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Past, Pandemic, and Future: Adaptations and Innovations in Student Engagement at Collegiate Art Programs

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Author Note

I pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance during the completion of this

work.

Abstract

This research paper will focus on student engagement programs associated with collegiate performing arts centers and art programs and how these programs engage and support students prior to and during the Covid-19 pandemic. It will look at the ways arts administrators identify and evaluate the barriers and motivations related to participation within arts programming. Lastly, this research will explore the ways in which these programs have adapted to the pandemic and how these innovations and adaptations might continue, post-pandemic, in order to better support faculty, staff, and students. Data was gathered through interviews with six student engagement professionals who work at American colleges and universities. This study reports the findings, looks at the implications, and provides recommendations gathered through the interview with arts administrators.

Keywords: student engagement, community engagement, higher education, arts and culture, interview

Past, Pandemic, and Future: Adaptations and Innovations

in Student Engagement at Collegiate Art Programs

As the box office manager of a university performing arts center, I have always been intrigued by what draws audiences to our programs. When I go to the theater, I not only watch what is happening on the stage but I also look around and study the reactions of the patrons sitting in the audience. I often wonder if the audience enjoys the performance as much as I do. I frequently think about how we can make this experience better. Since I work on a college campus, I specifically like to think of ways to make the ticket buying experience easier for students. For example, we have recently moved from selling paper tickets to using mobile tickets that can be accessed easily through a smart phone. Not only is the ticket buying experience now easier for students, but also environmentally friendly. Environmental sustainability is something that students on campus are interested in and we have adapted our ticketing program in response.

Problem

In the nonprofit arts and culture sector, younger audiences are one of the most sought after demographics (Ostrower, 2020). Organizations seek out this group specifically because, put bluntly, they need audiences to replace their current, aging patrons. There are two ways that collegiate performing arts centers (PACs) and arts programs can help with this. The first is through interactions with kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) students. Many PACs have a school series where elementary, middle, and high schools can bring young people to their theater as a field trip. They also might bring the visiting artist to the school for a hands on workshop. The second way is through engagement with their student body on campus. Engaging students can be difficult but fulfilling work. There are many barriers to the arts that students are faced with on college campuses. Arts administrators are challenged with adapting their programs to overcome these barriers.

Recently, I have begun really thinking about the problems that collegiate level performing arts centers and university art programs face while trying to support and engage students. Do university art departments and performing arts centers have official student engagement programs or do they lack the resources? If they do have programs, do they assess and evaluate them regularly to make sure they are providing what faculty, staff, and students actually need? Even more recently, I have considered how different organizations have adapted and innovated during this most peculiar time. At the writing of this project, the United States has been facing the Covid-19 pandemic for about one year. Everyone has heard many encouraging stories about how the human race has persevered, adapted, and even innovated impressive new ideas during this time. I have personally sat through dozens of Zoom sessions on the topic. One of the first I attended in 2020, was a roundtable discussion presented by the International Council of Fine Arts Deans. In his biography for the event, Paul Kassel, Dean for the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Northern Illinois University wrote:

> The pandemic has forced our institutions to think differently about fine and performing arts instruction. The impact of Covid-19 on our pedagogy and practice is not limited to the present moment, but will last well into the future. Changes have been made and are in the making-- and we aren't going back.

So, how have student engagement programs adapted to the pandemic? Are university arts administrators already discussing ways that their adaptations and innovations can continue after the pandemic subsides? My organization certainly has. Through my research, I would like to analyze these questions and look at qualitative data through interviews with student engagement professionals. I also think it is important for nonprofit organizations to share their triumphs and innovations especially during a global pandemic. This research will highlight the ways that the arts administrators have adapted their programs in order to support students on campus and virtually.

Context and Significance

In the past, my organization has spent a lot of time figuring out ways to attract audiences from outside of campus. It is easy to focus on these patrons when they pay higher ticket prices and donate money. Recently, we were charged with refocusing our attention toward the student experience. As a part of this directive, I began researching how collegiate level performing arts centers build participation in the arts across campus. We have always referred to the students as a "captive audience." We assumed that they would come to whatever events they were interested in and did little to cultivate our relationship with the student body. We did spend a substantial amount of time on masterclasses (an advanced seminar taught by an artist, which may or may not be in front of an audience,) residencies (a space to create work for an extended amount of time, outside of the artist's usual workspace,) and interactive workshops for students. We have spent a lot of time creating "curricular connections" by reaching out to professors, not only in the art departments, but also across campus to link art and artists with academics and curriculum. We look for ways to tie the performances we book to the coursework.

There is a lot of work that can be done building these curricular and co-curricular bridges across campus. For example, currently, we create our curricular connections newsletter after syllabi have been distributed and consistently reach out to the same faculty and staff each semester. Our curricular connections program and student engagement activities need to be overhauled. We still have a significant amount of work to do on all of our student engagement programs, even more so during a pandemic.

There has not been a lot of research on student engagement programs in the arts on the collegiate level. However, there are two significant reports that I would like to draw attention to now. The first is a case study done in May of 2013 by art consulting firm WolfBrown and commissioned by the Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College. This report highlights seven case studies focused on student engagement programs at American colleges and universities. Interactions with visiting artists

can be transformative on a young person's college experience (Clifford, 2013). WolfBrown put together

an extensive list of examples and illustrations to be used as a handbook by organizations who lack the

resources to implement official student engagement programs.

The second report is from a 1995 British research project put together by John Harland and Kay

Kinder for the National Foundation for Education Research at the University of York. Researchers on this

project interviewed 700 young people between the ages of 14 and 24. While this report is a little older

and it does not specifically focus on college students, it has a comprehensive list of twelve positive

attitudes (motivations) and eight negative attitudes (barriers) associated with arts involvement. These

positive and negative attitudes are universal and could still be used by arts administrators as a

foundation to help identify behaviors that could lead to successful arts participation and a breakdown of

barriers to their organization. A list of these attitudes can be found on page 14 of this report.

Performing Arts Centers and Higher Education

Collegiate performing arts centers are building complexes for the arts and are usually integral to

campus life (Morrison, 1973). They are a multi-use space and house multiple disciplines but usually

encompass theater, music, dance, and technical production. They not only serve the academic mission,

but they also serve as a gateway into the community. They often play a supporting role to the academic

departments and supply services such as ticketing, audience management, production, marketing, and

overall expertise and knowledge of theater management (Henley, 2017). The performing arts center can

refer to the building or the organization in general. Referring to a performing arts center as an

organization would also encompass the staff that works there.

Collegiate level performing arts centers and their presenting concert series have been growing

in popularity and number since the end of World War II (Morrison, 1973). University PACs work to

bridge the gap between the different art departments on campus, the art departments and other

academic and administrative departments across campus, and between the college and the local

community off-campus. These organizations can work as an umbrella for the arts on campus. They can

create programing with the art departments in mind or work together, hand in glove. There are

challenges to integrating the arts into the non-arts fields but these collaborations can lead to innovative

work.

While the arts have been present in higher education for some time, they are still facing the

same problems from the 1960s and 70s. Morrison observed that in many schools, there is a need to

bring the work that is done in performing arts centers into the forefront of curricular life on campus.

Margaret Mahoney (1970) wrote about the issues facing academic art programs decades ago. She noted

that there was little interdepartmental collaboration and the arts were separate from the rest of

academia. There was a lack of coordination between the arts curriculum and extracurricular activity. She

wrote that there was, "…little recognition that new ways may have to be found to reach large numbers

of students, and that student differences, not only in aptitude but degree of interest, are relevant in

planning an arts curriculum" (p. 22). This quote is an example of the problem that is still facing university

art programs today. Academic departments can silo themselves off from the rest of campus. Arts

programs and performing arts centers should build bridges campus wide and encourage collaboration,

cooperation, and shared creativity. University PACs also provide a stage for students to discuss difficult

topics like social justice issues or they can provide an unusual setting for creating new work. Artists can

also help students learn through active participation and imagination (Brown & Tepper, 2012). However,

university PACs and art departments still struggle to integrate the arts across campus.

Student Participation

Students participate in the arts on multiple levels on college and university campuses. Students

who major and minor in the arts are much easier to reach, however, it is still important to include

students who are not directly involved in arts activities. Students can be involved through live

performances but also workshops, masterclasses, student organizations, employment, and informal

gatherings. There is a good deal of research on audience involvement and participation in the general population. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) produces multiple surveys on this subject annually, however, there is not much research on college students specifically. This population has unique variables such as limits on time, money, and transportation.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), college students spend about four hours per weekday on leisure and sports activities (they only spend 3.5 hours a day on educational activities.) This should leave room for building interpersonal relationships with other students and classmates. There does not seem to be any research or data on how much time college students actually spend participating in arts activities. This data could vary significantly from school to school due to campus and regional culture in addition to the opportunities for engagement that are offered on site and in the community.

Morrison (1973) recommended that in addition to an arts program with majors and minors in the arts, there should be an art component for the general education of students. These days many liberal arts schools require at least one general education requirement in the humanities and many specifically require credits in the visual or performing arts. These introductory courses can help students with communication skills, critical thinking, and cultural diversity, and may even help decide what field of study the student will choose (Melega, 2015). Potential employers are looking for students who are not just good managers but have a creative skill set and are able to think outside of the box (Keeney, 2019). The soft skills developed during arts engagement can help students find high quality jobs after graduation. Studies show that there is a strong link between individuals that have higher education levels and arts participation (National Endowment for the Arts, 2015). This could be because students had some type of positive arts experience while they were in college by fulfilling a general education requirement or attending a performance.

