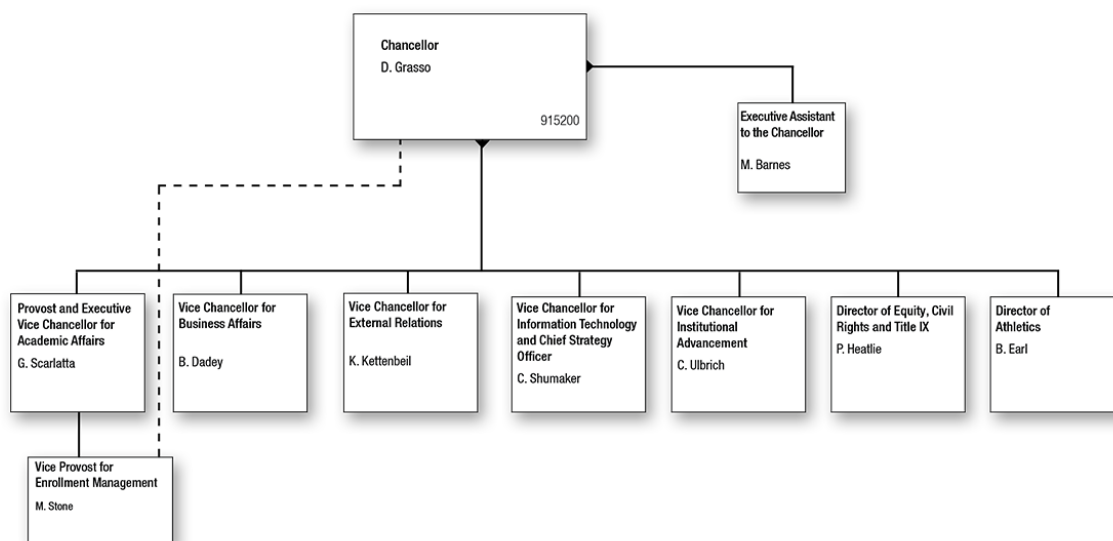


Figure 9.2 A more granular version of this U-M Dearborn organizational chart would explicitly map where the arts are situated within university structures. <https://spg.umich.edu/org-charts/915200>

The Student Experience

“We do have a pretty vibrant set of extracurricular programs to get students thinking about culture and the arts.”

— Faculty Interview

Overview

Insights sourced from student listening sessions and staff interviews, and synthesized with publicly available information, provide broad outlines of the student experience at U-M Dearborn vis-a-vis the arts.

Student organizations are an important part of the arts landscape at U-M Dearborn and the student experience. There are a total of 201 [registered student organizations](#) at U-M Dearborn. Clubs related to the arts include A Cappella Club, Anime Club, Comics and Manga, the Art Club, The Musician’s Club, and Swing Dearborn. Cultural organizations such as the Arab Language and Culture Club, the Chaldean American Student Association, and the Swiftie Society include arts elements, and students report that events that celebrate culture have a high visibility and pull.

The Campus Involvement Hub (CIH) at U-M Dearborn provides resources and opportunities for involvement to students and student organizations. CIH staff also characterize student fine arts interests as often related to cultural expression. Many in the diverse student population are eager to practice cultural art forms, preserve

them, and share them with others, and the arts are strongly present within that cultural context.

According to CIH staff, many arts-focused activities and clubs dropped off during the pandemic and still experience very low numbers. However, with increased enrollment, participation in cultural and social activities is set to pick up. Instead of focusing solely on the fine arts or arts for arts’ sake, many students want their extracurricular arts activities to be relevant to upskilling and community engagement, to be relevant and connected.

In addition to student organizations, students are involved with campus literary and media programs. The campus features the *Michigan Journal* and WUMD Radio as well as a literary journal, *Lyceum*, which was founded in 1971. These media were organized under the umbrella organization Wolverine Media Network to save costs, but this

structure also offers the opportunity for collaboration between the entities. Participation in these media is open to students of all majors and helps create community.

“There’s a number of student organizations in media... a campus video network. We have a radio station. We have a literary and arts journal that students produce. And those actually attract a lot of our engineering and STEM students which signals to me that they are hungry for kind of an artistic and creative outlet that they’re not necessarily getting in their curricula.”

—Faculty Interview

“The Lyceum, as an educational institution, functioned as the locus of the collective talent, ingenuity, and intellect of Ancient Greece. Since 1971, Lyceum at the University of Michigan-Dearborn has echoed this ideal tradition by serving as the showcase for the creative talents of writers and artists within the university community. The journal features poetry, short fiction, non-fiction, drama, photography and artwork submitted by students, alumni, faculty, and staff. Submissions, which retain their anonymity during the rating process, are critiqued individually by the staff and editors. Along with the publication of the journal, Lyceum exhibits local flavors of art and poetry with various on and off-campus events and shows. Meetings (which double as creative workshops) are held on a bi-weekly basis in the Lyceum office, 2123B UC.” <https://www.wolverinemedianetwork.com/lyceum>

Students we spoke to echoed faculty observations about the role of communal spaces. Students expressed a desire for more inclusive vibrant community spaces, and observed underutilized buildings with potential. They report socializing off-campus, for example in Detroit and Ann Arbor, and note that campus is very quiet, especially on Fridays. Weather and travel conditions also impact student engagement, with more students on campus during nice weather. Many students spoke of the desire for activities and spaces to foster a stronger campus culture, despite the commuter nature of the school.

Student Arts Engagement on the Dearborn Campus

[The Arts Engagement Project](#) (AEP), a longitudinal online survey study of precursors, behaviors, identities, activities, and expectations of undergraduate students engaging in the arts at U-M Ann Arbor during their time in college, was first implemented between 2010-2015. That database and analysis consists of 4000+ students and can be accessed through the National Archive of Data on Arts and Culture ([NADAC](#)) and the project [website](#).

In 2023, the Arts Initiative at U-M supported a new effort to resurvey students at U-M using the Arts Engagement Project as its foundational research platform, to see how student engagement has changed, how arts engagement impacts student development and experience at U-M, and how they could better improve the student arts experience. This phase of the Arts Engagement Project includes students from all three campuses: Ann Arbor, Flint, and Dearborn.

The new effort was updated in several ways to reflect the new

realities of the pandemic-era educational experience and the evolving ways students engage with the arts—both prior to and at college. The survey effort in March 2024 yielded ~740 responses across the three campuses, of which 106 were from the Dearborn campus, spread across their first- through fourth-year undergraduate students.

The analysis of these results are very preliminary, but there are some initial demographics and findings for the Dearborn campus.

Dearborn Survey Demographics

The portion of the Arts Engagement Survey pilot responses from Dearborn students represented a wide range of schools, colleges, and majors (Figures 9.3 and 9.4). It has little to no representation in the third-year cohort (Juniors), and an overrepresentation in the fourth-year cohort (Seniors) (Figure 9.5), so thinking about the upper and lower cohort distributions together may be helpful if the Junior cohort remains small. Sex/gender distribution is approximately 63% Female to 37%

Male (Figure 9.6), reflecting a fairly typical distribution of respondents in surveys like this. Race/ethnicity is more than 55% White (Figure 9.7), which needs to be compared with the campus enrollment demographics to understand the significance to the analysis. With the larger sample size generated by additional annual surveys and with more attention to marketing to underrepresented cohorts, we expect to somewhat smooth out these distributional disparities where needed.

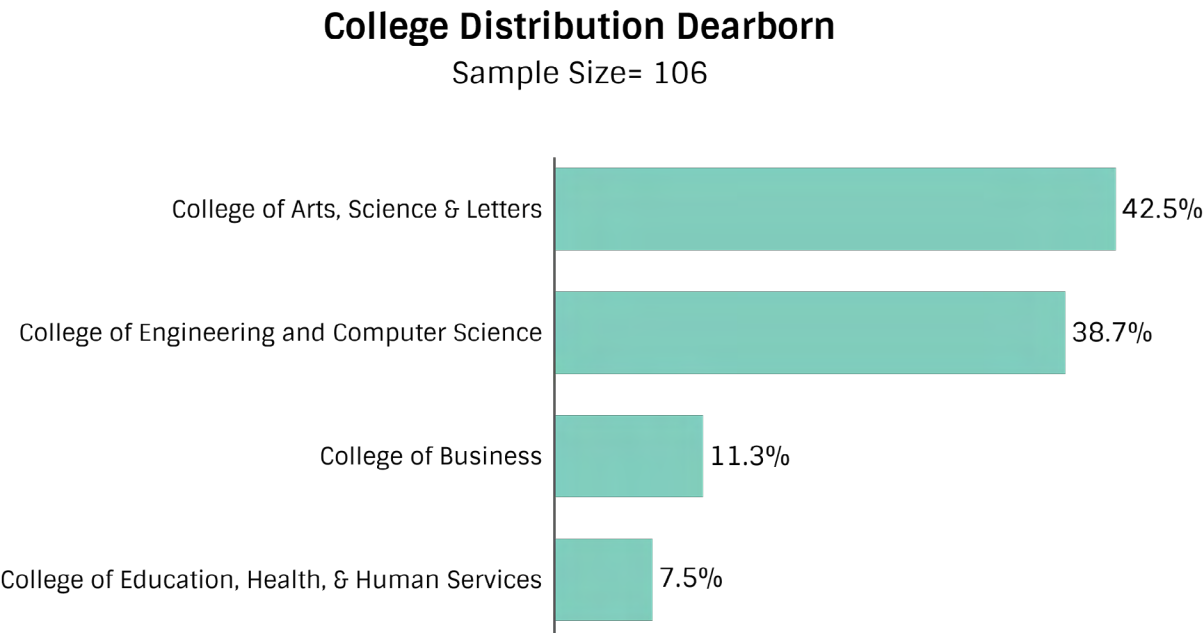


Figure 9.3. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: School/college distribution of student survey respondents at U-M Dearborn.

Majors - Dearborn (106)

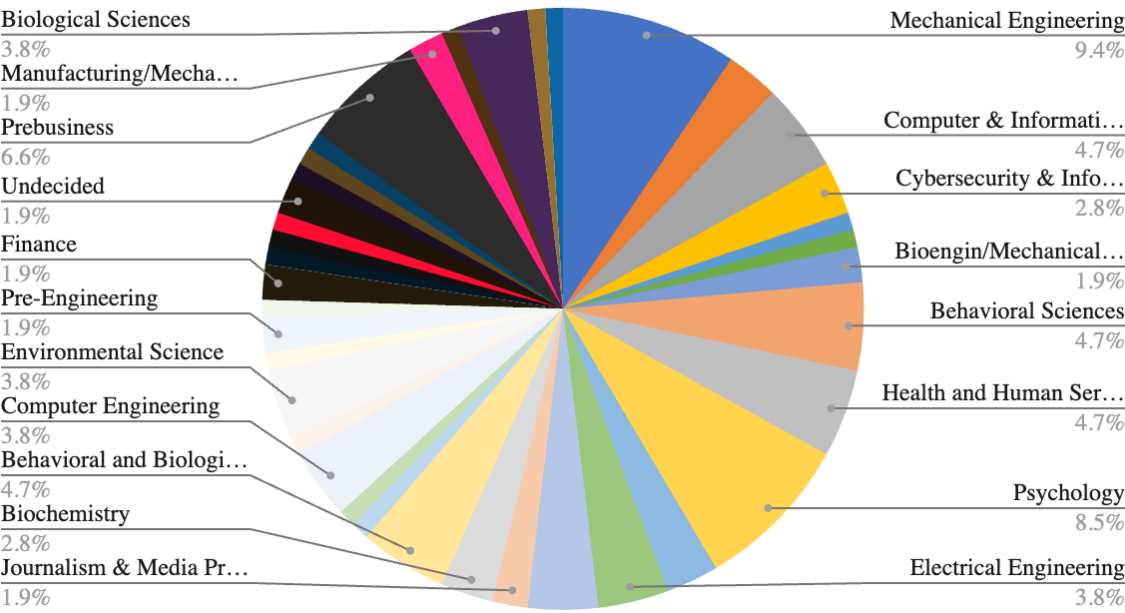


Figure 9.4. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Sampling of majors of student survey respondents at U-M Dearborn.

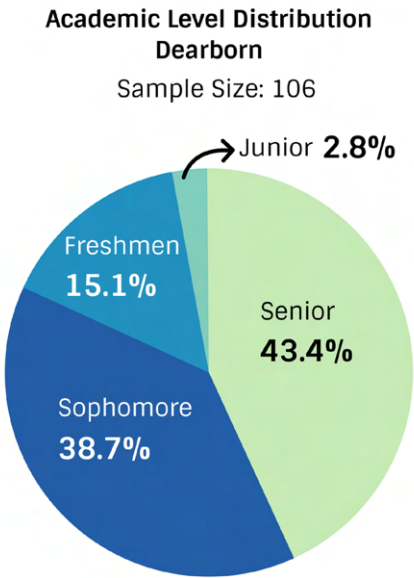


Figure 9.5. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Academic level distribution of student survey respondents at U-M Dearborn.

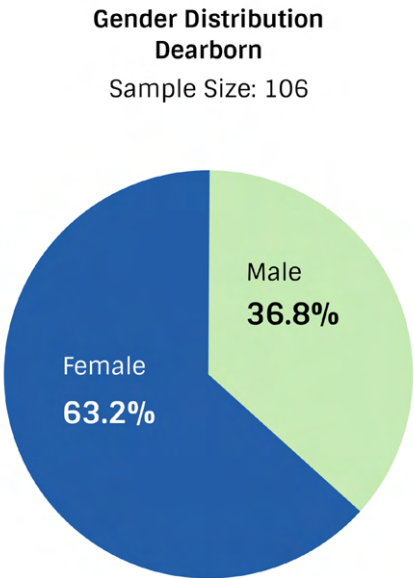


Figure 9.6. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Gender distribution of student survey respondents at U-M Dearborn.

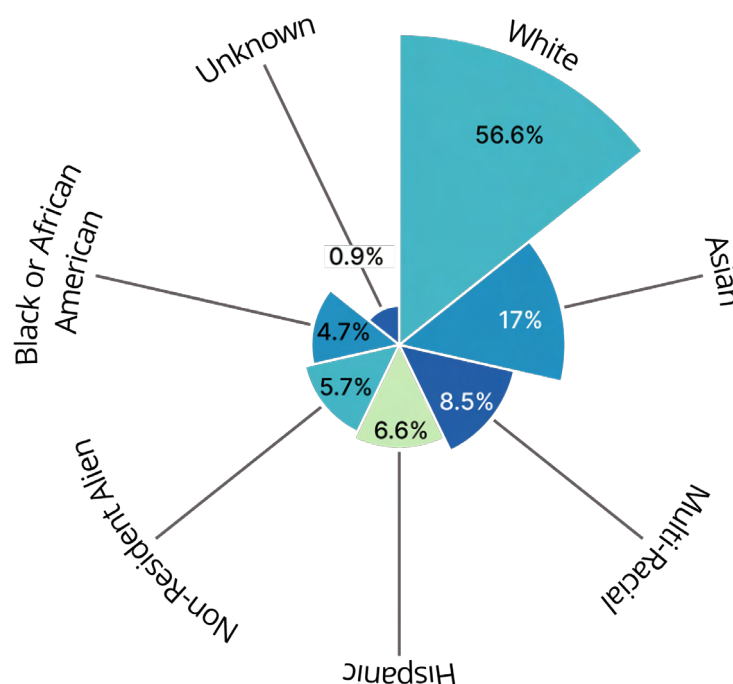


Figure 9.7. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Race/ethnicity distribution of student survey respondents at U-M Dearborn. Sample Size=106

Arts Identities

Students were asked to agree or disagree with phrases such as “I am a musician” or “I am studying in an arts field” or “I participate in an organization that occasionally participates in the arts.” These questions are mechanisms to track whether students identify as artists and how they participate in the arts, generating data that enables leadership to better support this aspect of student life. Here, we analyze the Dearborn campus responses in the context of the full three-campus subject pool.

Insights

It is striking to note the high level of artist identities and arts participation reflected in the Dearborn data, indicating the importance of the arts in those students’ lives. (See Figure 9.8.) Students in Dearborn express artist identities similar to the other U-M campuses, but there are also a number of differences between the campuses worth exploring in the future. For instance, Dearborn students report much higher than average Visual Artist, Creative Writer, Graphic Designer, and Designer identities. Is this attributable to pre-college experiences, specific campus opportunities, available academic programs, or other factors (such as encouragement by the University to pursue certain arts activities in college)? How these differences between the campuses reflect on-campus opportunities will be a focus of continuing research to better understand how each campus may have unique support needs.

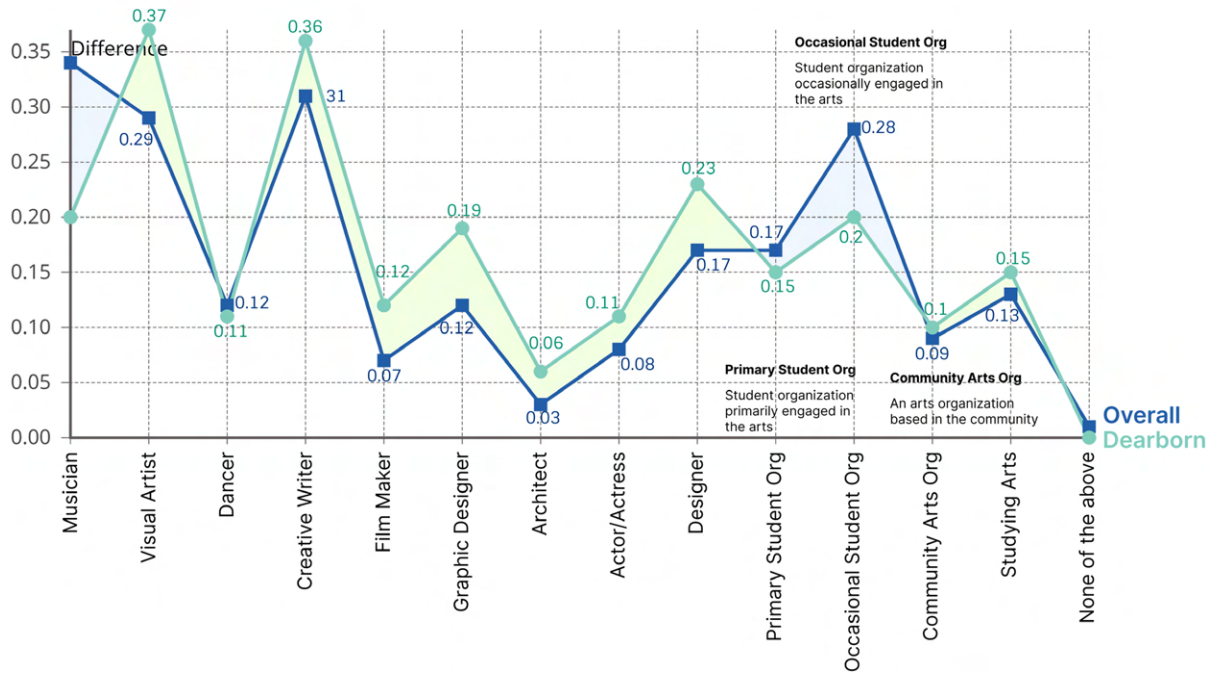


Figure 9.8. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Percentage of Dearborn students who have identified at least one artist identity (musician, creative writer, actor/actress, dancer, filmmaker, visual artist), compared to students across all three U-M campuses.

Arts related identification by artist type (Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Flint campuses)

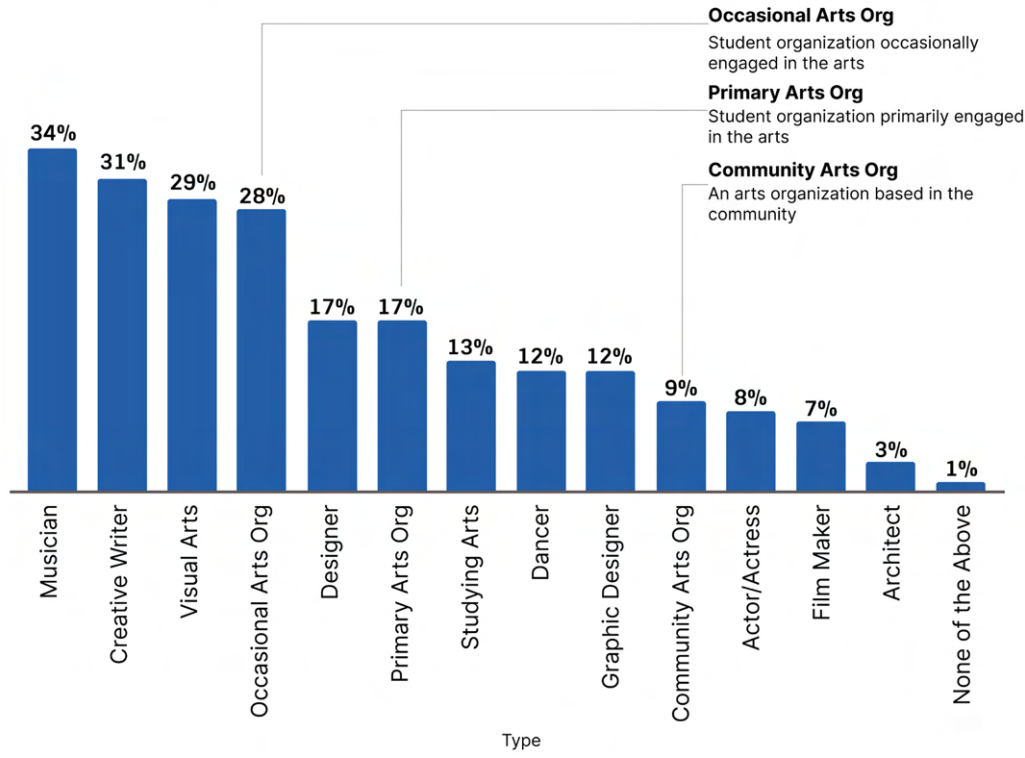


Figure 9.9. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Percentage of students across all three U-M campuses who have identified at least one artist identity (musician, creative writer, actor/actress, dancer, filmmaker, visual artist).

Arts related identification by artist type (Dearborn)

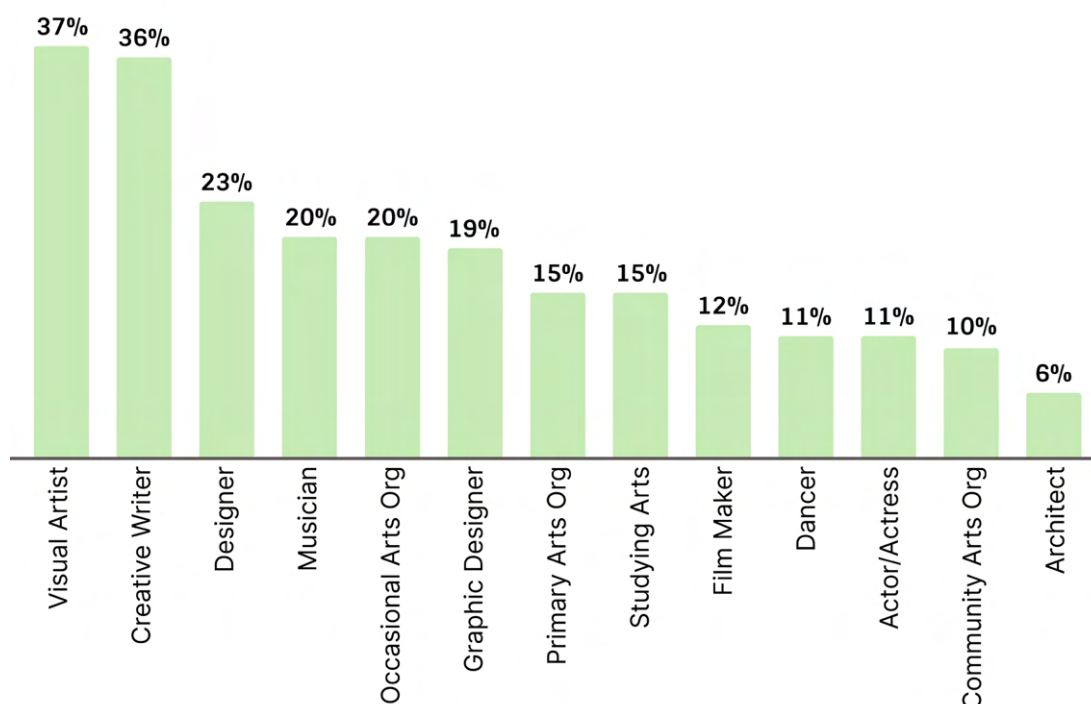


Figure 9.10. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Percentage of Dearborn students who have identified at least one artist identity (musician, creative writer, actor/actress, dancer, filmmaker, visual artist).

One of the longitudinal findings we were able to identify in the original AEP was how often artist identities were lost over the course of a student's college career, as well as how often artist identities were gained—in large part related to whether there were continuing opportunities in which to participate. For instance, Musician identities were found to be the most stable, with Actor/Actress among the likeliest identities to be lost. Using the current Dearborn data as a baseline, over the years ahead we will be able to ascertain whether Dearborn students maintain those

Creative Writer, Graphic Designer, and Designer identities through to graduation.

We have noted the prevalent need among Dearborn students to leverage a college degree for financial stability and success, as well as the pressure to graduate on time with a degree with a high earning potential. We might expect, then, Dearborn students to gravitate toward practical, “applied” arts identities such as architect, designer, or graphic designer. However, many more Dearborn students claim “fine” arts identities like musician, creative writer, actor/actress, or dancer than claim those more pragmatic, applied-artist ones (See Figure 9.11

and 9.12). That is, even on a career-focused commuter campus, students think the arts are important. What might it mean for those students to have their musician or dancer identities supported and even nurtured through coursework and other arts opportunities? Given the

data we have elsewhere in the AEP (see “[Student Experience](#)” section), we predict this could not only improve student wellness, but also support the development of skills like teamwork and communication that have currency in today’s job market.

Student Artist and Designer Identities: A Comparison of Self-Identified Roles at Dearborn

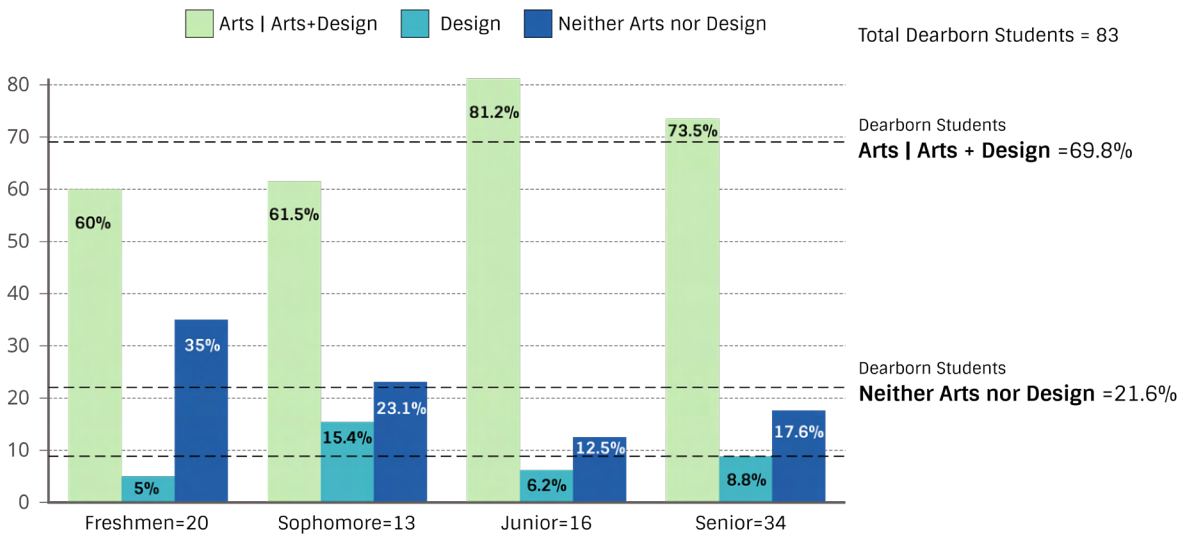


Figure 9.11. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Percentage of Dearborn students who have identified at least one artist identity (musician, creative writer, actor/actress, dancer, filmmaker, visual artist), compared to the percentage of students who identified a “designer” identity (architect, designer, graphic designer) in addition to an “artist” identity or chose only a “designer” identity. Question: “Please select all statements that apply to you (I am a musician, I am a visual artist, etc.)”

Student Artist and Designer Identities: A Comparison of Self-Identified Roles at Dearborn.

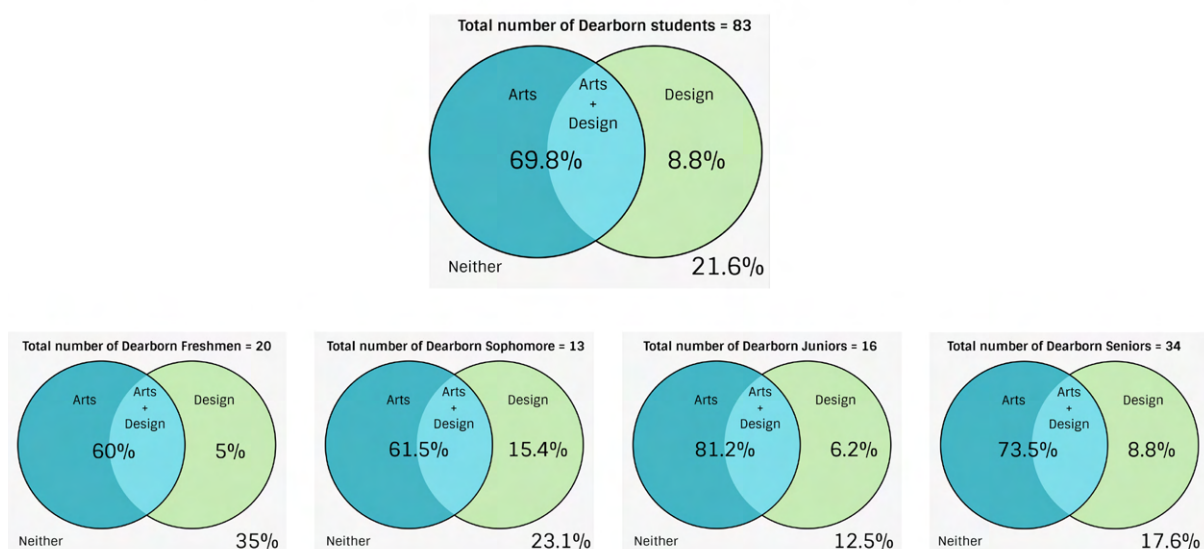


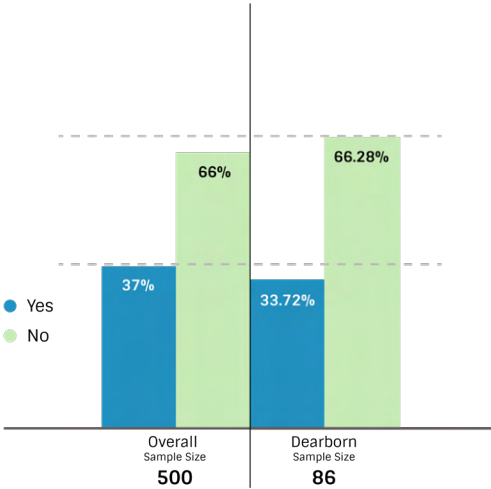
Figure 9.12. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Percentage of Dearborn students who have identified at least one artist identity (musician, creative writer, actor/actress, dancer, filmmaker, visual artist), compared to the percentage of students who identified a “designer” identity (architect, designer, graphic designer) in addition to an “artist” identity or chose only a “designer” identity. Question: “Please select all statements that apply to you (I am a musician, I am a visual artist, etc.)”

We believe that even these survey questions about student arts identities do not capture the full student picture at U-M Dearborn. For example, there are responses that indicate students are studying in an arts field, but these students do not identify themselves as “artists.” There are also a number of responses from students who don’t claim an arts identity for themselves, but who are involved in a student organization that frequently or occasionally engages in the arts, or are part of a community arts organization.

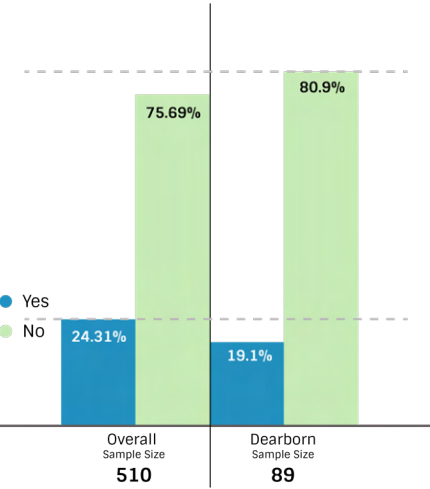
Arts Climate and Student Arts Organizations

Students on the Dearborn campus report higher levels of dissatisfaction with their level of arts involvement than students at either Ann Arbor or Flint (See Figure 9.13), perhaps due to the fewer opportunities they have to participate in student organizations or other cultural activities. They also indicate the climate encouraging arts involvement is slightly lower than at the Flint campus, and significantly lower than that in Ann Arbor. They do have higher participation in student arts organizations than on the Flint Campus, and as would be expected, more opportunities to be in leadership in such a student organization.

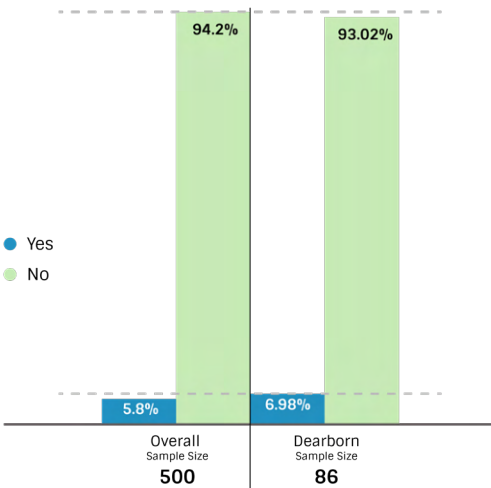
Do you feel like you are currently involved in the arts as much as you would like to be?



Are you involved in any University of Michigan student organizations in the arts?



Have you held a leadership position in a University of Michigan student organization in the arts?



Do you feel that the overall climate at the University of Michigan encourages involvement in the arts?

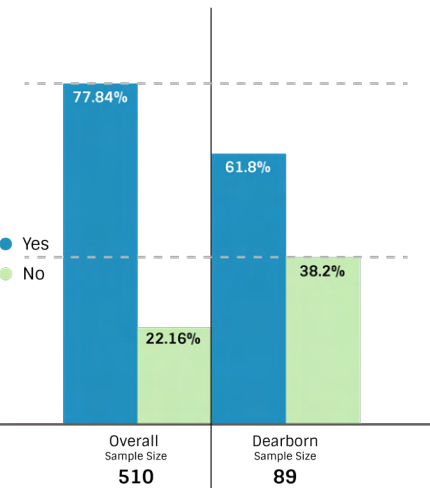


Figure 9.13. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24: Survey responses from students at U-M Dearborn compared to responses across all three campuses.

There are 201 recognized student organizations operating on the Dearborn campus. We used available data on these organizations to identify about twenty that appear to directly engage with the arts. Like Flint, Dearborn does not have an “Arts” or “Creative” tag for student organizations; instead, many are tagged “Hobbies & Recreation.” This may be indicative of administrators regarding the arts as not rigorous, non-professional, or otherwise less important than other student organization foci.

Arts-related student organizations at Dearborn

- A Capella Dearborn Club
- Anime and Manga Club
- Arab Language and Culture Club
- Art Club
- Campus Video Network
- Culture: The Musician's Club
- Design Club at UMich
- La Mezcla
- Le Societe de Francophone
- Lyceum Literary Magazine
- Monthly Book Club
- Organization of Bangladeshi Students
- Punjabi Student Union
- Student Association for Filipino Americans
- Swing Dearborn
- The Dead Poets' Society
- The Swiftie Society
- Wolverine Media Network
- Words of the World
- WUMD Campus Radio

These twenty organizations represent only 10% of all student organizations, whereas at the Ann Arbor campus about 15% of student organizations engage directly with the arts. So while more opportunities exist at Dearborn than at Flint (where we identified only ten student organizations engaged with the arts, about 8% of the total number), both campuses may need to look to more centrally-supported student arts efforts to move the needle on student satisfaction and opportunity in the arts.

Almost 20% of Dearborn students say they are engaged with at least one student arts organization; of these, about a quarter say they engage with two or more. This is surprising, given the relative scarcity of student organizations that appear to engage with the arts and the fact that even these do not have an “arts” designation or tag with which to identify them. We might attribute this relatively high percentage of students saying they engage with a student arts organization to the type of student who would choose to participate in a survey about arts engagement, or we might surmise that there are more organizations that include the arts than can be derived by perusing their organizational data.

Recommendations

1. Analyze additional data from a second year of surveying will bolster these initial findings and help us better understand the arts landscape for students on the U-M Dearborn campus.
2. Create a tag for student organizations doing the arts to better represent the importance of those organizations, and the role the arts play in students' lives, to administration.
3. Further explore student responses to the questions about artist identities—are they related to participation in curricular or major activities, or is the campus attracting students with these identities for some institutional reason?

Enrollment

Introduction

This section endeavors to show some enrollment trends in the arts as a benchmark for decision-making for all levels of campus leadership. Like most universities, enrollment determines investment in degree programs. Also, like many schools across the country, enrollment is in flux and generally in decline. Dearborn enrollment overall is down 2% because the number of graduate students decreased. However, as reported in *The Record*, 2023 saw the largest first-year class enrollment in Dearborn history, with a trend showing more undergraduate students taking full course load.

U-M Dearborn's First-Year Enrollment Sets Record

More first-year undergraduate students enrolled at U-M Dearborn this fall than any other year in the university's 64-year history. The newest class of 1,157 students is up 15% over last fall. The percentage of undergraduate students taking full course loads is 79% in 2023, compared with 76% in 2022. ([The Record 9.29.23](#))

Six-year Arts Enrollment Trends

Data show consistent cross-disciplinary engagement with the arts. The following chart highlight trends across degree programs, using descriptive ratios to illustrate the scale of participation.

