

5 Ways to Help Art Students become Art Professionals

Johanna Inman, MFA, Assistant Director, Teaching & Learning Center

1. Emphasize Multiple Options

Many of our students enroll in undergraduate degree programs with the full intention of becoming professional dancers, musicians, painters, or designers. Yet statistically, we know more than half of them will ultimately find employment outside of the arts. As both artists and art lovers ourselves, it's important to provide students with a variety of traditional and non-traditional career paths that will keep them engaged, invested, and working in the arts community long after graduation. Below are a few strategies for raising an awareness among our students of alternative or non-traditional career paths that will keep them working within the arts long after graduation.

- Assign projects that require students to research a range of traditional to non-traditional jobs within their discipline.
- Start a class or departmental wiki where students can build a job bank collaboratively and continue to access it post-graduation.
- Invite a range of guests and alumni to speak about their artistic work, as well as their own unique career paths, the steps they found crucial to their survival in the arts, and the jobs they took to make money along the way.
- Advise art students to take targeted business classes that teach competencies they will need to become self-employed independent contractors and/or business owners.
- Foster an entrepreneurial spirit within your students and encourage them to build their own businesses and non-profits as a way to grow the arts community and create more creative jobs for future students.

2. Teach Competencies

Although it may seem obvious to us, students are often in the dark about what competencies they will actually need to be working professionals both within

and outside of their disciplines. Communicating and teaching these critical competencies help prepare students for the professional world. These competencies can be integrated into existing courses through a number of methods or taught in courses specifically designed to help students transition to the professional world. Below are some examples of important professional competencies.

General Competencies

- Written Communication
- Verbal Communication
- Project and Task Management
- Time Management
- Teamwork
- Commitment to Quality
- Professional Conduct

Competencies Specific to the Arts

- Advanced techniques and skills in a specific discipline
- Writing about Art
- Grant Writing and Project Proposals
- Pricing and Valuing Artistic Work
- Marketing Artistic Work
- Developing Artistic Identity

Forbes Top 10 Worst (least valuable) College Majors in 2012

1. Anthropology & Archeology
2. Film, Video, & Photographic Arts
3. Fine Arts
4. Philosophy & Religious Studies
5. Liberal Arts
6. Music
7. Physical Fitness
8. Commercial Art & Graphic Design
9. History
10. English Language & Literature

3. Promote Community Involvement

Getting students involved in community art projects and arts organizations builds experience, provides opportunities for networking, and strengthens their resumes. These experiences are opportunities for students to make lasting connections in the local art community. Consider encouraging or requiring your students to participate in one or more of the following activities:

- off-campus community arts events
- department-wide field trips to attend major conferences
- community-based learning projects that partner students with community arts organizations
- membership and participation in arts organizations

4. Encourage Professional Experience

Hands-on experience working in the arts helps students gain confidence and can ease the transition into the professional world. Similarly to the previous strategy, students who perform volunteer work and complete internships in the arts will have stronger resumes, as well as references and contacts outside of the university. Consider encouraging or requiring students to participate in one or more of the

following activities:

- multiple internships
- volunteer hours
- student-level jobs in the arts
- applying to off-campus exhibitions or auditioning for off-campus performances
- presenting their work to guest speakers or reviewers
- applying for artist grants

5. Set an Example

Instructors easily see themselves as artistic and creative mentors to students, but we have an additional role to play as students' professional mentors and role models. Speaking with students about their professional goals and offering advice and strategies to help them reach those goals can be a critical factor in our students' success. Additionally, instructor modeling can provide students with an excellent example of real-world professional practice. Consider sharing your artistic story with students including:

- personal artistic work
- career path and benchmarks
- involvement in events, projects, and organizations