Collegiate level PACs build involvement in many ways on campus and off campus, however, this review will focus on the faculty, staff, and student communities on campus. After reading through journals, articles, and previous studies, it seems that participation in the arts is not only lacking across American campuses but also with audiences in general. There is much uncertainty in the state of the arts after the Covid-19 pandemic. However, many colleges and universities are looking at new ways to collaborate with faculty, staff, and students in order to boost campus participation.

As I will discuss in the literature review, organizations around the world still have trouble attracting young people to art programs and performances. As stated above, there is a link between higher education and arts participation later in life, yet attending arts activities and performances does not necessarily seem to be at the top of most college student's agendas. There is research on attitudes and behaviors of "young people" but there did not seem to be much published data on college students specifically. I believe that there is still a great deal of research that needs to be done on how to engage college students in the arts.

Research Objectives

This research aims to share information gathered through key informant interviews. The research will seek to answer the following questions:

- How do collegiate level performing arts centers and university art programs support and engage students?

- Do university art programs evaluate the barriers and motivations to participation in their art programs?

- How have collegiate level programs adapted during the pandemic?

- Are there innovations that could continue into the post-pandemic landscape to better support faculty, staff, and students?

The goals of this research are to identify how collegiate performing arts centers and art programs successfully engage and support students. It will look at the best ways that students can experience the arts on campus. According to the WolfBrown report, formal compilations of research such as this are hard to find (Clifford, 2013, p. 4). Schools have varying budgets and may not have access to resources or they may not even have a performing arts center to support them. Research like this should be shared so that smaller organizations have a foundation on which they can build or adapt their student engagement programs. This information is especially pertinent right now as programs are adjusting to restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is possible that the arts and culture sector will never be the same. Information gathered here can start conversations on college campuses about the direction of arts programing and the innovative new ways that they can be implemented. Adaptation and innovation will be key to engaging younger audiences in the arts.

Overview of Paper

This paper will consist of a review of the literature, the method and findings, and a discussion of the implications. The literature gathered on art and academics; curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities; social capital; barriers and motivation; and participation will be discussed in the next chapter. The data collection method, findings, and discussion will be featured later in the report. A large piece of the data collection will come from interviews of key informants. Six arts administrators who are experienced in the field of student engagement and who work at American colleges and universities will be interviewed in order to utilize their expertise to better understand the issues they are currently facing. The last chapter will discuss what these findings mean for higher education, the arts and culture sector and other nonprofits, the community and other stakeholders, and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

How do collegiate level performing arts centers and university arts programs support and

engage their students who are and are not invested in the arts? In this literature review, I will give an

overview of the current literature on the importance of art and creativity in academics and how they can

aid learning and pedagogy. The existing literature on extracurricular, co-curricular, and academic

connections and why they are important to arts programs and the performing arts will also be reviewed.

It is essential that every arts program understands the barriers stakeholders encounter accessing

programming and also what motivates them to participate. Evaluating their programs and including

stakeholder input is essential. Literature and tools focused on these barriers, motivations, and

evaluation will be discussed. These organizations must understand what motivates students at different

levels of participation and the individual barriers that hinder their involvement. It is also important to

understand how these things are affected by campus culture. What works for one university may not

work for others. I will also take a brief look at some of the articles that have been published on issues

and adaptations related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since, we are only about a year into the pandemic

there is not much published literature on the subject. Finally, I will discuss where there is a gap in the

research.

Curricular and Extracurricular Connections

There is an enormous amount of research on why the arts are integral to a well-rounded

education. For example, theater is important in an educational setting due to the social benefits the

students receive such as communication skills, self-esteem, and collaborative play (Woodson, 2004, p.

25). However, there are not many studies focused on higher education, the majority focus on grades K-

12. Discipline-based art education (DBAE) can be helpful in explaining a comprehensive approach on the

importance of art in education. According to Elliot Eisner, advocates of this method say it "addresses the

four things people do with art: they make it, they appreciate its qualities, they locate its place in culture

over time, and they discuss and justify their judgments about its nature, merits, and importance" (2002, p. 27). This way of thinking can be applied and transferred to other academic subjects. According to The Art of Learning website, curricular connections can create deeper learning when content areas are combined. This type of learning is more holistic and encompasses a student's heart, mind, body, and soul (DeWilde, 2019).

David Oxtoby suggests that the arts are an integral part of education because it pushes student's boundaries. It challenges them and can boost their confidence. He goes on to say that the arts can help with the messiness of the real-world and how to react when experiments go wrong (2012, p. 4). Dana Gioia, former chairperson of the National Endowment for the Arts, states that, "The real purpose of arts education is to create complete human beings who are capable of leading successful and productive lives in a free society" (2008, p. 2). This quote from Gioia sums up all of the previous descriptions. While the arts are useful at teaching other subjects, the arts alone prepare students for life after school.

Research into curricular activities has shown that learning that takes place outside of the traditional classroom environment can supplement academic learning and engage students. These studies looked at student organizations such as student government groups, sororities and fraternities, academic clubs, professional and honor societies, service groups, intermural sports clubs, and special interest/cultural groups. These groups share overlap with arts activities and may have a close working relationship with the performing arts center on campus. Some examples of these organizations could be student a cappella groups, cultural heritage clubs, or improv troupes. Most universities also have at least one student run organization that focuses on each of the major art genres: theater, dance, visual arts, and music. Membership in student organizations can lead to a more holistic learning experience in addition to cultivating relationships between faculty and staff, higher satisfaction rates with the college experience, building lasting friendships, and enhanced self-confidence (Montelongo, 2002).

Extracurricular activities have been proven to increase civic and social involvement into adulthood (Putnam, 2000). Co-curricular experiences such as involvement in student organizations, living and working on campus, and relationships between students develop intellectual growth. They also allow students to grow responsibility through leadership opportunities, gain independence by meeting new people, and living on their own (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

Relationships and Social Capital

There is an enormousness amount of research on the reasons why the general public in the United States engages or does not engage in arts activities. The NEA commissions research on this topic fairly regularly. Recently, they found that for 80% of young people born after 1996, the top reason for not attending a performance was lack of someone to go with (Carter, 2020). Social capital has a significant connection to campus life and the culture of a campus. According to Robert Putnam (2000), social capital refers to the connections between people. It is social networks and social relations.

People have a strong need to form networks with people and be near other people. One of the ways they do this is through group activities like sporting events, concerts, or by going to a play. People enjoy viewing art with other people, even if the people around you are strangers. Putnam explained that you do not have to have the same political views or shared ideologies to enjoy these activities with other audience members. Putnam called for people to spend more time with each other. He asked that we, "discover new ways to use the arts as a vehicle for convening diverse groups of citizens" (p. 411). College campuses are one of the best places for this to happen. The student bodies on today's campuses are one of the most diverse generations yet (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Collegiate performing arts centers' have the ability to build their audiences from people of many different ages and races.

Motivations and Barriers

There does not seem to be any published research or data on how much time college students actually spend participating in arts activities either hands on, through clubs and organizations, or by

attendance at performances and workshops. This data could vary significantly from school to school due to campus and regional culture in addition to the opportunities for engagement that are offered on site and in the community. Hopefully, universities are tracking this data through ticket sales and attendance records but decide to use it only for internal purposes. There are a couple of older reports that do look at the barriers and motivations that students face when deciding to participate in an arts program or activity.

In 1995, John Harland and Kay Kinder looked at young people's attitudes to participation in the arts. Twelve positive attitudes towards the arts and eight negative attitudes towards the arts were identified. These sets of motivations and barriers could form the basis for a framework that university performing arts centers could use to explore interventions and strategies to build participation in the arts. The twelve motivations they identified were:

- Enjoyment/Fun

- Achievement Orientated/Competition

- Task Orientated/To Learn New Skills

- Social Benefits/Meeting New People

- Image/Status (can also be viewed as a disadvantage)

- Social Pressure/In Order to Please

- Physiological/Therapeutic/Relaxation

- Self-Expression/Identity

- Comfortability/At Home With

- Intrinsic/Aesthetic

- Situation Specific

- Material/Monetary (can also be viewed as a disadvantage)

The barriers to participation were split into two categories:

Resource dependent:

- Lack of Opportunities/Transportation

- Lack of Time

- Lack of Money/Equipment

Attitudinal:

- Boring/Not for Me (attitude)

- Not Stimulating/Lack of Therapeutic Value (physiological)

- Lack of Ability/Talent

- Lack of Comfort/Knowledge

- Discomfort/Unease

- Situation Specific

- Social Image/Family Norms

- Self-Image/Not an 'Arty' Person

The motivations that seemed to lead to higher quality commitment and participation were task-oriented, physiological, self-expression, and intrinsic. The barriers were not ranked.

Floberg and Brown (2013) identified similar barriers specific to college campuses in a study by WolfBrown and the Hopkins Center for the Arts. They recognized that there is a significant investment college students take into consideration when deciding to attend a campus event. These are time, money, and lack of familiarity with the venue and/or artist. They propose bringing performances into everyday spaces at unexpected times could motivate students to participate. Lowering the ticket costs and implementing simple ticket policies would also lower barriers. Some ideas that could motivate students are encouraging peer to peer connections like arts ambassadors or advisory boards. They also mentioned curricular connections– bringing the performing arts into the classroom or requiring students to attend performances. This study also mentioned reaching out to students as soon as they get to

campus, "Exposing college students to the performing arts early in their campus experience can deconstruct perceptual barriers, increase attendance at performances, and inspire participation in other activities offered by the campus presenter" (p. 7). This report is an excellent resource that includes many more strategies and case studies.