Data over 6 years (2018-2024) shows the following flow:

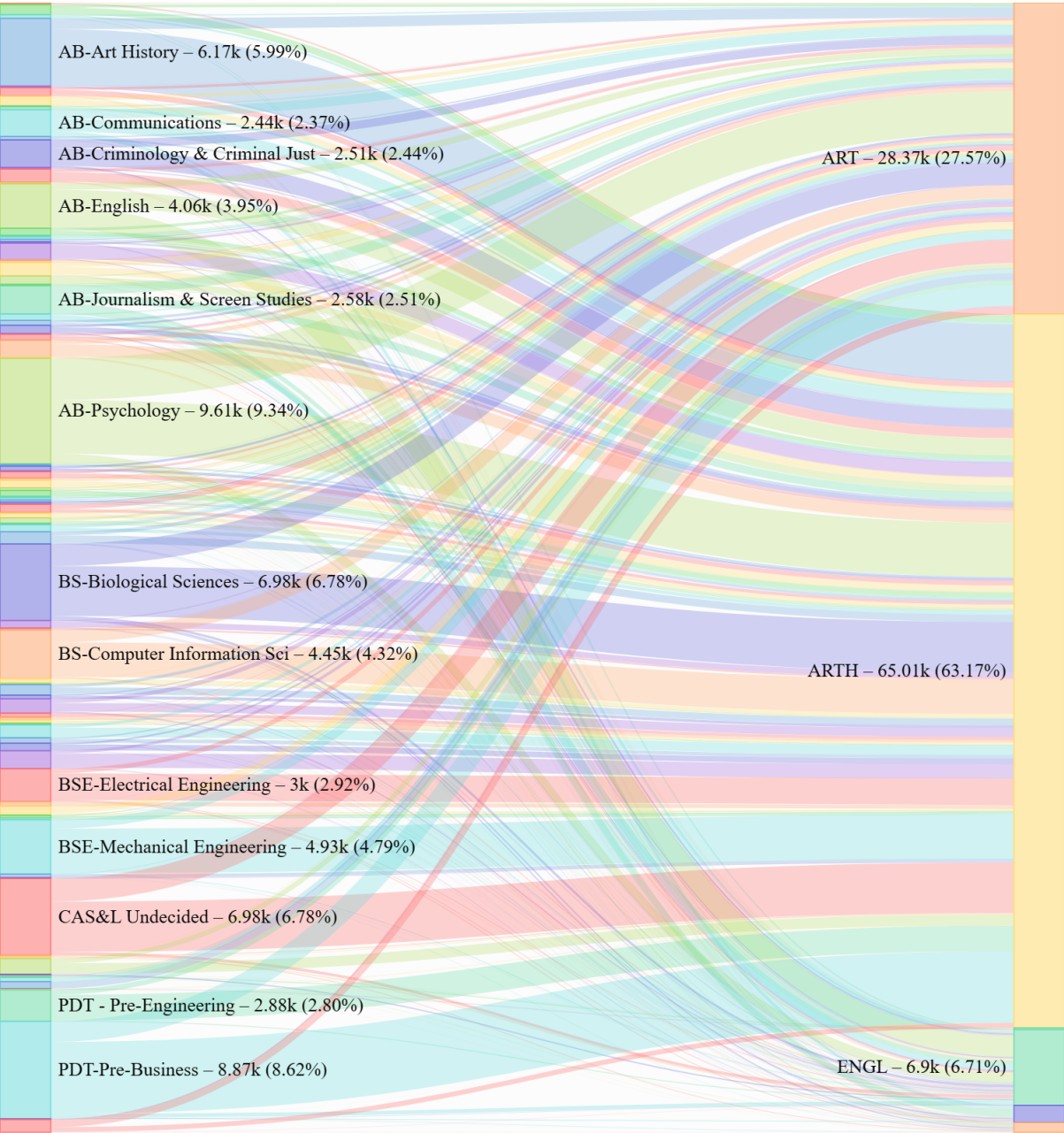


Figure 9.14: Graph showing enrollment trends by degree programs (2018-2024)

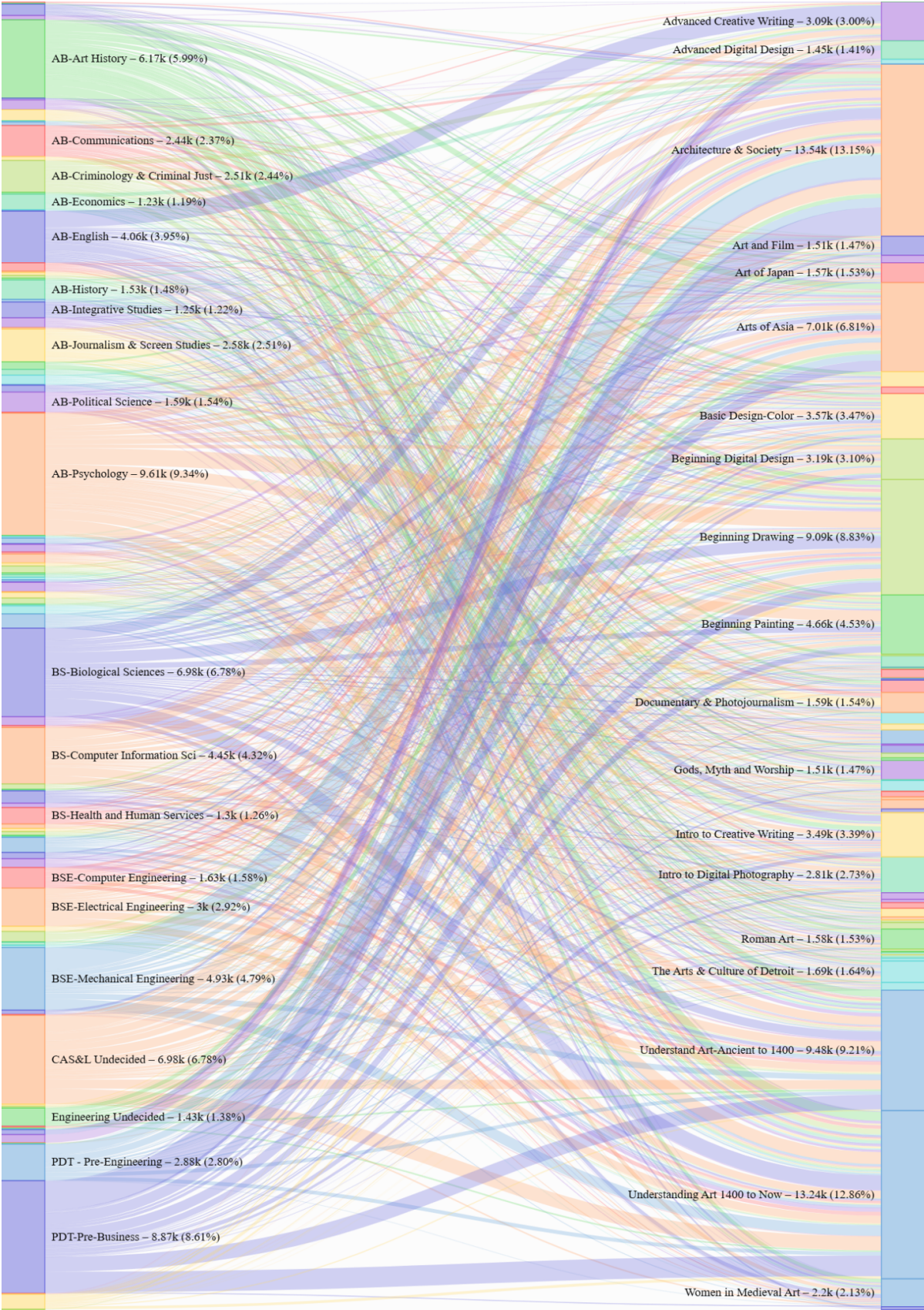


Figure 9.15: Enrollment patterns from majors to art courses (2018–2024)

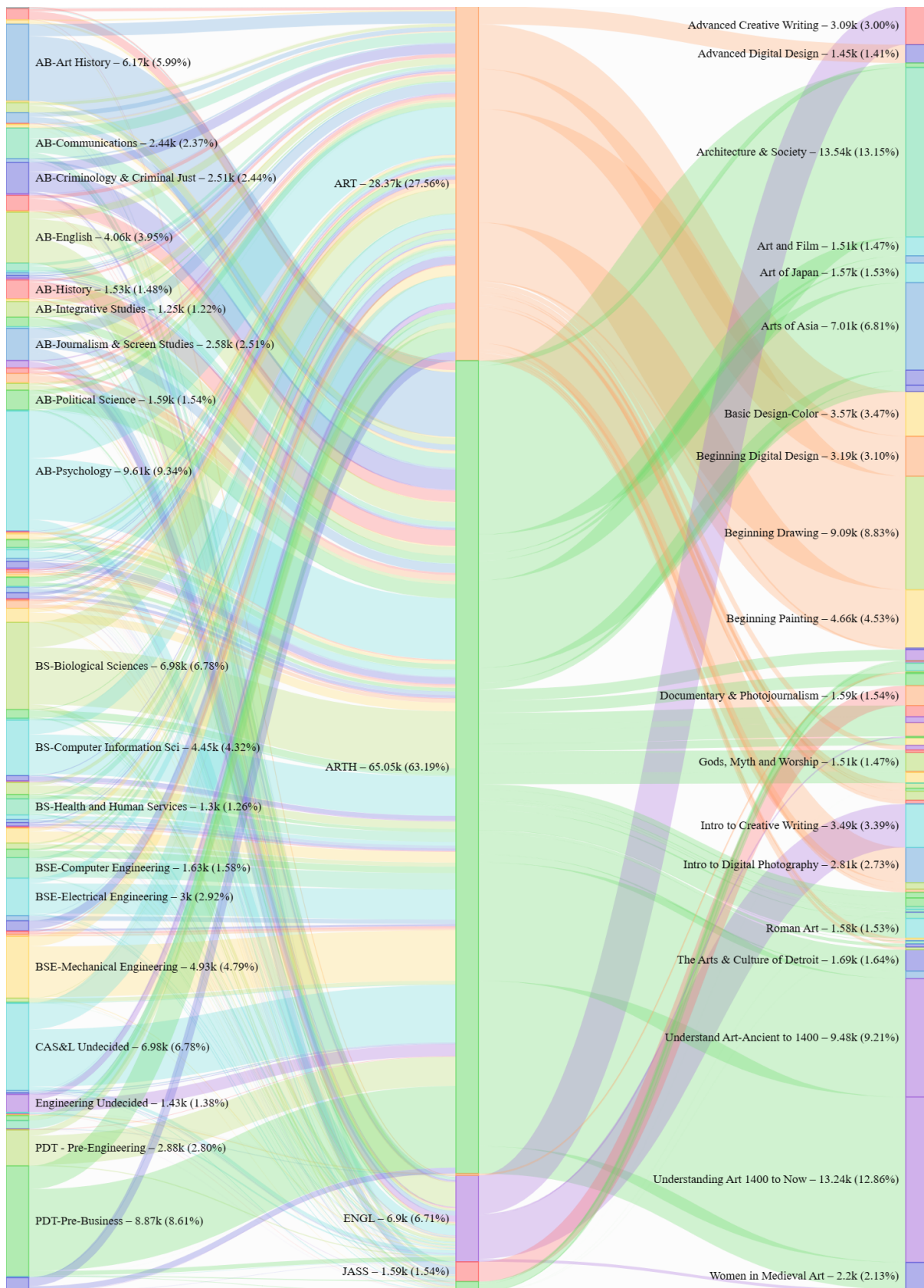


Figure 9.16: Sankey diagram showing enrollment flows from majors to art-identified subject areas and subsequently to art courses (2018–2024)

For additional information about arts enrollment trends at U-M Dearborn, see Appendix B.

Arts in the Curriculum

Arts are included in U-M Dearborn's general education program, the Dearborn Discovery Core (DDC), under the category "Critical and Creative Thinking." The DDC has six goals: Core Knowledge, Communication, Cultural Understanding, Critical and Creative Thinking, Collaboration, and Citizenship. Students may choose an arts course to fulfill the "Critical and Creative Thinking" requirement. Additionally, students must complete six credits in the Humanities and the Arts.

Faculty interviews also revealed that arts learning is embedded in other disciplines:

“We’re much more focused on examining culture and communication.... the arts get infused throughout those programs.”

– Faculty Interview

Music on the U-M D Campus

The following account is from Dr. Susan Erickson, the supervisor of the music program for more than a decade at U-M Dearborn. She provided these insights and background on the changing landscape of music courses on the campus. It has been edited to consolidate details.

“In the enrollment section of this report, throughout the document only Applied Music (MAPP) is considered. I believe adding Music History (MHIS) and Music Theory (MTHY) would present a more accurate picture of course enrollments and student interest involving music.

The MAPP program was deactivated by the Dean of CASL and the Chancellor of U-M Dearborn in 2021. Now, students at U-M Dearborn can enroll in a few applied music courses (MAPP) for credit through off campus options: private lessons taken off campus; or

participation in bands or choirs at Henry Ford College (The HFC Chorus or The Metro Symphony Band) or U-M Ann Arbor (Arts Chorale). Our on-campus class piano and class guitar courses were eliminated as part of the MAPP program deactivation in 2021. When they had been offered at U-M Dearborn, piano and guitar courses were capped at 6 students (with multiple sections) and were fully enrolled most times they were offered. In course evaluations, students wrote about how much they enjoyed these courses. This was a cost-cutting measure that instructors and students protested by making

a presentation at a meeting of the board of regents to no avail. The keyboards and instructional space have been removed from campus, meaning that currently, these courses cannot be taught at the Dearborn campus.

However, there are still courses in Music History (MHIS) and Music Theory (MTHY) being offered at U-M Dearborn as part of a Minor in Music that is currently active. Music History courses fulfill general education requirements. MHIS 100 (Intro to Music); MHIS 120 (History of Jazz) and MHIS 130 (World Music) have historically good enrollments and lead students to take more MHIS or MTHY courses. We offer a 300-level course every term for students in order to complete their minor. MTHY 100: Creating Music: Theory, Tools and Practice, is required for the minor and is taught once a year. Dr. Mark Douglass,

Lec I in Music, recently reworked the course in response to students contacting him to ask for help with their music compositions. We are planning to add an intermediate level in composition in the future.

Due to the death of one of only two LEO lecturers teaching music history and music theory courses, only one instructor remains to teach courses needed to complete a Music Minor. The other position was not replaced.

Decisions made to stop teaching applied music on campus may help explain why students may not identify as musicians on the U-M Dearborn campus (see “Student Arts Engagement on the Dearborn Campus,” above). Now with only one LEO Lecturer teaching in the music area, we have even greater problems offering a range of courses.”

Cross-Disciplinary Insights

Faculty observations highlight that students from diverse majors engage meaningfully with arts content in arts classes. For example, the data supports the observation that art classes enroll many psychology students (see graph below for enrollment trends for arts & humanities students; psychology majors lead in enrolling in art courses at a rate of 2-3 in 10).

These students astutely apply art concepts to their course of study, as explained in this faculty interview:

Dearborn Faculty Interviewee:

I get a lot of psychology majors enrolling in in my art classes ...my approach to the critiques that we would have is constructive, and the psychology students really nail the constructive critiques really well....I actually sent an email to the psychology faculty at our campus and told them whatever you're doing, keep on doing it.

a2ru: *Do you have an inkling of what it is about their training or them as people that makes them nail that constructive criticism?*

Dearborn Faculty Interviewee: *They've been trained to be good listeners and to what they would say has [substantial] content to it instead of being reactionary, if that makes sense. They know how to break it down [and provide constructive criticism], 'if you move that over there'.*

This suggests that the arts are being used strategically across disciplines—not only fulfilling curricular requirements but also enhancing interdisciplinary learning.

As for enrollment in arts classes by students other than arts majors, one faculty member observed: *"We do get significant numbers of students in both Art History and Applied Art courses coming from STEM fields as minors or even double majors (in Art History). In many courses, including upper-level art history courses and introductory level applied art courses, students enroll to fulfill one or multiple general education requirements."*

For additional information about arts enrollment trends at U-M Dearborn, see Appendix B.

Credits and Acknowledgements

By Maryrose Flanigan and Deb Mexicotte

Dearborn enrollment data: Michael (Xueliang) Lu Business Intelligence Analyst, and Rick Michalski Director Institutional Research & Effectiveness

Elizabeth Warren, Riverside Arts Center, Ypsilanti

Thank you to the following individuals who generously shared their expertise and insights into the arts landscape at U-M Dearborn: Maya Barak, Laura Cotton, Paul Draus, Drew Dykowski, Susan Erickson, Sally Howell, Sarah Nesbitt, Diana Y. Ng, Jennifer Proctor, and many students who participated in focus groups and interviews.

The office Institutional Research & Effectiveness, particularly Michael (Xueliang) Lu and Rick Michalski for providing enrollment information

The following individuals contributed to analysis and synthesis of this report: Principally, Krithika Balaji and Umang Bhojani; and special thanks to Veronica Stanich and Alison Rivett

Mya Dobbs, Nathaniel Liganor, Sarosh Manzur, and Cindy Ye (survey design and distribution, statistical analyses and interpretation, and data visualization and synthesis) for the Arts Engagement Project

Special thanks to the U-M Arts Initiative for funding this project, especially Alison Rivett, Chris Audain, and Mark Clague

The Arts at Flint

This section presents an initial overview of the U-M Flint Campus. For an overview of U-M Dearborn, see above; for an overview of the Ann Arbor campus, see the *Arts Data Pilot at the University of Michigan (2023)*.

Introduction

As part of the effort to map the landscape of the arts at all three of the University of Michigan's campuses, this report provides both an overview and snapshots of the arts on the Flint campus. To report on the arts landscape for Flint, we modeled this project on the mapping project for "The Arts Data Pilot" for [Ann Arbor in Phase 1](#) and included Phase 2 qualitative aspects as well. We conducted interviews and focus groups, analyzed enrollment data, and pulled together information from arts-related websites.

We started with "anchor" interviews with faculty and coded the responses to find trends. We looked at the enrollment data from 2018-2023 in arts courses. The figures and perspectives reported here are meant to serve as a benchmark going forward to help the campus stakeholders work toward the goals for the arts ecosystem surfaced in discussions with faculty, staff, and students. In this section, we highlight the successes and impacts of the arts programs specific to the Flint campus and share stories that showcase how these programs have

uniquely contributed to students' career readiness and development of critical skills.

This work was conducted over the course of the 2024-25 academic year. This report also includes data on student experiences and perspectives on the arts from the first Flint-based survey included in a longitudinal study, ArtEngine's the [Arts Engagement Project](#). This mirrors an ongoing study from the Ann Arbor campus which began in 2010.

U-M Flint was characterized by interviewees as having a distinctly liberal-arts feel. The campus serves around 6,500 students and those we talked with appreciate the intimate nature of the campus and the opportunity to get to know their professors well. They feel a strong connection to the arts ecosystem within the city; the artscape on campus has evolved to meet the needs of the educational and cultural landscape at Flint, building on historically strong arts and culture foundations.

“[What] we hear from [students] is that they appreciate the relationships that they develop with faculty, and that it feels like a small liberal arts college sometimes [especially from] students that come from larger institutions.”

—Faculty Interview

A Tradition of an Arts-Forward Campus

Flint’s first full-time faculty hire in the arts was in 1987 – emeritus professor Christine Waters—to anchor visual arts offerings to complement existing theatre and music programs with strong ties to local high schools. One initial barrier to developing arts programs was that niche was already filled by a very strong arts program at Mott Community College in Flint. Flint faculty developed relationships with that program, and theatre, dance, graphic design, and music programs gradually were built and thrived. Students benefited from a strong arts infrastructure in the city of Flint with many independent professional theatre companies, the Flint Institute of Music, the Flint Institute of Arts (the second-largest art museum in Michigan), several galleries including the artist-led Buckham Gallery, and the Greater Flint Arts Council. However, like many communities Flint is feeling the effects of the pandemic on the arts ecosystem, and of diminished funding for the arts and humanities. The campus at Flint

is also navigating a dramatic decline in enrollment, in large part due to the singular issue of the water crisis.

“Pre water crisis, the fall of 2014 [there was a] kind of spirit of interdisciplinarity: let’s create something with this other department or let’s partner on a Shakespeare [production] together with English or talk with history about these things. It was a really kind of positive, pleasant flow of ideas and making. So we were producing five shows a year...[also a] pretty large dance concert at that time. Enrollment numbers were probably near to our highest in the 2011 to (20)14 moment in time.”

—Faculty Interview

The campus is home to seven arts-related BAs (theatre, theatre design and technology, music and music performance, fine art, art and design, and applied science); a master's degree in arts administration; two undergraduate certificates (design thinking & practice; interaction design); and fifteen arts minors, among all those disciplines (a complete list is in the enrollment section).

Interviewees reported a “scarcity mindset” that resulted from several factors. Besides the enrollment decline, the college of Arts, Sciences and Education has been reduced from eighteen departments to six. However, interviewees were proud of the resourcefulness of students and faculty who stay engaged in artistic activity that reflects the beauty of the community. For example, to remedy the adverse effects of college cuts, faculty from different disciplines started emerging from disciplinary silos to collaborate. And faculty have learned to be very resourceful in repurposing unused spaces in service of fostering creative activities and making them visible.

The recent uptick in support from the U-M-wide Arts Initiative has fostered activity in addition to the arts and culture research cluster introduced in 2021. Nonetheless, as many long-time arts faculty retired in the pandemic years and those slots are not necessarily being replaced, this is an inflection point for the campus in terms of arts expertise.

Goals that emerged from the interviews are to ensure the visibility of arts on campus and to continue working to connect the arts strongly with the community.

The arts at Flint are a very important resource for the community. In 2020, U-M Flint was selected by the Carnegie Foundation as one of only 119 U.S. campuses to receive the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, an “elective designation that indicates an institutional commitment to community engagement.” The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification has been the leading framework for institutional assessment and recognition of community engagement in U.S. higher education for the past 14 years.

“[O]ne of our goals consistently is...how do we develop relationships? In Flint how do we support and be an anchor institution in the city, but one that is ...outward facing? ...that’s consistently been a challenge, but an aspiration. So I think a lot of our work [and] events that happen on campus are with [that] in mind: How do we be good neighbors?”

—Faculty Interview

The following list shows selected, strong arts assets on the campus surfaced from research and the interviews:

- **Qua Literary Magazine**, a 50-year old literary journal.
- **Foundational curriculum in the arts.** The arts are an integral part of the curriculum: fine arts are included in the general education curriculum, and students can take at least 3 credits in fine arts courses to fulfill the general education requirement.
- **Strong connection to the arts community:** The campus is near strong arts galleries and high school training in the arts in Flint.
- The campus supports **River Bank Arts**, “a community-centered space for creatives, community members, and academics to develop and find support for artistic and cultural production in Flint.”
- Arts are featured as [one of four research clusters](#) supported by the Office of Research.
- **Arts as career development:** The campus positions study in the arts as a career path.

Spotlight on Riverbank Arts:

“We’re here for the community, full stop. That’s what we’re doing each day. And not just the university; we’re here for Flint. You don’t have to sell your art to be an artist. You don’t have to be quirky or act weird or whatever. We’re all artists. No matter your major or job, art is an outlet anyone can access to bring more balance, play, and joy to their lives. We can all create together and build a deeper community through that.”

—Audrey Banks [U-M Flint’s Riverbank Arts creates a healing space for city’s queer community](#)

“Art is a real job that you can practice and train for and really have in this world. I love to teach and I love to encourage people to be creative and express themselves in safe spaces and that is what I am here to provide.”

—Artist My Proulx [U-M Flint’s Riverbank Arts to partner with Sylvester Broome Empowerment Village for summer camp](#)

Arts as a Career Path

The following excerpts from the [Fine Arts website](#) give some insight how U-M Flint positions the arts to illuminate a career path:

Preparing Students for Careers in the Arts

“The fine arts enriches the human experience. For those who love to freely express themselves through a variety of art forms, there are fulfilling career options for you to consider. At the University of Michigan-Flint, we pride ourselves on our outstanding Fine Arts academic programs that prepare students to get jobs in a wide variety of industries and organizations. From dedicated faculty to compelling study opportunities, the U-M Flint Fine Arts majors are made for you. Discover where you can start your journey to your future here.”

—[U-M Flint’s Fine Arts website](#)



- Art Director
- Actor
- Choreographer
- Interpreter and Translator
- Technical Writer
- Graphic Designer
- Public Relations Specialist
- Sound Engineering Technician

Note: This data is from US News & World Report page: <https://money.usnews.com/careers/best-jobs/rankings/best-creative-and-media-jobs>

In-depth: Arts & Culture Research Cluster

The Arts and Culture (A+C) research cluster is one of five introduced in 2021 by Chancellor Debasish Dutta to foster discovery and connection among disciplines. In addition to the Arts and Research Cluster there were four others:

Center on Aging Research Cluster (CoARC); Persistence and Mattering in Undergraduate Education (PMUE) Research Cluster; Racial, Economic, & Environmental Justice Research Cluster; and the Urban Sustainability & Environmental Health Research Cluster.

These clusters were established as “an interdisciplinary effort to mobilize the shared strengths.” The clusters connect researchers across disciplines, academic departments, centers, and institutes, and then beyond the university to community and industry partners and funders. They provide a means to stand up collaborative efforts on areas of regional strategic importance.

The A+C Research Cluster connects U-M Flint arts faculty directly with the research office. Its programs include leveraging the arts for social engagement and improvement, artist residencies, collaboration opportunities, and

leveraging external resources for the arts at Flint. They are focused on connecting a Flint Cultural Network. Features of the cluster include:

- Development of an Arts + Culture Asset Map and Community Resource
- Programming of Arts + Culture Events with Community Partners
- Establishment of a Local Artist/ Research Residency Program
- Riverbank Arts

One activity of the A+C Research Cluster was a cultural asset map and related app ([from 2022 progress report](#)).

Flint Cultural Network: Asset Mapping

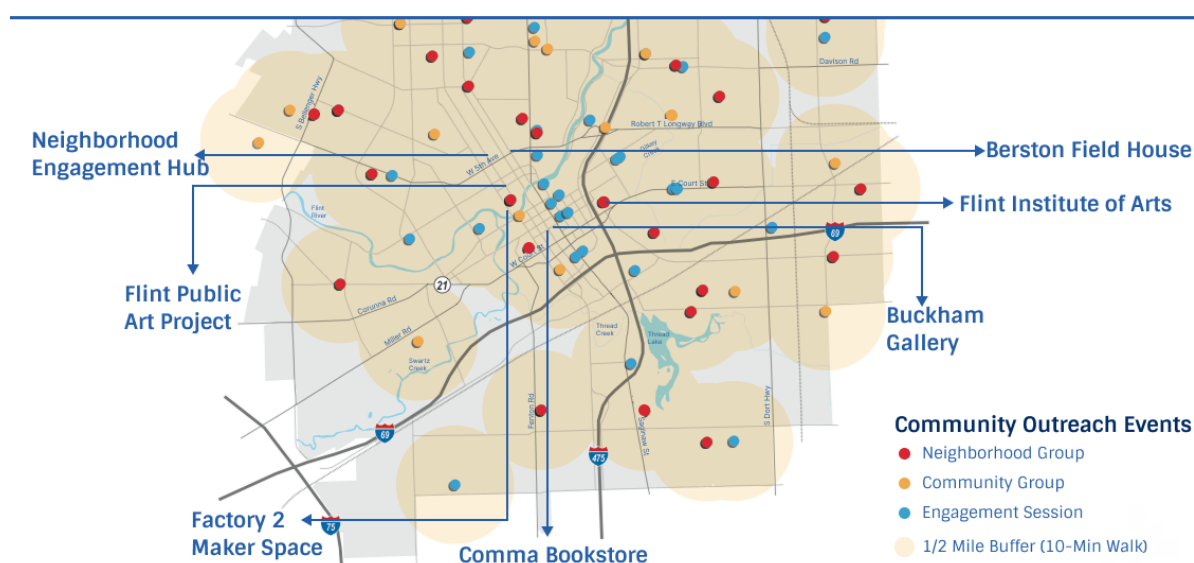


Figure 10.1: Flint Cultural Asset Map

“ Arts and Culture (A+C) Research Cluster was created out of a desire to bring researchers, students, regional cultural institutions, and community organizations together in collaborative partnership with the goal of advancing the intellectual and cultural vibrancy of Flint, Michigan and making an impact on the national cultural landscape. A+C aims to bridge existing gaps in coordination and cultivate new and diverse audiences for the arts, primarily through Riverbank Arts, our community-centered space for creatives, community members, and academics to develop and find support for artistic and cultural production in Flint. A+C seeks collaborative program funding and opportunities, shares information, and promotes artistic and cultural collaborations, elevating the arts and culture of the city of Flint.... ”

The stated research objectives of the Arts + Culture Research Cluster reflect the desires of many of the students and faculty interviewed for this report:

- **Interdisciplinary Dialogue**
 - Collectively engage in conversation with colleagues around shared interests and initiatives
 - Outwardly engage in dialogue beyond our campus
- **Local Impact through Civic Engagement**
 - Publicly engage in creative practice + scholarship as a means to create positive social impact
 - Strengthening relationships with community partners and institutions
- **Collaborative Opportunities + Initiatives**
 - Develop public programming and events
 - Develop community based collaborative spaces
 - Pursue larger grant opportunities

More about Riverbank Arts:

In January 2022, the Arts+Culture Research Cluster launched Riverbank Arts, a community space for the arts located on the first floor of the Northbank Center on 400 N. Saginaw Street in Flint, Michigan. Riverbank Arts is a community-centered space for creatives, community members, and academics to develop and find support for artistic and cultural production in Flint. Not only do we see this space as a way to connect with the Flint community, but we also view Riverbank as a way to connect our students and faculty from various disciplines and backgrounds within the University of Michigan-Flint. For this reason, we do not limit ourselves to act as a space for solely the visual arts, but all types of media involved with the arts. Overall, we hope Riverbank Arts can connect several spheres, including Flint's downtown community, commerce, and U-M Flint community. [Excerpted from the U-M Flint Arts & Culture page]

“*We have a lot of community things that, you know we have the front public art project, you know we bridge that divide. And you know (a) majority of those who are part of that live in poverty, and they're thriving.***”**

-Student Interview

Opportunities for Growth

As the aforementioned goals of the Arts and Culture Research Cluster mirror the opportunities for growth discussed across our many conversations with stakeholders on the Flint campus; we provide the following as a summary of specific areas, drawn from our interviews, that could serve the objective of bolstering the arts for the campus and wider community through interdisciplinarity, civic engagement, collaboration, and initiatives.

Connections across campus: Arts Integration/Interdisciplinarity

The arts departments and initiatives were reported as isolated from other academic and social units on campus. This isolation limits interdisciplinary collaboration and the overall impact of arts programs. Interviewees identified different approaches to better embedding the arts and culture into the curriculum, as well as a range of benefits to this integration.

“Envelop the arts into the polytechnic direction [where] the campus is [headed]”

—Faculty Interview

There is an increased investment in tech and professional career readiness, and interviewees expressed a strong interest in making sure the arts were a central part of this transition for the campus. Complementing the attention to arts training in the general education curriculum, we hear a desire for an articulation of the intrinsic value of arts education to emphasize its role in fostering critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving across diverse academic disciplines.

1. Position the arts as a strategic asset within the university's overarching vision. Demonstrate how arts contribute to innovation and align with the institution's broader objectives.
2. Showcase how arts participation imparts transferable skills that can be used in a variety of ways within the workplace. Emphasize the versatility of arts education in preparing individuals for various professional avenues.

3. Preserve the diversity of arts offerings available to students to satisfy general education credit.
4. Communicate innovatively the value proposition of arts programs to prospective students. Address concerns of families who may perceive arts as impractical.
5. Foster adaptability in the management of arts programs. Capitalize on opportunities arising from shifting landscapes to ensure the continual growth and relevance of arts initiatives.
6. Foster interdisciplinary communication and collaboration among arts programs themselves, as well as across other types of programs and student groups at Flint.
7. Create more interdisciplinary projects and events that involve students from various fields.
8. Cultivate an environment of mutual respect and understanding among different university departments engaged in collaborative projects. Strengthen collaboration mechanisms for enduring and successful partnerships.

Capital/infrastructure and Administration

Physical infrastructure for the arts needs comprehensive and ongoing support, especially to renovate and maintain arts spaces.

1. Renovate and maintain the theatre for the Theatre and Music department; and the first floor of the multi-use North Bank Center
2. Paint, light, and make habitable empty spaces that have been acquired for the arts.

“*[The] [i]nfusion of grants is a fraught thing: it's not like you can just conjure up somebody for the five months of the grant...and then they go away;... there needs to be the... infrastructure and the administration in place to be able to receive this grant money and actually pull off those projects.*”

—Faculty Interview

As administrative support positions were downsized, communications, marketing, and grant writing has been shifted to faculty workloads, leading to burnout. Interviewees expressed that there is no money to hire students, and faculty with little or no course release are stretched across many duties such as running productions, events, or galleries, and writing grants. Faculty need support with general administration, marketing, research administration, and communications. Furthermore, while faculty piece together grants, they need support that is stable and sustainable.

“What faculty members really [need is] that kind of administrative support so that I can go back to being a researcher and a faculty member and a teacher and a mentor.”

—Faculty Interview

Support Faculty positions

As expressed in the anchor interviews, Arts faculty need opportunities for advancement and sustainable workloads. These basic measures support not only career longevity but also collaboration. Interviewees expressed that with a culture of scarcity, faculty are in “survival mode” and the units don’t feel they have the bandwidth to collaborate, especially if they are focused on establishing an academic conservatory model.

1. Institute full professorships, as current arts faculty opportunities top out at the lecturer IV level.
2. Allow “reassign time” to reduce faculty teaching loads to a manageable size. Currently, if a faculty member directs a play, that is considered either research or professional development, so it is in addition to, rather than replacing part of their three course teaching load.
3. Support collaboration amongst arts faculty.

Restore a Strong Arts Identity

The campus would benefit from a coherent identity around the arts. This would help re-establish the “story” of the arts for the campus for casemaking: making the value more visible for upper administration to support and celebrating the arts culture at U-M Flint to attract students, faculty, and restoring the footing of the arts on campus for the community.

1. Release public statements from leadership regarding long-term investment in the arts. “It relies on leaders and vision to say that it matters.”
2. Regrow the arts units, replacing tenure lines. Ensure arts faculty are “first class citizens” of the academy.
3. Provide professional development opportunities for students in the arts by restoring the ability to put on more shows and developing programs such as apprenticeships for students wanting to join professional arts unions and career focused organizations at some point.
4. Advocate for leadership positions within the university that possess a deep understanding of the arts, which can significantly enhance institutional support.
5. Maintain consistent advocacy efforts by demonstrating the positive outcomes and impact of arts programs to university leadership. Reinforce the alignment of arts initiatives with broader institutional goals.
6. Craft compelling narratives that illustrate the tangible impact of arts programs. Utilize real success stories to convey the meaningful contributions of arts education.

Support for young artists

Student artists face programmatic and structural challenges. Arts spaces are spread across campus. With administrative help downsized since the pandemic there are no longer open, operational spaces for arts students to gather. There is no centralized school of art and arts faculty are also spread across campus; it is hard for students and faculty to find each other to collaborate.

1. Establish an emerging artist program to nurture artists who have completed undergraduate education in the arts, providing mentorship, stipend, and studio space before graduate school.
2. Enhance outreach to ensure that all students are aware of and can engage with arts initiatives.

The following is a vision provided by an interviewee as an aspiration for the arts for the campus and community in Flint:

“...that there’s an audience’s respect for and expectation that the music, theatre, dance, (and) art that’s produced from Flint is of a very high caliber, and that they can have enriched lives because they come to see our work. And that they’re safe when they come to campus. It’s easy to get to these shows. And it’s going to be an enjoyable night, a cultural thing to get involved with. And then the next zoom out is that the university as a whole respects the type of work that we’re doing in Flint, and doesn’t expect us to look like Ann Arbor, but knows that we’re doing something different, equally meaningful, and that those colleagues in the rest of the units are accepting of these, what I think are amazing collaborative ideas that could enrich their programs if they were also given the opportunity to produce those relationships.”

—Faculty Interview

Attend to Community Ties

1. Continue to leverage the community bond that residents of Flint have with the campus to drive external engagement with the arts alongside students.

“We need support for bringing in marginalized communities, especially in Flint. So we need outreach engagement to high schools, to elementary schools, to amazing organizations like the Sylvester Broome Empowerment Village and the Burston Fieldhouse where they do after school programs with youth.”

—Faculty Interview

The Student Experience

Student focus groups

This section reflects perspectives from focus groups with Flint students.

Flint has a diverse student population that encompasses a wide range of demographics. There is no “one size fits all” within the Flint campus and students see that as an advantage, as they are able to learn about other cultures and broaden their horizons. Students we spoke to see student organizations on campus as one of the most common ways to access such experiences.

Students spoke of hurdles they face. Due to the commuter nature of the university, very few students stay on campus after class, making connections within the other students difficult. The COVID-19 pandemic had a big impact on the overall student experience as the vast majority of learning moved online and face-to-face interaction became practically non-existent. Even as the campus has reopened, regaining the student atmosphere that was prevalent pre-pandemic has been difficult.

“The Art Club that meets every month at the River Bank Arts. But you only see a few students because there’s the lack of communication”

—Student Interview

Students have tried to revitalize their campus [through clubs and other student organizations](#). Incentives such as food or prizes have resulted in a higher turnout of people attending events. Student organizations have also gained traction by making their events a part of the curriculum of certain majors within the university. For example, the School of Management at Flint has a “Career Development Requirement” that requires undergraduate students to accumulate at least thirty points by completing various professional development tasks. Allowing students to gain points by attending events increases the likelihood of higher attendance.

Funding for student organizations is mainly handled by the university, with every organization receiving a set amount.

Students report that there aren't many alternative avenues to fundraise. Giving Blue Day is one of the biggest opportunities of the year to raise money but at Flint, the main focus is fundraising for the sports organizations. This creates feelings of frustration and of competition between other organizations, undermining any sense of community. Students want more support from the university that is distributed equitably.

Students hope to see more opportunities to participate in cross-campus activities between Flint, Ann Arbor, and Dearborn, and to attend events outside their main campus. There is a palpable divide between the campuses, with information about happenings often not traveling beyond the campus walls. Cross-campus activity would allow for the potential of greater collaboration as well as stronger community building.

Faculty insights

The following are some insights from staff that work with students.

1. Student involvement and leadership at Flint is composed of all student organizations that are recognized by the university including general student organizations, Greek life, and sponsored student organizations.
2. Staff emphasized the importance of a low-cost or no-cost avenue of access for students to attend such activities on campus. Like most campuses, funding for student organizations to organize events can come from both internal and external sources. The Student Government Funding Board is responsible for allocating funds to student organizations; other forms of funding include sponsoring units.
3. Many students find a community within both formal university programs and/or student-led organizations that involve arts, creativity, and culture. The connections that students form with each other, along with the relationships they cultivate with members of the city and surrounding area, are invaluable to a holistic student experience.

4. General student organizations that are arts-related bring in a wide spectrum of students, connected by their curiosity about a specific art form or niche interest. There is a wide spectrum of student engagement with the arts, from attending the open art gallery where students or anyone from the public can browse student-made creations, to actively participating in events that are put on by student organizations.
5. Staff observed that students in formal university programs that involve the arts (such as Theatre, Design, Dance, etc.) have built a strong rapport with university faculty, allowing them to develop foundational skills as well as display the fruits of their efforts in various ways.
6. In the future, student life staff hope for more institutionalized funding as well as university support to student organizations along with bringing together campus and community resources to support student-led initiatives.

Student Arts Engagement on the Flint Campus

The Arts Engagement Project, a longitudinal online survey study of precursors, behaviors, identities, activities and expectations of undergraduate students engaging in the arts at U-M Ann Arbor during their time in college, was first implemented between 2010-2015. That database and analysis consists of 4000+ students and can be accessed through the National Archive of Data on Arts and Culture ([NADAC](#)) and the project website, [The Arts Engagement Project](#).

In 2023, the Arts Initiative at U-M supported a new effort to resurvey students at U-M using the Arts Engagement Project as its foundational research platform, to

see how student engagement has changed, how it impacts student development and experience at U-M, and how they could better improve the student arts experience. This phase of the Arts Engagement Project includes students from all three campuses: Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint.

