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Arts Administration as an Academic Study
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Arts ‘administration’ is as old as the arts themselves; someone has always been behind the scenes arranging for the creation of performances or artworks, ensuring payment for the artists, finding locations for the art to be showcased, etcetera. Prior to the 19th century arts administrators received their training on the job at their respective organizations or companies. Their success had as much to do with their expertise in their arts discipline as it did managing relationships of those influential to their organizations (patrons, government officials and the like). In the 1960’s and 1970’s this style of management started to become somewhat obsolete. According to Varela (2013) this was due to a “combination of internal and environmental shifts that impacted the arts sector broadly” (p. 74)¹. Because of these shifts (along with concerns expressed for the future of the leadership of arts organizations by boards, donors and the National Endowment for the Arts) the academic study of arts administration was born as the first advanced degrees in arts management were developed. These programs were created to explore and understand the economic, technological, social and political climates in which arts organizations operate and to anticipate the challenges and opportunities for the future².

¹ Varela (2013) goes on to state, “Some of these shifts and their more obvious consequences were a recession in the 1970’s followed by a boom in the 1980’s (initially less funds available for indiscriminate projects- accountability for moneys spent grew), the combined appearance of more significant government spending in the arts and an increase in the number of charitable institutions, demographic changes, technological advances, and an ever-increasing number of arts organizations, among others” (p. 74-75).

² “Arts management is frequently perceived as constituting a new terrain for the dissemination of managerial thought. This approach perceives the arts as a managerially underdeveloped area that would benefit from being fertilized by the importing of managerial knowledge and techniques” (Evrard & Colbert, 2000, p. 4).

Two phases have been identified in the emergence of arts administration programs- a period of slow growth from 1966 to 1980 and a rapid growth stage after 1980. During this time, two key areas the arts world was focusing on were seeking/maintaining private support and attracting new audiences and revenue. According to the Association of Arts Administration Educators (AAAE) there were 46 graduate programs in 2004. As of 2012, the number of programs had almost doubled to 82! The earliest graduate programs include:

- 1966-Yale University- *Theatre Management as part of their MFA*
- 1969- University of Wisconsin- Madison- *Arts Administration and Arts Management*
- 1971- New York University- *Theatre Management*
- 1971- Indiana University- *Arts Administration and Arts Management*
- 1973- Drexel Univ. and Univ. of Illinois at Springfield- *Arts Admin & Arts Mgmt.*
- 1974- American University- *Arts Administration and Arts Management*
- 1975- Columbia University- Teachers College- *Arts Administration and Arts Mgmt.*

Sixteen years ago, the Americans for the Arts created a peer group called the Emerging Leaders Council. According to Saunders (August 2006), “through their work the following issues were recognized: (1) Between 50 and 85 percent of non-profit executives plan to retire in the next five years, (2) the current generation of young professionals who are between the ages of 20 and 35 are preparing to take the helm of arts and culture organizations in communities across America, and (3) there is a need to nurture and develop these young professionals into strong and successful leaders” (p. 1). The evolution of the need of this type of arts training is observable however, the data on the success (or failure) of the degree programs and subsequent impact on the sector is still forthcoming; the assessment of arts administration as an academic study is a continuous one with the feedback shaping curriculum of degree programs nationwide.³ Regarding the pedagogical design

³ According to Varela (2013), “there is a dearth of empirical work on actual needs of the field (and its subfield) from the purely practitioner point of view (and its implications for formal arts management education” (p. 78).

of these programs, it is evident there has been a lack of communication between universities across the nation; the curricula vary depending on a variety of factors such as time of establishment, location of the program and needs of its art community. For example, a major impetus of the development of the MA of Arts Leadership program at University of Houston was Houston's arts community expressing a desire for the next generation of leaders (for both established and emerging organizations); leaders that would not only be well trained, but acutely aware of the unique needs of the 4th largest city in the nation⁴. Case in point, the demographic scope and cultural diversity in Houston is said to be the example of what most major cities in the country will look like in 20 years. While audience diversity and community representation is important to organizations worldwide, at present it is especially crucial for Houston to be able to recognize and respond appropriately to its diverse population.

While concrete data is still forthcoming, informal surveys of current arts organizations/institutions/companies show the instruction is serving the field well. Many institutions state that Arts administration training is preferred for their current/prospective managers- regardless of discipline or budget size of the surveyed organization. However, many sources cited that a major element missing is actual job-site training; to round out the curriculum it would be beneficial to have more internships/mentorship programs like San Diego's Emerging Leaders of Arts and Culture Initiative or the Mentorships in the Arts Program (MAP) created by Eve Childs.

Arts administration as an academic field is still emerging and there are some challenges facing the program. These challenges include changes in the management sector, program credibility, and a general income disparity for the arts sector. Regarding transitions in management, there are some tensions existing between emerging leaders and established managers who are on the cusp of retiring (but are still working). The XY Generation is entering the Arts Administration field

⁴ Referenced from the Kinder Houston Area Survey from the Rice Kinder Institute for Urban Research.

with a higher level of education, theoretical training and current technology expertise than their predecessors- however they lack the 'hands-on' experience vital to being a skilled and effective leader. Many Boomers that currently sit in leadership positions have been with organizations for years (perhaps even being a founding member) and have a different point of view/work ethic/approach to management which don't always align with the millennials methodology. In addition to the administrators changing, the nonprofit paradigm itself is transforming. Saunders states, "The nonprofit model itself will come under greater scrutiny as the commercial arts sector becomes more entwined with the nonprofit sector through changes in media and technology" (Saunders, 2006, p. 2). In short, the field is evolving both internally and externally.

When it comes to program credibility, it is suggested there needs to be an "evidence-based understanding of what training in arts administration currently comprises", (Rosenstein, 2013, p. 112). In looking at a sampling of curriculum from arts management programs, it shows a varying emphasis on three areas: management, art, and public administration issues. This disparity shows that standards must be developed and set at all levels of management training (undergraduate, graduate and doctorate).

There is a growing recognition that many of the skills in arts management are not learned from a textbook. According to Saunders (August 2006), "Established leaders are also concerned the current academic programs in arts administration are geared more towards developing expertise in matters such as grant writing and fund accounting while ignoring the "soft skills" of leadership like community and political organizing, making presentations to elected officials and arts advocacy" (p. 3). Thus the goal should achieve a balance in the curriculum of arts administration programs.

As a final point concerning credibility, it is important to note there is an observable absence of minority enrollment in arts management training programs nationally. Organizations have a responsibility to reflect the community they serve and having a diversified pool of new arts leaders (both ethnically and through gender) is critical to achieving that representation.

A last challenge for arts administration programs is the wide income disparity for the arts and nonprofit sector. The potential revenue of arts organizations is unlikely to provide the means of paying competitive salaries for managers. According to Saunders (August 2006), “Laden with the high cost of their college education, today’s young leaders are not as eager as their predecessors to forego financial stability or competitive wages for the ‘desire to produce art’” (p. 4). The programs must create value in a system that undervalues the arts. Until there is a major shift in the way the arts are funded in the United States this financial issue will most definitely continue to be an impacting factor when it comes to the attracting (and keeping) a high caliber of arts administrator.

Overall, the field of arts administration as an academic study is still somewhat in its infancy. While degree programs have been successful thus far, there is still much room for expansion and refinement of this indispensable training that will help shape the next generations of arts leaders in years to come.

Works Cited

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