There is a close relationship between barriers and motivations towards the arts on campus. What might be seen as a barrier to one student, may be a motivation to another. Projecting the image that you are an "artsy" person may be beneficial for some students but other students may not want to be seen in that way. Harland and Kinder also found that attitudes towards the arts could be changed. When young people were exposed to positive immersions with other people who offered positive reinforcement in the arts their attitudes towards the arts improved.

A more recent study found that the strongest predictor of involvement in the arts was comfortability or feeling at home with the arts (Hale & Woronkowicz, 2019). Students who were more experienced in the arts had higher rates of participation. This study also found that university investing in arts programs did increase access for some students. They did this by increasing funding in order to make the tickets free for all students. This eliminated the cost barrier completely. However, lack of time was still a problem for most students. The results of this study showed that significant increases in investment in the arts really only lowered the barriers for students who already had experience in the arts.

The NEA came out with a set of findings based on the 2017 *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* and the 2016 *General Social Survey*. These finding were from surveys of American adults, however, they show some connection to the findings from Harland and Kinder. The NEA reports found that the most commonly stated motivation for arts participation was socializing with friends or family. Seeing a specific performer/artist/exhibit and supporting a community organization or event were also high on the list of motivations. Depending on the campus culture, other motivations to participation might be

student's interest in finding alternate activities outside of Greek organizations or parties that focus on

binge drinking and other problematic activities. Barriers to attending a performance were lack of time,

cost, and location (Dwyer et al., 2019).

There are also several studies on Millennial arts participation (Ostrower, 2020) (Tait et al., 2019).

Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2019). This group of young people are close in

age to current college students and can give us a clearer understanding of their social habits and

preferences. More importantly, these two studies spell out the importance of engaging young people in

the arts, "Too few young patrons were emerging to replace current and aging audiences, and

organizations therefore needed to tap into the large millennial population to create a pipeline of

younger audiences" (Ostrower, p. 1). This article supposes that this is due to cuts in funding for arts

education in K-12 schools. In an article based on the NEA's 2008 *Survey of Public Participation in the*

Arts, Mark J. Stern (2011) concluded that people born before 1955 were much more likely to attend arts

related activities. However, if younger people attend performances early in life they will continue to

participate as they age. The Ostrower, Stern, Hale & Woronkowicz, and Harland & Kinder studies all

touched on an important point, age and generation do not correlate to participation– early familiarity

and interaction with the arts is a much better predictor of involvement.

Participation Tools

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) created a set of core values, a code

of ethics, and a spectrum of public participation that makes up its three pillars for effective public

participation. The spectrum of public participation was developed to help with designating the level of

participation that organizations would like to seek from the public. This is a helpful guide on the

importance of including stakeholders in your planning and evaluation process in order to build strong

participation (2018).

The Wallace Foundation (2014) has an infographic for *Nine Effective Practices for Building Audiences for the Arts.* Some of the practices are recognize when change is needed, determine what kinds of barriers need to be removed, use audience research to take out the guess work, provide multiple ways in, and build in learning. The IAP2 spectrum and the Wallace infographic are not specifically related to student engagement but they do provide guidance on building participation that can be applied to a student engagement program.

Covid-19's Impact

The Covid-19 pandemic has had significant implications and repercussions on the arts and culture sector. Performing arts audiences require unrelated people to be in close quarters with each other and restrictions have forced many venues to close. The consequences of this disaster are hard to discern due to the size and scope of the sector (Guibert & Hyde, 2021). According to Daniel Johnston, "being close to others is intrinsically associated with theatre" and "proximity and touch" are vital to the live experience (2020, p. 1). Some arts genres were quick to adapt to virtual environments. Storytelling quickly caught on to the need for digital content and produced recorded or 24 hour festivals that could easily be accessed by people around the world (Mages, 2020). However, Zoom fatigue is a real problem and can result in fatigue, anxiety, and worry from overusing virtual videoconferencing platforms (Wiederhold, 2020). There is at least one benefit to travel restrictions and limitations. Reduced demand in the sector has opened up opportunities for local, smaller scale, arts and culture events (Florida & Seman, 2020). Many arts and culture institutions have been able to adapt and pivot to the restrictions put in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic, however, the effects of this disaster will not be fully measured for some time.

Conclusion

There does not seem to be very much current and publicly available literature on how collegiate performing arts centers and art programs support and engage students and how they evaluate the

barriers and motivations to participation in the arts. Updated studies similar to the WolfBrown and

Harland and Kinder studies are needed. Building on this research could positively affect student

engagement programs across the country. This is especially necessary to rebuild lost audiences due to

the pandemic.

This paper aims to specifically contribute by conducting interviews with experts on the subject.

Using data collected through interviews with student engagement professionals, new insights can be

gathered on what attracts or deters students from participation in the arts and what adaptations and

innovations have been made due to the pandemic. This data can be used to create better programming

that can engage and support students. These students can then, hopefully, go on to become arts

enthusiasts who will supply the arts and culture sector with supportive and engaged audiences.

Chapter 3: Method and Findings

Research Method

  The main objective of this research is to look at how collegiate performing arts centers and art

programs support and engage students, how they evaluate barriers and motivations to participation in

the arts, how the programs have adapted to the pandemic, and how these adaptations could continue

into the future. This section lays out the methods used to recruit participants, the questions that were

included, and how the findings were organized and analyzed. The next section will identify findings of

the interviews. This includes the themes and sub themes that were observed throughout the process.

Sample

  Qualitative data were gathered by interviewing key informants. Six arts administrators who are

experienced in the field of student engagement and who work at American colleges and universities

took part in the interviews. They were chosen due to their expertise in order to better understand how

collegiate level performing arts centers and art programs support and engage students and how they

have adapted during the Covid-19 pandemic. These participants were recruited after examining their

organization's websites, speaking with colleagues, and my own knowledge of interesting student

engagement programs. Their job titles varied. Two participants work at major universities with 25,000 or

more students, two participants are from midsize universities with between 5,000 and 10,000 students,

and two participants are from smaller universities with less than 4,000 students. Three of the arts

administrators are on the staff of a collegiate performing arts center. One is positioned in academic

affairs, one in student affairs, and one is on the staff of an academic department. These last three

participants gave an interesting view of student engagement from outside of a presenting organization –

a performing arts center that focuses on presenting other artist's work instead of producing their own

artistic works. I reached out to six arts administrators, all six responded and participated. The

participants will be referred to by their participant number. Table 1 describes each participant's school

size, job title, and college/university type. Names are not used to protect anonymity.

Table 1

Interview Participant Description

Participant	School Size	Title	Type
1	Small	Director of Arts & Creative Engagement (academic affairs)	private liberal arts college
2	Small	Director	private liberal arts college
3	Medium	Executive Director (academic department)	private research university
4	Medium	Curator of Academic Programing	private research university
5	Large	Program Director (student affairs)	public research university
6	Large	Education & Community Engagement Director	public research university

There were three qualifications for the programs that were researched and associated with the

arts administrators. Programs were only considered if they were still progressing through the pandemic,

student engagement content could be previewed on their website, and it looked like they had made

interesting adaptations or innovated new ideas due to the pandemic. These interviews took place over

Zoom in March of 2021. The interviews were conducted just over one year into the Covid-19 pandemic.

Participants were asked the same 11 questions. Most of these questions were open ended. If they were

not, a follow up question was then asked. The full list of questions can be found in Appendix A.

After the initial questions were answered, there were some additional questions asked based on

advanced research of the organization. These questions were related to specific programs or events that

were listed on their website.

Analysis

The raw data, the transcripts from the interviews, was used to interpret the findings. Computer

software from Otter.ai was used to transcribe the recorded Zoom calls. This data was imported into

Word, analyzed, and the emerging themes were coded. The transcripts were read through multiple

times and the possible themes were highlighted. The code word or theme was then noted in a comment

in the sidebar of the Word document next to the highlighted text. An example of the coding of the

transcripts can be found in Appendix B. They were then logged into an Excel spreadsheet by simply

counting the times they were mentioned in the interviews. A number one in the "mentions" column

would mean that it was mentioned in one of the interviews. A six would mean that it was mentioned in

all six interviews. The highest numbers were then included in the report. The data from the Excel

spreadsheet can be found in Appendix C and Appendix D. The collected data was split into the barriers,

motivations, and the main themes or categories. The categories were color coded and grouped with

similar ideas. The data from the Word document and Excel spreadsheet was used to interpret my

conclusions, which will follow in the next section. The implications of these conclusions will be discussed

in the final chapter.

Limitations

There were some pros and cons to this research design. The strength of using this method was

the in-depth qualitative data gathered. However, with any interview, one of the weaknesses is reliability

and bias (Brown & Hale, 2014). Another weakness, is that this is not an adequate representation of the

collegiate level academic art programs. It is only a small representation of six organizations. Further

research could be structured in the form of surveys sent to a larger sample of arts administrators to get

a better overall view of the state of student engagement programs before and after the pandemic. Even

though the same questions were asked, each interview was very different. However, several similar

themes emerged from them.