The new effort was updated in several ways to reflect the new realities of the pandemic-era educational experience and the evolving ways students engage with the arts – both prior to and at college. The survey effort in March 2024 yielded ~750 responses across the three campuses, of which 115

were from the Flint campus, spread across their first- through fourth-year undergraduate students.

The analysis of these results are very preliminary, but there are some initial demographics and findings for the Flint campus.

Flint Survey Demographics

The Arts Engagement Survey pilot responses from Flint students represented a wide range of schools, colleges, and majors (Figures 10.2 and 10.3). There is less representation in the first-year cohort, and an overrepresentation in the fourth-year cohort (Figure 10.4). Sex/gender distribution is approximately 2:1 Female/Male, which is typical of surveys into which students self-select (Figure 10.5). Race/ethnicity is overwhelmingly White (Figure 10.6), which needs to be compared with the campus enrollment demographics to understand the significance to the analysis. With the larger sample size generated by additional annual surveys and with more attention to marketing to underrepresented cohorts, we expect to somewhat smooth out these distributional disparities where needed.

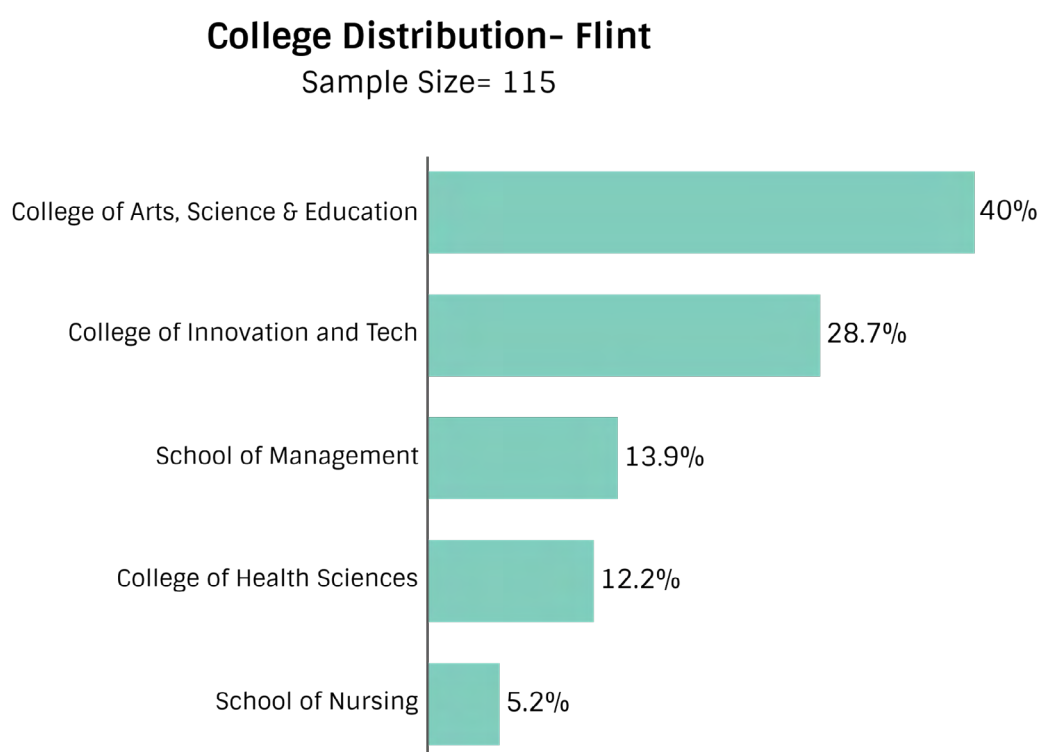


Figure 10.2. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: School/college distribution of student survey respondents at U-M Flint.

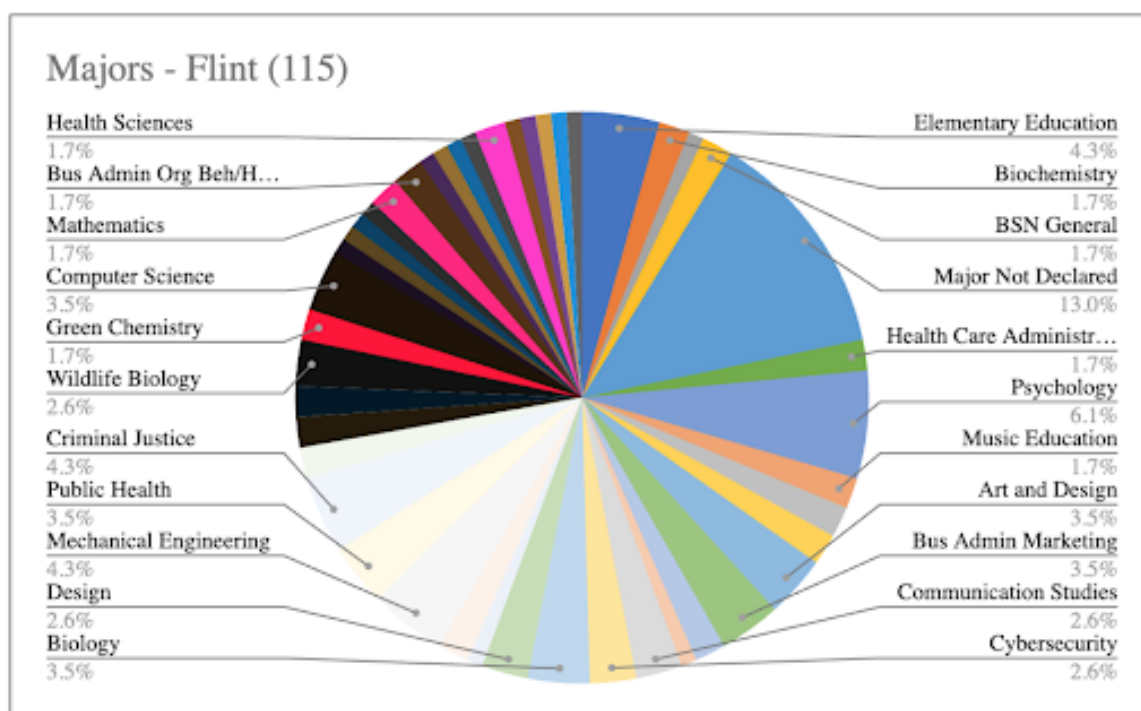


Figure 10.3. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Sampling of majors of student survey respondents at U-M Flint.

Academic Level Distribution - Flint

Sample Size: 115

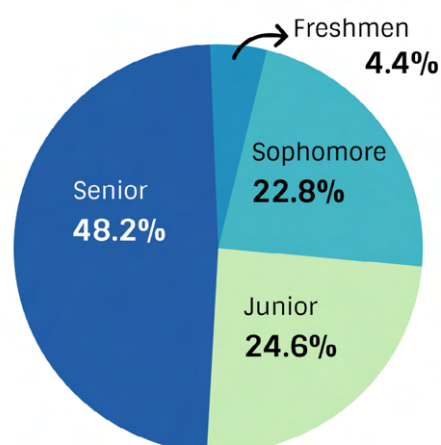


Figure 10.4. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Academic level distribution of student survey respondents at U-M Flint.

Distribution of Sex - Flint

Sample Size: 115

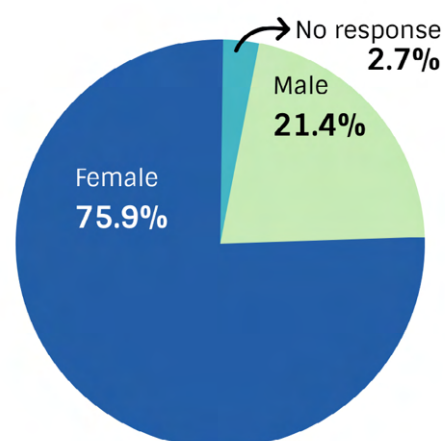


Figure 10.5. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Gender distribution of student survey respondents at U-M Flint.

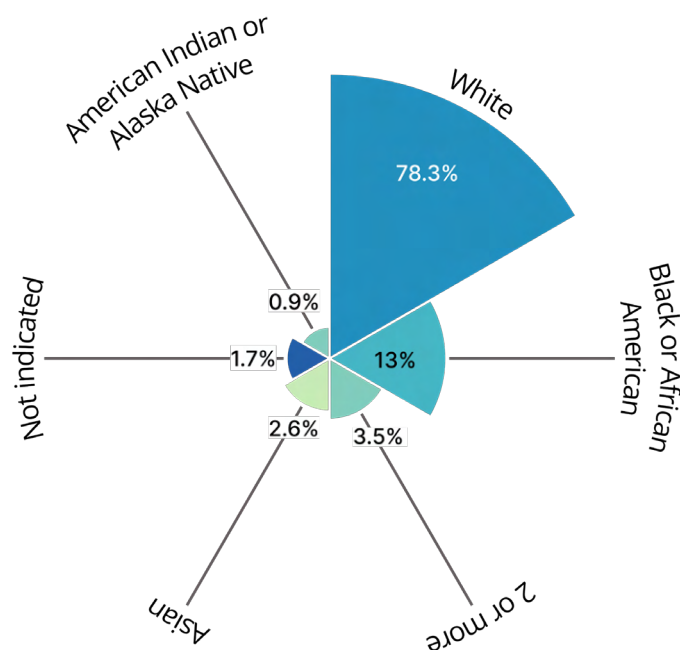


Figure 10.6. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Race/ethnicity distribution of student survey respondents at U-M Dearborn. Sample Size=115.

Arts Identities

Students were asked to agree or disagree with phrases such as “I am a musician” or “I am studying in an arts field” or “I participate in an organization that occasionally participates in the arts.” These questions are mechanisms to track whether students identify as artists and how they participate in the arts, generating data that enables leadership to better support this aspect of student life. Here, we analyze the Flint campus responses in the context of the full three-campus subject pool.

Insights

It is striking to note the high level of arts participation and artist identities reflected in the Flint data, indicating the importance of the arts in those students’ lives (Figure 10.7). There are also a number of differences between the campuses worth exploring in the future. For instance, Flint students report much higher than average Creative Writer, Graphic Designer, and Designer identities. Is this attributable to pre-college experiences, college opportunities, offered academic programs, or other factors (such as encouragement by the University to pursue arts activities in college)? How these differences between the campuses reflect on-campus opportunities will be a focus of continuing research to better understand how each campus may have unique support needs.

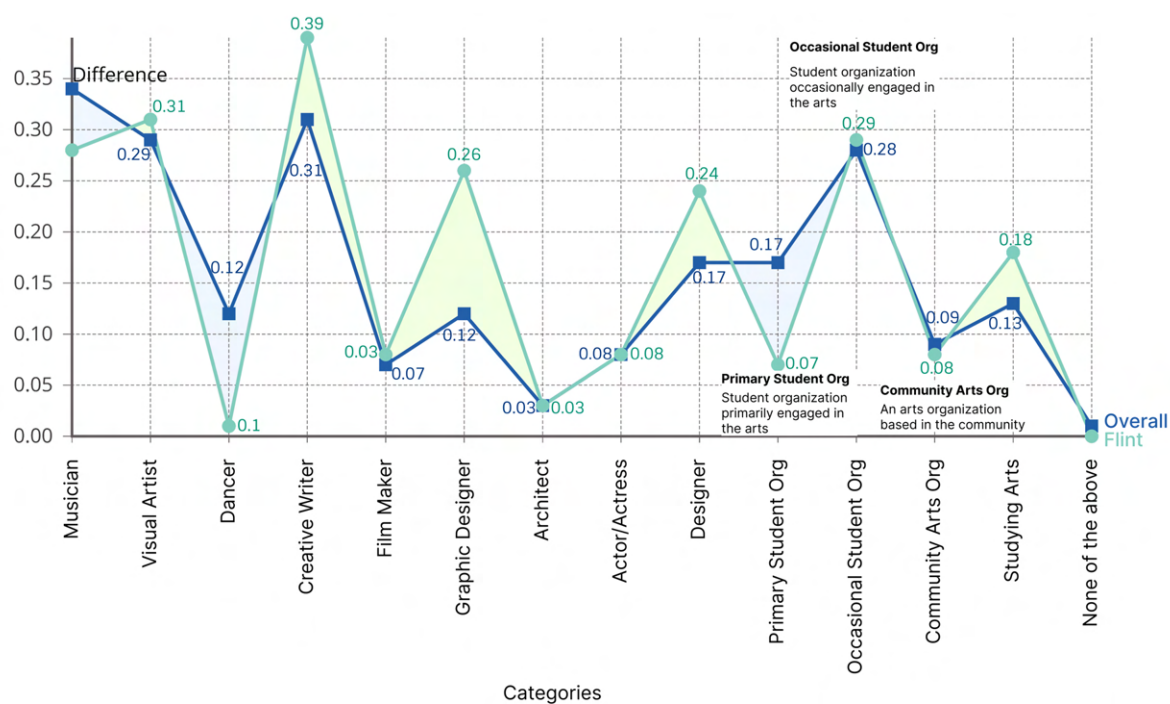


Figure 10.7. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Percentage of Flint students who have identified at least one artist identity (musician, creative writer, actor/actress, dancer, filmmaker, visual artist), compared to students across all three U-M campuses.

Arts related identification by artist type (Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Flint campuses)

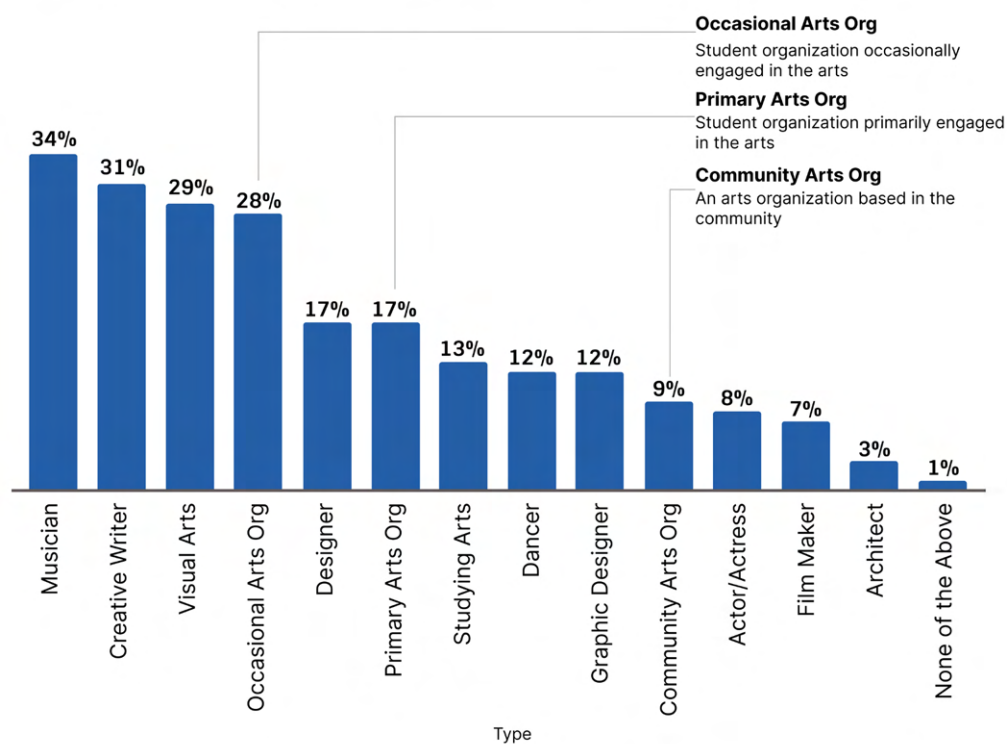


Figure 10.8. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Percentage of students across all three U-M campuses who have identified at least one artist identity (musician, creative writer, actor/actress, dancer, filmmaker, visual artist).

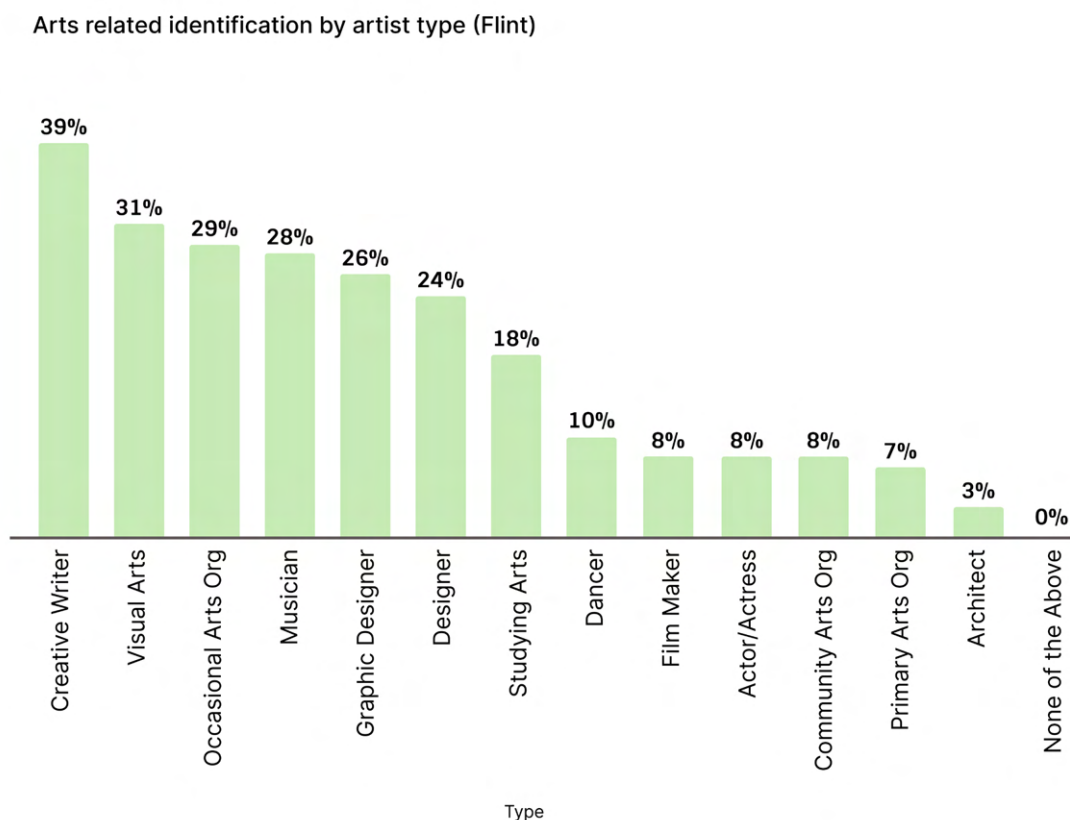


Figure 10.9. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Percentage of Flint students who have identified at least one artist identity (musician, creative writer, actor/actress, dancer, filmmaker, visual artist).

One of the longitudinal findings we were able to identify in the original AEP was how often artist identities were lost over the course of a student's college career, as well as how often artist identities were gained – in large part related to whether there were continuing opportunities in which to participate. For instance, Musician identities were found to be the most stable, with Actor/Actress among the likeliest identities to be lost. Using the current Flint data as a baseline, over the years ahead we will be able to ascertain whether Flint students

maintain those Creative Writer, Graphic Designer, and Designer identities through to graduation.

We see at Flint, as at Dearborn, that more students claim “fine” arts identities like musician, creative writer, actor/actress, or dancer than claim more pragmatic, “applied” arts identities like architect, designer, or graphic designer (Figure 10.9). Students on the Flint campus, who may be studying in more professionally focused schools and colleges, report that the arts are important to them. What might it mean for those students to have their musician or dancer identities supported and even nurtured

through coursework and other arts opportunities? Given the data we have elsewhere in the AEP (see “Student Experience” section), we predict this could not only improve

student wellness, but also support the development of skills like teamwork and communication that have currency in today’s job market.

Student Artist and Designer Identities: A Comparison of Self-Identified Roles at Flint

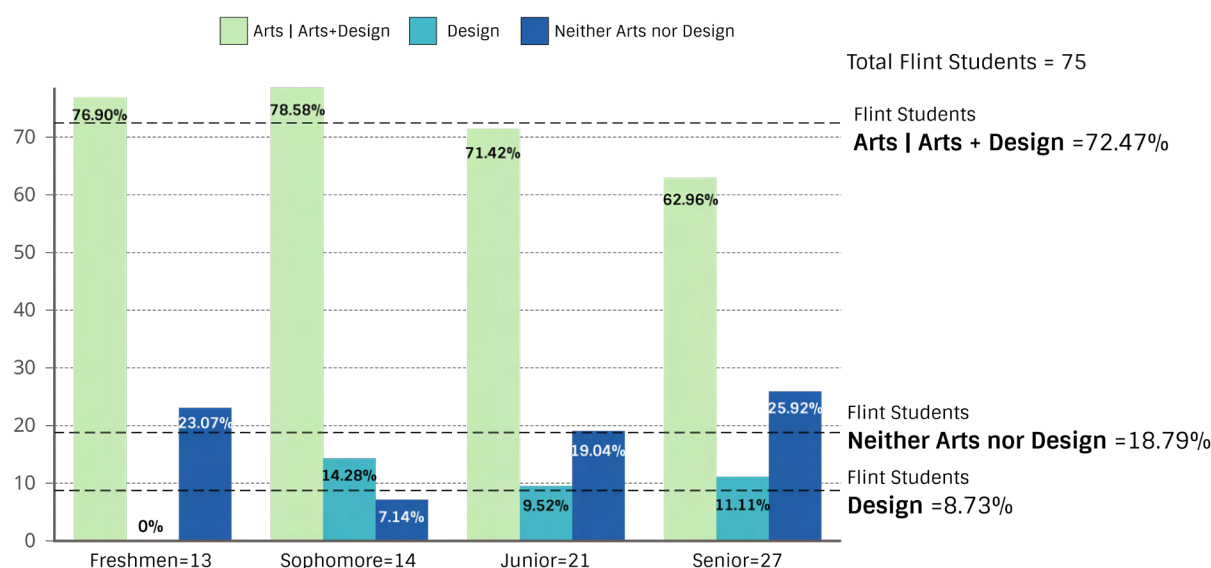


Figure 10.10. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Percentage of Flint students who have identified at least one artist identity (musician, creative writer, actor/actress, dancer, filmmaker, visual artist), compared to the percentage of students who identified a “designer” identity (architect, designer, graphic designer) in addition to an “artist” identity or chose only a “designer” identity. Question: “Please select all statements that apply to you (I am a musician, I am a visual artist, etc.)”

Student Artist and Designer Identities: A Comparison of Self-Identified Roles at Flint

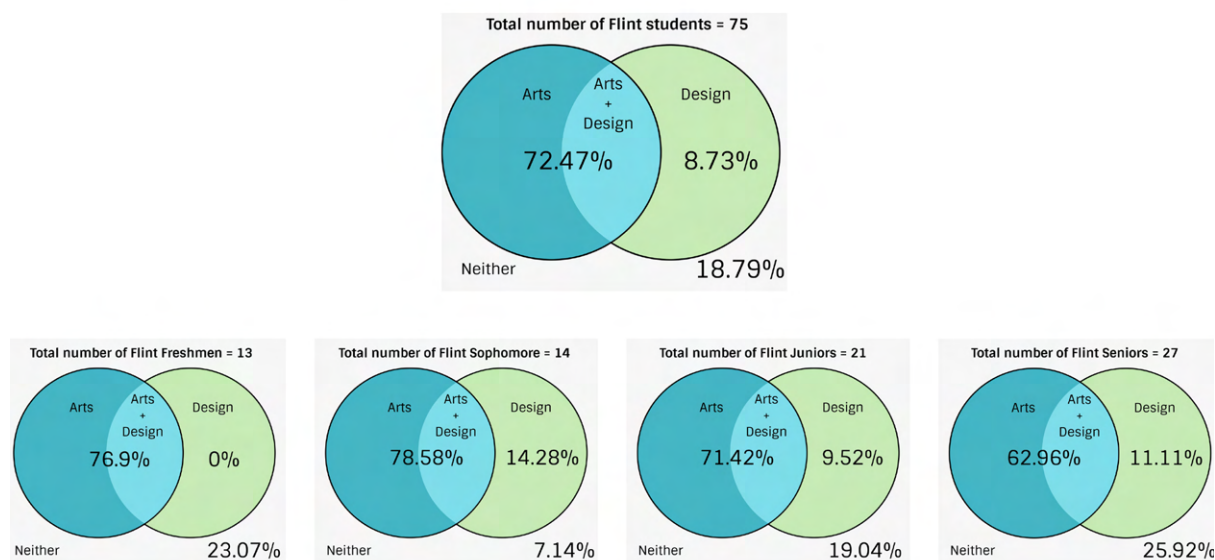


Figure 10.11. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24 student survey: Percentage of Dearborn students who have identified at least one artist identity (musician, creative writer, actor/actress, dancer, filmmaker, visual artist), compared to the percentage of students who identified a “designer” identity (architect, designer, graphic designer) in addition to an “artist” identity or chose only a “designer” identity. Question: “Please select all statements that apply to you (I am a musician, I am a visual artist, etc.)”

We believe that even these survey questions about student arts identities do not capture the full student picture at U-M Flint. For example, there are responses that indicate students are studying in an arts field, but these students do not identify themselves as “artists.” There are also a number of responses from students who don’t claim an arts identity for themselves, but who are involved in a student organization that frequently or occasionally engages in the arts, or are part of a community arts organization.

Arts Climate and Student Arts Organizations

Students at Flint report the highest levels of satisfaction with their current arts involvement of all three campuses, and indicate that U-M is largely supportive of the arts from a climate standpoint. However, the majority of respondents also indicate they are not as involved in the arts as they would like to be (59%), which is only slightly lower than those respondents from the Ann Arbor campus (See Figure 10.12).

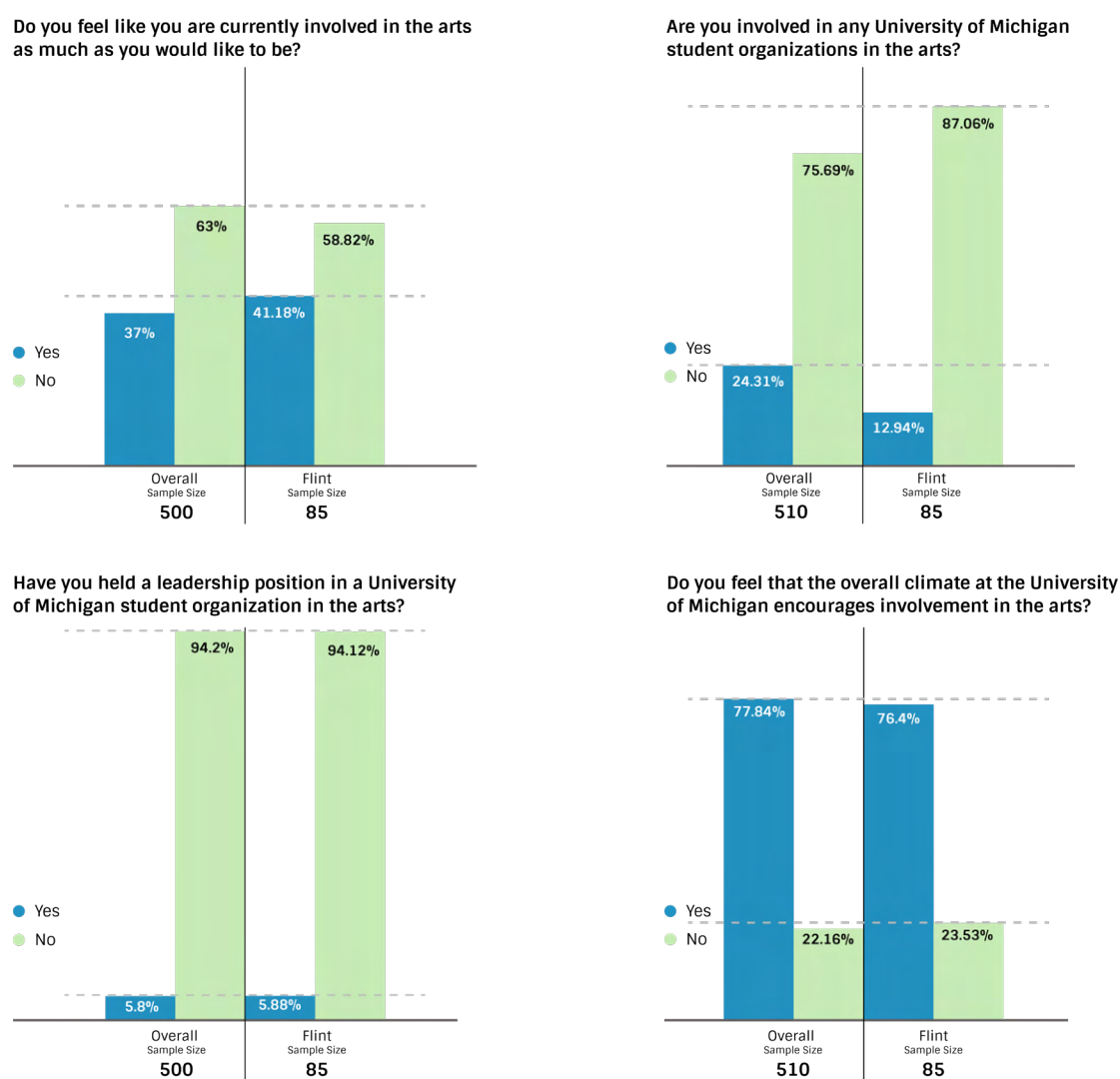


Figure 10.12. From the Arts Engagement Project 2023-24: Survey responses from students at U-M Flint compared to responses across all three campuses.

List of Student Arts

Organizations: Parentheses indicate category/tag in student organization list

- Anime Club (Social)
- Campus Activities Board (Social)
- Comic and Manga Club (Social, Identity-Based)
- Indian Student Association (Identity-Based)
- Innovators and Makers Club (Academic)
- K-Pop (Social)
- National Organization for Music Education (Academic)
- Qua Literary and Fine Arts Magazine (Professional, Interprofessional)
- Riverbank Arts (Academic, Interprofessional)
- Student Theatre Organization (Social)

On the Flint campus, we identified only ten of 125 (about 8%) recognized student organizations that appear to be engaged with the arts (as compared to 9% at Dearborn and 15% in Ann Arbor). We used available data on student organizations to identify those ten because, like Dearborn, Flint doesn't have an "arts" or "creative" tag for student organizations. Instead, many are tagged as Social or Identity-based organizations. It is interesting, therefore, that students indicate arts

organization participation despite the lack of such an official designation. With only about 8% of student organizations associated with the arts, having ~12% of students claim arts organization participation (and a fifth of these say they engage with two or more arts organizations) is a bit higher than expected, although the small sample size may smooth this out in subsequent analyses.

Recommendations

1. Additional data from a second year of surveying will bolster these initial findings and help us to better understand the arts landscape for students on the U-M Flint campus.
2. Create a tag for student organizations doing the arts to better represent the importance of those organizations, and the role the arts play in students' lives, to administration.
3. Further explore student responses to the questions about artist identities—are they related to participation in curricular or major activities, or is the campus attracting students with these identities for some institutional reason?

Enrollment

The Flint campus experienced a ten percent enrollment decrease campuswide starting between 2013-2015. 2023 marked the first time in a decade that the trend reversed. A significant factor in the reversal of that trend was an increase in international students. Enrollment rebounds have mostly been in the areas of tech, health, and nursing. Drops in enrollment affected humanities and the arts with few faculty lines replaced if the position was vacated in those disciplines. The College of Innovation and Technology (CIT), founded in 2021 has had good growth fueled by start-up investments. There are cross-appointments with these popular colleges with the arts faculty and that is a promising trend, integrating the arts (e.g. CIT students taking design thinking courses). Faculty have observed that any art unit that integrates with or across the arts is experiencing some growth, as

opposed to a strategy of cultivating a more independent, conservatory type model (which can be defined as a standalone arts conservatory where artists-often recruited nationally-immerse themselves in rigorous, performance-heavy training). A barrier is non-arts departments not seeing the value of arts training and not seeing the arts departments as “equal.”

The arts are part of the general education curriculum at Flint. The most recent general education model was introduced in 2023 and “is designed to provide students the opportunity to explore topics and ideas beyond their chosen degree. General Education allows students to develop and demonstrate their reasoning and critical thinking abilities, and introduces the fundamental disciplines through which people seek to understand themselves,”

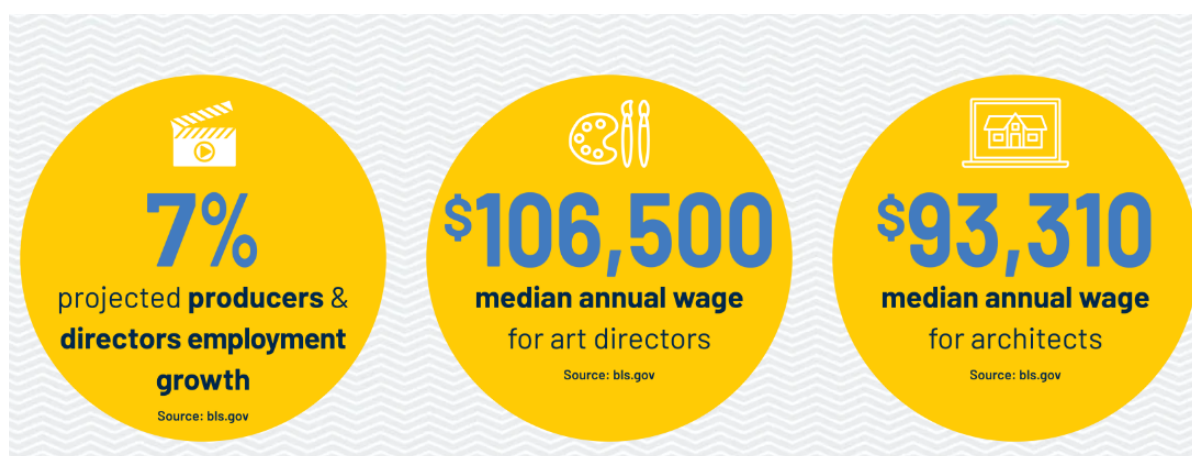


Figure 10.13: From [U-M Flint's Fine Arts Pathways](#) webpage

The arts are housed under the College of Arts and Sciences. Degrees include:

1. **Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre**
“This is our most flexible degree, as you can choose different tracks: performance, musical theatre, literature & history, or the broad general track, where you can devise your course of study and mix-and-match courses across design, technology and performance.”
2. **Bachelor of Science in Theatre Design & Technology**
 A flexible program ranging from the nuts-and-bolts of production to theory.
3. **Bachelor of Arts in Theatre**
 A diverse degree program where students select from several different tracks, such as performance, musical theatre, literature & history; or the broad general track, from which they create their own course of study and combine courses across design, technology and performance.

Arts Majors and Minors

There are minors available in Dance, Musical Theatre, and Theatre

7 Bachelor's Degrees
 associated with the arts
 Bachelor's Degrees

- Applied Science
- Art & Design
- Fine Arts
- Music
- Music Performance
- Theatre
- Theatre Design & Technology

1 Master's Degree

- Arts Administration: MA

2 Undergraduate Certificates

- Design Thinking & Practice
- Interaction Design

15 Minors

- Art History
- Art of Drawing
- Art of Painting
- Ceramics
- Dance
- Graphic Design
- Interaction Design
- Music
- Music Composition
- Music Technology
- Musical Theatre
- Photographic Printmaking
- Pre-Conservation of Art & Architecture
- Sculpture
- Theatre

Snapshot of Enrollment Trends in the Arts

We acquired all arts enrollment data (students from all majors enrolled in courses that had an arts prefix). For the Flint dataset, we received both class size capacity and actual registration, so although some of the summary charts feature that detail, *it is important to note that some sections such as ensembles and independent study are not designed to be at capacity.*

These trends are important to track because of the upheavals introduced by the pandemic, typical leadership changes, and shifts in emphasis for workforce readiness and education satisfaction. Reports like these can pull out how these forces influence the landscape of education in the arts at Flint for all students and looking at these trends can help leadership in the arts and otherwise use this information to ensure goals and priorities in education are being met, specifically in terms of the arts.

Fine arts are included in the general education requirements (at a minimum of three credits) to enable this curriculum to support learning outcomes, specifically the fine arts as described: “Fine arts courses focus on the study of, and appreciation for, creative processes in producing aesthetic expression. They may include creation or re-creation of works in the visual and performing arts that reflect cultural development and growth or current and historical

trends of global cultures through aesthetic concepts.” ([source: course catalog](#))

To provide this snapshot in enrollment trends in the arts, we analyzed that data with preliminary conclusions and then ran the analysis by individuals familiar with the enrollment landscape. These discussions yielded the following recommendations for further benchmarking research questions.

We recommend more in-depth analysis of the enrollment trends with the following research questions (a few of them we could answer with the current data set.):

- What are trends in faculty positions?
- Where are the investments in the fine arts and humanities disciplines?
- How has the investment changed over time?
- How have general education requirements and options changed for all students over time in terms of arts and humanities (Currently there is a requirement for 3 credits in fine arts)?
- What are enrollment trends in non-art majors (how are they fulfilling the fine arts requirement)?

- What are the enrollment trends in the intro courses such as THE100?
- What changes have there been in majors offered over time (for example, dance used to be offered as a major and minor and now is only a minor)?
- What are trends in terms of graduate versus undergraduate enrollment in the arts?
- What are the trends of virtual versus traditional enrollment in the arts classes?
- What are the enrollment trends broken out by each major and minor?
- How does enrollment affect the size of ensembles over time? How does this impact the arts ecosystem?

Arts in the General Education Curriculum

The following graphs represent courses from five subjects within the fine arts offerings, included as part of the general education curriculum.

Some courses that are a part of the General Education Curriculum are missing from the below graphs as there was no data in the original spreadsheet which could mean any number of things such as:

1. Course was added later or was discontinued.
2. Course had a different name. (e.g. a course was featured in course catalog but absent from data sheet. Could mean the course had no registrants.)

Graph Structure Overview:

Graph Type: Heat map

The data is represented using two key indicators: color and size.

Color:

- The color gradient ranges from red to green.
- Green represents courses with higher actual enrollment, while red indicates lower enrollment, with the intermediate shades showing enrollment levels relative to these two points.

Size:

- Represents the maximum possible enrollment for each course.
- It's important to note that the squares in the graph are not drawn to scale; rather, their sizes are shown relative to one another.

How to interpret size:

- The largest square corresponds to the course with the highest possible enrollment, as indicated in the legend.
- The smallest square represents the course with the lowest maximum enrollment.
- All other squares fall proportionately between these two extremes.