Findings

Six arts administrators from six different American colleges and universities participated in six

semi-structured interviews. There were a variety of ways that administrators support and engage

students. There were also many different ways that they organizations adapted to the pandemic. Some

were very similar. The main themes and sub themes and are listed. This section will report on the

findings from the interviews and will be organized by research question. Using the transcripts from the

data the following themes and sub themes were observed.

Supporting and Engaging Students

The arts administrators described a wide range of support or engagement programs. The top

five ways were through curricular connections, artists (students and professional,) grant funding,

student employment, and ticketing/students as audience members. Curricular connections and artists

were the most discussed. Curricular connections include the sub themes of class requirements, cross-

department, and cross-campus collaboration. Artists can be broken down into two sub themes: students

as artists and visiting artists. Student employment sub themes were internships, fellowships, peer

advisors, and arts ambassadors. Student as ticketing/audience members sub themes include discounts

and voucher programs. Figure 1 is a concept model of the top themes and sub themes regarding support

and engagement programs and activities. Not all of the topics that were discussed in the interviews are

listed, only the major themes and sub themes. Other student engagement programs may have

additional programing and activities.
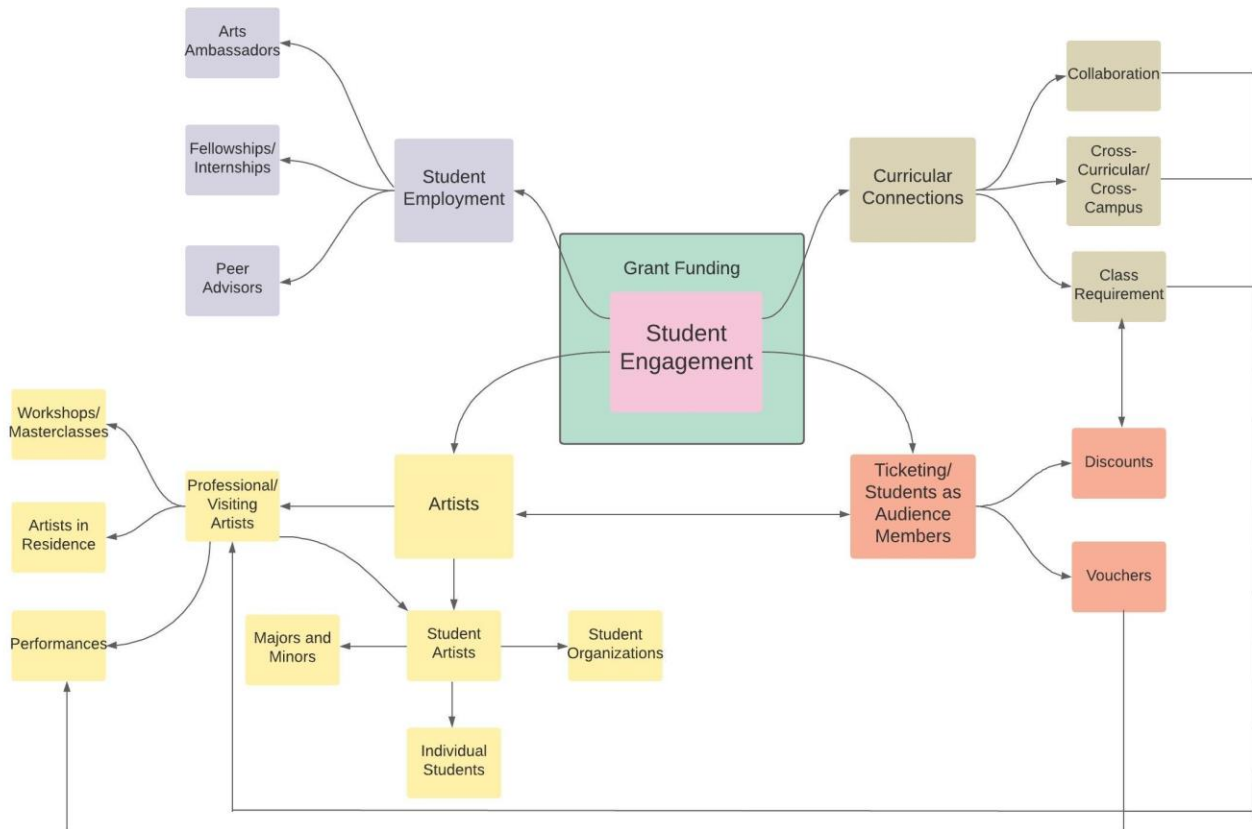
FIGURE 1 – Conceptual Model

There is overlap between these themes. For example, class requirements and ticketing are connected in two ways. Students who are required to go to a performance for class receive a discounted ticket. When professors require students to see a performance for class they are boosting student participation, more tickets are sold and more students fill the audience. Participant 4 mentioned that one of the best ways to get students to attend a performance was for a professor to require it in their syllabus but an artist visit in the classroom will also increase attendance. Students will now be familiar with this artist and their work, therefor, they will have more motivation to attend the performance. This scenario includes themes related to curricular connections, artists, and ticketing.

Curricular Connections. Curricular connections were mentioned by all six arts administrators. Making connections between the curriculum and the art or artist is integral to each of the collegiate

level arts organizations. These programs encompass collaboration between the art departments and across campus. The main way that curricular connections programs are offered at schools is through the professors requiring students to attend a performance for class credit or extra credit together as a class or individually. Masterclasses, residencies, and other artist visits in the classroom are the other ways in which curricular connections are made.

Participant 1 meets regularly with department chairs. This aids in collaboration, another sub theme related to curricular connections. They meet to discuss common ground between the different disciplines and how participant 1 can advocate and resource for them. Since participant 1 is positioned in academic affairs they have a broader scope. They are not situated in a school of arts and sciences or an art program and are able to collaborate with all of the different departments on campus. They noted that,

> Being in academic affairs has changed my job. And I think it was really needed. I think the arts
>
> feel more supported. I feel more supported and relevant and have direct access to the Dean's in
>
> the faculty and Associate Dean. And I think that has been helpful in my relationships with the
>
> chairs, and with the other faculty and with students. So I think there's some relevancy there.

Participant 1 also stated that, "the more visible you are, the more impact you can have on campus." This enables them to have more outreach across divisions like athletics, student life, admissions, and college relations. These cross-curricular and cross-departmental relationships are able to give the arts on campus more visibility.

Participant 4, the Curator of Academic Programming's, engagement program focuses heavily on curricular connections. Their program formerly to consisted of a PDF with a short description of each performance they were hosting that season that was then forwarded off to all of the faculty. It was then up to the professors to decide if an event was relevant to their class curriculum. Now, participant 4 looks through the course catalogue to identify professors who may have a class connection to an event. They

personally writes to each professor about how the show is aligned with their curriculum. This has increased response rates from professors.

Curricular connections can help with social connections as well. A first year scholars program at participant 6's school requires freshman to attend a performance together. In addition to creating deeper learning, it is also a way for first year students to meet people and build a community. It can help new students become familiar with the buildings and connect with campus.

Six years ago, participant 2 redesigned their organizational model. Instead of bringing in artists for a one-off performance each night, they decided to become a residency-based organization. Almost all of their performances have some form of artist residency, workshop, or masterclass. If they are able to bring an artist on campus, they are going to connect them to multiple activities with students.

Participant 2 is also working to not only collaborate with art departments but also across campus. They mentioned that their favorite cross-collaboration was between a string quartet and the Department of Neuroscience. The students created projects and discussed the ways that sound is processed by the body and how the audience receives sensory information. They looked at how the artists communicated with each other on stage and with the audience. They have done similar collaborations with Environmental Studies and Women and Gender Studies. This has a strong connection with the next theme: artists.

Professional and Student Artists. Artists are another very large category with multiple sub themes. The interviewees discussed student artists, which includes majors and minors in the arts, student organizations, and individual students. This can be something as big as a semester long performance piece or something small like a workshop where students are given art supplies and they create a piece of art. The theme also included topics relating to visiting or professional artists who in addition to performing at these colleges and universities hold workshops, masterclasses, and residencies.

Participant 2 said that they are consistently looking for artists "who want to engage meaningfully with their student body." On the other end of the spectrum, they also want to book artists who the students find engaging and interesting. They know that if the students are interested and engaged then that program will be a success. Their residency program is specifically for students but it is a part of their performing arts series. It is, "specifically designed to find meaningful direct contact between our professional artists we bring to campus and our students." This program also supports a student initiated residency. Students submit proposals and they are voted on by the performing arts center's member society. The student is the lead organizer and is supported with the donated funds. It can include a public performance but is mostly intended for students to closely work with an artist and produce their own residency. This is also an example of another sub theme I identified, investing in students.

Participant 3 discussed the professional artist experience in a different way. Their department often ponders the educational value of a professional artistic experience. Most of their students will not go on to be artists and the faculty is not there to train professional artists. What are the students getting out of this experience? How many resources (budget, time, energy) do you put into this when there are only a few students who will go on to become professional artists? This did lead to an interesting point: you still want them to be art enthusiasts and support the arts financially or as audience members no matter what they go on to do.