ARH - Art History

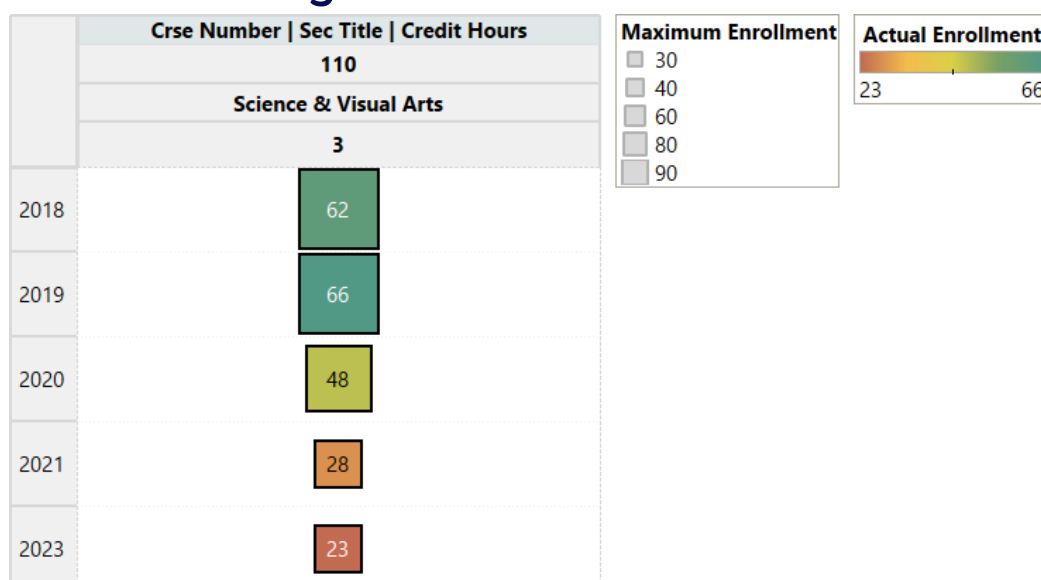


Figure 10.14: Class enrollment size over six years in Art History.

ART - Art

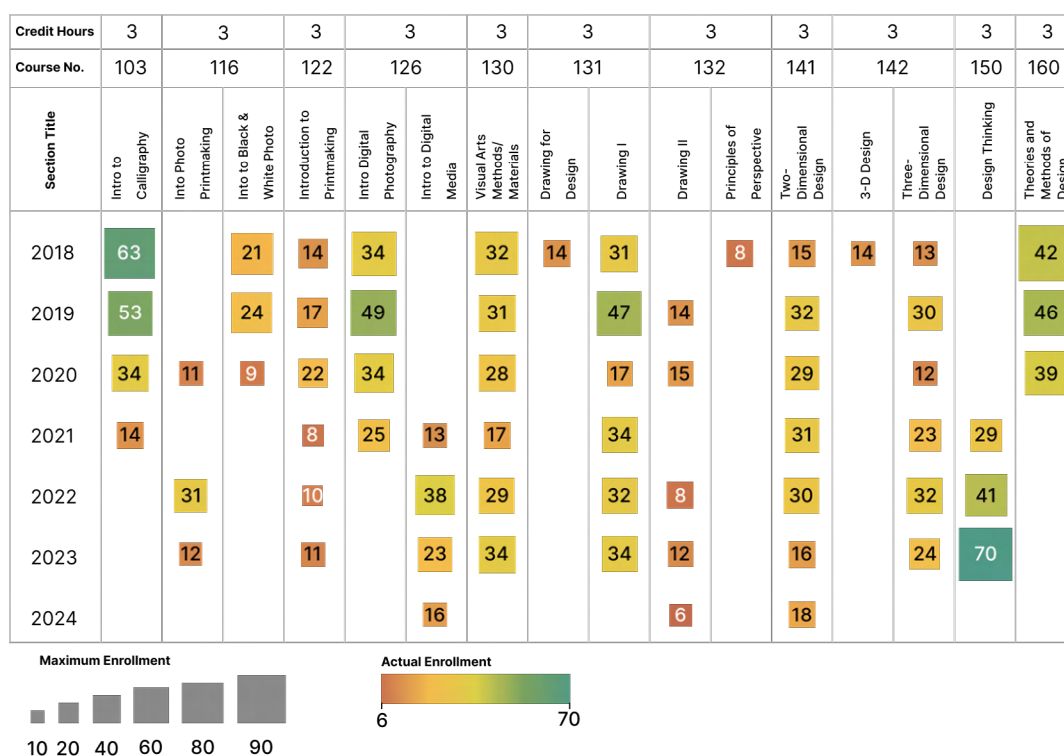


Figure 10.15: Class enrollment size over seven years in Art.

DAN - Dance

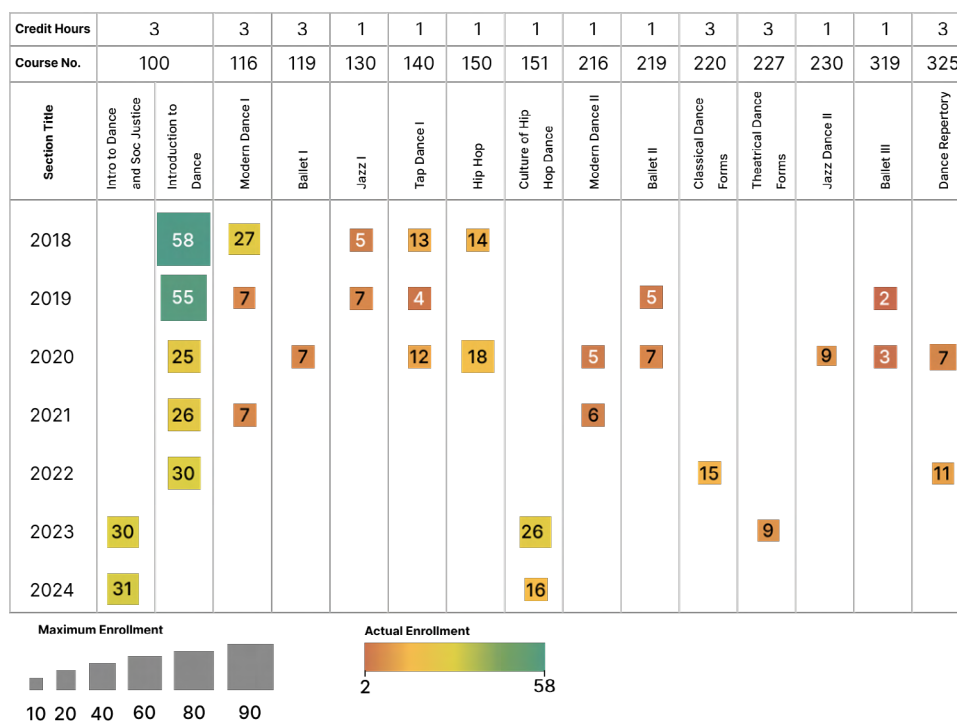


Figure 10.16: Class enrollment size over seven years in Dance. DAN 240 (Tap Dance II – 1 Credit) is missing from the graph.

MUS - Music

The music graph is divided into two sections, as the introductory course (MUS 100) is highly popular among students and its enrollment numbers are outliers. This separation ensures that the significance of other MUS courses remains visible on a broader scale.

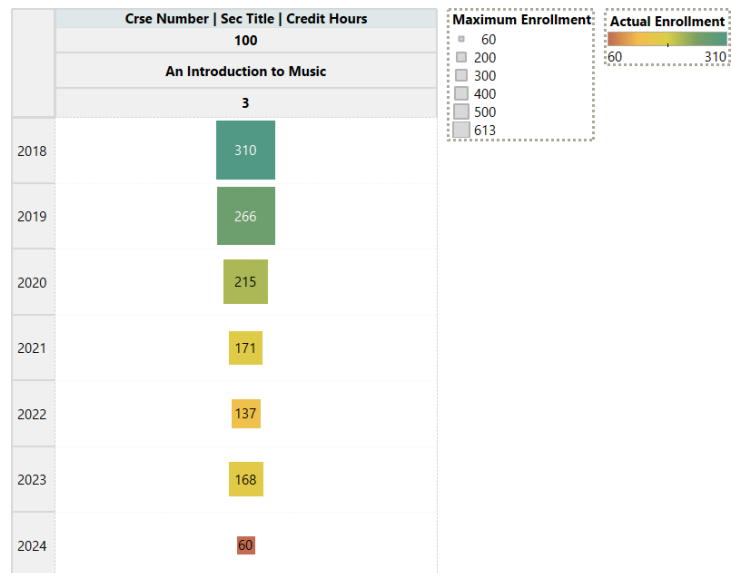


Figure 10.18: Class enrollment size over seven years in an introductory Music course (MUS 100).

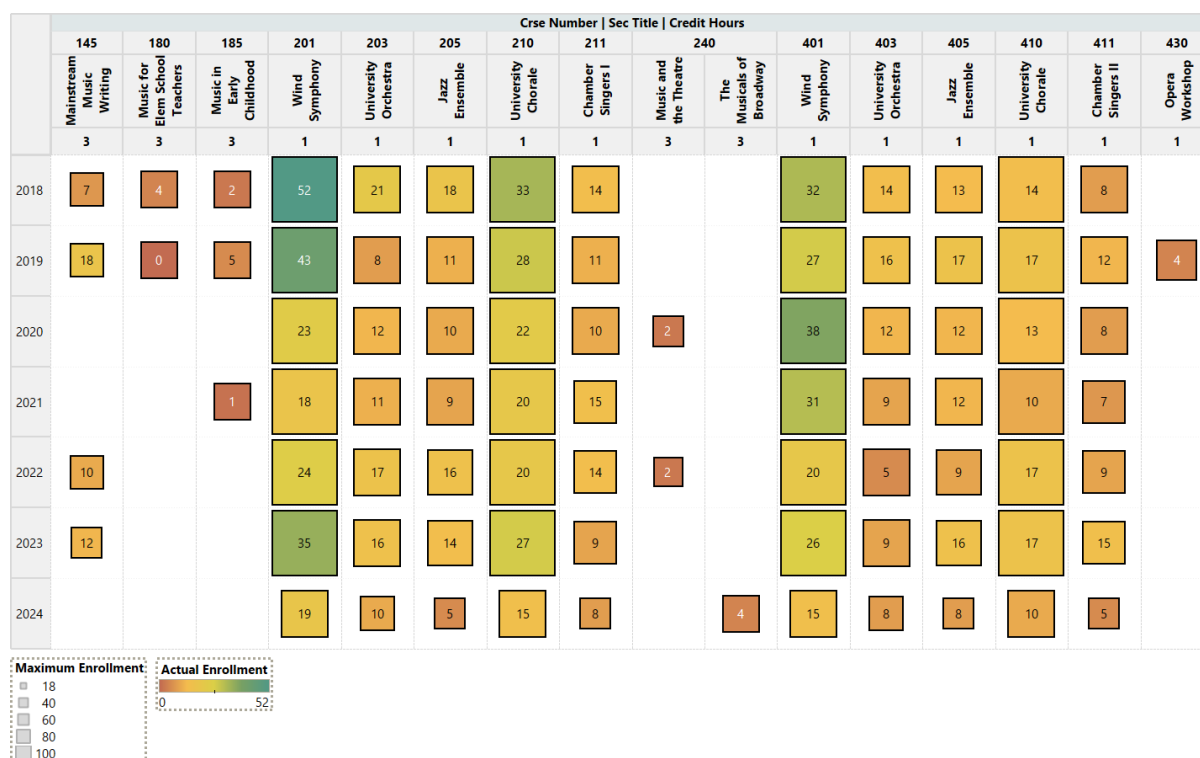


Figure 10.19: Class enrollment size over seven years in Music. MUS 100 has been excluded here.

THE - Theatre

Similarly, the theatre graph will be divided into two sections, as the introductory course (THE 100) is highly popular among students and its enrollment numbers are outliers. This separation ensures that the significance of other THE courses remains visible on a broader scale.

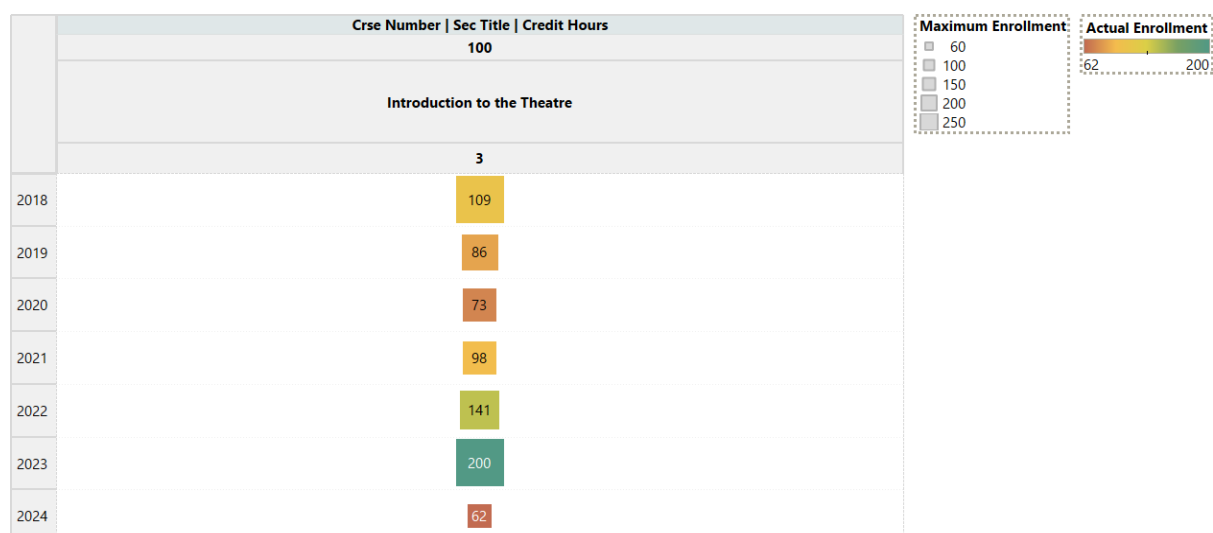


Figure 10.20: Class enrollment size over seven years in an introductory Theatre course.

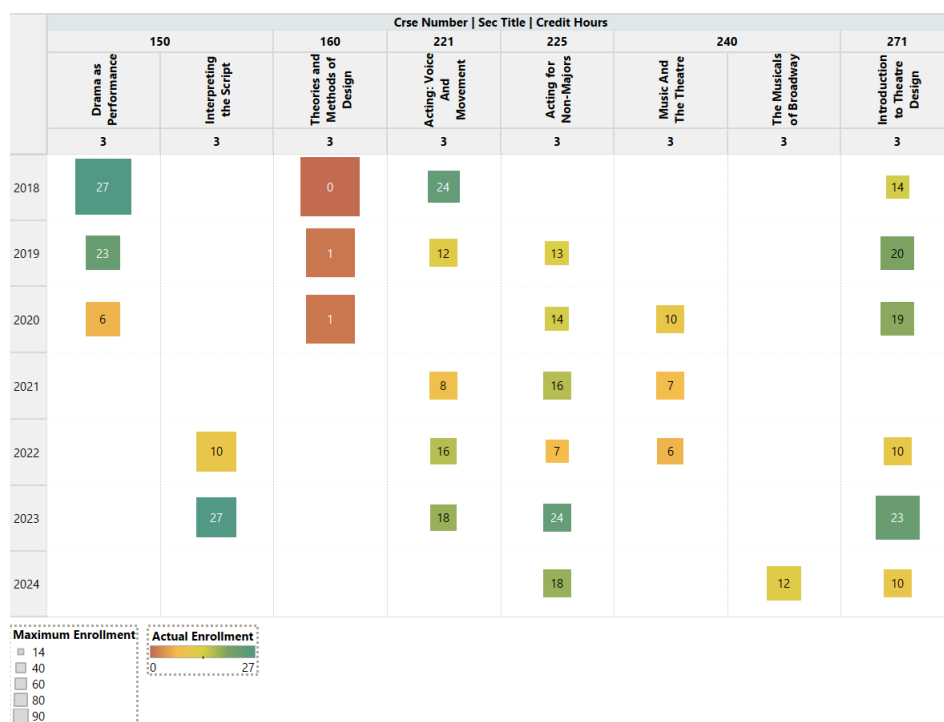


Figure 10.21: Class enrollment size over seven years in Theatre. The following courses are missing from the graph:

- THE 220 (Classical Dance Forms – 3 Credits)
- THE 227 (Theatrical Dance Forms – 3 Credits)
- THE 430 (Opera Workshop – 1 Credit)

For more information on Flint enrollment indices, see Appendix C.

Conclusion

U-M Flint has a rich, community-connected tradition in the arts. Flint has traditionally had a strong fine arts ecosystem and there was a lot of optimism and momentum for the arts pre-water crisis (prior to 2014). Our interviews with faculty bore this out and our conversations with students showed energy and optimism. We heard ways in which the campus infrastructure and energy of faculty has been depleted and its identity as an arts-rich campus has struggled especially since the debilitating effects of the water crisis and the pandemic. There is a scarcity mindset now and the arts are struggling to support and build on existing arts infrastructure. There is faculty burnout resulting from lack of support and we saw concrete markers of change, such as the dance program being discontinued. A connected ecosystem has become fragmented with each arts discipline in survival mode. This has affected having a coherent identity around the arts (which is a typical challenge for arts in a research university environment). Interviewees generously shared both visions for a connected, arts-forward campus that meets needs for career readiness in a tech-connected environment, and concrete areas that need attention, especially in the areas of facilities and faculty positions.

Credits and Acknowledgements

By Maryrose Flanigan and Deb Mexicotte

Flint enrollment data: Celia Dell, Associate Registrar Office of the Registrar Flint

Thank you to the following individuals who generously shared their expertise and insights into the arts landscape at U-M Flint: Shelby Newport, Ben Gaydos, Christine Waters, Audrey Banks, Christopher DeEulis, and many students who participated in focus groups and interviews.

Mya Dobbs, Nathaniel Liganor, Sarosh Manzur, and Cindy Ye (survey design and distribution, statistical analyses and interpretation, and data visualization and synthesis) for the Arts Engagement Project.

The following individuals contributed to analysis and synthesis of this report: Principally, Krithika Balaji and Umang Bhojani; and special thanks to Veronica Stanich, Deb Mexicotte, Alison Rivett, and Maryrose Flanigan

Special thanks to the U-M Arts Initiative for funding this project, especially Alison Rivett, Chris Audain, and Mark Clague

Institutional Research

The information and insights put forth in this report exist in larger U-M, arts, and higher education contexts. Here we offer a very small sampling of the data that represents those larger contexts.

Volume of research at U-M

The university measures its volume of research according to expenditures. These numbers are related to the internal and external funding awarded for research. The [university's annual report on research volume](#) demonstrates a wide range of research expenditures across the institution's schools, colleges, and units. However, this dollar-based metric fails to capture the big picture of research/creative practice outputs in the arts. It illustrates the very small amount of research money used by arts units, relative to units like Engineering and the Medical School, without acknowledging that research/creative practice in the arts, like that in the humanities and public scholarship, is funded on a much smaller scale. In fact, arts research/creative practice defies other metrics, too; citation and publication counts are ill-suited to these outputs. At the time of this writing (2025), best practices for measuring and assessing these outputs is an urgent topic of discussion across the Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities (a2ru) network.

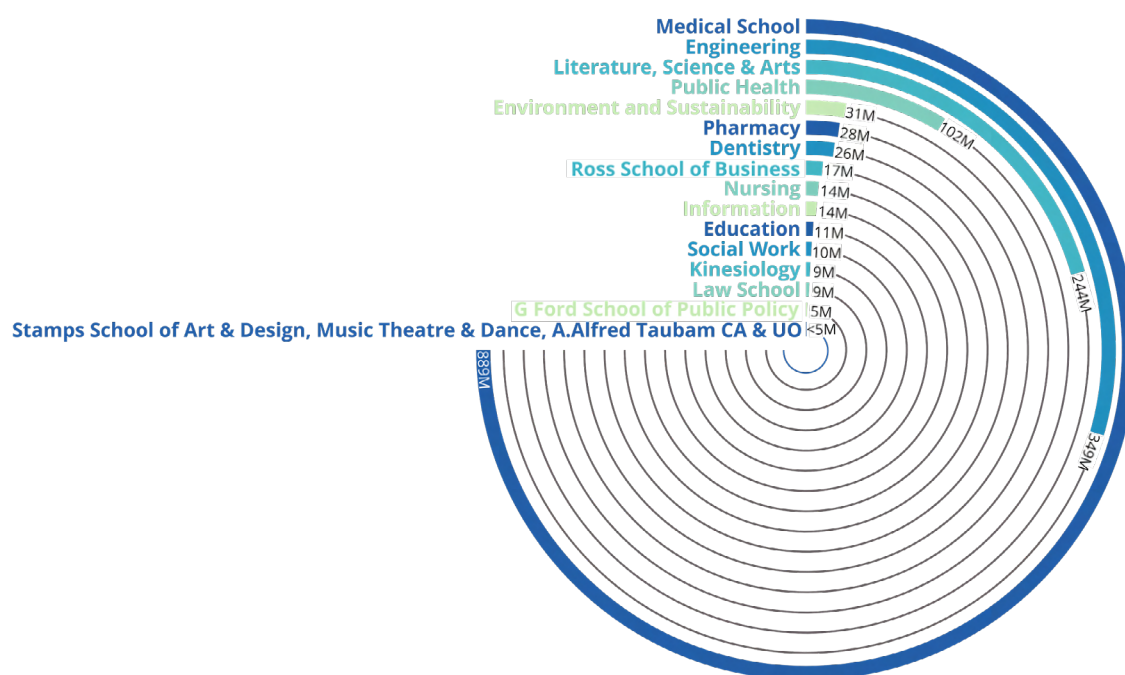


Figure 11.1. Volume of research at U-M by school or college ([data source](#)). The low numbers associated with arts-designated units do not represent a full picture of the research there.

Existing U-M surveys and the arts

Some campus-wide surveys ask about student arts experiences, in limited ways.

The University of Michigan Office of Budget and Planning invites students to “tell M what you’re thinking” with its annual UMay (University of Michigan Asks You) survey. The [2022 UMay Summary Report](#) (the most recent one available) uses data collected as part of the institution’s participation in the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) national

survey. One question on the UMay survey refers to “creative project,” which can be understood as an arts experience. The UMay survey (question 8.6 and 8.7) shows that from over 6,000 responses, 67% of students are currently doing or have completed a creative project as part of coursework, and 11% are assisting or have assisted faculty with a creative project.

#	Question	Yes, doing now or have done	No	Total Responses
1	A research project or research paper as part of your coursework	67%	33%	6,892
2	At least one research methods course	41%	59%	6,857
3	At least one independent study course	18%	82%	6,844
4	At least one small research-oriented seminar with faculty	20%	80%	6,828
5	Assist faculty in conducting research	28%	72%	6,839
6	A creative project as part of your coursework	67%	33%	6,856
7	Assist faculty with their creative project	11%	89%	6,799
8	Conduct own research or creative project outside of your regular coursework under the guidance or supervision of a faculty member	18%	82%	6,845
9	Conduct own research or creative project outside of your regular coursework without the guidance or supervision of a faculty member	18%	82%	6,840

Figure 11.2. From the 2022 UMay Summary Report, responses to the question: Indicate the following scholarship, research, and creative activities that you are currently doing or have completed as a U-M student.

[The Engaged Learning Census \(ELC\)](#) collects information from graduating seniors about participation in a set of high-impact and action-oriented engaged learning experiences. As such, this survey’s question about creative work, which researchers might associate loosely with arts experiences, frames such work in a classroom teaching-and-learning context: “Have you engaged in the production, curation, or interpretation of a creative work or performance that was shared with an audience beyond that of a typical course?” The most recent report available from this survey is 2022. In that report, about 30% of students replied yes to the question about creative work, down from about 34% in 2021.

Enrollment trends in the arts in higher education

This section synthesizes research on various aspects of arts training, including the impact of recession, rising tuition costs, enrollment trends, and challenges faced by international students. Drawing on existing data, we present a holistic view of the evolving landscape of education in the arts, incorporating empirical evidence and historical analysis to inform policies and practices in this field.

Introduction

Note: This section provides context for enrollment and other trends presented in “The Arts Data Pilot at the University of Michigan” (2023) and the follow-up report “The Arts at the University of Michigan: A Benchmarking Report” (2025), especially for readers unfamiliar with the landscape of the arts in higher education.

Education in the arts¹¹ has always been foundational to both cultural progress and personal development. A diverse range of disciplines, from fine arts and music to humanities and liberal arts, offers students opportunities for creative expression, intellectual growth, and cultural exploration. However, the landscape of education in the arts is undergoing significant transformations influenced by a variety of factors, ranging from enrollment trends to financial challenges.

One of the notable shifts in higher education in the arts revolves around changing enrollment trends, particularly in humanities and liberal arts programs. These disciplines, once considered fundamental to a well-rounded education, have faced declining enrollments in recent years.

Factors contributing to this decline include economic considerations, the growing focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, challenges in acquiring financial aid that is increasing tied to early-career salary levels, and shifting career priorities among students. While enrollment trends can provide insights into the evolving preferences of students, they also raise questions about the future of education in the arts and the broader implications for society.

Furthermore, the impact of economic recessions on the arts cannot be ignored. Historical analysis reveals that past recessions, such as the Great Recession (2008), have influenced government funding for the arts, grant availability, and job market prospects for arts graduates. These economic downturns have

raised questions about the resilience and sustainability of arts programs in times of financial hardship. Lastly, the rising costs of tuition in higher education have profound implications for education in the arts. Tuition increases can act as a barrier to entry for prospective arts students, affecting both enrollment and the diversity of students pursuing arts degrees. The burden of student debt, in particular, presents challenges for arts graduates and can influence their career choices.

This paper aims to explore many of these issues within the context of education in the arts, drawing on existing data and research to provide an insightful overview of the challenges, transformations, and opportunities facing the field. By delving into each of these areas, we seek to shed light on the multifaceted nature of education in the arts and offer recommendations for policymakers and institutions to ensure the arts remain central to education in an ever-changing landscape.

Literature Review and Background

Arts and Humanities in General Education

General education requirements at U.S. colleges and universities, especially regarding arts and humanities course offerings, have seen steady decline in recent decades. Overall, the trend has been toward reducing or streamlining these requirements, raising concerns about diminished arts exposure for students not majoring in those fields. For example, in early 2024, the California State University system approved a new general education transfer pathway that cuts the mandated arts and humanities courses from three to two for incoming students¹². Such reforms, often aimed at easing credit loads or improving transfer efficiency, mean that many undergraduates can now complete general education with fewer humanities or arts classes and fewer options. National

surveys likewise indicate that many institutions allow students to bypass traditional liberal arts core subjects. As of 2019, fewer than half of U.S. colleges required a broad literature course as part of their core curriculum (only 32% did)¹³, and only 18% required a U.S. history or government course. In practice, most general education programs give students a menu of humanities/arts options and do not require specific foundational courses in arts or culture¹⁴. Qualitatively, this reflects a shift away from prescriptive “Great Books” or survey courses: colleges increasingly emphasize student choice or career-aligned subjects in the core, sometimes at the expense of broad arts exposure.

The implications for student exposure to the arts are significant.

With leaner general education mandates, a science or business major today could conceivably graduate having taken minimal coursework in visual arts, music, literature, or history beyond high school. Higher education leaders have voiced concern that arts and humanities are becoming peripheral in the undergraduate experience¹⁵. A joint 2018 statement by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and American Association of University Professors (AAUP) noted that studying “forms of human expression” is too often construed as nonessential or “frivolous,” after several universities announced eliminations of liberal arts departments¹⁶.

In short, arts course requirements have generally decreased or become more flexible in the past six years, which can shrink the arts exposure of non-majors. Fewer general ed requirements in these areas means fewer touchpoints for students to engage with the arts unless they seek them out. Indeed, provosts nationwide report pressure to prioritize career-focused STEM and professional programs over general liberal arts education¹⁷. While this streamlining can help students graduate faster or with less debt, it also risks creating a cohort of graduates with little experience in creative or humanistic modes of thinking. Some educators argue that this trend could produce graduates who lack a well-rounded perspective, unless other mechanisms (electives,

minors, double majors, etc.) compensate for the reduced arts exposure.

Arts & Humanities Education and Workforce Preparation

Paradoxically, even as fewer college students take arts and humanities courses, research continues to affirm the unique value of arts/humanities education for career preparation. A growing body of evidence since 2018 highlights that training in the arts and humanities fosters cognitive and holistic skills highly sought by employers. The National Academies’ landmark 2018 report *Branches from the Same Tree* warned that over-specialization in one field can leave graduates ill-prepared for the modern workforce, whereas an integrative education including arts and humanities best equips students for the “challenges and opportunities” of work and civic life¹⁸. The report found widespread agreement among leaders and employers that qualities like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and continuous learning are increasingly in demand – and importantly, “those skills are strengthened by the arts and humanities”¹⁹. In other words, studying painting or literature is not a detour from career preparation; it actively builds versatile skills (creative thinking, empathy, adaptability) that complement technical knowledge.

Empirical studies from the past six years reinforce this point. Employer surveys consistently show that broad skills associated with liberal arts education are critical for career success. In a 2021 national survey of nearly 500 hiring managers, 9 in 10 employers agreed that students who have been exposed to a wide variety of academic disciplines (not just job-specific training) are important to their organization's success²⁰. The top skills employers rated as "very important" included critical thinking, complex problem-solving, teamwork, and clear communication²¹ – all hallmarks of arts and humanities training.

Notably, creativity and adaptability have emerged as key differentiators in the age of automation and AI. A 2022 analysis by MIT Open Learning observed that "employers are increasingly demanding the human skills that liberal arts institutions teach... Critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, comfort with ambiguity, and systems thinking are core components of a liberal arts education."²² This aligns with reports from industry: major surveys (e.g., by NACE and AAC&U) find that employers value candidates who can think creatively and work in diverse teams over those with narrowly technical skill sets²³. In short, the skills nurtured through arts and humanities – the ability to analyze complex human situations, communicate nuanced ideas, adapt to new contexts, observe closely, or innovate

– are not just "nice-to-have" skills but essential workforce competencies in the current economy²⁴.

Education in the arts also cultivates less tangible skills that yield concrete professional benefits. For instance, studies in medical training show that integrating the arts can sharpen students' observational acuity and empathy, qualities directly applicable to patient care. In 2018, a randomized study found that first-year medical students who underwent formal art observation training had significantly improved clinical observation skills compared to those who did not²⁵. Recognizing this, a number of U.S. medical schools now require or offer humanities coursework to foster "skills that are essential to good clinical care, including observation, critical thinking, and empathy"²⁶. This example illustrates in microcosm what employers across fields report more broadly: the arts and humanities inculcate a mindset of careful observation, creativity, and human-centered thinking. Graduates with such a mindset are better prepared to interpret complex, ambiguous situations in the workplace and devise innovative solutions – whether that means diagnosing an illness, designing a user-friendly product, or leading a diverse team.

Enrollment and Degree Trends in Arts and Humanities

Declining Humanities and Arts Enrollment

National data show a continued **downward trajectory** in student enrollment for arts and humanities disciplines in recent years. After 2012, humanities majors were already in decline, and this trend persisted into the 2020s²⁷. In fact, the number of humanities bachelor's degrees conferred fell below 200,000 in 2020 for the first time since the early 2000s²⁸. The decline accelerated through the pandemic period – dropping 7.3% from 2021 to 2022 alone – reaching just 179,000 humanities B.A. degrees in 2022²⁹. By that year, the humanities (often grouped with liberal arts disciplines) accounted for only 8.8% of all bachelor's degrees, down from 13.1% in 2012 – roughly a one-third reduction in share³⁰. Similar patterns are observed at the graduate level: master's and doctoral completions in humanities fields fell substantially over the past decade. Even with a brief post-COVID uptick, 2022 saw about 27,137 humanities master's/professional degrees (down ~17% from 2012 levels) and around 5,110 humanities PhDs (down 14% from the mid-2010s peak)³¹. These figures underscore a *sustained decline* in humanities and arts participation among U.S. college students.

Comparing Enrollment Trends Across Fields

The contraction in arts and humanities stands in stark contrast to enrollment trends in other fields like STEM, business, and health. Even before 2020, students were increasingly gravitating toward technical and professional majors. For example, between 2012 and 2020 the number of undergraduate degrees in engineering and health sciences surged by over 56%, even as humanities degrees declined by ~16%³². This divergence has only grown in the 2020–2025 period. In the 2021–22 academic year, U.S. colleges awarded roughly 375,000 bachelor's degrees in business and 263,800 in health professions – far outpacing the total for all humanities disciplines that year (about 179,000)³³. Likewise, computer science and engineering programs have continued to expand. In fall 2023, enrollment in computer and information science majors jumped by 10–13% (at both bachelor's and master's levels), whereas liberal arts and humanities programs saw another 2.2% drop among bachelor's students³⁴. Fields tied to clear career pathways – business, STEM, and healthcare – have not only maintained their large share of students but in many cases have grown during this period, while liberal arts and creative arts majors struggled to

attract the same numbers. By 2022, the humanities' share of degrees had sunk to under 1 in 10, whereas science and engineering-related fields made up roughly 38% of bachelor's degrees nationwide³⁵. These comparisons highlight how students' choices have shifted decisively toward fields perceived as more applied or technical, at the expense of traditional arts and humanities disciplines.

Pandemic-Era Fluctuations and a Brief Stabilization

The COVID-19 pandemic initially disrupted higher education across the board, but it did not fundamentally reverse the decline in humanities and arts enrollment. Early in the pandemic, overall undergraduate enrollment dropped sharply (e.g. -3.5% in fall 2021 nationally) as many students postponed college³⁶. Humanities programs largely shared in these losses rather than being spared by any renewed interest. However, there were a few temporary signs of stabilization amid the turbulence. For instance, community college liberal arts programs – which had seen steep enrollment declines of about -11.7% in fall 2020 and -9.1% in 2021 – nearly stabilized by fall 2022, posting only a 0.1% decline that year³⁷. This leveling off at two-year colleges suggests that the worst losses for general liberal arts enrollment may have bottomed

out as the immediate shock of the pandemic passed. At the graduate level, humanities doctorate production even saw a minor rebound: the number of humanities PhDs rose ~9% from 2021 to 2022, a partial recovery after a COVID-related drop the year before³⁸. Despite these momentary upticks, the broader trend remains one of decline. By 2023, as overall college attendance began to inch back up, arts and humanities enrollments were still lagging. The slight post-pandemic improvements were not enough to offset longer-term losses – they served only to pause or slow the decline briefly, rather than reverse it. In sum, the pandemic period offered a short-lived plateau in some humanities and liberal arts enrollments, but any stabilization proved temporary against the prevailing downward momentum.

Students' choices have shifted decisively toward fields perceived as more applied or technical, at the expense of traditional arts and humanities disciplines.

Student Priorities: Jobs, Earnings, and Global Competition

The persistent shift away from humanities and arts majors can be linked to student and societal concerns about career outcomes. In an era of rising tuition and economic uncertainty, students (and their

families) are increasingly focused on the return on investment of a degree. STEM, business, and health fields are often viewed as providing more direct paths to stable jobs and higher salaries, which makes those majors more attractive. Employment data bear out some of these perceptions: humanities graduates, while gaining valuable skills, on average earn less and face slightly higher unemployment than graduates in business or certain STEM fields³⁹.

This earnings gap, widely publicized, reinforces the idea that liberal arts degrees carry more financial risk. Moreover, national policy discussions have placed heavy emphasis on STEM education as key to U.S. global competitiveness in technology and innovation. From the rise of artificial intelligence to strategic workforce investments, the public narrative often suggests that the nation needs more engineers, scientists, and health professionals – and many students are responding to that signal⁴⁰. One recent analysis notes that a mix of market changes, the boom in AI, and legislative support for technical training is “steering the younger generation” toward STEM-oriented paths⁴¹.

In this climate, humanities and arts may be perceived as luxuries or less *practical* pursuits. University leaders and policymakers have also questioned the viability of some liberal arts programs, further sending the message that STEM and professional fields are the safer bet for a secure career. All of

these factors – concerns about job security, relative earnings, and the push for skills aligned with a high-tech economy – are converging to influence student behavior. As of the editing of this report, proliferating trends in legislation tie financial aid to degrees with higher initial salary acquisition, despite considerations of life-long earnings and intangible benefits.

Overall, the decline in humanities and arts enrollment is a national trend driven by rational choices in the face of economic pressures and policy priorities. It presents a challenge for educators and leaders who value the broad benefits of liberal arts training. As the data show, without intervention or a change in perceptions, arts and humanities fields will likely continue to lose ground to STEM, business, and health sectors, raising important questions about how to balance workforce needs with a well-rounded education in the coming years⁴².

Financial Pressures and Student Decision-Making

The declining enrollment in education in the arts is influenced by a complex interplay of factors that affect students' decision-making processes and the overall landscape of higher education. Two significant factors that play a pivotal role in shaping these trends are economic considerations and the impact of double majors.

Job Prospects and ROI Perceptions: Arts vs. STEM

Economic factors are frequently cited as a driver of declining enrollment in arts and humanities programs. Students and families increasingly weigh the cost of higher education against the perceived return on investment (ROI) of different majors. Rising tuition prices, concerns about job prospects, and the burden of student loan debt can all influence students to pursue fields seen as more practical or lucrative. This dynamic has led to the perception of weaker job prospects and ROI in the arts compared to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. STEM majors are often seen as more “marketable” in the job market, leading to stable employment and higher starting salaries, whereas humanities or arts majors are sometimes stereotyped as leading to underemployment. Salary statistics do show substantial

differences in early-career earnings. For example, recent data indicate engineering graduates have the highest median earnings for bachelor's degree holders (around \$88,000), whereas graduates in the arts and humanities fields typically earn a median in the mid-\$50,000s⁴³. In one analysis of lifetime ROI by major, fields like computer science and engineering were estimated to yield over \$500,000 in net lifetime earnings advantage, whereas majors such as fine arts or English showed much smaller financial returns, in some cases near zero when factoring in tuition costs⁴⁴. Such comparisons, often highlighted by media and policymakers, reinforce the view that choosing a STEM or business major is a better financial bet than pursuing the arts⁴⁵. Many students internalize these trends, worrying that an arts degree might not lead to a good job or salary. The result is a shift in student interest toward majors perceived as offering higher ROI, to ensure that the significant investment in college pays off in tangible economic terms.

Student Loan Debt and Financial Pressures

The influence of rising student debt further amplifies these economic considerations. College graduates today face record levels of educational debt – as of 2023,

Americans owe over \$1.7 trillion in student loans collectively⁴⁶. The average debt per borrower has jumped ~39% from 2008 to 2022, reflecting how students are borrowing more as tuition outpaces family incomes⁴⁷. This heavy debt burden means students must think about their ability to repay loans after graduation. Fields with lower expected salaries may be seen as impractical for a student worried about debt. Indeed, anecdotal reports suggest some students avoid humanities and arts majors because they fear “they will not be able to pay back their student loans” if they don’t enter a high-paying profession⁴⁸. In this climate, a major’s perceived paycheck potential becomes a crucial factor in academic choices. The need to manage future loan payments can push students away from less remunerative fields – even if they have interest or talent in those areas – simply as a form of financial risk management. In summary, mounting student loan pressures often steer students toward fields like STEM or finance, where they believe they’ll have a better chance to quickly secure a well-paying job and comfortably service their debt.

Impact of Economic Recessions on Arts Degree Attainment

Economic recessions have periodically reshaped student behavior and institutional support

for the arts. Past downturns provide insight into how financial crises influence arts education.

Great Recession (2007–2009): Enrollment Shifts and Field Choices

Economic distress during the Great Recession reshaped college enrollment patterns in the arts. Overall, college-going rose as job prospects dimmed – recessions lower the opportunity cost of schooling, pushing more people to enroll or stay in school⁴⁹. Federal financial aid expanded sharply to support this influx; for example, Pell Grant funding grew 32% from 2006 to 2009, enabling many low-income students to afford college despite the recession⁵⁰. However, students often steered away from arts and humanities majors in favor of “practical” fields. Research shows that during periods of high unemployment, both women and men shifted into career-oriented majors (business, nursing, engineering, etc.) and away from fields like literature, history, and the arts⁵¹. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, enrollment in humanities and arts programs “fell off a cliff,” as students tried (perhaps misguidedly) to improve job prospects by choosing non-arts majors⁵². As a result, the share of undergraduates completing traditional arts or humanities degrees dropped markedly after 2008 and never fully rebounded⁵³.

Fine arts majors were particularly impacted. One cross-sectional study of U.S. graduates found a significant decline in the proportion of students completing degrees in “traditional” fine arts fields during and after the Great Recession⁵⁴. At the same time, there was a rise in students choosing “related creative fields” – more applied arts disciplines with clearer career paths⁵⁵. For instance, some students who might have pursued painting or music turned to graphic design, communications, or architecture. Architecture programs, in particular, bucked the negative trends: analyses indicate that architecture and related professions saw only minimal enrollment declines (around 1%) compared to the steep drops in other majors⁵⁶. This resilience likely owes to architecture’s vocational nature and perceived stability. Despite a tough construction job market post-2008 (new architecture graduates faced nearly 14% unemployment at the time⁵⁷), students continued to view architecture as a professional career path worth pursuing.

Arts-career data show that architecture majors tended to stay in their field at much higher rates than fine arts majors – one study found architecture majors were 185% more likely to remain in an arts career (be “stayers” vs “leavers”) compared to fine arts majors⁵⁸. This suggests a stronger expectation of career payoff, which may have sustained enrollment in architecture programs even amid economic uncertainty.

Student Adaptations: Double Majors and Delayed Entry to the Workforce

Another notable trend during the Great Recession was students “hedging” their arts education with additional credentials. Recession-era arts students were far more likely to double-major or pursue advanced degrees than those who graduated before the downturn⁵⁹. A recent peer-reviewed analysis confirms that arts graduates in the recession cohort disproportionately added second majors and enrolled in graduate programs⁶⁰. By pairing a fine arts degree with another field (for example, combining studio art with arts education or literature), students sought to broaden their skill sets and job options. Indeed, the likelihood of completing a double major increased significantly for arts students graduating during/after 2008⁶¹. Many also chose to “ride out” the weak job market in graduate school, often with the help of loans or expanded financial aid. This use of financial aid to delay entry into a harsh labor market was common across higher education in 2008–09⁶², and arts majors were no exception. In short, faced with anemic employment prospects, arts students leveraged education through dual majors, MFA programs, etc., to enhance their credentials until the economy improved.

These adaptations had mixed outcomes. On one hand, additional education helped some arts graduates pivot to other

careers or bolster their earnings. On the other hand, the arts labor market still suffered. Unemployment among arts majors spiked into the double digits after 2008, and many graduates ended up underemployed. Research led by Joanna Woronkiewicz documented that the Great Recession pushed many artists into precarious employment or out of the arts entirely. Using national survey data, Woronkiewicz found the downturn increased both unemployment and self-employment for artists, as traditional jobs dried up⁶³. Many artists had to cobble together freelance gigs or leave their artistic occupation for non-arts work or inactivity.

Such trends alarmed researchers and policymakers: losing trained artists due to economic pressure can erode the country's cultural workforce. As Paulsen notes, the recession's impacts – fewer arts majors and more career instability – likely hurt the “pipeline” of future artists, reducing the supply of creative talent in subsequent years⁶⁴. These findings underscore a key policy concern: economic downturns can cause a lasting talent drain in fields like fine arts, unless mitigated by support for emerging artists.

COVID-19 Recession (2020): Disruptions and Enrollment Declines

The brief but sharp COVID-era recession in 2020 presented a different set of challenges for arts education. Unlike 2008–09, when

college enrollment climbed, 2020 saw overall college enrollment fall as the pandemic disrupted campuses nationwide. Many students deferred or canceled plans amid health fears and financial strain. Arts programs were especially hard hit in fall 2020: performing arts classes moved online, exhibitions were canceled, and hands-on learning became difficult⁶⁵. National data show undergraduate enrollment dropped about 3.5% in fall 2020, with community colleges seeing the largest exodus⁶⁶. Liberal arts and general studies programs suffered some of the steepest declines. For example, at two-year colleges, the Liberal Arts/General Studies enrollments plunged ~12% in a single year (the largest decline among major fields)⁶⁷. Fine and performing arts majors also declined as students reconsidered the value of an arts degree under pandemic conditions (some questioning paying full tuition for virtual studio classes⁶⁸).

Not all indicators were negative – in some cases, the creative fields showed resilience. Enrollments in certain digital media, design, and architecture programs held steady, as those could adapt to remote instruction more easily. Early 2021 data suggested that while enrollment in traditional humanities majors continued to drop, some arts-related majors (like communications or graphic design) were relatively stable or even increased in popularity⁶⁹. And notably, graduate enrollment rose during the COVID recession (up ~3.6% in fall 2020) as many college grads, including those in

the arts, opted to pursue master's degrees instead of entering a frozen job market⁷⁰. In effect, COVID-19 replicated the Great Recession's counter-cyclical enrollment pattern to an extent, with students delaying workforce entry, but the unique constraints of the pandemic (remote learning, closed theaters and studios) made it a particularly challenging time for arts education. College arts faculties responded by innovating (e.g., virtual performances, lending equipment for home use⁷¹), helping to retain students where possible. By 2021–2022, as the economy and campuses reopened, arts enrollments began to recover, though it will take time to assess long-term effects.

Motivations for Arts Degrees in Hard Times: Beyond Passion

Despite economic headwinds, a core contingent of students continued to pursue arts degrees during these recessions, driven by motivations deeper than simple love of art. It is important not to portray these decisions as naive or purely passion-driven. Many such students view the arts as a *vocation* – a calling to contribute creatively to society – and consciously choose an arts path to fulfill a mission. Interviews and surveys find that arts students are often motivated by a sense of purpose or social contribution: they believe their creative work can educate, inspire, and engage communities, especially in times of crisis. For example, during economic

downturns, some students express a desire to address social issues through art, whether by preserving culture, telling untold stories, or providing solace and commentary amid hardship.

This “arts vocation” mindset frames an arts degree as a form of service or *creative research*, using aesthetic inquiry to explore and improve the human condition, rather than as a luxury.

Moreover, intrinsic motivations (intellectual curiosity, desire for creative expression) frequently intersect with civic-minded goals. Arts majors in tough times often talk about engagement and impact: they plan to teach art in under-resourced schools, develop community art programs, or produce works that stimulate dialogue and healing. In their view, the arts hold social and cultural value that is especially critical when society is under stress. Such students are willing to take on the risks of an arts career because they see their work as meaningful labor, not just a personal hobby. This perspective was reflected in how many arts graduates responded to the 2008 downturn – even as some peers left the field, those who remained did so out of commitment to their craft and its importance⁷². Researcher Woronkowitz and others have highlighted these dynamics, noting that artists who “stayed” through the recession often did so out of dedication to an artistic identity or community mission, despite financial challenges. This

sense of duty to the arts community explains why arts enrollment never vanished entirely: a resilient group pursued their creative education as *mission-driven*, hoping to emerge ready to enrich society when better times returned.

Across both the Great Recession and the COVID recession, arts education has shown a mixture of vulnerability and resilience. Quantitatively, economic downturns correlate with dips in arts enrollment and shifts toward career-oriented majors, as in the significant post-2008 decline in arts/humanities degrees⁷³ and the 2020 enrollment falloff in liberal arts programs⁷⁴. Qualitatively, recessions spur arts students to adapt: doubling up majors, prolonging their studies, or re-focusing on creative subfields that promise steadier employment⁷⁵. Fine arts programs felt the brunt

of these pressures, while fields like architecture and design often fared better by offering a clearer professional payoff⁷⁶. The motivations of students who do enter the arts under these conditions tend to be grounded in a *vocational ethos* – a commitment to creative engagement and societal contribution that outweighs short-term economic logic.

Ultimately, the story of arts education under economic pressure is one of contraction but also conviction. Even in the worst economies, a dedicated cohort of arts students persists, propelled by more than passion—by a resolve to develop their creative gifts and serve society. They ensure that the arts continue through the lean times, and flourish in—and contribute to—the recovery.

Career Outcomes for Arts Graduates

Comparative Earnings of Arts Graduates vs. Other Fields

Recent data underscore substantial earnings differences between arts graduates and those in fields like STEM and business. The U.S. Census Bureau's Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) data show that arts majors tend to have the lowest early-career salaries among broad fields of study. For example, one multi-state

analysis found that one year after graduation, arts graduates earned roughly **\$26,500** on average – nearly 60% less than graduates in the highest-paying majors (engineering, computing, etc. at about **\$65,700** in year-one earnings)⁷⁷. By ten years out, arts alumni were averaging around **\$48,800** annually, compared to over **\$93,000** for top-earning fields (a gap of ~48%)⁷⁸. However the earnings gap can **narrow with time and advanced study**. Studies indicate that as careers progress (or with graduate degrees), liberal arts

majors do close some of the earnings gap with STEM majors⁷⁹. Still, even mid-career, arts graduates on average remain on the lower end of the pay scale relative to other fields⁸⁰. These comparative earnings figures are crucial for policymakers and students to consider when evaluating the return on investment of arts education.

Career Alignment and Job Satisfaction for Arts Alumni

Despite lower pay, arts graduates often find employment that **aligns with their field of training**, and they report generally positive career satisfaction. According to the 2022 Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) survey – a large nationwide survey of arts and design alumni – a majority are leveraging their arts education in their jobs. About **56%** of arts alumni in the workforce identify their occupation as an *arts or design-related job* (including roles in design, performing arts, art education, etc.)⁸¹. Even more (approximately **75%**) say they perform **arts/design duties as part of their work**, even if their official job title is outside the arts⁸². In fact, nearly half of arts graduates (47%) consider their current career to be “closely related” to their arts field of study, and 46% report that they “very much” utilize the skills and abilities from their arts training in their work⁸³. This suggests that many arts alumni find pathways to apply

their creative skillsets, whether in the creative industries proper or in adjacent fields.

Crucially, arts alumni tend to be satisfied with their careers on non-monetary dimensions. SNAAP 2022 data show that about 60% of arts alumni are very satisfied with their degree of independence at work⁸⁴. Similarly, a majority are very satisfied with their job security (around 57%) and the creative or intellectual challenge their work provides⁸⁵. Opportunities for creativity and alignment with personal values are especially fulfilling for those in arts-related roles⁸⁶.

However, satisfaction is lower when it comes to pay and advancement: only roughly **30%** of arts graduates are very satisfied with their **earnings or opportunities for career advancement**⁸⁷. (In other words, about two-thirds feel less than “very” satisfied with their current pay prospects.) This trade-off – high fulfillment and relevance of work vs. lower financial reward – is a recurring theme in arts career outcomes. Even so, overall job satisfaction remains reasonably high for arts alumni. Most indicate that having an arts degree has been important to their career progression, and they continue to engage in creative practice at high rates, pointing to strong intrinsic motivation in their career choices⁸⁸. These findings suggest that while arts graduates may not be earning top salaries, they often find meaningful employment related to their studies

and derive substantial personal and professional satisfaction from their work.

Student Debt and Financial Outcomes for Arts Graduates

Student debt levels among arts graduates tend to be moderate. Data from one large arts college (UT Austin College of Fine Arts) show 48% of arts alumni graduated with no debt (solid orange) and 62% had less than \$20,000 in loans (striped + solid)⁸⁹. Nationally, the undergraduate arts alumni average is 34% with no debt and 49% with under \$20k owed⁹⁰.

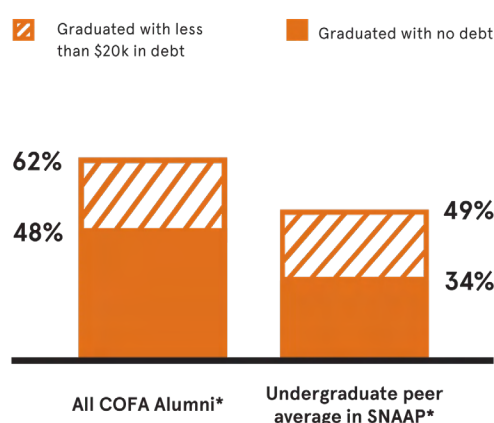


Figure 11.3. Student debt of all UT Austin College of Fine Arts alumni compared with the undergraduate peer average in SNAAP. Image source: “College of Fine Arts 2022 SNAAP Data,” College of Fine Arts - The University of Texas at Austin, 2022

A common concern is that arts majors may end up financially strained by student loans while earning low salaries (“starving artist” trope). **Recent data do not support the notion that arts graduates are**

universally crippled by debt. In fact, arts alumni often have student debt loads comparable to or even lighter than other graduates. The 2022 SNAAP survey found that a significant share of arts students leave school with *manageable debt levels*. In a national sample, about **34%** of undergraduate arts alumni had **no student debt at all** upon graduation, and roughly 49% graduated with loans totaling less than \$20,000⁹¹. Combined, this implies that around four out of five arts graduates had zero or relatively low debt (under \$20k) when they finished their degrees. Only a minority borrowed more than \$20,000. The average student loan debt for college graduates nationwide often falls in the \$28k–\$30k range in recent years, so having 73% of arts grads with no debt or relatively low debt is notable. Moreover, arts alumni from some institutions fare even better: for example, at one large public arts college, 48% of arts majors graduated debt-free⁹². These statistics help counter the narrative that arts graduates are uniquely burdened by student loans. While individual circumstances vary, the data suggest that most arts degree holders are not incurring outsized education debt relative to their earnings. Additionally, many arts alumni pursue cost-saving strategies (such as working while in school, scholarships, or attending public institutions), which may contribute to these moderate debt outcomes. In sum, the typical arts graduate’s

financial situation – at least in terms of student debt – is often no worse than that of other graduates, and in some cases better, undermining the stereotype that an arts degree leads to unmanageable debt without economic payoff.

Employment Patterns and Career Trajectories in the Arts

Arts graduates tend to navigate unique employment patterns that reflect the nature of artistic work. Research supported by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and others highlights that only a fraction of arts degree holders follow a single, traditional career path in the arts. For instance, one analysis by Northeastern University researchers found that “only a small share of college graduates with majors in the arts” end up working primarily in occupations formally classified as artist jobs (e.g. painter, musician, actor, etc.)⁹³. Instead, the majority of arts alumni build careers in related fields or blended roles using their creative skills⁹⁴. Many find employment in education, design, media, arts management, or other sectors that draw on their arts background even if their job title isn’t “artist.” This broad dispersion across industries means the career pipeline for arts grads is more fluid and diverse than a direct path to being a professional artist.

Another hallmark of arts career trajectories is a relatively high degree

of self-employment and “gig” work, which can affect job stability. By their nature, arts professions often involve freelance projects, short-term contracts, or entrepreneurship. National labor statistics show that artists are about 3.6 times more likely to be self-employed than the average worker⁹⁵. The SNAAP survey similarly found that 75% of arts alumni have been self-employed at some point in their careers, with nearly 40% self-employed in 2022 alone⁹⁶. This includes freelance designers, independent artists, small business owners, and performers – reflecting an entrepreneurial career model. While self-employment offers flexibility and creative control, it can also mean income uncertainty. Many arts graduates juggle multiple jobs or projects to piece together a full-time living⁹⁷. It’s not uncommon for an artist to hold a day job (or several) alongside their creative practice. Research on creative labor markets notes that those who don’t land a stable full-time creative position often pursue a “portfolio career,” balancing artistic work with other paid roles⁹⁸. This can lead to periods of underemployment or irregular income, a concept often referred to as the precarious nature of artistic work. Indeed, studies have found that arts-related jobs tend to pay less on average than non-arts jobs, contributing to financial pressure on graduates who stay in creative occupations⁹⁹.

Despite these challenges, career outcomes for arts graduates are not uniformly negative. Many

arts alumni find ways to sustain their creative careers over the long term. Some combine arts-related jobs (for example, teaching arts classes plus doing freelance creative projects) to create synergies that extend their time in the field¹⁰⁰. Others transition into adjacent careers that offer more stability while still engaging their artistic passion on the side. Importantly, intrinsic rewards play a big role in these career decisions. Surveys and qualitative research emphasize that arts professionals derive strong non-monetary rewards

from their work – personal fulfillment, creative expression, autonomy, and a sense of purpose – which often offset the downsides of lower pay or job instability¹⁰¹. This helps explain why a large proportion of arts graduates remain in or near the arts sector over time. In the SNAAP 2022 survey, even among alumni well into their careers, 70% agreed that having an arts/design degree was important to advancing their career in the arts¹⁰², and many continue to practice their art form in some capacity.

Policy Analysis and Recommendations

Debt as a Barrier to Inclusion and Access

Despite the comparatively strong position that arts graduates have relative to other majors, they increasingly rely on loans to finance their education.

Escalating Student Debt among Arts Alumni

Arts students increasingly rely on loans to finance their education. Only about one-third of arts alumni graduated debt-free in recent cohorts, meaning nearly two-thirds left school with student loans¹⁰³. Prior SNAAP research confirms that debt levels for arts students have risen considerably in recent decades¹⁰⁴. (Nationally, student loan balances topped \$1.7 trillion by 2023¹⁰⁵, underscoring the broader context of rising debt.)

Debt Deterring Arts Careers

Mounting loans are pushing many arts graduates away from arts professions. A 2023 SNAAP analysis found that arts bachelor's graduates with over \$10,000 in student loan debt are significantly less likely to enter arts careers than those with no debt¹⁰⁶. In fact, arts alumni carrying substantial debt (>\$50k) are much more likely to leave arts-related jobs compared to peers with lower debt¹⁰⁷. This suggests that high debt “increases the amount of earned income needed to survive,” often forcing arts graduates to seek higher-paying non-arts jobs to repay loans¹⁰⁸.

Lower-paid creative work becomes less feasible under heavy debt obligations.

Impacts on Income and Job Satisfaction

Because arts careers generally yield lower early-career earnings than other fields, debt can be especially burdensome. (For example, previous studies have noted that full-time artists earn about 15% less than other professionals on average¹⁰⁹.) SNAAP researchers observed that education-job mismatch – e.g., an arts grad working in an unrelated higher-paying field – often comes at the cost of career satisfaction and well-being¹¹⁰. Many indebted arts alumni confront this trade-off. SNAAP data historically show that while arts alumni report high satisfaction in creative aspects of their work, they are far less satisfied with income and job security¹¹¹. Heavy student debt amplifies the tension between financial stability and pursuing artistic passions.

Equity and Access Concerns

Rising tuition and debt loads pose particular challenges

for students from less advantaged backgrounds, potentially worsening inequality in arts education. First-generation college students and those from lower-income families tend to borrow more and feel greater pressure to secure ROI from their degree. SNAAP findings underscore this: first-generation arts alumni **carry significantly higher loan debt relative to their incomes** than their continuing-generation peers¹¹². They are also **59% more likely to cite debt as a reason for leaving an arts career** than non-first-generation graduates¹¹³. Similarly, alumni of color often graduate with higher debt burdens, which can constrain their career choices¹¹⁴. One analysis suggests as many as **“80% of students who pursue the arts are from more affluent backgrounds,”** pointing to an underrepresentation of low-income students in arts programs¹¹⁵. In short, the high cost of an arts degree is becoming a barrier to diversity and access, as those without family resources either forgo arts paths or graduate with debt that steers them away from arts professions.

State Trends: Financial Aid Restrictions for “In-Demand” Majors

Between 2020 and 2025, some U.S. states have considered or enacted policies tying public financial aid to majors deemed workforce-aligned or “high-demand,” a trend that often de-prioritizes arts and humanities degrees. Key examples include:

Florida's Bright Futures Proposal (2021)

In 2021, Florida lawmakers introduced Senate Bill 86, which sought to restrict state scholarships based on a student's major. The bill proposed that the state create an approved list of degree programs that “*lead directly to employment.*” Students not in an approved major would receive only half of the usual Bright Futures scholarship funding (60 credit hours instead of 120)¹¹⁶. In effect, degrees in fields not on the workforce-aligned list – widely expected to include many arts and liberal arts majors – would be financially penalized¹¹⁷. Initial versions even suggested ineligible majors might get *no aid*¹¹⁸. (After significant public outcry and student protests, the proposal was softened to reduce rather than eliminate aid for “non-approved” majors¹¹⁹, but the intent signaled a clear deprioritization of arts/humanities disciplines.)

Texas Legislation on Low-ROI Degrees

In Texas, policymakers advanced measures to scrutinize or even cut funding for programs with poor debt-to-income outcomes. A 2023 Texas House bill (HB 281) would direct the state's Higher Education Board to “eliminate or sanction” degree programs if graduates commonly struggle to repay their student loans with their earnings¹²⁰. Similarly, in 2025, the Texas Senate passed SB 37, which requires universities to “sunset” majors that

do not offer a sufficient return on investment (ROI) in terms of post-graduation earnings¹²¹. While not explicitly naming fields, these efforts target degrees in which graduates have high debt and low salaries, for example, fine arts, music, theater, education, and other lower-paying social sciences. Arts programs would likely be among those flagged under such ROI criteria. These policies frame certain creative and academic majors as economically unjustifiable, putting them at a disadvantage for state support.

Workforce-Targeted Scholarships

A subtler trend is states channeling new aid programs into specific high-demand fields, implicitly sidelining other majors. For instance, in 2023, Utah created a scholarship for students training as mental health first responders, and Minnesota funded hundreds of scholarships for paramedic training¹²². While addressing workforce shortages (in health care, STEM, etc.), these targeted funds may mean less state investment in broad-based or arts-focused aid. The overall climate is one where public funding mechanisms (scholarships, grants, loan forgiveness) are increasingly tied to direct workforce outcomes. By definition, this approach tends to exclude many arts and design degrees, which may not fit a narrow “in-demand” definition despite the cultural and economic value of the creative sector.

In summary, the early 2020s have seen heightened scrutiny of majors not perceived as immediately job-ready. Arts and humanities programs have had to defend their value amid proposals to steer financial aid toward fields with clearer short-term earnings prospects¹²³. Such policies, if adopted widely

(which is part of federal legislation as this report is being edited), risk reducing access to arts education, especially for financially needy students, by making aid less available for those majors or even threatening the viability of certain arts programs in higher education.

Policy Recommendations for Affordable and Equitable Arts Education

To counter rising costs and ensure the arts remain accessible, a series of actionable policy measures can be pursued by higher education leaders and state policymakers:

Expand Need-Based Financial Aid

Bolster grant programs that support students with financial need, regardless of major. Increasing Pell Grants and state need-based scholarships will especially benefit arts students, who often rely on such aid to offset high tuition. For example, in 2023, Arkansas created a lottery-funded need-based scholarship that grows to \$5,000 by a student's senior year¹²⁴. Similar investments could be scaled up nationally, with guarantees that arts majors are fully eligible. Augmenting need-based aid levels (and indexing them to rising tuition) can reduce the loan burdens arts students carry and improve access for low-income and first-generation learners.

Regulate or Restrain Tuition Growth

Policymakers could consider tuition caps or freezes at public universities. State-imposed tuition freezes have become more common in recent years as a tool to improve college affordability¹²⁵. By limiting annual tuition hikes (or freezing tuition at current rates during budget-surplus years), states can prevent further escalation of the cost of an arts degree.

These policy steps can help preserve equity in arts education amid economic pressures. Ensuring that rising tuition and debt do not shut out talented creatives is crucial – not only for those individuals' career satisfaction and success, but for the cultural and creative vitality of society as a whole. By adopting targeted reforms in financial aid and tuition policy, states and institutions can keep the doors to arts education open wide, even in an era of mounting costs.

Conclusion

In summary, the data portray arts degree holders as highly engaged in the workforce – frequently in creative or culturally related roles – and achieving careers that prioritize creative satisfaction, even if accompanied by more modest and variable earnings. In addition, the career value of arts-based skills and capacities for students in non-arts fields is evident. This nuanced picture of alumni employment can inform higher education and workforce policy, helping to move beyond stereotypes toward a more evidence-based understanding of the value and outcomes of an arts degree.

Methodology

This report was developed through an iterative research and synthesis process incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data from national sources. Data was drawn from publicly available government databases (e.g., NCES, PSEO, NEA), institutional surveys (e.g., SNAAP), and peer-reviewed literature. The analytical framework employed includes trend analysis, policy evaluation, and comparative outcome assessment across academic disciplines.

In addition to traditional research methods, generative AI was used to support the drafting and organization of this document. The AI tool was employed to structure content, and ensure clarity in academic formatting. All data sources were fact-checked and verified by human researchers to ensure accuracy.

By Krithika Balaji

Editor: Maryrose Flanigan

Data visualization: Krithika Balaji

Citations: Earth Lyons

Internal Perspectives: Benchmarking for the Arts Initiative

“The arts’ job (is) to push the university, to challenge the present...through subject matter. (To) Imagine and develop projects that expand and stretch people’s understanding and to inform U-M.”

For this project we wanted to capture the collective insights of long-time “arts insiders,” some of which are currently informing new and ongoing efforts to improve and strengthen the arts at U-M.

Thirteen long-time U-M-Ann Arbor staff members—with an aggregate 100+ years’ experience guiding their respective departments and programs and serving as standard-bearers and advocates for the arts at Michigan—participated in interviews in 2024. The efforts of these leaders have undergirded the arts infrastructure at U-M for decades, resulting in the robust ecosystem which supports students, faculty, and the community, and from which the Arts Initiative emerged.

The interviews included questions regarding insights and impressions of the role of the arts at U-M, persistent and ongoing needs of arts units, and past and current impressions, impacts, and future of the Arts Initiative itself. A separate internal report was developed from some of these responses, and a general analysis of the participants’ answers yielded insights discussed earlier in this report. The following section is an in-depth analysis of participants’ understanding of the role of the arts at U-M, for use in benchmarking, case-making, planning, and reporting.

The order of responses in this section represents the frequency with which a topic was mentioned across interviewees, with most frequent first. Participant quotations help reinforce a particular topic’s meaning, inclusion, and ranking, and give readers the opportunity to experience reactions from these experts in their own words.

“(T)here’s been a sea change there in terms of... the role the arts can play.”

The role of the arts at U-M is as a(n):

A. Platform for Feeling, Expressing, and Understanding

The arts at U-M create a navigable platform for enhancing and expanding thinking, feeling, expressing, information sharing, knowledge creation, problem-solving, inquiry and research, risk-taking, creative practice, cultural perspectives, and understanding historical context, modern society and the human experience. They provide the opportunity for new ideas and a broadening perspective, and help us make sense of the world.

“It is a space for contemplation and research where we can make sense of the time historically and in which we currently live.”

“I have always thought that the arts can bring a perspective that can enhance imagination, a perspective of looking at things differently...exposure can broaden a person's viewpoint.”

“The...scholarship, creative practice, research, and teaching around the arts is also fundamental to our mission [and are] absolutely essential in creating that new knowledge, that new creative practice that... new understanding of who we are as a culture, as a society, as a global community through the arts and culture.”

“(The arts role is as a) Point of connection for students and community outside of scholarship. Creates a space for thinking, feeling, and problem-solving. Is a safe way to navigate societal ideas as a community with disparate points of view. A portal for transmitting information. A different medium for exploration.”

“(T)he role of the arts is a channel of inquiry and a type of research and introspection.”

B. Pathway to Student Development and Experience

The arts at U-M are a vital avenue for students to develop themselves by broadening their viewpoints, presenting them with different perspectives, giving them access to supportive communities, promoting improved wellness and belonging. The arts provide ways for students to express themselves creatively, explore curricular objectives, develop new skills, and find their place in the world.

“(The arts are) Bringing in other cultural perspectives, not just the Western point of view. Helps students understand how they are situated in the world and how they view others. The only way to do that is through other cultures.”

“The arts inform student skills, giving them different insights into problems like climate change and politics. (The) Arts give you (the) ability to look from a different perspective.”

“Creative force for helping people—bettering themselves and bettering collaboration.”

“The arts are absolutely essential to the Michigan experience for students... absolutely essential (to) the cultural fabric, the social interactions, co-curricular learning ... an essential student experience at the university.”

“(The arts) Open different modes of learning for students and researchers that are more relational and less transactional, discovering new methodologies with the arts as valuable through integrative experience.”

“The arts inform student skills, giving them different insights into problems like climate change and politics.”

C. Avenue for Engagement with Challenging Subject Matter

The arts at U-M are an important presenter, promoter, and engagement mechanism for challenging subject matter, diverse cultural perspectives, and both historical and current social issues for the greater good.

“(The role of the arts is) Finding solutions to difficult issues and reconciling historical and current injustices.”

“The arts’ job (is) to push the university, to challenge the present...through subject matter. (To) Imagine and develop projects that expand and stretch people’s understanding and to inform U-M.”

“(The arts give an) Opportunity to speak to complicated issues. Artists communicate in ways others are afraid [to].”

D. Support System for Community and Shared Communal Experiences

The arts at U-M serve as an essential platform for the community surrounding the U-M campus to promote social cohesion and to access resources and supportive infrastructure (facilities, technology, expertise, etc.). The arts serve as an important support for and connection to the community and to shared communal experiences.

“(T)he arts are also a channel for social cohesion for making sense of social problems and the way things happen in society and even on the campus... they are a channel for interpersonal relations.”

“The infrastructure at the U is publicly built and so it has to be publicly shared and that’s true with the arts as well. It’s kind of written into the description of a public university.”

“(Art) Is a safe way to navigate societal ideas as a community with disparate points of view.”

“They function for the greater good of the university and are the cultural fabric tying the community to U-M, UMS, UMMA. It is where the community engages with the U. Like football, the arts are the cultural “glue” and the front door to U-M. A white box gallery or a black box theater (for everyone to use).”

“(The arts at U-M are) huge resources for the community. Where else could I see the(se) kind of cultural programs, [and] exhibits? creates that infrastructure, that interest, that scholarly underpinning, and that built in audience that allows for us to have absolutely the world. On our doorstep and delivered to the community. So the university’s role of being a conduit of the world of the knowledge, the culture, the, the arts engagement of the world to the community in Southeast Michigan is imperative.”

E. Engine for Creativity, Innovation, and Experiential Learning across Disciplines

The arts at U-M are a driving engine for creativity and innovation, interdisciplinary initiatives, experiential learning, and collaborative team skills. They foster curiosity and excitement, and catalyze new ways of thinking and partnering in interdisciplinary problem-solving. They also teach important team collaboration and translation skills enhancing employment and research outcomes.

“I have always thought that the arts can bring a perspective that can enhance imagination, a perspective of looking at things differently...exposure can broaden a person’s viewpoint.”

“(An) Engine for creativity and innovation.”

“(The arts are a) Creative force for helping people – bettering themselves and bettering collaboration. (They allow people to) Imagine and develop projects that expand and stretch people’s understanding and to inform U-M.”

F. Essential and Integrated (Integrable) Enterprise across the University

The arts at U-M are an essential, central, and integrated enterprise operating across teaching, learning, and community life and experience.

“(The arts are) Beneficial for everything within and among disciplines, discovering new methodologies with the arts as valuable through integrative experience.”

“(It is a discipline which has under it many different disciplines. And the arts are uniquely able to be integrated into events, programs, research projects.”

“(Like to see (the arts) integrated into as many disciplines as possible. I mean, to see those connections that North Campus has with engineering and music and the arts, but, outside to get them also intertwined and integrated with standard academic disciplines to get (them) more integrated with the sciences.”

G. Integral Partner in Informing U-M Policies and Practice

The arts and arts practitioners at U-M collectively serve as an integral thought leader uniquely positioned to inform U-M policies and practice to ensure inclusion, equity, and courage.

“(A) space for thinking, feeling, and problem-solving. Is a safe way to navigate societal ideas as a community with disparate points of view.”

“To be a leader at U-M thinking about the role and potential of [arts and design] impacting policy and making sense of the world. They are a place to take risks.”

“The arts’ job (is) to push the university, to challenge the present and through subject matter. Imagine and develop projects that expand and stretch people’s understanding and to inform U-M.”

By Deb Mexicotte

Thanks to faculty and staff interviewees.

Appendix A: Faculty/Staff Survey

Methodology

Survey

The survey begins with a broad and accommodating definition of the arts. All respondents were asked a set of questions about “The Arts in My Life” and a set about “The Arts at the University of Michigan.” Faculty were asked additional questions about their teaching and research as they relate to the arts, with one set of questions tailored to faculty in arts-designated units and another set for those in non-arts-designated units. There were questions in both multiple choice and open-ended formats. We incorporated select feedback from the Survey Research Center and from a group of pilot respondents into the survey design, and used more open-ended questions than is typical for this type of survey.

Sample

For this faculty/staff survey, it became important to distinguish which units are dedicated to the arts—units where the arts are explicitly part of the mission, faculty’s professional profiles, and the content of teaching, learning, research, and creative practice. We needed this distinction, first because arts-designated faculty and staff are in the minority and in assembling a sample we wanted to be sure their voices were heard. In addition, we wanted to surface the unique needs of arts faculty with a set of questions just for them.

This distinction creates a challenge for nomenclature. We understand that the arts permeate the lives of many faculty and staff, and we recognize that creativity, and even arts-based approaches and practices, are present in every domain and profession. As such, we have a level of discomfort with the labels “arts” and “non-arts,” as “non-arts” belies that range of arts identities and practices across the university. To describe these units, we use the terms “arts-designated” and “non-arts-designated,” and trust the reader will accept these reductive words in the limited context where they are used.

We designated the following units as “arts”:

- LSA: Lloyd Scholars for Writing and the Arts
- LSA: Residential College
- Engineering: Socially Engaged Design
- Engineering: ArtsEngine
- Taubman CA&UP: all units
- Arts Initiative
- Stamps School of Art & Design: all units
- School of Music, Theatre, & Dance: all units
- Museum of Art
- University Musical Society

We discovered some discrepancies in the way we designated faculty as arts or non-arts. Four faculty members report that they teach arts-related courses even though we designated their units as non-arts (in Medicine, LSA, and Engineering). Conversely, fourteen faculty from arts-designated units reported that they do not teach an arts-related course. Explanations for this discrepancy include not teaching such a course at the time of the survey (i.e., sabbatical), teaching an urban planning or technical course in Taubman, and teaching a humanities course in the Residential College.

We hoped to get 600 total responses. Therefore, with an expected 50% response rate from non-arts units and 60% response

rate from arts units, who we assumed would be more inclined to respond to the survey, we sent out 1100 surveys.

At U-M, for every arts faculty member, there are seventeen non-arts faculty members, and for every arts staff member, there are approximately 95 non-arts staff members.

Population	Faculty	Staff
Arts	533	403
Non-Arts	9,065	38,306

If we had used a proportionate allocated sample, we would have had too few cases from arts-designated units. Instead, we used a stratified random sample with the following allocation:

- 300 non-arts-designated faculty
- 250 arts-designated faculty
- 300 non-arts-designated staff
- 250 arts-designated staff

Faculty and staff in arts units are over-sampled; we compensated for this later using a weighted analysis of responses. U-M HR, under consultation by staff at the Institute for Social Research, provided our list of randomly sampled names. We distributed the survey via email, sending out weekly reminders.

Participation

After excluding respondents who completed less than 40% of the survey, we refined the dataset to 241 participants. As expected, participation was higher in arts-designated units, with the pool of respondents divided as follows:

- 40% arts-designated staff
- 18% non-arts-designated staff
- 27% arts-designated faculty
- 15% non-arts-designated faculty

Participation from faculty and staff in the School of Medicine and Michigan Medicine was nearly as high as that from arts-designated units. Write-in units (those who chose “other” because their unit was not offered as an option) were UMMA, UMS, University Libraries, Facilities and Operations, and the Arts Initiative.

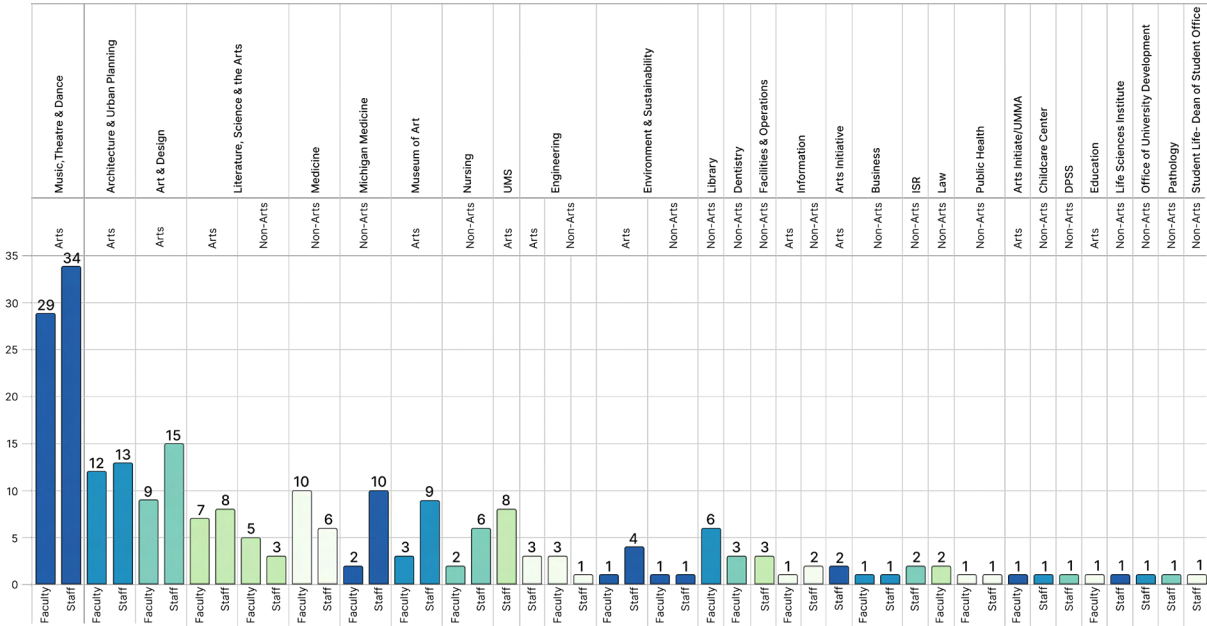


Figure A.1. Participation in the Arts Initiative/a2ru 2024 survey of U-M faculty and staff

Analysis

A weighted analysis was conducted on the survey data to address the over-representation of arts respondents. Initially, the survey received 295 responses, broken down as follows: 71 Faculty-Arts, 46 Faculty-Non-Arts, 122 Staff-Arts, and 56 Staff-Non-Arts. However, 54 respondents who had completed less than 40% of the survey were excluded, leaving a refined dataset of 241

respondents: 64 Faculty-Arts, 36 Faculty-Non-Arts, 97 Staff-Arts, and 44 Staff-Non-Arts.

Weighted analysis adjusts the influence of each group in the results, correcting for sampling biases. In this case, the arts respondents were over-represented, which could skew the results if uncorrected. By applying weights, we aimed to better represent the actual distribution of faculty and staff across arts and non-arts departments/units.

Steps for the Weighted Analysis:

Identify Population Totals:

- The total population for each group was identified as follows: 533 Faculty-Arts, 403 Faculty-Non-Arts, 9,065 Staff-Arts, and 38,306 Staff-Non-Arts.