Interview participants spoke about students as artists and makers. For participant 3, the Executive Director of the academic department, student direction is a popular topic of discussion. The faculty frequently discuss the balance between how much they push the students in a certain direction and how the student forges their own path. Participant 6's organization supports student artists in a couple of different ways. One of the unique ways is that they have their students speak at the pre-show talks. At participant 5's organization, the majority of students are virtual. They still wanted to support

students making art at home. They had an abundance of funding so they wanted to invest in students by supporting their projects financially. They do this through student employment or grant funded projects. These two programs overlap with the themes of student employment, investing in students, and grant funding.

Grant Funding. Grant funding is a large part of these organization's student engagement programs and seems to overlap with each of the other main themes. Grants can provide funding for student employment positions, artist visits, student art projects, discounted tickets and voucher programs. Many of the participants spoke about it, however, two programs leaned heavily on grants.

Participant 1's program is based almost entirely on grant funding for students and employees. According to their website they have ten specific grants available to faculty, staff, and students who would like to integrate the arts into their project. These grants have different parameters around them and some include a public performance piece. There are also grants that can be used for enriching classroom experiences, which overlaps with curricular connections. These funds can be used to take a class to a museum or be used to pay for an artist visit. Some of the grants are not tied to curriculum at all. Participant 1 really pushes to get non-art majors involved. Students who may be very creative and would be interested in incorporating the arts into their independent study but just do not have the resources. In the end, participant 1 believes that these programs are important because it teaches students how to find the money and be the producers. They want them to learn how to do it themselves.

Participant 5 also uses a grant program for faculty who incorporate the arts into their curriculum. Their grants can also be used for work on a project like a capstone or thesis or for students and student organizations to put on an event. This can be for academic work or independent work. Their organization would like to make it easier for student groups to receive money. They want to make sure that the students know that the funding is there. They also want to make it easier for them to get the

funds by cutting out red tape and lowering the barriers. This seems to be working. Their grant program has doubled their applications in the last five years.

Student Employment. For many students, on campus employment is their first real job. Some are required to have jobs tied to their work study, for extra money, and or just for fun. This can be through regular student employment, as paid or unpaid internships or through fellowships. They can work in the box office or directly with the arts administrators. They can be arts ambassadors or peer advisors. Whatever their position, student employment is a huge part of student engagement programs.

Participant 1 relies on their fellows and interns to run their grant programs. They were able to secure funding through work study to pay them about four years ago. A couple of their grants now supply funds for students who have received unpaid art internships. They also use their interns and fellows to connect with the rest of the student body, they are their "boots on the ground." They help with talking to their peers to identify the issues that are important to the student body and the barriers that students may face when deciding to attend arts activities.

Student to student connections are also important. Peer advisors have many different roles at the schools discussed in the interviews. One of the administrators had an interesting perspective. They have recently built their peer advisor program as a component of their diversity and inclusion work. This has been a necessary program for students who come from underrepresented backgrounds, who may not have had access to the arts as children, or whose interest in the arts may not be supported by their family members. Peer advisors work one on one with students or through personal interactions between students. Arts ambassadors are similar to peer advisors in that they are students who enjoying talking to other students about the arts. These are groups of students who may work for the arts center or they may volunteer their time. This group is a mix of students who are engaged in the arts or are just excited about the arts.

Ticketing, Vouchers, and Students as Audience Members. The next theme identified is students as audience members. This can include ticketing rewards such as free or discounted tickets. This also includes vouchers that can be used to pay for tickets to events on and off campus. This usually helps boost ticket sales at the on campus performing arts center but it seemed like getting students excited about art was the main goal. A couple of the arts administrators spoke specifically about creating future audience members and arts enthusiasts. Participant 2 gave a great example of how they view their organization's target audience:

> I describe our audience, our target audience almost like a bullseye. The students are at the
>
> center, they are the bull's eye, our student body. That's the audience that I would consider
>
> primary and that we are aiming for, first and foremost, the circle that's around that group is our
>
> faculty and staff, maybe our alumni who live in the area, other people who are connected to
>
> [redacted] in some way, you know, they're part of the [redacted] family but they're not students
>
> they're adult people, you know, bonafide adult people rather than emerging adult people. And
>
> then the tertiary audience is the next wing around which is our community members and our
>
> audience.

Not all of the organizations described their student audience members or the number of students who attend performances.

Vouchers can be thought of like reimbursements for the cost of the ticket. Sometimes the organizations give them out in advance, and sometimes the student will need to be reimbursed for the performance they attend afterward. A couple of the schools involved in this study are close to large cities. The organization will purchase tickets to popular events in the city for the students. A benefit of one of the student engagement programs is that the organization will not only purchase student tickets in advance, but also they will give out the train tickets in order for them to have transportation into the city. They also make tickets available to students if there is a faculty member who is preforming off

campus. Participant 5 has had great success with their voucher program. Sometimes it has been almost

too successful when they have students redeeming up to 4,000 vouchers that need to be processed and

budgeted for. Students learn about it when they are freshman. The organization regularly hears from

students who have positive experiences. Seniors frequently let them know that they have been

participating in the voucher program all four years of school.

Many of the arts administrators mentioned field trips as something that was very popular with

faculty, staff, and students before the pandemic. One of the barriers that students face is transportation

since most students do not have cars on campus. The organizations providing that bus or train ticket

enables them to experience something they would not have had access to on their own. This is

something that participant 1 will look forward to doing again after the pandemic.

Evaluating Barriers and Motivations

Including students in surveys and evaluations is a large part of student engagement programs.

Each of the arts administrators included student feedback in their program evaluations. However, not all

of them are evaluating barriers and motivations specifically as they relate to participation in the arts.

Some of the administrators identified specific barriers and motivations and then modified their

programming. Participant 6 brought up an interesting point about surveying. They want to do more

campus wide surveys. Most of the organizations are surveying students after they have participated in

an arts event. The campus wide survey would get a broader view and include the voices that "aren't in

the room." They would like to gather student thoughts from the students who are not taking part in

these events.

Barriers. There are many barriers that students face when deciding to participate in the arts.

These barriers to participation could discourage a student from attending a performance, deciding

whether they want to take an art class, choosing how they spend their free time, or even deciding what

they discuss with their friends. The top barrier to participating in arts programming that the arts

administrators identified was time. It was mentioned by almost all of them. The other top barriers were over programming, unfamiliarity with the arts, advertising, accessibility, and atmosphere. Only one arts administer mentioned Zoom fatigue. All of the barriers that were mentioned in the interviews are listed in Appendix D.

Unfamiliarity, atmosphere, accessibility, and elitism are similar barriers. Students can be reluctant to engage if they are unfamiliar with the arts. This could be because they do not understand the genre or are confused by what they are watching. It could also be something as simple as they do not know when to clap or how to dress. Some venues may have an unfriendly atmosphere. Students may feel unwelcome due to the physical space. It may seem pretentious, intimidating, or too fancy. There is nowhere for them to meet with other students, study, or just take a break in between classes. Participant 3 brought up elitism. They thought that there may be a psychological barrier to going to a professional performance. The student just does not think that type of event is for them.

Advertising can be a barrier because it is hard to reach students. Arts staff do not have access to residence halls, therefore, it is not always easy to advertise where students spend a lot of their time. Participant 2 has a background in marketing. They said it takes 12 layers of impressions for a person to actually hear the message. This could be word of mouth, a poster, a Facebook ad, etc. That is a lot of advertising needed to convince a student to come to a performance. Over programming is very similar. On campus, students are berated with announcements of campus events. It can be hard to cut through the static and get an event noticed.

According to the participants, time is the hardest barrier to overcome. Student's schedules are packed with other campus events, extracurricular activities, and clubs. Some of the administrators noted that academic pressure was a huge factor here. Students stress out about getting all A's so schoolwork takes priority. Participant 3 said, "I think we're constantly evaluating how much to expect of students outside of their class time, … we're still trying to kind of support their control over their time." They also

brought up the fact that this is why it is important to pay students for their time. Student schedules are

packed and there just might not be enough incentive to choose to come to an arts activity.

Motivations. There are ways that schools and administrators can make it easier for students to

participate in arts activities or entice them to come. Many of these examples of barriers and motivations

are opposite sides of the same coin. A barrier could be that the space is unwelcoming and cold but a

motivation is that the space is friendly and warm. Motivations could be incentives that are easy to

implement like discounted tickets or free food. Some are harder to execute like overhauling your

physical space so that students want to hang out there. There are a couple of motivations that have a

significant impact on student health and wellness. These are using the arts to relieve stress and

providing alcohol free activities. A couple of the participant's organizations collaborate with the student

health center to create activities surrounding these issues. The other top incentives were the popularity

of the artist, their friends are involved in the event, and the social aspect of it but, by far, free or

discounted tickets was the most popular motivation. The full list of motivations that were mentioned

can be found in Appendix D.

Free and discounted tickets were mentioned by the majority of participants. Discounts can be

given to the entire student body, groups of students, student organizations, or classes depending on the

school. A couple of the administrators are looking for ways to make it easier for students to learn about

these discounts and also how to receive them. One of the schools offers free tickets but the student

needs to pick them up from the box office on the night of the event. They would like to figure out a way

for their ticketing system to recognize them as students so that they can get the tickets sent to them

directly on their phone. Right now this is not possible because it is too easy for the general public to

abuse the system and get free tickets. This can also be associated with curricular connections. Students

receive discounts or free tickets when they are required to attend a performance by a professor. The

professor usually receives an incentive as well. Administrators use free and discounted tickets as a way to boost attendance to arts events on campus.