Calculate Weights:

- Weights were calculated to adjust the influence of each group based on their actual representation in the total population. The weight for each group was determined by dividing the total population of that group by the number of respondents from that group in the survey.
- **Formula:**

$$\text{Weight} = \frac{\text{Total Population of Group}}{\text{Number of Respondents in Survey}}$$

Apply Weights:

- The calculated weights were then applied to the responses from each group. This involved multiplying the responses by their respective weights to ensure that the results reflected the actual distribution of the population.

Analyze Weighted Data:

- After applying the weights, the data was analyzed to draw conclusions that more accurately represented the broader population, correcting for the over-representation of arts respondents.

Open-ended responses were analyzed using bottom-up coding. In most cases, coding choices were checked by two researchers.

Appendix B: U-M Dearborn

Methodology

University of Michigan-Dearborn offers more than 100 options for majors and minors, from Computer and Information Science to Early Childhood Education and from Digital Marketing to Criminal Justice. We asked U-M Dearborn for enrollment data from Fall 2018 to Fall 2023 for six subject areas that were defined as arts-related for this report:

- ART – Applied Art
- ARTH – Art History
- CIS – Computer and Information Science (game design)
- JASS – Journalism and Screen Studies
- MAPP – Applied Music
- ENGL – English

This spreadsheet also included data for individual students enrolled in arts courses, including their majors and degrees. From these enrollment records, we analyzed arts course offerings from 2018 through fall 2023. We defined the scope of “arts and arts-related courses” based on the following individual courses:

- Applied Art (ART), Applied Music (MAPP), Art History (ARTH)
- English (ENGL) 223, 320, 321, 323, 328, 468
- Journalism and Screen Studies (JASS) 406
- Computer and Information Science (CIS) 587, 588
- Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE) 5251

(Note: ENGL 320, ENGL 321, and ECE 5251 were not active after Fall 2017.)

This data was processed and visualized using Excel for structured tabular analysis, Python for advanced computational techniques, and Tableau for interactive and dynamic visual storytelling.

Enrollment Trends

Trends in Arts Enrollment Across Majors

Students of all majors take advantage of arts courses. The series of graphs below show in greater detail the trends by major of how many and which arts courses they choose.

BSE (Engineering Majors)

- Roughly **4 in 10** engineering students taking arts courses are in Mechanical Engineering.
- Another **2 to 3** are in Electrical Engineering.
- **Popular Courses:** Architecture & Society, Understanding Art (Ancient to 1400 and 1400 to Now), Beginning Drawing.

The chart below highlights the top five Engineering Majors with the highest enrollment in art courses from 2018 to 2023, along with the corresponding enrollment figures for these courses.

Art Course Enrollment by Top 5 BSE Majors(2018-2023)

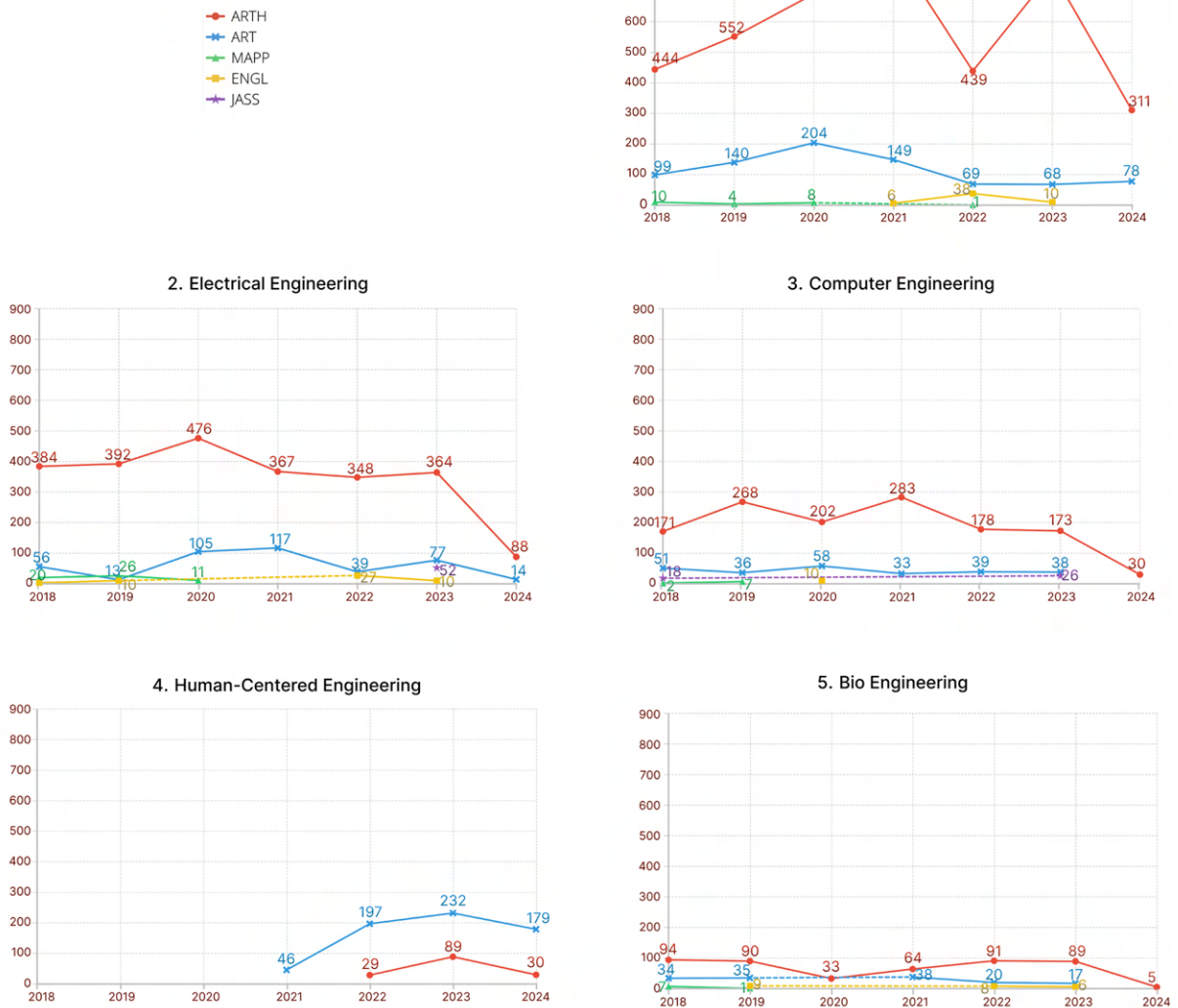


Figure B.1. Top five BSE majors by student enrollment in art courses (2018–2023)

BS (Science Majors)

- About **4 in 10** science majors taking arts courses are studying Biological Sciences
- **2 in 10** come from Computer Information Science.
- **Popular Courses:** Beginning Drawing, Understanding Art, Architecture & Society.

The chart below highlights the top five Science Majors with the highest enrollment in art courses from 2018 to 2023, along with the corresponding enrollment figures for these courses.

Art Course Enrollment by Top 5 BS Majors(2018-2023)



Figure B.2. Top five BS majors by student enrollment in art courses (2018–2023)

BBA (Business Majors)

- 1 in 4 are Marketing students
- Nearly 1 in 5 are in Accounting
- **Popular Courses:** Beginning Drawing, Architecture & Society, Class Piano I, Basic Design Color.

The chart below highlights the top five Business Majors with the highest enrollment in art courses from 2018 to 2023, along with the corresponding enrollment figures for these courses.

Art Course Enrollment by Top 5 BBA Majors(2018-2023)

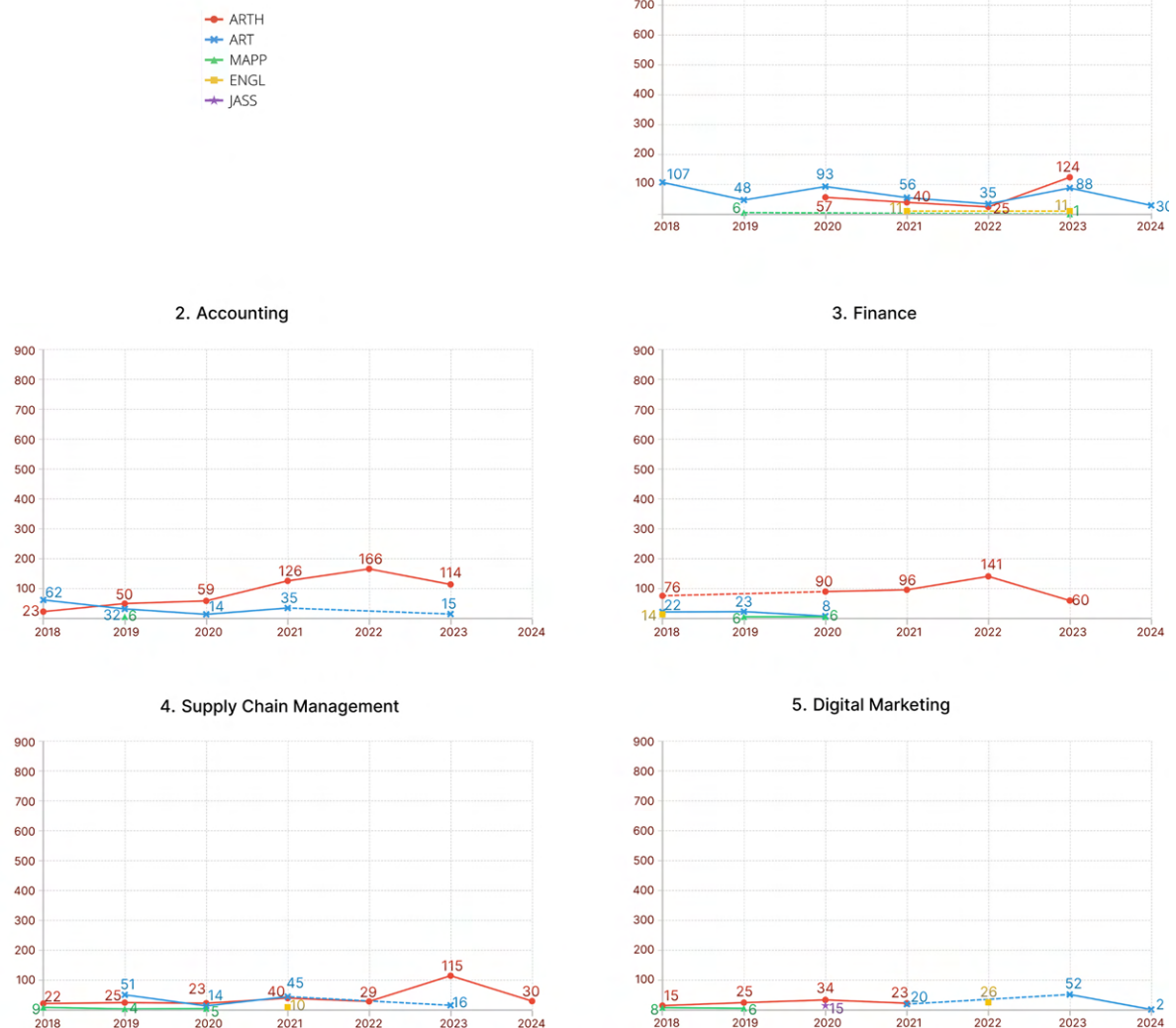


Figure B.3. Top five BBA majors by student enrollment in art courses (2018–2023)

AB (Arts & Humanities Majors)

- Psychology majors lead this group (2 to 3 in 10).
- Art History and English follow.
- **Popular Courses:** Beginning Drawing, Intro/Advanced Creative Writing, Beginning Painting.

The chart below highlights the top five Arts & Humanities Majors with the highest enrollment in art courses from 2018 to 2023, along with the corresponding enrollment figures for these courses.

Art Course Enrollment by Top 5 AB Majors(2018-2023)

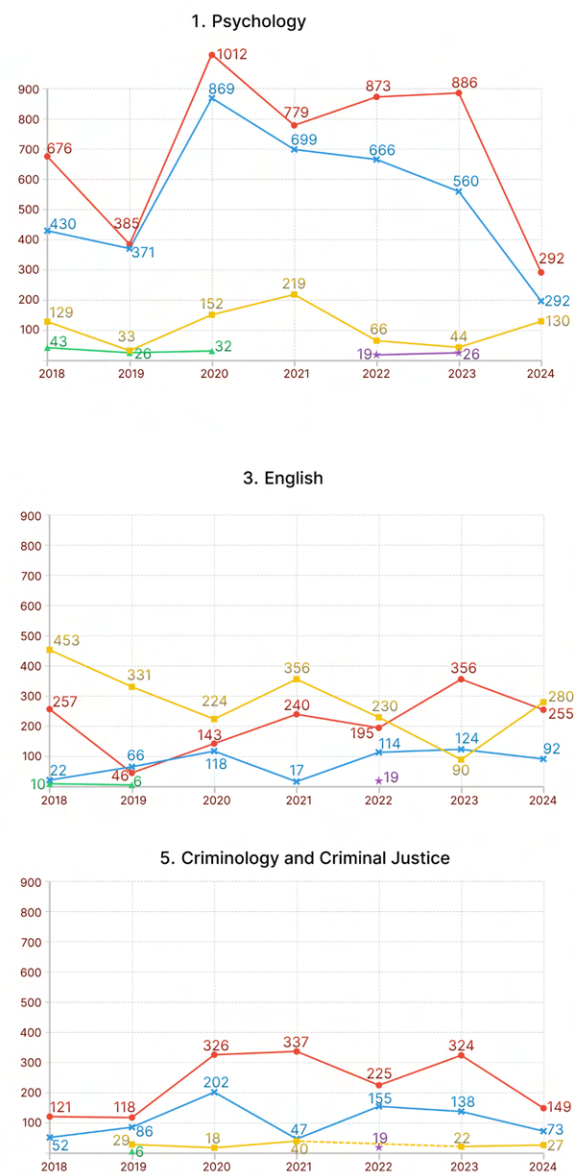
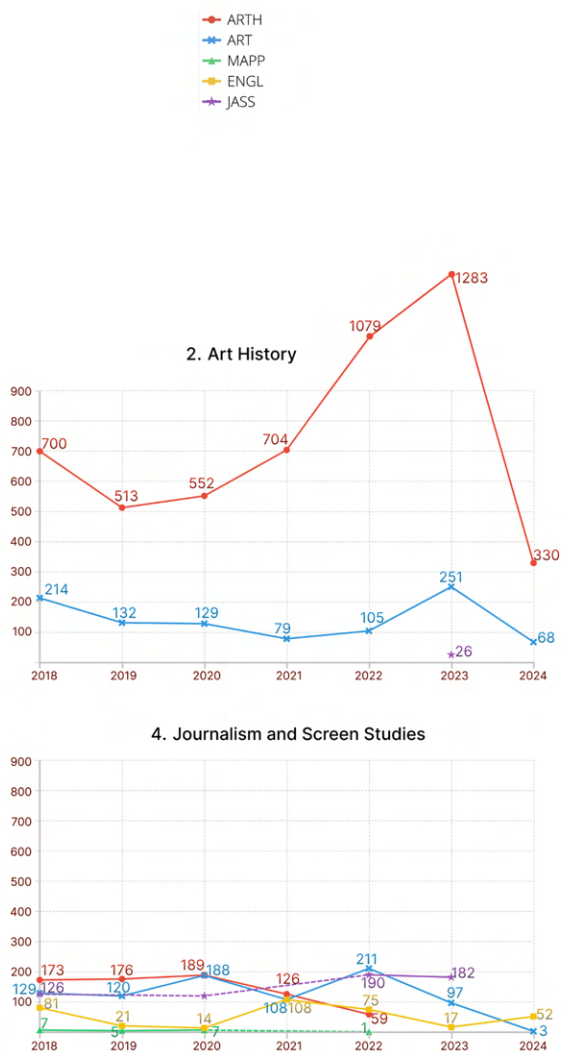


Figure B.4. Top five AB majors by student enrollment in art courses (2018–2023)

CAS&L Undecided

- **Most selected courses:** Beginning Drawing (chosen by 1 in 8), Understanding Art 1400 to Now (1 in 10), Architecture & Society.

Course Enrollment by Subject Area

Below are lists of the most frequently taken courses (organized by major) within each broad subject category between 2018–2023. These subject categories are: Applied Art (ART), Art History (ARTH), and Applied Music (MAPP).

Applied Art(ART)

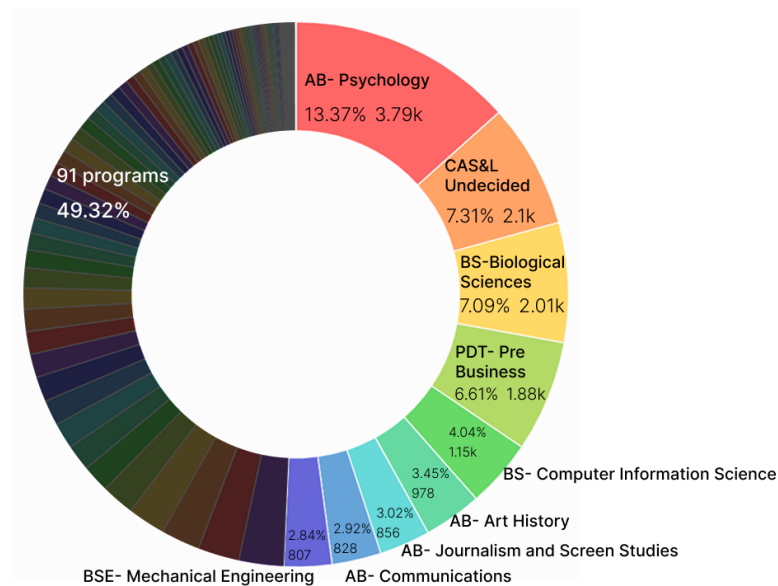


Figure B.5. Most frequently taken programs by major in Applied Art (2018-2023), highlighting ~50% of total enrollment.

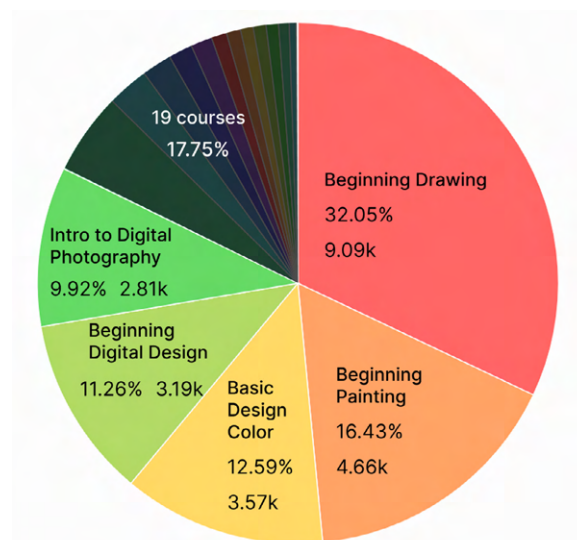


Figure B.6. Most frequently taken courses in Applied Art (2018-2023)

Art History(ARTH)

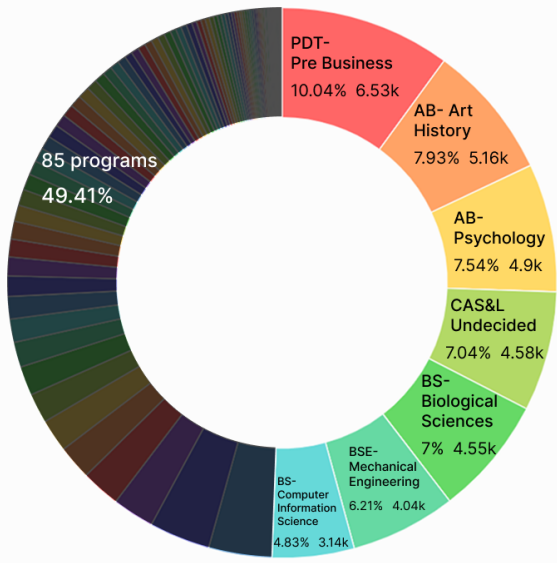


Figure B.7. Most frequently taken programs by major in Art History (2018-2023), highlighting ~50% of total enrollment.

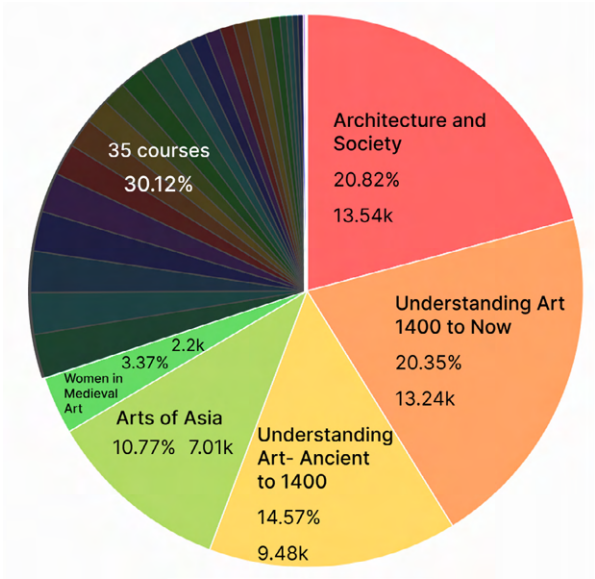


Figure B.8. Most frequently taken courses in Art History (2018-2023)

English

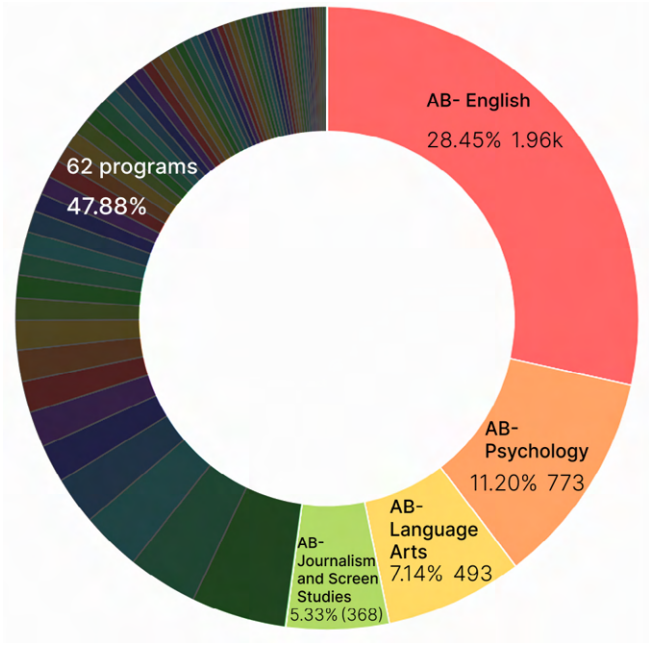


Figure B.9. Most frequently taken programs by major in English (2018-2023), highlighting ~50% of total enrollment.

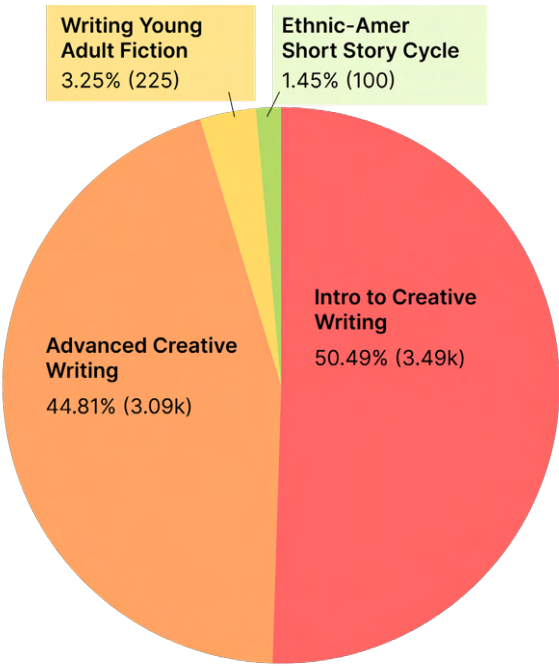


Figure B.10. Most frequently taken courses in English (2018-2023)

Applied Music

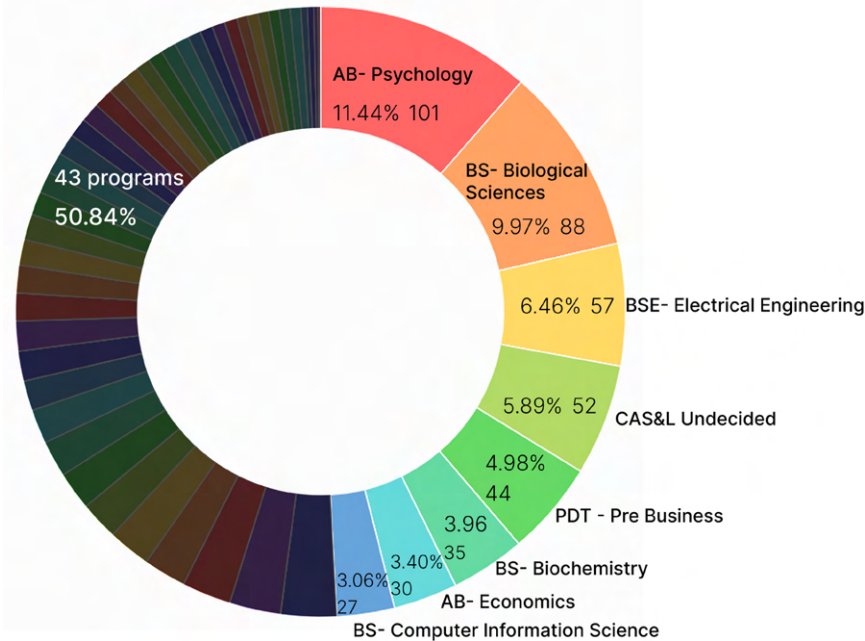


Figure B.11. Most frequently taken programs by major in Applied Music (2018-2023), highlighting ~50% of total enrollment.

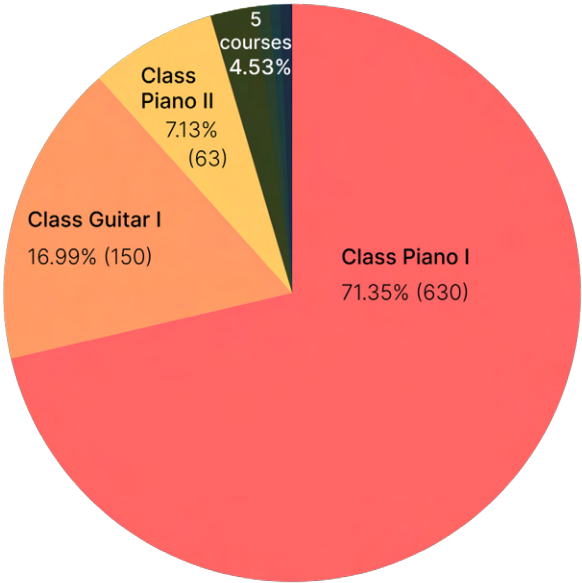


Figure B.12. Most frequently taken courses in Applied Music (2018-2023)

Computer and Information Science

MS-Computer and Information Science (33.33%(51)) and MS-Computer and Information Science Web (21.57%(33)) account for more than 50% of the total enrollment over 5 years. 10 other programs combined take up 45.10% of total enrollment.

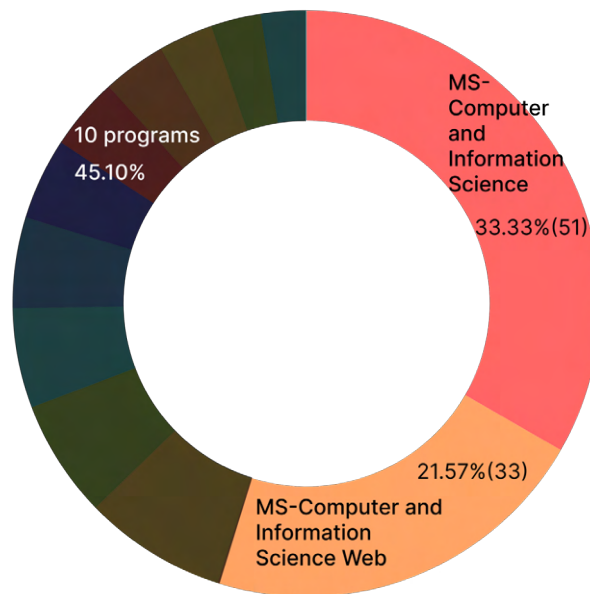


Figure B.14. Most frequently taken programs in Computer and Information Science (2018-2023), highlighting ~50% of total enrollment.

Most frequently taken courses in Applied Music (2018-2023):

- Computer Game Design and Impl - 69.28% (106)

Computer Game Design II- 30.72% (47)

Journalism and Screen Studies:

AB Journalism and Screen Studies (38.97%) and AB Communications (17.9%) take up more than 50% of total enrollment over 7 years. 22 other programs combined take up 43.12% of total enrollment.

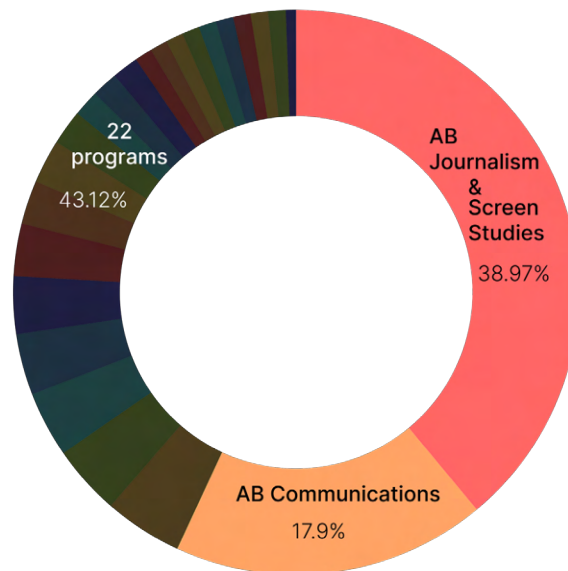


Figure B.13. Most frequently taken programs in Applied Music (2018-2023), highlighting ~50% of total enrollment.

Most frequently taken courses in Applied Music (2018-2023):

- Documentary and Photo Journalism - 100% (1586)

Enrollment Trends by Courses

We looked at trends in enrollment by courses, for example beginning drawing and intro to creative writing courses.

Beginning Drawing

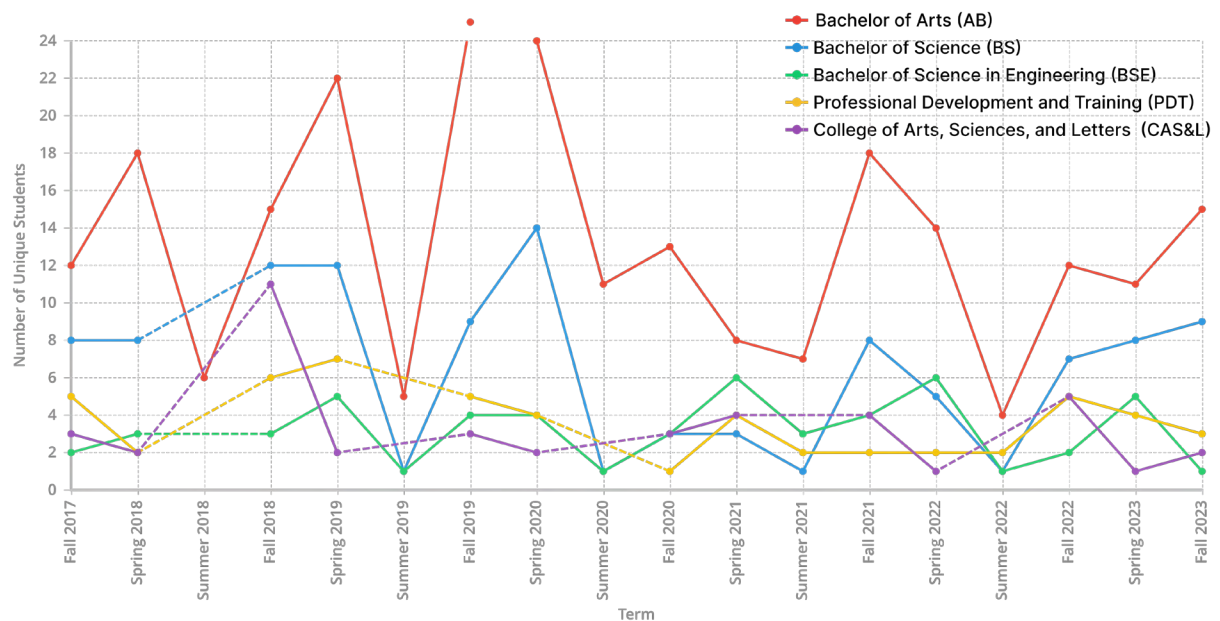


Figure B.15. Enrollment Trends for Beginning Drawing by Top 5 Degrees

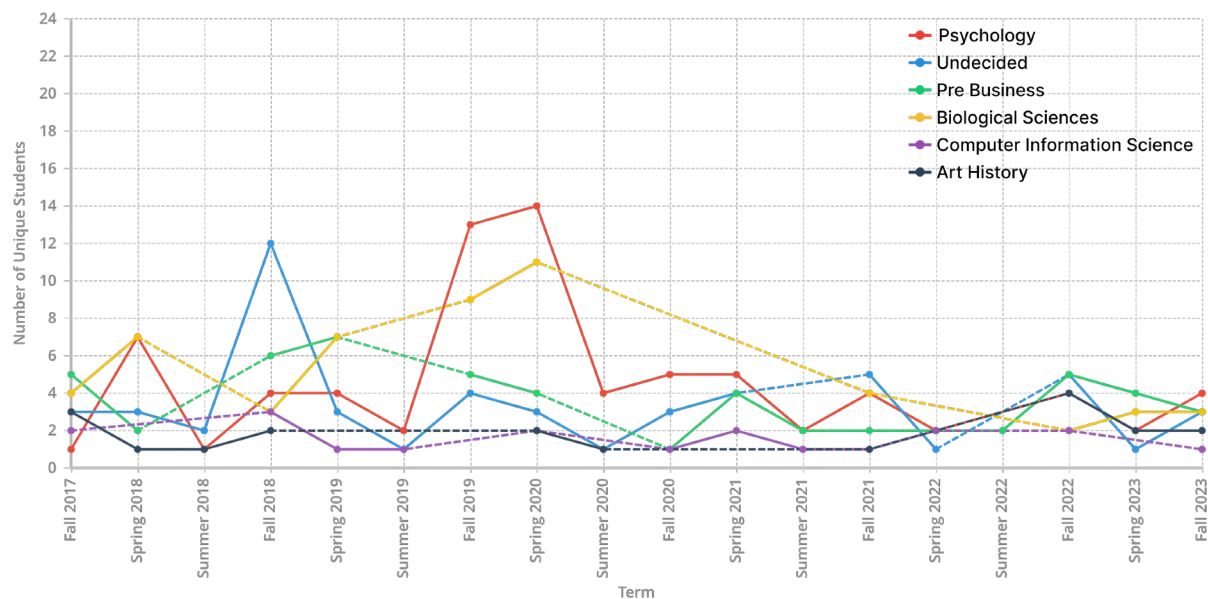


Figure B.16. Enrollment Trends for Beginning Drawing by Top 6 Primary Programs

Understanding Art 1400 to Now

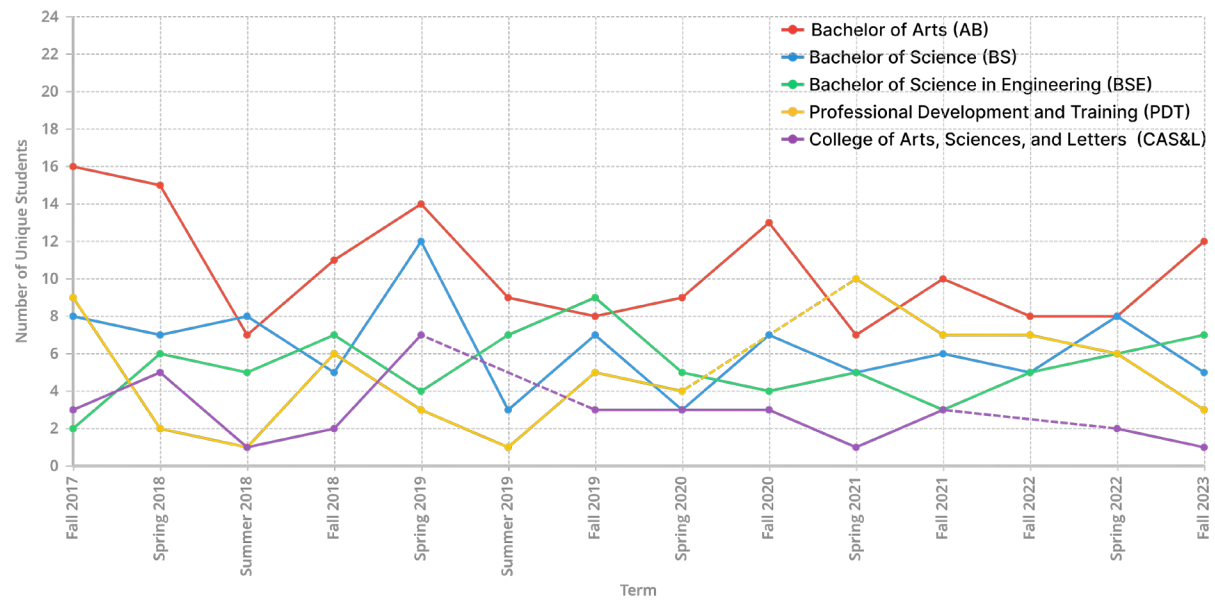


Figure B.17. Enrollment Trends for Understanding Art 1400 to Now by Top 5 Degrees

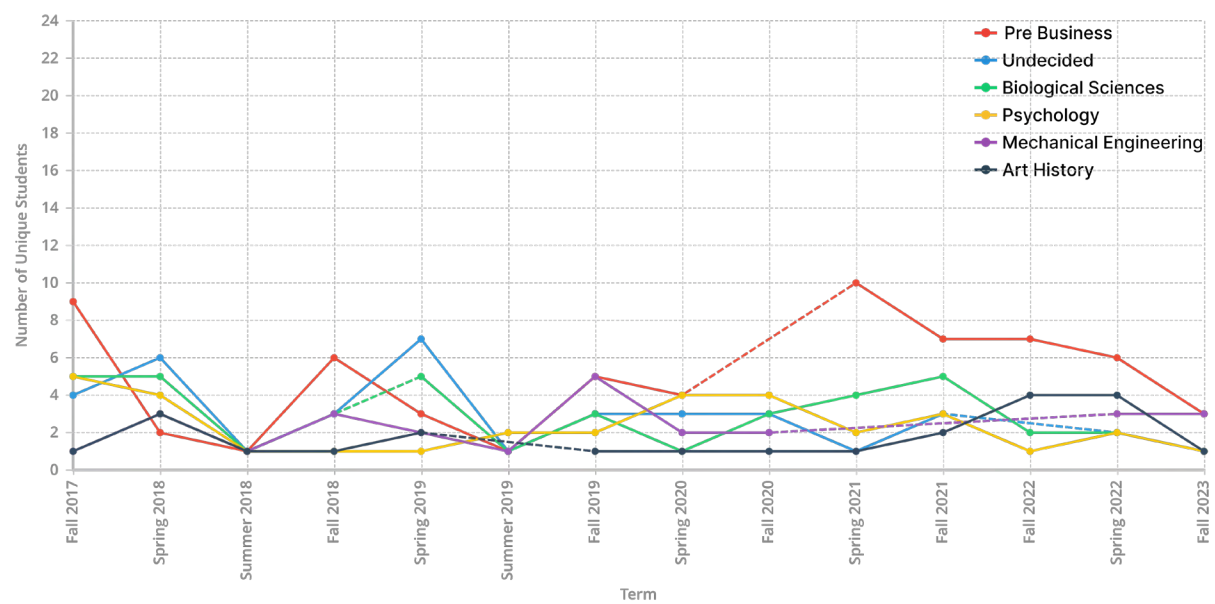


Figure B.18. Enrollment Trends for Understanding Art 1400 to Now by Top 6 Primary Programs