The popularity of the artist has a lot to do with who decides to come to performances, workshops, and other arts events where attendance is not required. Participant 2 says that if the artist is someone the students are interested in or engaged by they know it will be a successful event. One of the downsides, however, is that these events sell out very quickly. This might make it hard for students to have a chance to get tickets. These events are usually Broadway type shows, large orchestras, or ballet companies. They have a huge draw and their students love attending these types of events, especially with friends and classmates.

The last two motivations are the social aspect and their friends are taking part in the event. These two are very similar because they have to do with being with friends or making new friends. This is great for art events because then the students have someone to talk about the event with or just enjoy it together. First year students are especially interested in these types of events so they can start building their social circles. During the pandemic, the social aspect was especially important to new students. When they were remote learning, they had no way to meet people outside of their classes. Participant 3 worked on setting up virtual social hours so that freshman could meet new people. Having people to go to arts events with was a big motivator for students at participant 6's school.

Adaptations, Innovations, and Post Pandemic

All of the schools, programs, and administrators have adapted in some way. All but one of the schools are working in a hybrid environment. This means that most of the students are on campus but some are attending classes virtually. They may have some classes in person or classes may be virtual. The classes may even be taking place in-person but some of the students are there in the classroom and some are tuning in virtually. One of the larger schools is almost completely virtual. None of their student engagement programs are taking place in-person. The rest of the schools are still doing a majority of

events online but are trying to have small, safe in-person events when possible. These schools are

working with differing levels of restrictions. The schools that are allowed to have small in-person events

may have lost space in their large concert halls or in their theaters because large classes have moved in

to them. All of the schools are still doing something and adapting in whatever way they can.

Virtual programming is the most prominent adaptation. All of the schools have adapted their

performances to take place online in one form or another. This can be a live performance, pre-recorded,

or even interactive. Participant 2's school is located in a state that has inclement weather for the

majority of the winter months. Traveling to and from their venue can be treacherous, especially at night.

Their audiences do not seem to mind the virtual programming, they are still bringing in about 500

people per event. They have had viewers in 28 states and six countries. Participant 5 spoke about the

asynchronous nature of virtual programming. They think that it is a new way for students to engage in

programing and may be appealing to students. Students might be more willing to participate if they do

not have to show up at a certain time and can watch it on their own.

Participant 6's organization has come up with a couple of interesting virtual adaptations and

innovations. The first is a lunch and learn video podcast. They speak with an artist and discuss different

topics each month. The second is a spotlight series where they interview one of their current students or

alumni each month. These have both been very successful programs for their organization and they will

probably continue after the pandemic is over. They do want to be mindful of the additional work it will

take to put these on once they have a full season of shows again. They want to make sure they will have

time to do a mix of live and virtual events once things are back to normal.

Remote learning is a consistent part of student life all of the participant's schools. Virtual artist

visits, masterclasses, and workshops are a new product of this and they come with some benefits. One

class at a participant's school got an unexpected surprise when a very high profile musician was able to

Zoom into their songwriting class. This musician gave an impromptu workshop and gave the students

tips on their songwriting. The professor was only able to set this up due to the class being virtual. This was an opportunity that never would have happened before the pandemic. This topic came up in the discussions. Many of the schools are working with artists that they may never have worked with before due to travel or budget. Participant 3's organization will prioritize in-person visits but if there is another amazing opportunity like this, it will not be passed up.

Participant 1 is adamant about paying artists the same as they would before the pandemic. They indicated that, even though the artist is participating through Zoom, they are still sharing their knowledge and they do not deserve to be paid any less. Others are looking forward to the possibility of getting bigger named artist virtually for less money. Participant 4 is thinking about how much easier it will be to get artists in for a Zoom discussion instead of having to fly them out and work that artist in to the season. This is one area they will continue after the pandemic.

Administrators and professors have to reimagine ways for students to perform their work. Recitals, dance concerts, theater pieces are now virtual too. This is not necessarily a bad thing according to participant 3. They put together an online dance festival with guest choreographers. They went to them and asked, "what do you want to do online, you know, and how do you want to engage with our students and they all came up with these extraordinary and very unique ways of doing that." One of the pieces premiered live and then the other five pieces were recorded. The students were still engaged with this project even though it was virtual. They think they will include recorded media in the dance festival moving forward.

Participant 1's grant program now includes a specific Covid-19 grant. These grants were about $1,000 each and there was consideration given to cross-discipline or collaborative proposals. The projects must have a public presentation at the end. This grant was very popular with their students and they received an overwhelming amount of proposals. This grant will continue in one way or another after the pandemic. Participant 1 has realized that they need more funds like this to be available for

students to create their own art. This was not just art students participating. There were non-arts

majors, athletes, and faculty that were taking part in it.

The post-pandemic landscape will look different from what anyone is used to. There will be

lasting effects. The administrators have already began discussing where these new adaptations will lead

them in the future. Virtual artist visits are very popular and many of the schools are discussing ways to

make this a regular part of their programs. The reimagined dance festival will hopefully lead to a dance

on film or video dance class at participant 3's school. They were very excited about letting the students

and choreographers go crazy with their pieces, things they would not be able to do in a theater. Even

once there is a live audience again, the dance festivals can still have recorded segments.

Participant 2 is looking forward to keeping up with their new audience from around the world.

This Executive Director still believes that the power of live performance is still important but would like

to continue to interact with their new regional and international patrons. They are thinking about

adding on a streaming pass. They would still offer the in-person experience but for the winter months

they may add on the option of tuning in virtually. They are also excited to collaborate with their alumni

office to collaborate on these types of virtual programming. The overall feel of the interviews led me to

believe that these arts administrators are hopeful for the future of their programs and student

involvement within them. There are some very innovative projects coming out of these schools that will

continue after everyone can gather together once again.

Conclusion

This chapter has summarized the research method including the sample, analysis, and findings.

The interview participants shared the many ways they support and engage students in through their art

programs. The most popular ways were through curricular connections; student and professional artists;

grant funding; student employment and ticketing, vouchers, and students as audience members. The

arts administrators who were interviewed shared many examples of how their programs adapted to the

Covid-19 pandemic and how they plan to adjust their programs in the future. The final chapter will

discuss what these findings mean for the education and arts and culture sectors and other

constituencies that have a connection to student engagement.

Chapter 4: Discussion

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic turned the world upside down. Nonprofit organizations had to quickly

adapt or risk shutting down. College students moved from learning almost entirely in the classroom to

virtual learning in a couple of weeks. American colleges and universities were able to return to

structured learning either in-person, virtual, or in a hybrid version of both of these scenarios in the fall

of 2020. The barriers that kept students from participating pre-pandemic grew stronger but their

motivations also grew. Student engagement professionals and arts administrators adapted their

programs or learned new ways to support and engage their students through art programming and

activities. Arts administrators are evaluating their programs and have begun to discuss the ways that

these new adaptations could continue in a post-pandemic landscape.

This paper aims to find out how collegiate level performing arts centers (PACs) and arts

programs support and engage students, evaluate the barriers and motivations to participating in the

arts, how these programs have adapted during the Covid-19 pandemic, and how these adaptations can

continue after the pandemic in order to better support faculty, staff, and students. This data was

collected through interviews with six student engagement professionals who work at American colleges

and universities. The data was analyzed and the emerging themes were examined.

The main ways that collegiate Performing arts centers and art programs support and engage

students is through curricular connections, professional and student artists, grant funding, student

employment, and ticketing/students as audience members. These themes were threaded throughout

the interviews and have implications for different constituencies related to education, the performing

arts, and the arts and culture sector. Many of the organizations survey students and evaluate barriers

and motivations to participation, however, they understand that they could and should do more. This

chapter will look at what these findings mean for the stakeholders that fall in those categories especially

college students, faculty, and staff. Alumni, perspective students, community members, and family and friends of students, nonprofit performing arts centers, arts organizations, community organizations and businesses, and K-12 schools can also gain benefits from these findings. These organizations have a large stake in attracting young adults to their venues and will depend on young people to fill their future audiences.

Implications for Education

The title of this paper refers to student engagement in collegiate arts programs. The research had originally focused on performing arts centers located on college campuses, however, three of the arts administrators that were interviewed do not work at a performing arts center. This added an interesting perspective to the research. There are many college campuses around the country that do not have performing arts centers associated with their school. Art programs do not need to have a performing arts center in order to support and engage students. One of the main findings from my research is that student engagement programs were able to quickly and successfully adjust to restrictions put in place during the pandemic. Arts administrators were able to adapt their programs for students living on campus, remote learning, and hybrid- a mix of the two.

Adaptation and Innovation

Virtual Programming. One thing the pandemic has shown us is that we can do a lot virtually. Artists do not need to set foot on campus to have meaningful interactions with students. You do not need plane tickets, hotel rooms, ground transportation, you do not even need a venue, all you need is a computer and a web camera. The arts administrators that participated in the interviews were adamant that live and in-person interaction is best; however, there may be benefits to continuing virtual or hybrid events. Artist were still able to visit classrooms through Zoom. Some lucky students were even able to learn from high profile artists that they never would have had access to before. For others, the cost and

simplicity of virtual artist visits made it valuable. These programs may be so pragmatic that arts

administrators are beginning to discuss keeping them around for perpetuity.

Virtual programming has benefits for art department alumni and family and friends of current

students who do not live in close proximity to campus. In the past, these constituents would not have

access to student theater pieces and recitals, student organization events, and awards ceremonies if

they were unable to travel to campus. Once the world regains some normalcy, it would be very

beneficial to continue sharing student work virtually. This will enable art departments to stay incredibly

connected with alumni, family, and friends. This might result in more donations into their department.

There are many ways that virtual programming can benefit the community and other nonprofits. This

will be discussed later.

Curricular Connections

Another finding was that curricular connections were the most popular of the student

engagement programs. This program includes masterclasses, workshops, residencies, or asking

professors if they would like their class to take part in an event. Linking the arts to curriculum is an

essential practice for performing arts centers. Curricular connections can create deeper learning when

content areas are combined. As was mentioned in the literature review, this type of learning is more

holistic and encompasses a student's heart, mind, body, and soul (DeWilde, 2019). It promotes

collaboration and can also make learning fun.

It is important for arts administrators to make personal connections with faculty and staff.

Instead of just sending out a promotional piece to departments, it is important to spell out how the art

connects to the curriculum. This should be done as soon as an artist is booked and before the semester

begins. That way professors are able to list it in their syllabus and completely integrate it into their class

plans.

Curricular connections are also a great way for students to become comfortable with the arts. Even if the artist is virtual, students are still able to discuss a performance they just saw with their classmates. Students may not be interested in taking part in the arts on their own. Requiring attendance at a performance or engaging artists in class can make the arts seem less intimidating especially when they get to share the experience with other students. This will give them a reason to be in the venue and they may enjoy it. So much so, that they decided to seek out new arts activities on their own.

Students as Audience Members

Filling seats with students tends to be high on the list for many collegiate performing arts centers. However, they may not need to concentrate on strictly filling seats with a student audience. There is more to student engagement then student attendance numbers. It might not be worth it for performing arts centers to focus on filling seats with students, as this could be a waste of resources. High attendance rates may look good on paper but the students should come into the space organically. Events like an arts open houses, freshman orientation, or informal events would be a great start but they will need to feel welcome in the venues and lobbies.

The physical space is important. There should be room for students to interact with each other, study, or hang out between classes. Comfortable furniture and workstations can serve a dual purpose. Providing inviting and multipurpose spaces throughout the building and lobbies can have many benefits. Students can use these spaces to relax between classes, work on homework, or hang out with other students. Patrons can enjoy them while they are waiting to enter the theater or concert hall at night or enjoy food and beverage before the show or during intermission. These spaces can be shared during performances with a mix of students and patrons. This is also advertising to students that events take place in this building and they might just wonder if they should be attending those events.

Marketing to students is very different from marketing to the general public. They are constantly bombarded with advertising for campus events during their daily life on campus. A couple of

the interview participants mentioned that students love watching other students and friends perform. When they are in the theater for a student performance, subtly advertise the other events that take place there. Marketing departments can also try harder to make the arts accessible to students who are not familiar with the different genres. Introductory YouTube videos to events like opera, chamber music, or ballet could make the arts seem less intimidating. These can be produced in house and feature students who major in music, dance, or theater.

Administrators should ask arts ambassadors, peer advisors, student workers, or students who already participate in arts activities to share what they love about the arts with other students. Most events have a playbill or include program notes and they can include many technical terms. Accessible and easy to understand program notes or maybe even a student version of a playbill that is advertised well in advance of the event could also make the arts seem more approachable.

Even though most ticket prices are free or reduced for students at university PACs, this could still be a barrier for students. Students still have a limited budget to work with and may not have support from parents or an on campus job. Academic departments could foot the ticket cost when performances are required for class or extra credit. Free and reduced ticketing are a necessity for motivating students to attend performances. This would completely eliminate the money barrier.

Now is a great time to reach out to students who may be missing interactions with other people. Many students are suffering from Zoom fatigue and want to be with other students in the flesh. Students who were first year students during the pandemic will be looking for ways to connect with people in person and build their social capital. This could be the time to really capture their attention. Collegiate performing arts centers could use this time to help alleviate feelings of loneliness and give students a way to de-stress and connect with each other.

It is important to look at campus-wide calendars to make sure that students are not being over programed. Collaborating with student activities and other campus organizations can eliminate this

problem. Workshops for students to create their own pieces of art or social hours that take place in the venues are fun events for young people. Collaborating with student health is a great way to provide alcohol free activities for the student body. It is up to arts administrators to understand their campus culture and decide if now is the time to reach out to students who have missed taking part in group activities.

It was surprising that arts open houses and freshman orientations were not mentioned more by the interview participants. These types of activities can get students in the door and familiar with the building soon after arriving on campus. Getting them in the space, giving tours, explaining how ticket discounts and voucher programs work, and advertising upcoming events can make them feel welcome and knowledgeable. This is also a perfect time to recruit student employees. Arts open houses are great ways to collaborate with the rest of the art departments. They should also be interested in recruiting students for plays, music ensembles, and getting an early introduction to students who may be interested in majoring or minoring in the arts. Inviting student art clubs and organizations to take part can legitimize these events when freshman and sophomores see that upperclassmen are interested in these activities.

Student Employment

Another finding from my research is that collegiate performing arts centers are committed to investing in students. Working at a collegiate performing arts center may be many of student's first jobs. Student employment in the arts should be a holistic experience and one that could prepare them for a career in the arts. Students can learn project management, customer service, and how to be a part of a team. These are important skillsets no matter what profession they go into. They can also learn specific skills like working in a box office, stage management, production design, and even working with contracts or grants. Mentoring students should be an integral part of any student engagement program.

Grant Funding

Grant programs are another way that collegiate performing arts centers can invest in students. Giving students the freedom to create their own art and programing can be empowering. They can give students or student organizations the resources they need to create their own art or plan their own activities. It can teach students how to be producers, find funding, and how to report out their process. Grants can also encourage collaboration between faculty and students.

Evaluation

Including stakeholders such as students, faculty, and staff in planning and evaluation stages is integral to forming strong student engagement programs. Surveys, focus groups, and interviews with stakeholders should help design student engagement programs. It is important to meet with the art department chairs on a regular basis and include them when deciding on what artists to bring on campus or virtually. This will give them a voice and hopefully encourage them to take part in the events or require their students to attend the performances. Student employees, arts ambassadors, and peer advisors can also serve as the organizations' "boots on the ground" by finding out what might be holding other students back from participating.

In addition to surveys, interviews, focus groups, and other evaluation methods, student engagement programs should build their participation toolkits. The WolfBrown study, the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, and the Wallace Foundation infographic are great examples of this. The IAP2 Spectrum is an especially helpful tool. It can be applied to collaborating with faculty and seeking participation with students. It is important to note that it is a scale. PACs can choose whichever level fits them best and move along the spectrum as they build their program. The more the public, faculty, staff, and students in this case, are invested in the process the more willing they will be to participate. It is essential for nonprofit organizations to include stakeholders in the planning process. There is more work to be done on gathering information from students on the barriers and motivations to arts participation.

Consulting and involving students more in this process can lead to better information that PACs can use to lower barriers. Including evaluation into your organization will build stronger programs and it should be included in any art administrator's toolkit.

Implications for Practice (NPOs, foundations, other fields)

Investing in Students

Investing in student engagement programs can be beneficial to nonprofit performing arts centers not associated with colleges and universities. Creating young arts enthusiasts is advantageous to all arts organizations. A problem unique to university programs is that once you have engaged students in your program, they graduate and often move out of state. However, it is good for the nonprofit arts sector as a whole if students begin to love the arts before they leave college since research shows that highly educated people are more willing to participate in the arts (National Endowment for the Arts, 2015) and early arts participation leads to more participation later in life (Harland & Kinder, 1995). Collegiate performing arts centers have an obligation to create positive opportunities for arts engagement from kindergarten through college graduation.

It was not a significant focus of this research, but collegiate performing arts centers are important supporters of arts programming in K-12 classrooms. Almost all of the organizations highlighted in this research connect with local private or public elementary, middle, and high schools. Research in the literature review showed that young adults are more likely to participate in arts activities if they are familiar with the arts or have had interactions with the arts early in life. Collegiate performing arts centers have a large role in creating a pipeline of arts participation starting with kindergarteners. Arts experiences such as field trips and artist class visits can be life changing. It is possible that visits such as these, early in life, could allow older students to become more comfortable with the arts and arts programming. Discounted tickets, innovations in virtual programming, and subsidized transportation can help low income schools receive the same opportunities as private or

well-funded public schools. Investing in students in grades K-12 can provide meaningful and

transformative experiences that can lead to greater arts involvement later in life.

Vouchers were another program that can benefit off-campus nonprofit performing arts centers

and for-profit venues. Providing students with either paper vouchers or reimbursing them for arts

experiences also contributes to young adults becoming arts enthusiasts. Visits to local theaters, art

galleries, jazz clubs, and music festivals allow students to become more familiar with the arts. In

addition, it supports the local economy. Arts administrators should work with these organizations to

secure discounts or even free tickets to make this program more budget friendly. Universities could set

up a grant or endowment for students to pull money in order to cover the cost of ticket price. This

would also entice students to venture out into the community and attend performances at other local

performing arts venues.