Architecture & Society

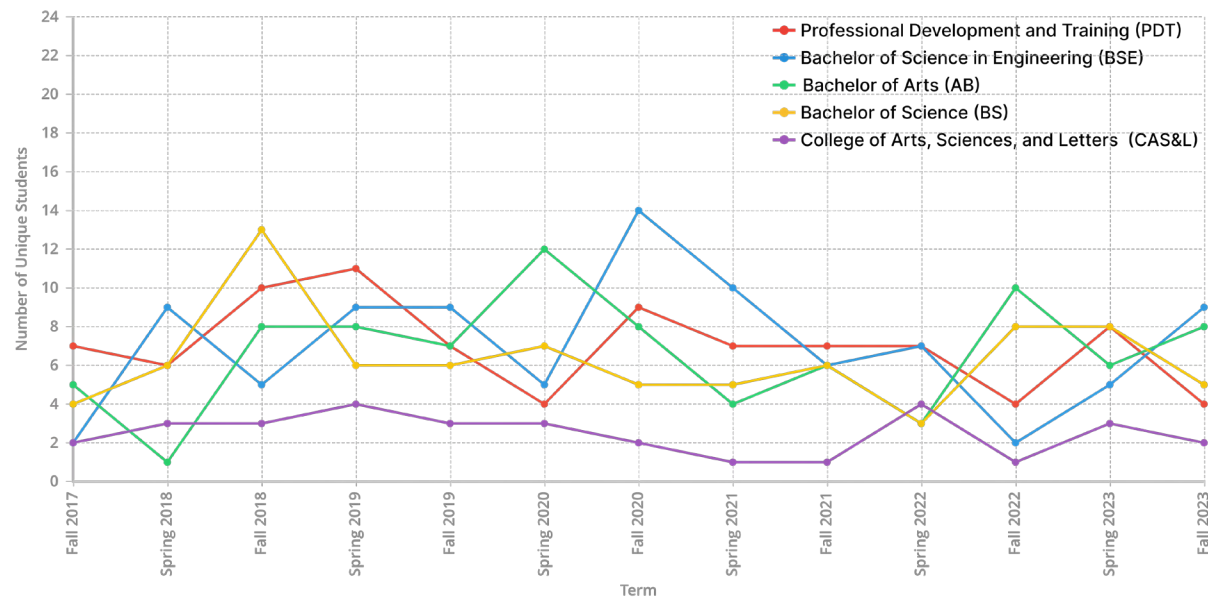


Figure B.19. Enrollment Trends for Architecture & Society by Top 5 Degrees

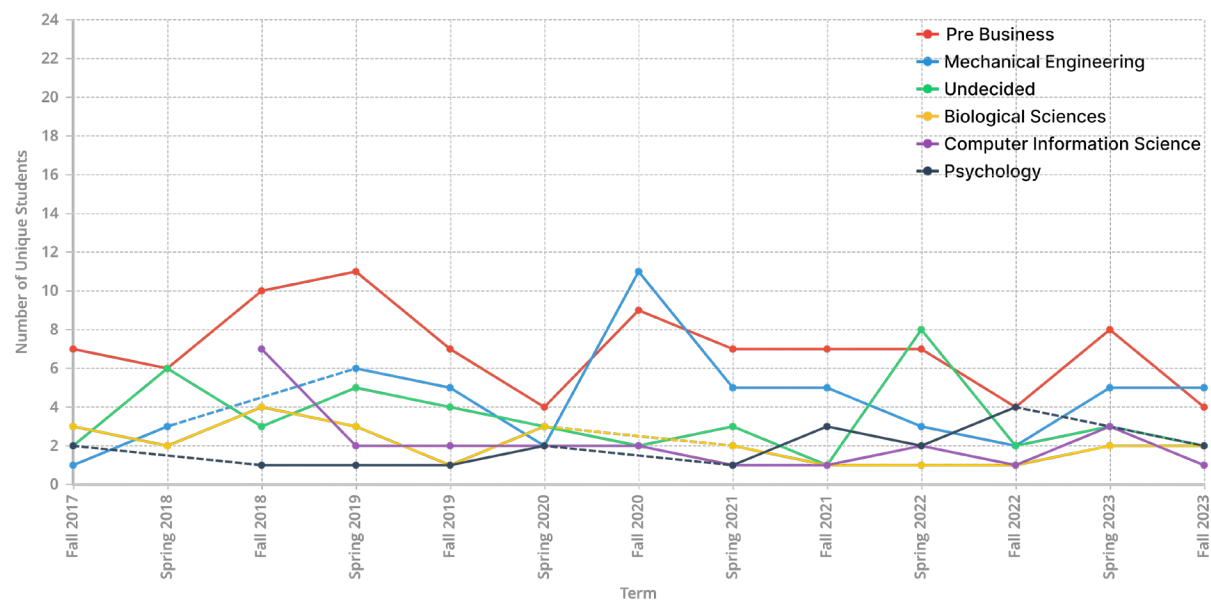


Figure B.20. Enrollment Trends for Architecture & Society by Top 6 Primary Programs

Understanding Ancient-Art to 1400

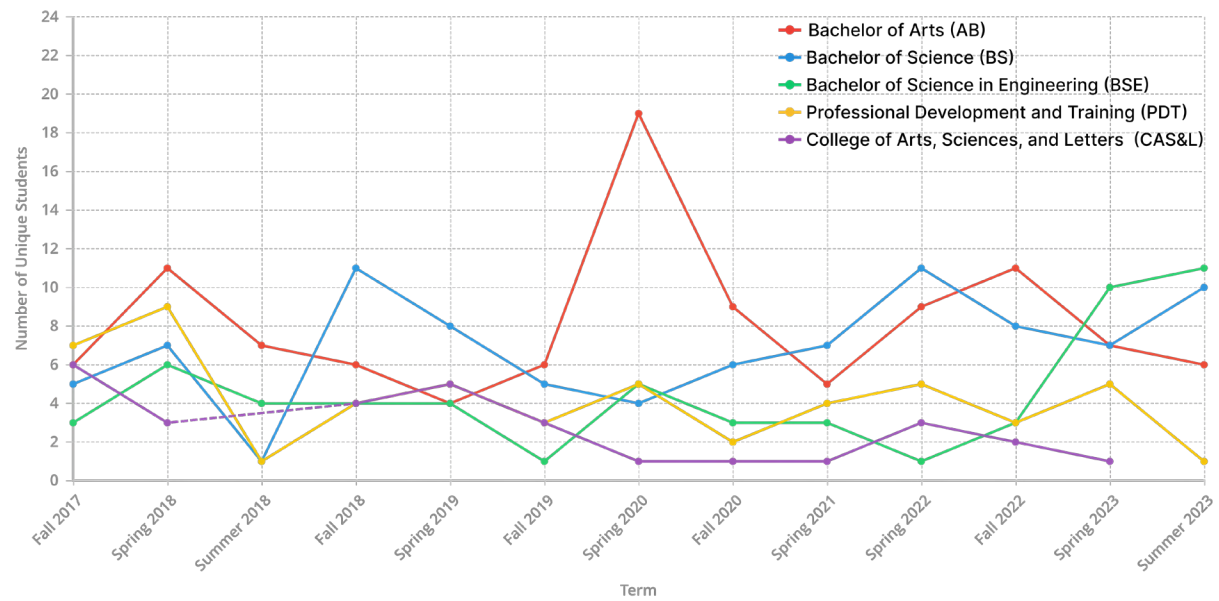


Figure B.21. Enrollment Trends for Understanding Ancient-Art to 1400 by Top 5 Degrees

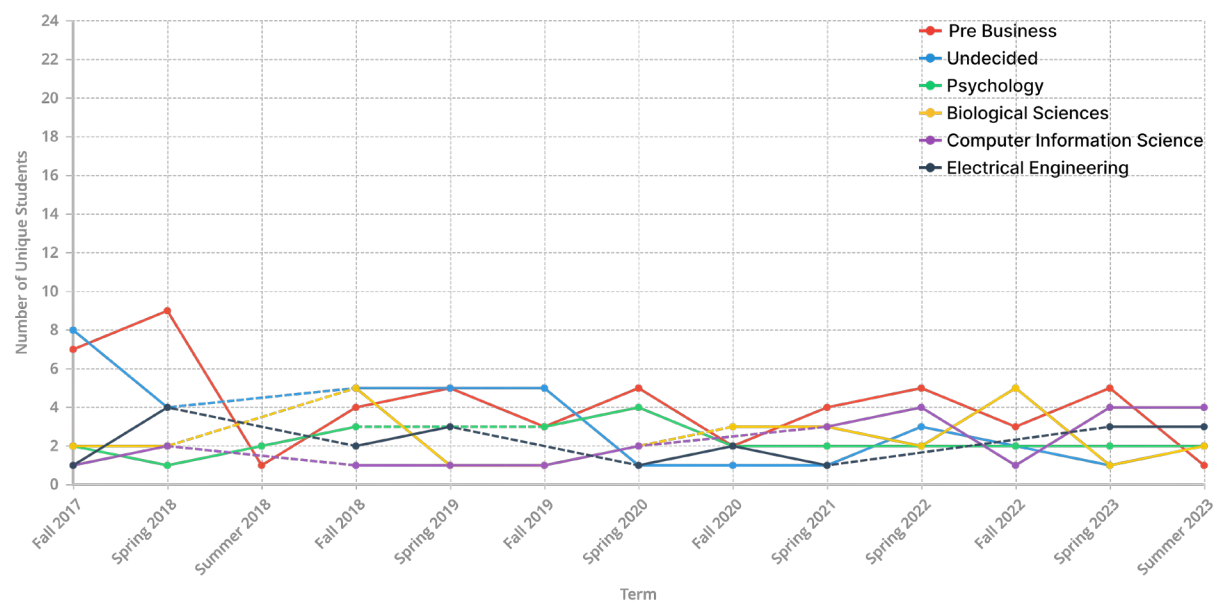


Figure B.22. Enrollment Trends for Understanding Ancient-Art to 1400 by Top 6 Primary Programs

Intro to Creative Writing

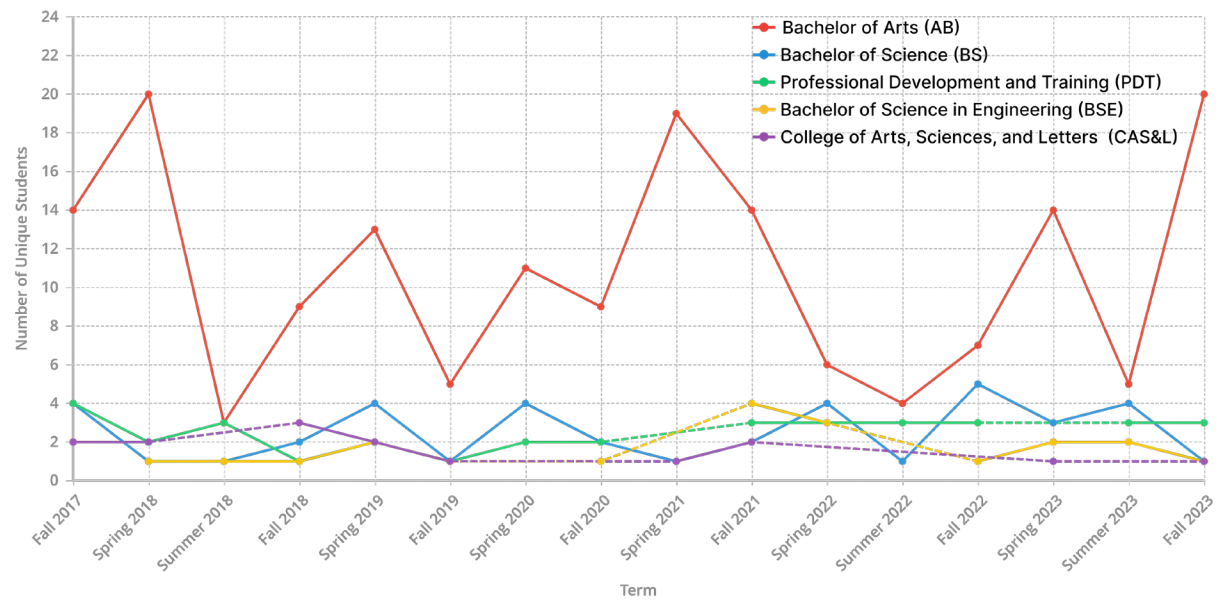


Figure B.23. Enrollment Trends for Intro to Creative Writing by Top 5 Degrees

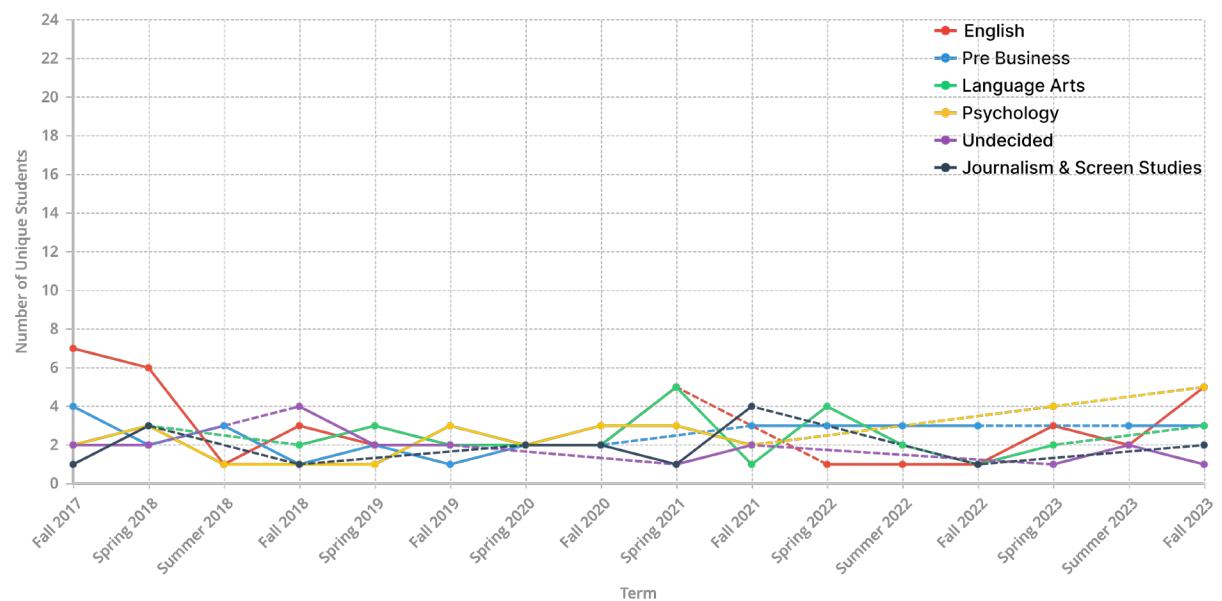


Figure B.24. Enrollment Trends for Intro to Creative Writing by Top 6 Primary Programs

Arts of Asia

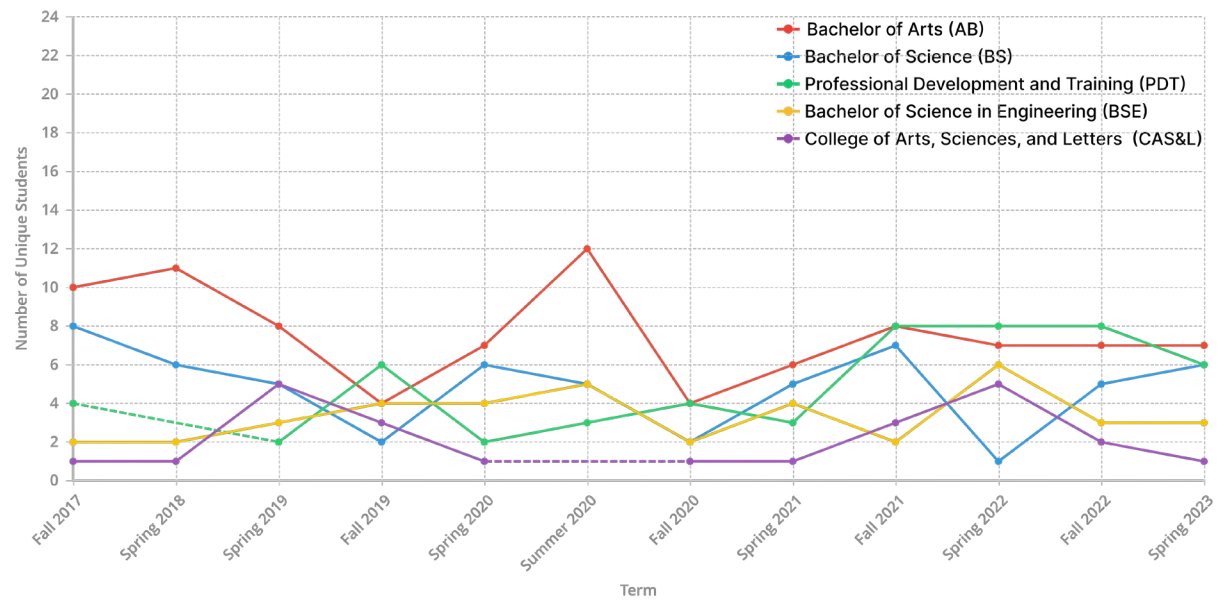


Figure B.25. Enrollment Trends for Arts of Asia by Top 5 Degrees

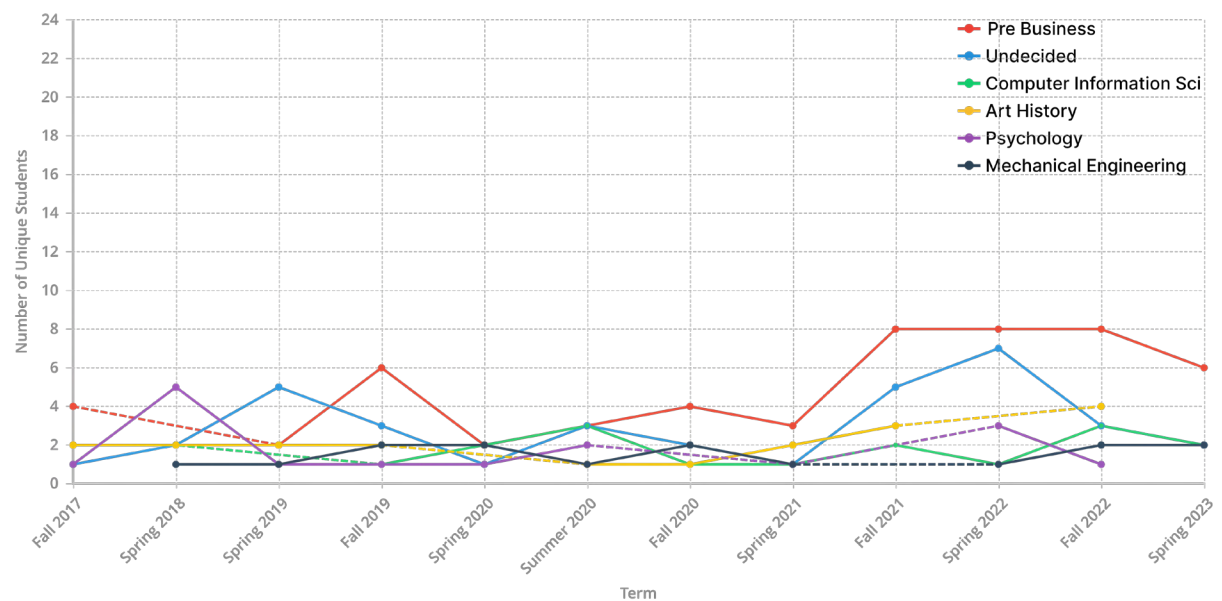


Figure B.26. Enrollment Trends for Arts of Asia by Top 6 Primary Programs

Beginning Painting

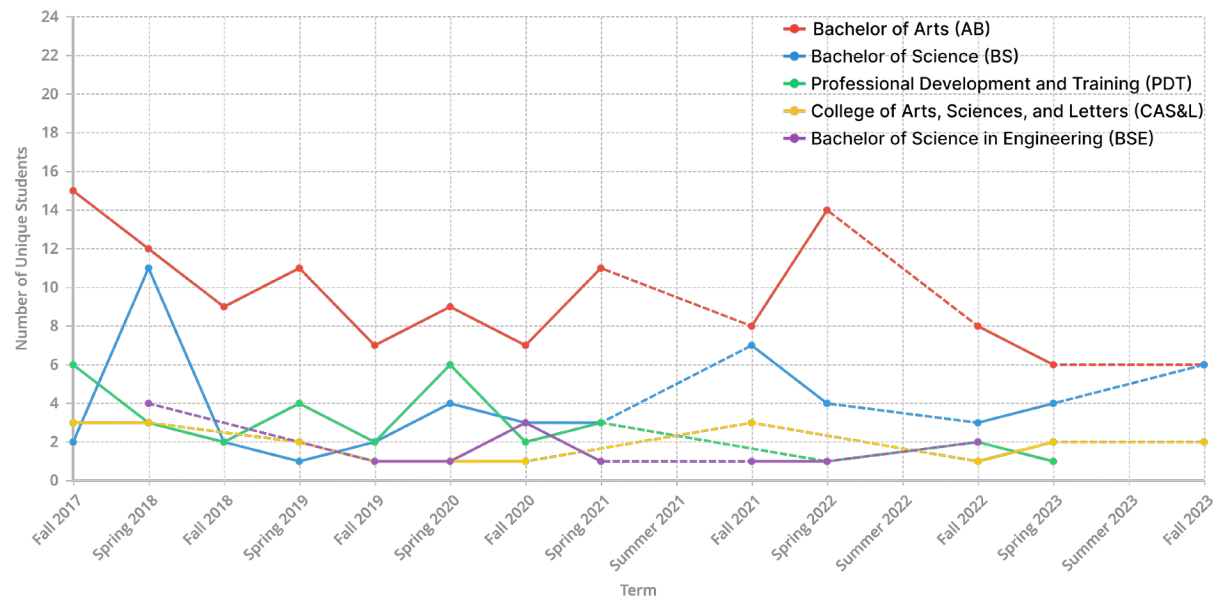


Figure B.27 Enrollment Trends for Beginning Painting by Top 5 Degrees

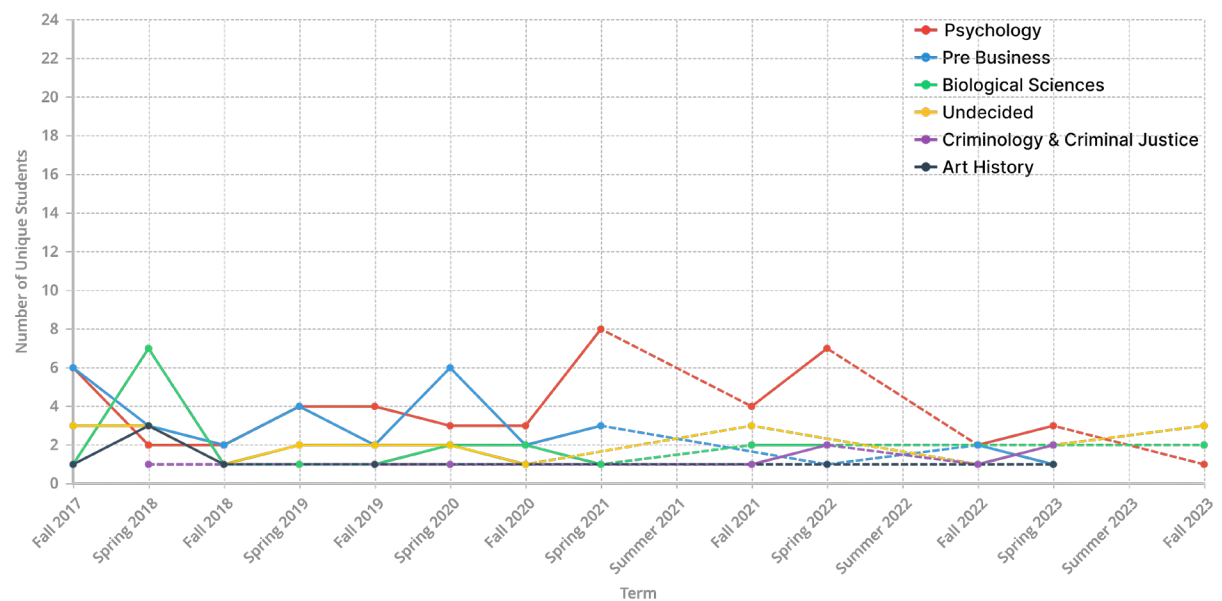


Figure B.28. Enrollment Trends for Beginning Painting by Top 6 Primary Programs

Basic Design-Color

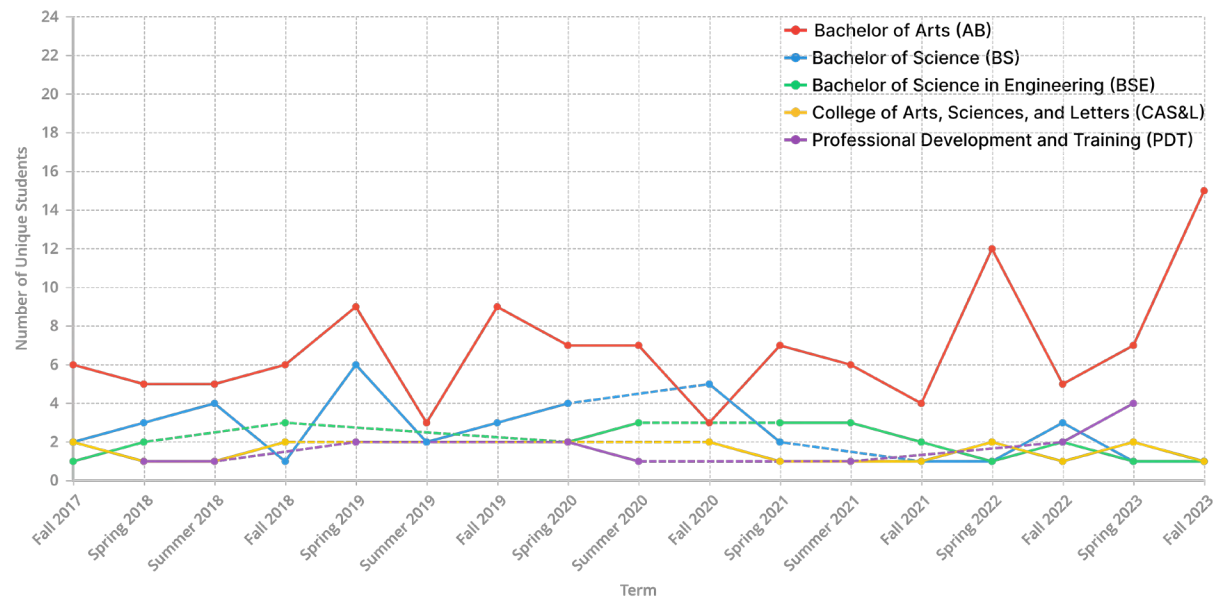


Figure B.29. Enrollment Trends for Basic Design-Color by Top 5 Degrees

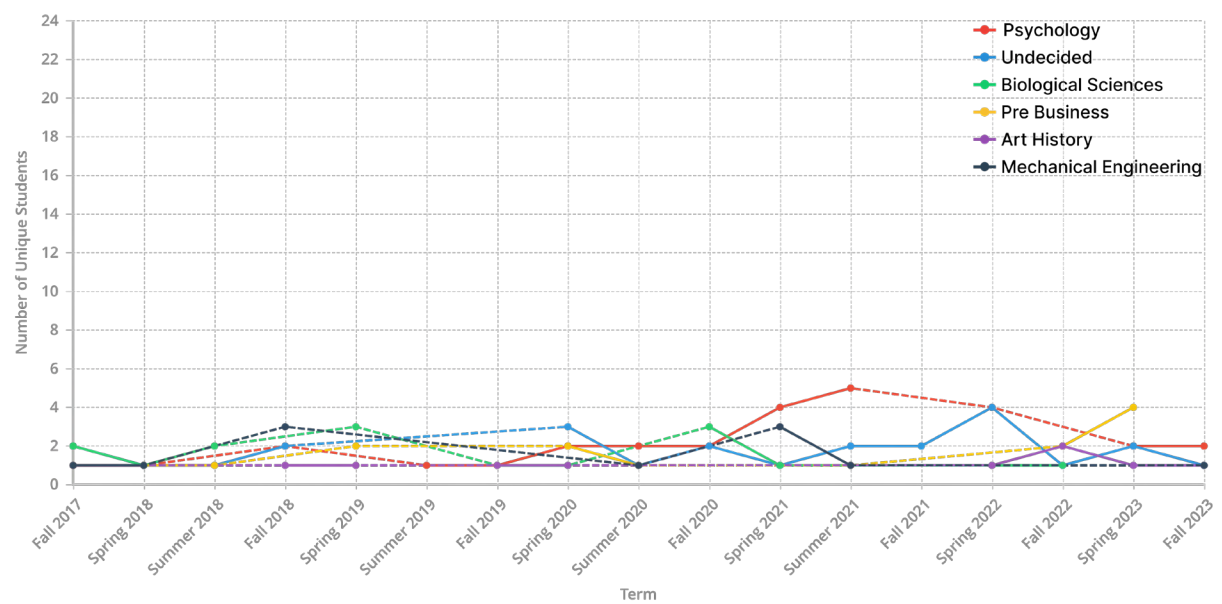


Figure B.30. Enrollment Trends for Basic Design-Color by Top 6 Primary Programs

Appendix C: U-M Flint

Enrollment Indices

The following graphs show analysis of the following areas:

- What are the trends of virtual versus traditional enrollment in the arts classes?
- What are enrollment trends in non-art majors (how are they fulfilling the fine arts requirement)?
- What are trends in terms of graduate versus undergraduate enrollment in the arts
- What changes have there been in majors offered over time (for example, dance used to be offered as a major and minor and now is only a minor)
- What are the enrollment trends broken out by each minor?
- What are the enrollment trends in the intro courses such as THE100?

Virtual vs Traditional Enrollment

The following graphs represent courses offered in both online and face-to-face formats, excluding other methods such as mixed, hyperflex, and independent study.

Graph Structure Overview:

Graph Type: Circle view

The data is visualized using two indicators: size and color.

- **Color:** Yellow represents online courses, while blue indicates face-to-face courses.
- **Size:** The size of each circle corresponds directly to the number of people enrolled in that course.

Additional details:

The same cell may contain two circles, indicating that the course was offered in both formats—face-to-face and online—during that particular year.

Insights:

- 1. The trend changes post 2020 (likely due to Covid) and more courses introduce online modes and continue it.
- 2. Some courses continue in a hybrid mode of teaching post 2021

ADM - Arts Administration



Figure C.1. This graph illustrates the transition to virtual enrollment post pandemic for Arts Administration.

ARH - Art History



Figure C.2. This graph illustrates the transition to virtual enrollment post pandemic for Art History.

ART - Art

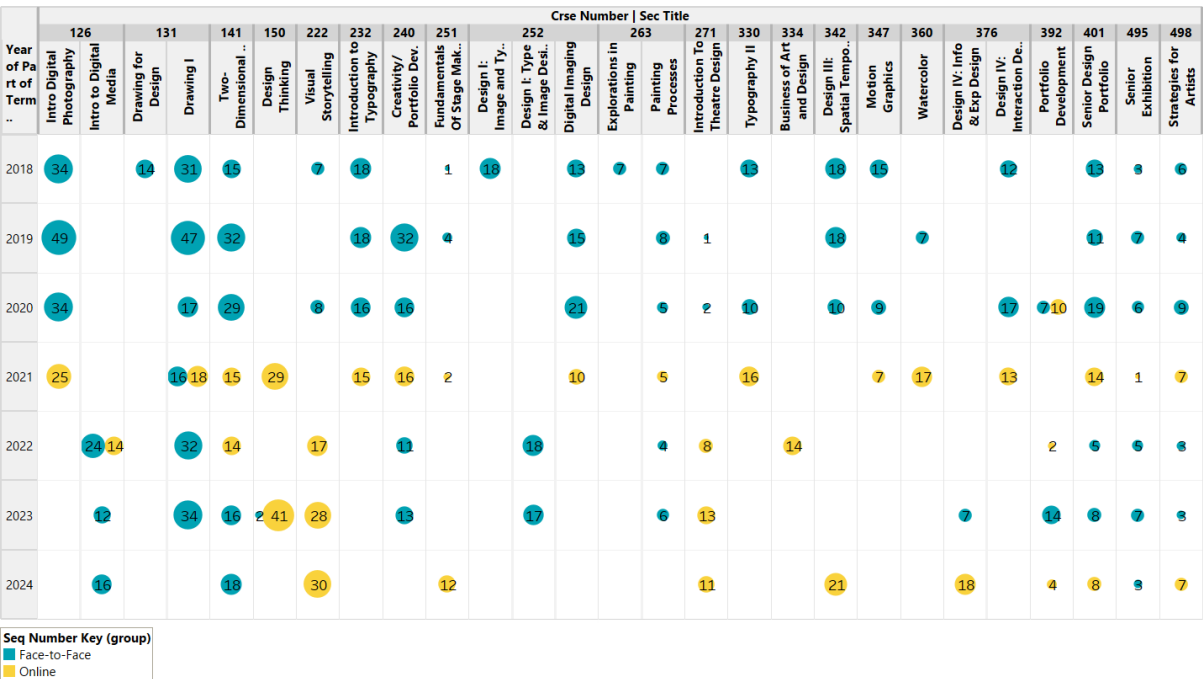


Figure C.3. This graph illustrates the transition to virtual enrollment post pandemic for Art.

DAN - Dance

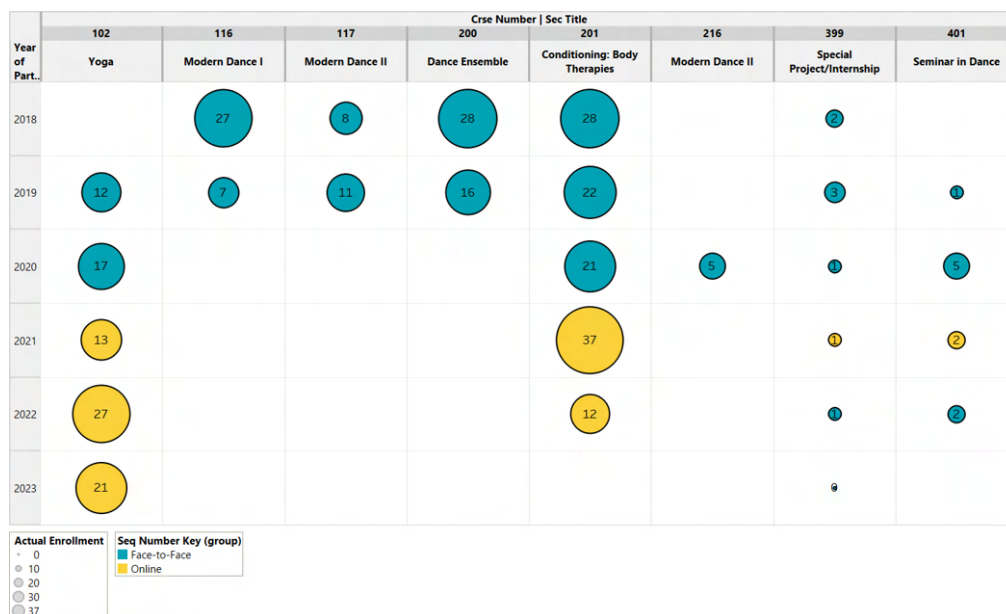


Figure C.4. This graph illustrates the transition to virtual enrollment post pandemic for Dance.

MUS - Music



Figure C.5. This graph illustrates the transition to virtual enrollment post pandemic for Music.

THE - Theatre

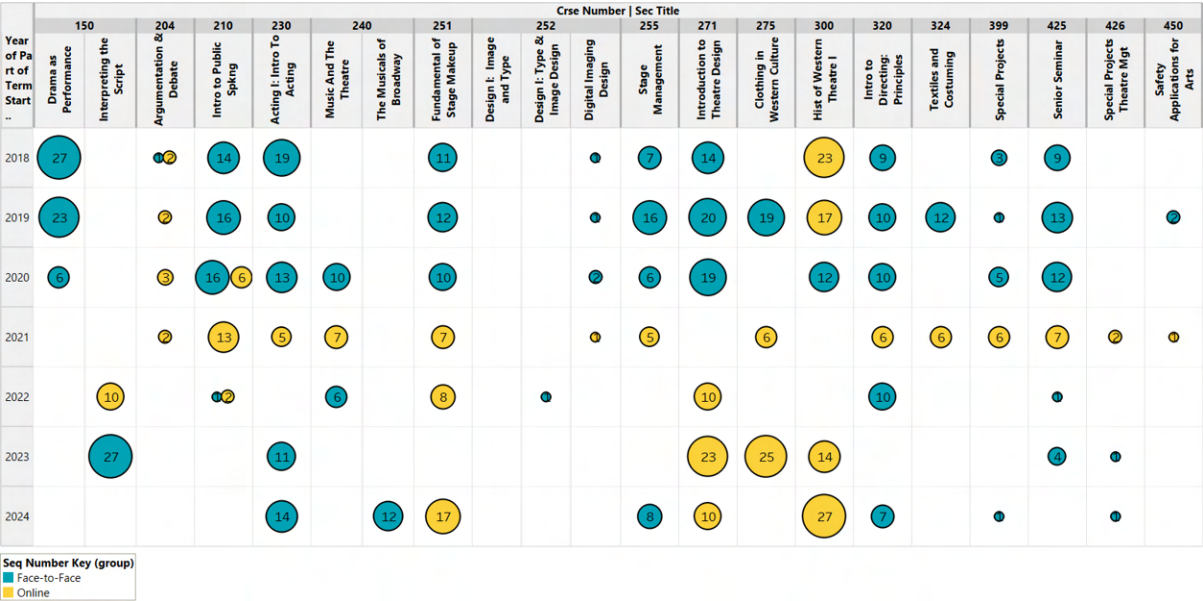


Figure C.6. This graph illustrates the transition to virtual enrollment post pandemic for Theatre. THE 100 is shown in the graph below.

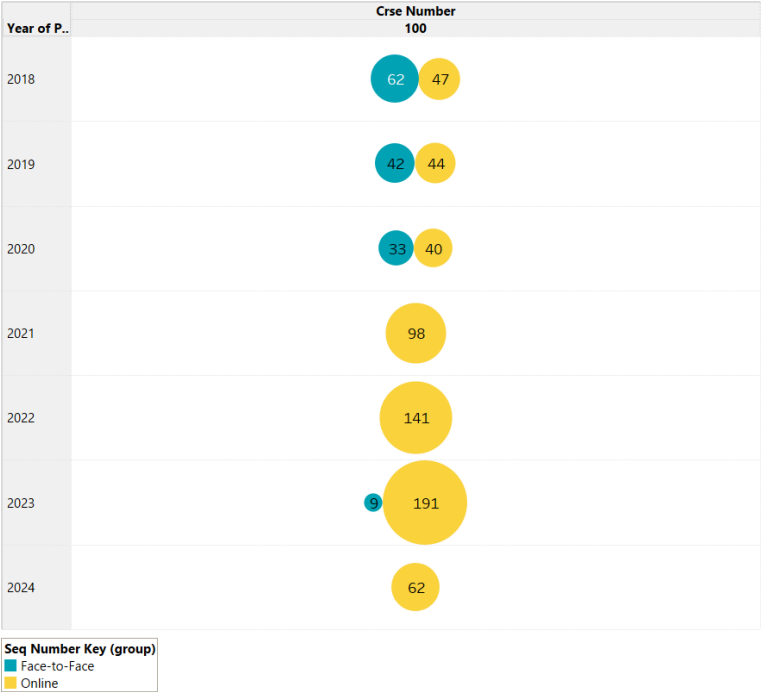


Figure C.7. This graph illustrates the transition to virtual enrollment post pandemic for an Introductory Theatre course THE 100.

Art Minors:

Graph Structure Overview:

Graph Type: Line graph

The data is represented using two indicators: line thickness and line placement.

Line Thickness:

- The thickness of the line reflects the number of students enrolled in the course.
- A thicker line corresponds to higher enrollment.

Line Placement:

- The line can be positioned at two levels: upper and lower.
- When the line drops to the lower level, it indicates that the course was not offered that year.
- When the line remains at the upper level, it signifies the course was offered. Whether students enrolled (enrollment > 0) or no students enrolled (enrollment = 0), the line stays at this level.

1. Art History (ARH courses)

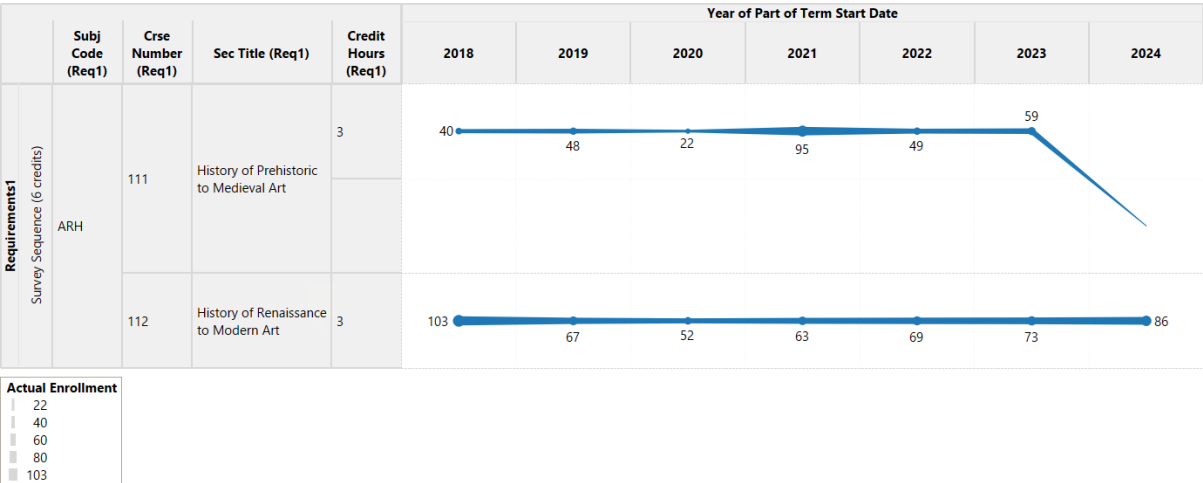


Figure C.8. Enrollment of students in Art History.

Note: For Electives, additional ARH courses at the 200 level or higher.

2. Art of Drawing (ART and ARH courses)

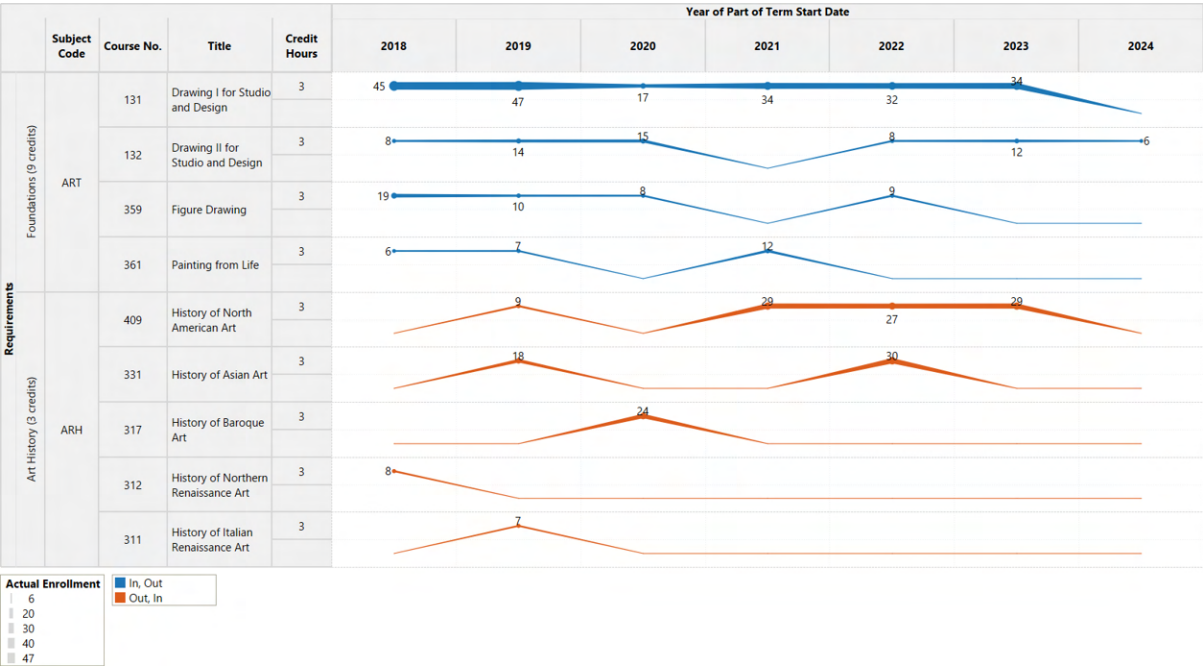


Figure C.9. Enrollment of students in Art of Drawing (ART and ARH courses).

Missing course from above lists:

- Requirement-Advanced Drawing (ART)
- ART 353 - Intermediate Painting (3)
- ART 407 - Advanced Life Painting or Drawing (3)
- ART 408 - Boundaries of Painting or Drawing (3)

3. Art of Painting (ART and ARH courses)



Figure C.10. Enrollment of students in Art of Painting (ART and ARH courses).

Missing course (electives) from above lists:

- ART 407 - Advanced Life Painting or Drawing (3)
- ART 408 - Boundaries of Painting or Drawing (3)
- ART 353 - Intermediate Painting (3)

4. Ceramics (ART courses:)

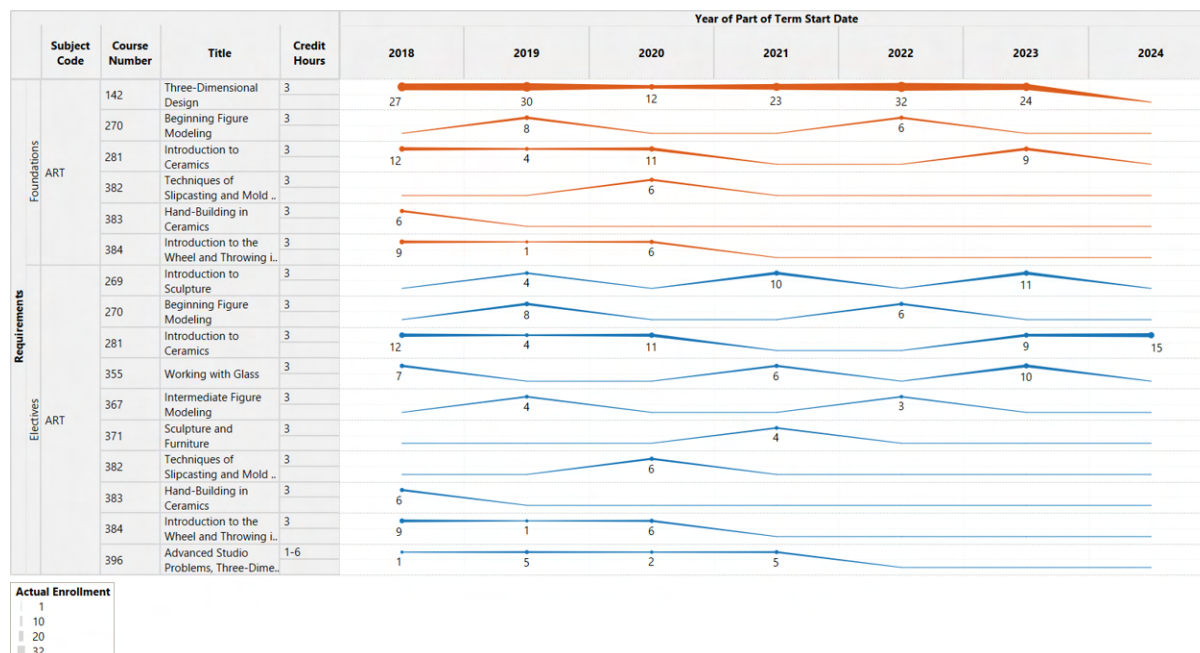


Figure C.11. Enrollment of students in Ceramics (ART courses).

Missing courses (electives) from above lists:

- ART 350 - Mixed Media Sculpture (3)
- ART 368 - Installation Art (3)
- ART 372 - Sculpture: Alternative Methods and Materials (3)
- ART 373 - Sculpture: Public Art (3)
- ART 378 - Kiln Operation and Glaze Formulation (3)
- ART 471 - Sculpture: Advanced Techniques (3)

5. Dance (DAN courses)

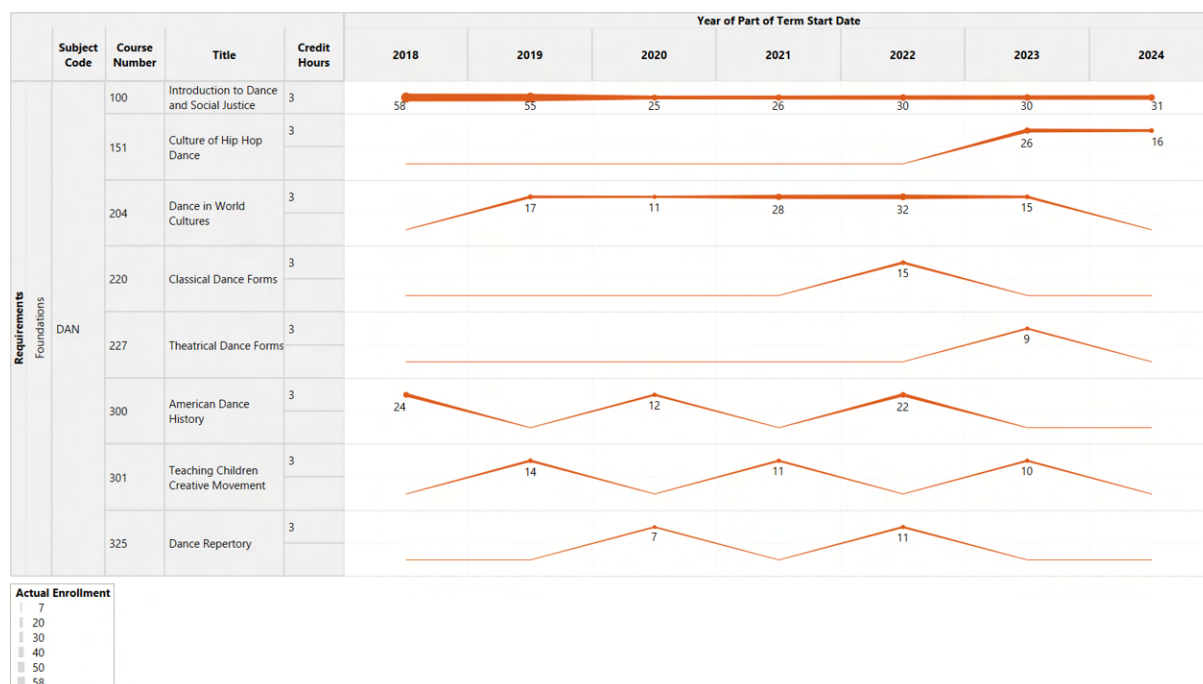


Figure C.12. Enrollment of students in Dance (DAN courses).

6. Graphic Design (ARH and ART courses)



Figure C.13. Enrollment of students in Graphic Design (ARH and ART courses).

7. Interaction Design (ART Courses)

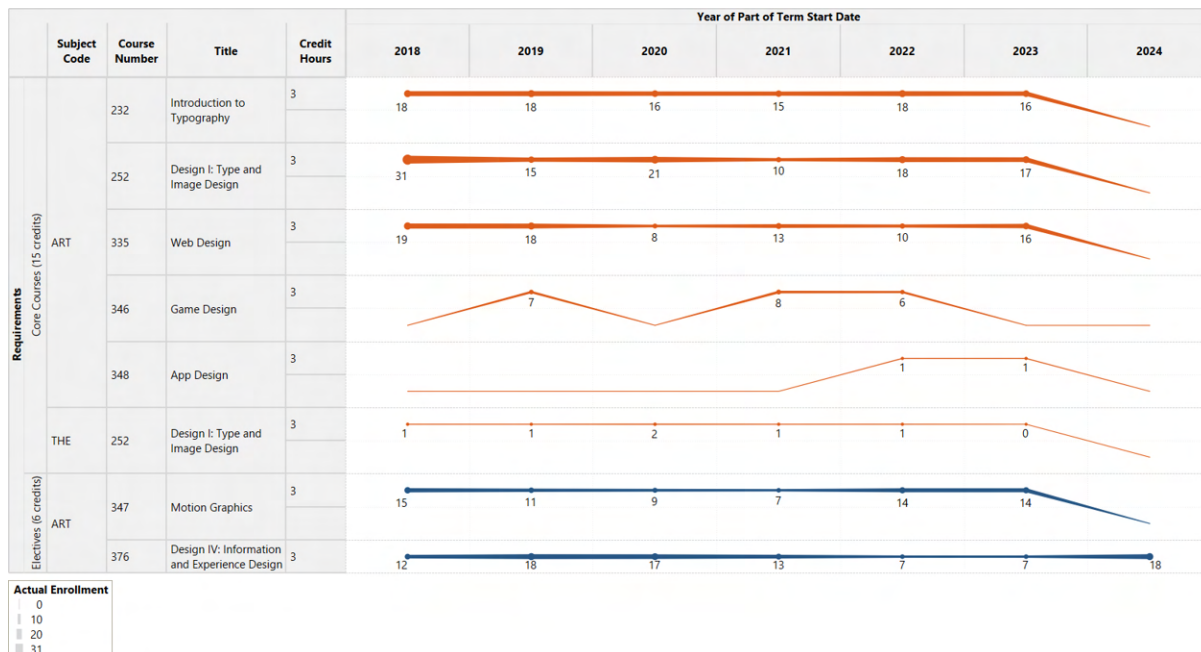


Figure C.14. Enrollment of students in Interaction Design (ART Courses).

Missing courses (electives) from above list:

- ART 391 - Advanced Interactive Projects (3)
- ART 377 - Interaction Design: Beyond Screens (3)

8. Music (MUS courses)

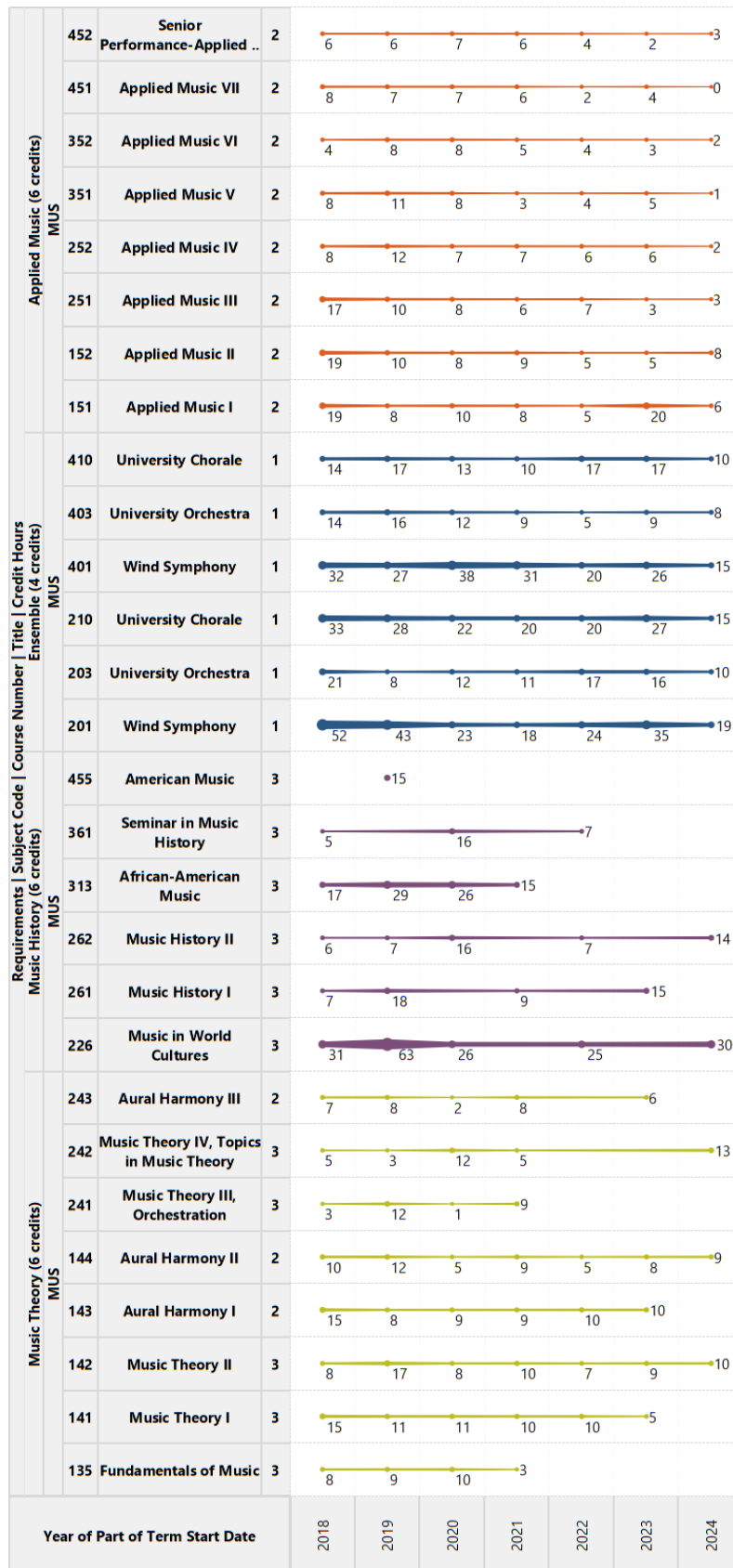


Figure C.15. Enrollment of students in Music (MUS courses).

9. Music Composition

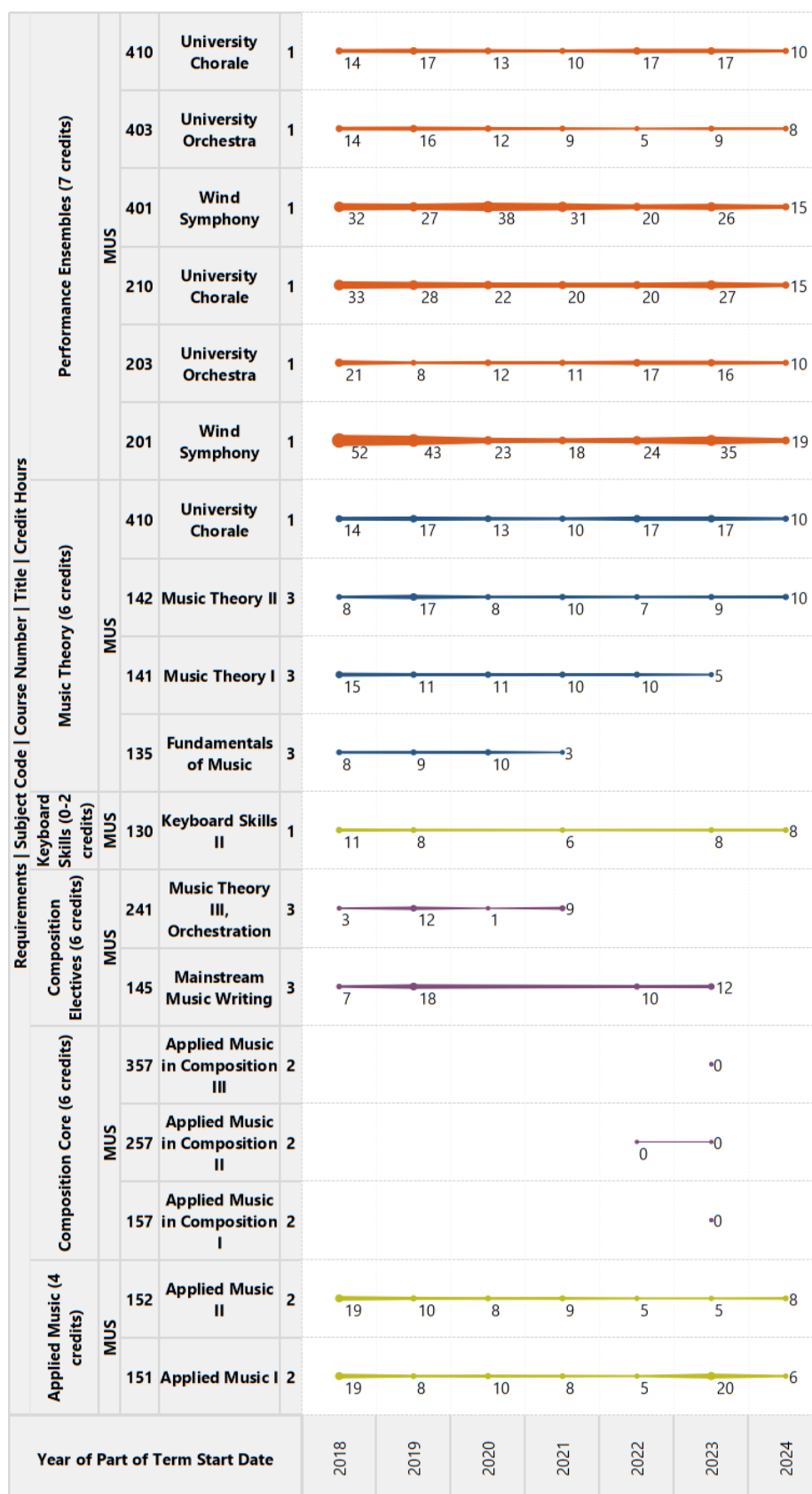


Figure C.16. Enrollment of students in Music Composition.

Missing courses from above list:

- MUS 312 - Composition for Media (3)
- MUS 370 - Introduction to Computer Music (3)

10. Music Technology



Figure C.17. Enrollment of students in Music Technology.

Missing courses from above list:

- MUS 270 - Sound Recording Production (3)
- MUS 312 - Composition for Media (3)
- MUS 370 - Introduction to Computer Music (3)
- MUS 375 - Technical Aural Harmony and Critical Listening (3)
- MUS 475 - Music Technology and Image (3)

11. Musical Theatre

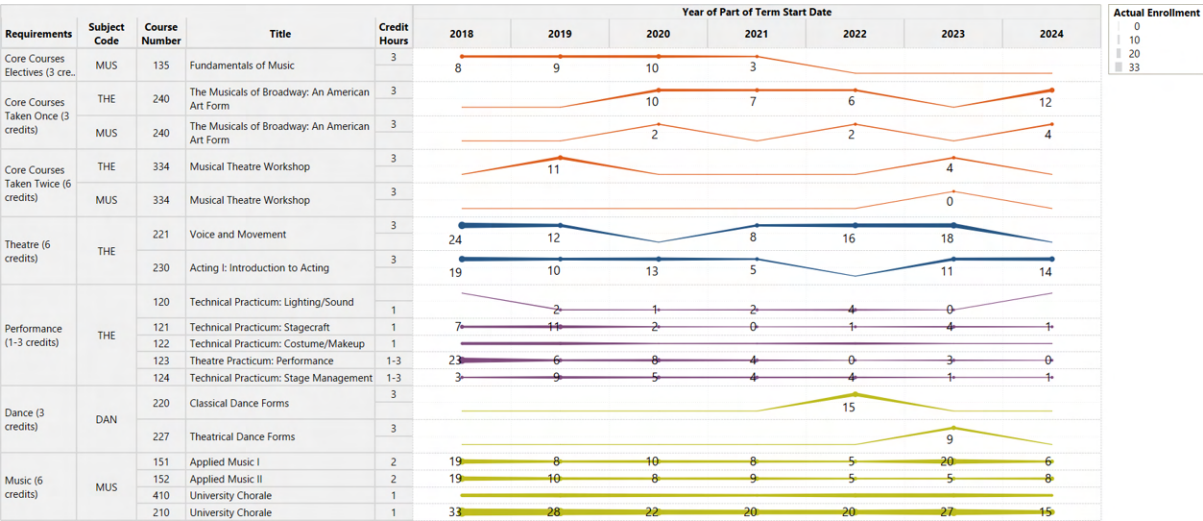


Figure C.18. Enrollment of students in Musical Theatre.

Missing course from above list:

- MUS 114 - Musical Mechanics of Theatre and Dance (3)

12. Photographic Printmaking

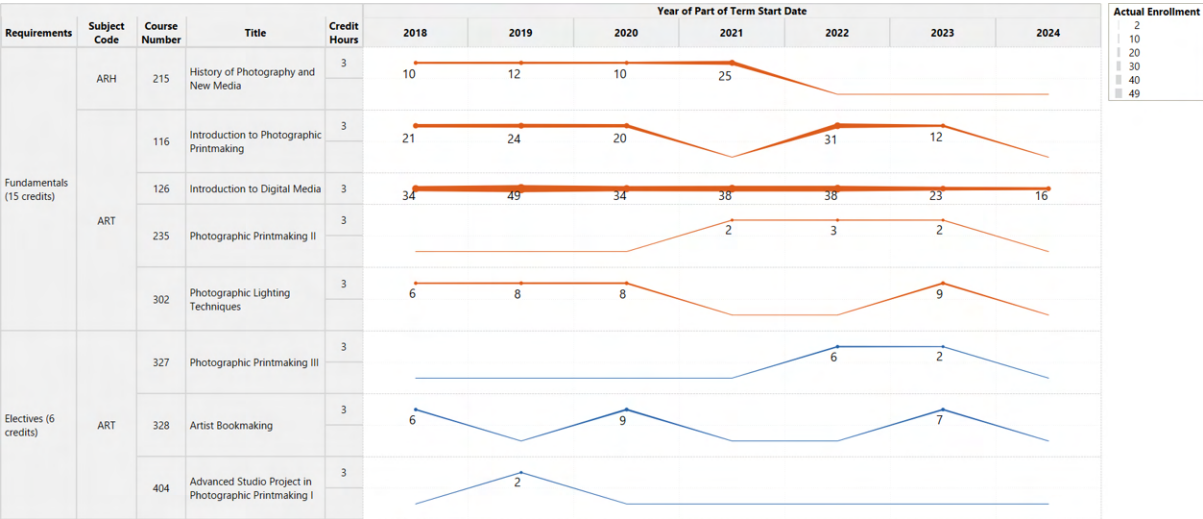


Figure C.19. Enrollment of students in Photographic Printmaking.

13. Pre-Conservation of Art & Architecture

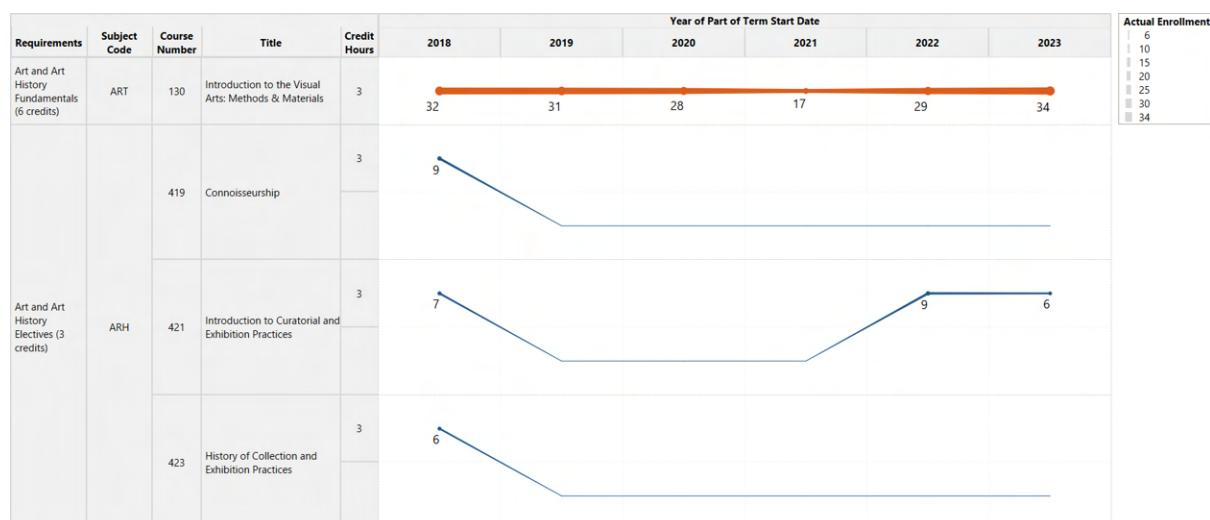


Figure C.20. Enrollment of students in Pre-Conservation of Art & Architecture.

Missing courses:

- ARH 313 - Physical Properties and Material Limits of Design for Art and Artifacts (3)

14. Sculpture (Art courses)

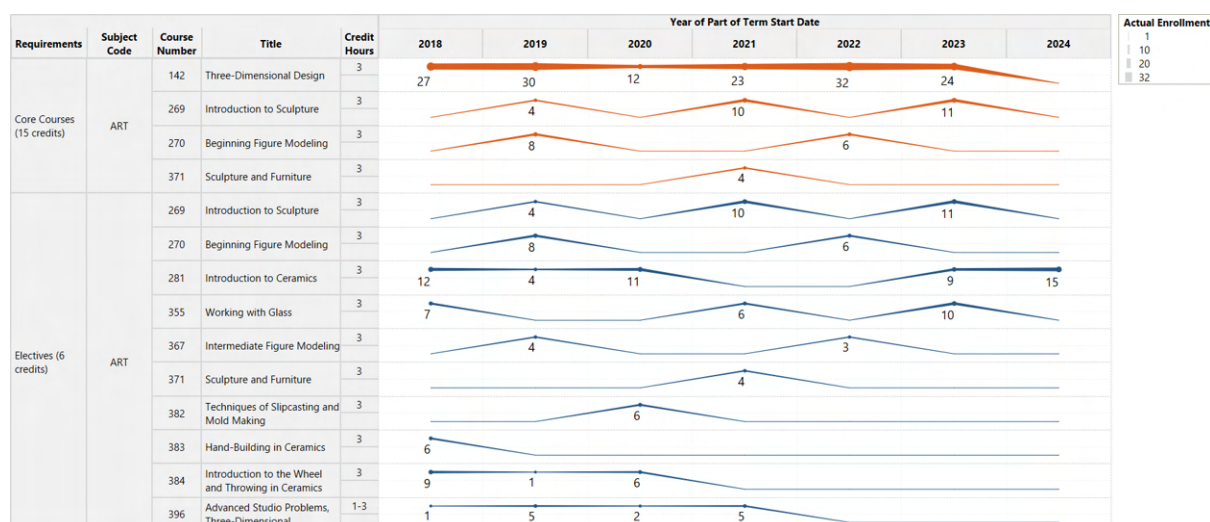


Figure C.21. Enrollment of students in Sculpture (Art courses).

Missing courses (Core) from above list:

- ART 350 - Mixed Media Sculpture (3)

Missing course (Elective) from above list:

- ART 350 - Mixed Media Sculpture (3)
- ART 368 - Installation Art (3)
- ART 373 - Sculpture: Public Art (3)
- ART 378 - Kiln Operation and Glaze Formulation (3)
- ART 381 - Ceramics: Survey of Materials and Processes (3)
- ART 471 - Sculpture: Advanced Techniques (3)

15. Theatre

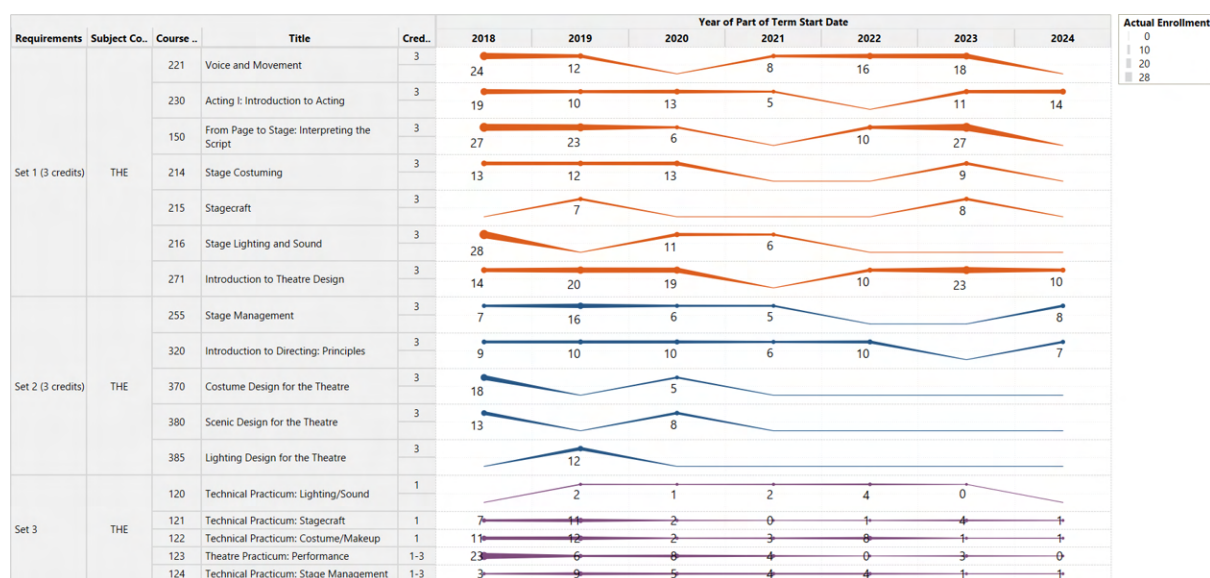


Figure C.22. Enrollment of students in Theatre.

Endnotes

1. For more on transference, see Veronica Dittman Stanich and Gabriel Harp, *Skills and Capacities for Students: Impacts of Arts Integration and Interdisciplinary Practice* (Ann Arbor: Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities, 2020), 32-33, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.11660694>
2. See [RIT's Performing Arts Scholars program](#).
3. For an explanation of the concept of disciplinary distance, see Julie Thompson Klein, "A Taxonomy of Interdisciplinarity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Robert Frodeman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15-30.
4. Alan S. Brown and Jennifer L. Novak, *Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance* (San Francisco, CA: WolfBrown, 2007).
5. Gabriel Harp, *What Is Arts Research?* (Ann Arbor: Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities, 2018), 24, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.11560992>
6. Some faculty may face challenges making the case for arts or arts-integrated work in the tenure and promotion process. [a2ru offers a research brief and other resources to support faculty and leadership through these processes](#).
7. Harp, *What Is Arts Research?*, 5
8. Harp, *What Is Arts Research?*, 18.
9. Harp, *What Is Arts Research?*, 22.
10. For an example of an artist integrated into STEMM research, see Gupi Ranganathan, Aiden Lab, and Erez Lieberman Aiden, "Unfolding the Genome," *Ground Works*, <https://doi.org/10.48807/2021.0086>
11. Defined as "encompassing a wide range of creative and expressing learning experiences including dance, music, theatre, visual arts and considered a core academic subject that contributes to a well-rounded education for all students" (National Endowment for the Arts "[Back to School with Arts Education](#)", Edutopia and the Princeton Review)
12. "Changes in General Education Requirements May Be on the Horizon," California Faculty Association, February 29, 2024. <https://www.calfac.org/changes-in-general-education-requirements-may-be-on-the-horizon/#%3A~%3Atext%3DThe%20proposed%C2%A0new%20Cal%2Cenrollment%20collapses%20and%20courses%20cancelled>.
13. Jonathan Pidluzny, Nathaniel Urban, and Lauri Kempson, *What Will They Learn? 2019-20* (American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2019), <https://www.goacta.org/images/download/What-Will-They-Learn-2019-2020.pdf#:~:text=Less%20than%2%20half%20of%20the,Government%20or%20History%20%E2%80%93%2018.PDF>.

- 14 Shannon Watkins, "Protecting the Liberal Arts and Humanities in American Higher Education," Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, December 5, 2024, <https://manhattan.institute/article/protecting-the-liberal-arts-and-humanities-in-american-higher-education#%3A~%3Atext%3Dgeneral%20education%20programs%2C%20a%20set%2Crequired>.
- 15 Scott Jaschik, Doug Lederman, and *Insider Higher Ed*, "The 2019 Inside Higher Ed Survey of Chief Academic Officers," *Inside Higher Ed*, 2019, <http://insidehighered.com/news/survey/2019-inside-higher-ed-survey-chief-academic-officers>.
- 16 Jaschik, Lederman, and Insider Higher Ed, "Inside Higher Ed Survey".
- 17 Jaschik, Lederman, and Insider Higher Ed, "Inside Higher Ed Survey".
- 18 David Skorton, "Branches from the Same Tree Report Release" (National Academy of Sciences, May 7, 2018), <https://www.si.edu/sites/default/files/about/djs-branches-release-5-7-18.pdf#%3A~%3Atext%3Dbetween%20specialization%20and%20a%20traditional%2Cthose%20who%20are%20looking%20for>
- 19 Skorton, "Tree Report Release"
- 20 Colleen Flaherty, "What Employers Want: AAC&U survey of employers shows liberal arts skills are valued and sought out in the workplace but raises questions about student preparation," *Inside Higher Ed*, April 5, 2021, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/04/06/aacu-survey-finds-employers-want-candidates-liberal-arts-skills-cite-preparedness#%3A~%3Atext%3DEmployers%20said%20they%20appreciate%20breadth%20and%20depth%20of%20academic%20topics%20and%20disciplines>.
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