Implications for Communities and Other Stakeholders

Virtual programming is here to stay. Nothing beats live and in-person performance and activities

but virtual programming is still a good option if in-person is not possible. The arts administrators that

took part in the interviews are all planning to continue some virtual performance or artist visits in the

future. This can have significant benefits for the stakeholders outside of the faculty and students directly

impacted by student engagement programs.

Hopefully, many performing arts centers will integrate virtual programing into their seasons

regularly. Giving people the option to watch virtually could change the way we participate in the arts.

This is not a bad thing. This can greatly benefit older patrons who feel unsafe driving at night, who may

be homebound, or confined due to illness. Virtual programming should be very attractive to residential

living facilities, retirement communities, or schools who may have funding and transportation problems.

Alumni, family and friends of students, and even prospective students could watch virtual student

performances no matter where they are located. In the past, many of these stakeholders have been

unable to take part in student work and arts programing due to the travel it would involve. This opens up new opportunities for students to share their work with people from around the world.

Implications for Research

There are many nonprofit organizations that are working to identify issues with participation in the arts such as the National Endowment for the Arts and The Wallace Foundation. They have sponsored numerous studies focused on what motivates the general public to participate in arts activities and the ways to lower barriers to participation. There is research that shows that highly educated people are stronger supporters of the arts but there is not really an explanation of why. More research is needed to see exactly how college students spend their time and how they choose what activities to participate in. Individual universities should commission research projects and surveys to understand their own campus culture.

Future Research

During the interview process, it became clear that this project would be an in-depth examination of six collegiate performing arts centers and art programs and how they adapted to the pandemic. This method has many benefits due to the rich qualitative data, however, it cannot be used as a generalization of all collegiate level art organizations. In the near future, a mixed methods survey of qualitative and quantitative data would be highly beneficial in order to have a full picture of how collegiate level art organizations adapted their student engagement programs, how they identify barriers and motivations to the arts, and what innovations or adaptations they will continue after the pandemic. It would also be interesting to survey students directly at a wide range of schools to see their view of student engagement programs, the barriers they face, how they would like to be supported through the arts, and how these programs can adapt to better suit their lifestyle.

Conclusion

The focus of this research was to observe the ways that collegiate level performing arts centers and university art programs support and engage students and how these programs have adapted during a global pandemic. Supporting and engaging young people is an important part of building future audiences. This study found that the organizations that took part have successfully pivoted their programs and will continue to use many of their innovations after the pandemic. Even if an organization did not adapt their program during the pandemic, they can still use some of these examples in the future. The research found that the participants mainly use surveys to identify barriers and motivations to participation in the arts; however, they do not measure these regularly. The arts administrators know that there is room for improvement here. Not only do these findings contribute to the many stakeholders listed above but they also contribute to the nonprofit sector as a whole. If college students have positive arts experiences leading up to and during their time on campus they might be more willing to be arts enthusiasts after graduation. This will be integral to nonprofit performing arts centers who will need to recover in the years following the Covid-19 pandemic. This research shows that there are many ways that student engagement programs were able to adapt to significant restrictions on how they could operate. It is important to celebrate these triumphs.

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Appendix A

IRB Approved Interview Questions

1. Do you have a structured student engagement program?

If so, please give a brief overview of your student engagement program.

If not, how do you support and engage students in university art programs?

2. How do you evaluate your student engagement program(s)? Interviews, surveys, focus groups,

etc.

If so, how often do you do these?

3. How have you identified barriers to participation for your students?

4. How have you identified what motivates students to participate in the arts?

5. Have you implemented new policies after identifying these barriers and motivations?

6. Have you found success with your student engagement programs?

7. What is/are the status of your student engagement program(s) during the pandemic?

8. Are your students currently on campus or are they remote and/or a hybrid model?

9. How have these programs adapted during the pandemic?

10. Are there any innovations that you are especially proud of?

11. Have you discussed continuing these innovations and adaptations after the pandemic?

Appendix B

Sample Coding of Interview Transcript

their way. And so we kind of surveyed some students and talk to our students and it was, I don't have enough money. There's multiple prongs to that so if I don't have enough money because I'm broke. I don't have enough money because it costs a lot to go to something like this. And I don't necessarily want to risk them something that I'm not that comfortable with. So, I don't have money. I don't even know what's going on, which is another component of it. And then there's also the, I don't have time, we can't necessarily change the time. But I think there's other ideas there regarding what, what time actually mean the financial component is something that we're definitely trying to address in this. You know we have a significant portion of people who, Who are prone I've been asked before they're like well you know what, what portion of either low income students, but I was like, what we're trying to deal with is not necessarily income, it's dealing with sort of getting them past that point where they think that this is too expensive, because you'd have people would say, Well, I'm not low income but you know it's $10 to go that I don't really want to waste that I'm something that I'm not sure about liking. Also people who would say, don't have anywhere to go with or you know none of my friends are interested in same things and so what they're dealing with is not necessarily them going and having to pay the price it's their friend, being willing to also pay the price to go to something. And so we've talked to, we've gotten some feedback on surveys and stuff like that but is it let's, let's create this program where we're getting people to go to something for free, which is basically just giving them the opportunity to go to the event, which is what we want them to do anyways and taking away some of the barriers to engagement in the program. It was, it was like 240 with the first semester, returned it. And then it was 1200 the following year. And then 2400 and then 3600 and then it hit the point where we're like, oh, we actually have to be able to afford this too. And then that's, that's where some of the financial stuff comes in we're like okay, what can I include as event, what events are people going to go to anyways you know there's some events that we've been able to include in the past because you know this musical theater organization that's going to have a two productions. This is the lesser known one, you know, we're going to get people to go to this because they've got a ticket for it that way. And thinking about some of those sort of challenges in terms of finances and trying to figure out exactly how to afford 4000 people bringing in vouchers for tickets and stuff. But in terms of like, you know, motivations and stuff like that I think some of that is, is also trying to convince people that this is something that is easily accessible. We've talked to. [Redacted], wellness, I think. So basically, you know, health services at the university and they've talked about sort of the importance of people having, you know alternatives to a party, even just the, the presence of an event that is attractive, and that people are aware of and going to is really meaningful in terms of avoiding some alcohol engagement essentially and party engagement. And so, as the people who don't create those events, sort of recognizing there are a billion things happening on the near campus. Let's connect people to them and try and promote them and stuff like that. The other thing that is helpful, there's also, you know, a student group puts on something and they want their friends to come and being able to say, Hey, there's this voucher that you can get for free. That's certainly our March and April performance slots and stuff like that are really popular feature a lot of student orgs on them and students will clamor to have the opportunity to see their friend perform for free or see their friends even for free and so there's a lot of that sort of social element to

Jessie Buford 18:37

Buford, Jessie
Survey

Buford, Jessie
Barrier: Money

Buford, Jessie
Barrier: Unfamiliarity

Buford, Jessie
Barrier: Advertising

Buford, Jessie
Barrier: Time

Buford, Jessie
Barrier: Money

Buford, Jessie
Barrier: Unfamiliarity

Buford, Jessie
Barrier: Their friends aren't interested

Buford, Jessie
Survey

Buford, Jessie
Vouchers

Buford, Jessie
Barrier: Accessibility

Buford, Jessie
Motivation: Alternative to Parties/Alcohol

Buford, Jessie
Over Scheduling

Buford, Jessie
Student Organizations

Appendix C

Sample Analysis of Code Words and Themes

	Mentions	Code Word/Phrase		
1	Mentions	Code Word/Phrase		
2	6	Curricular Connections		Curricular Connections
3	6	Visiting Artist/Masterclass		Artists
4	4	Cross Curricular or Collaboration or Cross Campus		Student Employment
5	4	Students as Artists and Makers		Ticketing and Patron Services
6	4	Virtual		Grant Funding
7	4	Workshops		
8	3	Fellows or Interns		
9	3	Student Employment		
10	3	Ticket Cost		
11	2	Artist in Residence		
12	2	Arts Ambassadors		
13	2	Connecting People or social		
14	2	Field Trip		
15	2	Grant Funding		
16	2	Investing in Students		
17	2	Students as Audience Members		
18	2	Vouchers		
19	1	Alternative Venues		
20	1	Asynchronous		
21	1	Awards		
22	1	Compensating Students for Their Time		
23	1	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility		
24	1	Freshman/First Year		
25	1	In-Person Events		
26	1	Listening to Students		
27	1	Outdoor		
28	1	Peer Advisors		
29	1	Pre-show Talks		
30	1	Student Organization		
31	1	Students as Arts Leaders		

Appendix D

Sample Analysis of Barriers and Motivations

	Mentions	Code Word: Barriers
33		
34	4	Time
35	2	Unwelcoming Atmosphere
36	2	Advertising
37	2	Over Programming
38	2	Accessibility
39	2	Unfamiliarity
40	1	Location
41	1	Start Times
42	1	Better Shows Off Campus
43	1	Elitism/Art is not for me
44	1	Friends Are Not Interested
45	1	Gatekeeping
46	1	Money
47	1	No Incentive
48	1	Zoom Fatigue
49		
50	Mentions	Motivations
51	4	Free Ticket
52	2	Artist is well known or popular
53	2	Their Friends are Performers/Crew
54	2	Social/Something to do with friends or meet people
55	1	A Place where students feel welcome
56	1	Reducing Stress
57	1	Thought Provoking
58	1	Alternative to Parties/Alcohol
59	1	Curricular Connection
60	1	Free Food
61	1	Giving Students a Voice
62	1	Love of the Arts
63		