

Diversity internships in arts management, do they work?

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Abstract

This participant-oriented evaluation answered the research question; does a diversity internship in arts management work by assessing if the *Diversity Initiatives* at Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts: 1) recruited culturally diverse interns, 2) provided quality professional development in arts management valued by participants of the diversity internship, and 3) placed and retained diverse interns in careers in arts management. Based on the perceptions of participants, this evaluation determined that the *Diversity Initiatives* at Wolf Trap works.

Keywords

Arts administration, arts management, diversity, internship, participant-oriented evaluation, and professional development

Introduction

In response to arts management's call for diversity, some cultural organizations have created internships to professionally develop the next generation of culturally diverse arts managers (Americans for the Arts, 2014; Getty Foundation, 2014; Smithsonian Institution, 2014; Steppenwolf Theatre, 2014; and Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, 2014). Diversity internships could prove a viable recruitment strategy to produce culturally diverse and well-prepared arts managers (Cuyler, 2013; and Stein, 2000). However, they typically focus on ethnicity and race to the exclusion of other aspects of human difference. In addition, extant research has not examined if these programs work (Brindle, 2011; Channell & Anderson, 2010; Christensen & Barton, 2008; Cuyler et. al, 2013; Holmes, 2006; Murphy, 1977; Rolston & Herrera, 2000; and Stein & Bathurst, 2008).

This evaluation defines "work," as yielding the following outcomes: 1) recruit culturally diverse interns, 2) provide quality professional development in arts management valued by participants of the diversity internship, and lastly, 3) place and retain diverse interns in careers in arts management. Therefore, this participant-oriented evaluation investigates the primary research question; does a diversity internship in arts management work? In addition, this evaluation answers three subsidiary questions: (1) does the diversity internship recruit culturally diverse interns; (2) does the diversity internship provide quality professional development in arts management valued by the participants of the program, and (3) does the diversity internship place and retains diverse interns in careers in arts management? This evaluation is significant because examining if this program works could improve the overall design of diversity internships in arts management.

Evaluator Bias

As the primary instrument of this evaluation, two of my biases may affect its conduct. First, in 2005, I participated in the Josie A. Bass Career Development program at the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts. Because of my positive experience, and the potentiality that others had similar experiences, I thought it important to examine if this diversity internship works or not. In addition, my current research agenda focuses on internships in arts administration and diversity & social justice in arts administration. To minimize the impact of these biases, this evaluation focused on the participants and their perceptions of the program.

Program Description

Initially, the *Diversity Initiatives* at Wolf Trap started as two separate programs inspired by former board members. Respectively, in 2000 and 2004, the Josie A. Bass and Los Padres programs allowed Wolf Trap to recruit and professionally develop African American and Hispanic students into their internship program who have career interests in arts management. Because Wolf Trap values its commitment to diversity and the power of the arts to change society, in 2014 they expanded access to their acclaimed internship program.

Students of all minority ethnicities (including those with cultural/ethnic backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in the arts management field) and students who qualify for needs-based support at their college or university (who might not

otherwise participate in the program due to the cost of housing and transportation) may apply to the program under the *Diversity Initiatives*. Students accepted into the program receive a transportation and housing stipend to offset these expenses (Wolf Trap, 2014). Wolf Trap distinguishes these opportunities in the application process as the *Multicultural Diversity Initiative* and the *Economic Diversity Initiative*.

The *Diversity Initiatives* are simultaneously reactive and proactive. They acknowledge the history of racial discrimination that has challenged the upward mobility of people of color in arts management (Cuyler, 2013; and Stein, 2000). They also contemplate the fact that (1) not all students can afford to complete an unpaid internship in arts management, and (2) a student's economic challenges should not preclude him or her from participating in Wolf Trap's internship program. These reasons and the lack of empirical study of diversity internships in arts management justify scholarly examination of Wolf Trap's *Diversity Initiatives*.

Method

According to Trochim (2006), evaluation is the systematic acquisition and assessment of information to provide useful feedback about some object. Stake (1995) argued that in participant-oriented evaluation researchers use information for practical problem solving. This study used participant-oriented evaluation because it emphasizes the central importance of the evaluation participants, i.e. users of the program.

In 2004, Brandi used a similar approach to evaluate Project BUILD (Business United In Leadership Development), a program geared towards encouraging African American high school students to consider business as a career. Including 330 alumni, Brandi's (2004) findings suggested that the alumni of Project BUILD were well satisfied with their experience in the four-week summer program. In addition to enlightening students on the types of degrees they could earn in business, the program taught functional skills and concepts such as time value of money, supply and demand, consumer behavior, leadership qualities, and total quality management process, which led to intellectual and educational growth. More importantly, 90% of the alumni completed their undergraduate studies and now contribute to the local economy and their communities as business and other types of professionals.

Furthermore, Rothman (2007) learned a lot by asking 345 interning business students three simple questions: (1) what did you like most about this internship position, (2) what did you like least about this internship position, and (3) please provide specific suggestions for how this employer could improve the experience for future interns. The findings recommended clarity of tasks, communication, expectations around challenging assignments, on-going feedback, mentoring, exposure to other parts of the business, and respectful treatment as ways to improve the effectiveness of internships in business.

This participant-oriented evaluation followed the methodological frameworks suggested by Brandi (2004) and Rothman (2007). I used an alumni survey (N=26). Alumni who completed the survey participated in the *Diversity Initiatives* between 2000 and 2012. I also used a focus group (N=5) of diversity interns in the 2013 cohort. In addition to Rothman's (2007) questions, I asked participants "should Wolf Trap continue the Josie A. Bass, Los Padres, or other programs similar to it." As a test of affinity for the

Diversity Initiatives, I also asked, “would you give a charitable gift to support the Josie A. Bass or Los Padres program?”

Findings

As stated above, approximately 26 alumni of the *Diversity Initiatives* completed the survey. Figure 1 shows that the majority of participating alumni were female. In terms of ethnicity and race, Figure 2 illustrates that most of the alumni identified as African American, some identified as Hispanic or Latino, and fewer identified as other. When asked to clarify other, an alumnus identified as Haitian American. Another identified as Mexican/Iranian. Two females and three males participated in the focus group. All but one of the five focus group members identified as African American. The other focus group member identified as Hispanic/Latino.

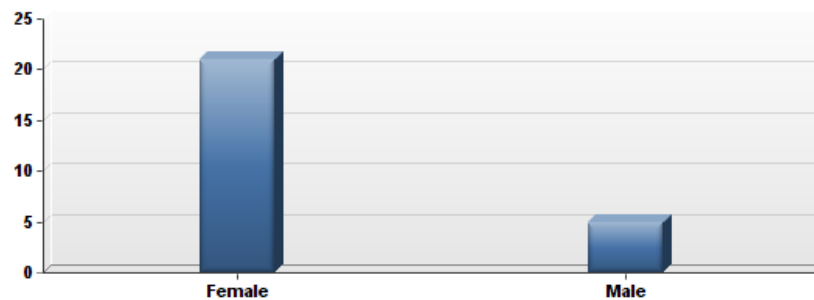


Figure 1

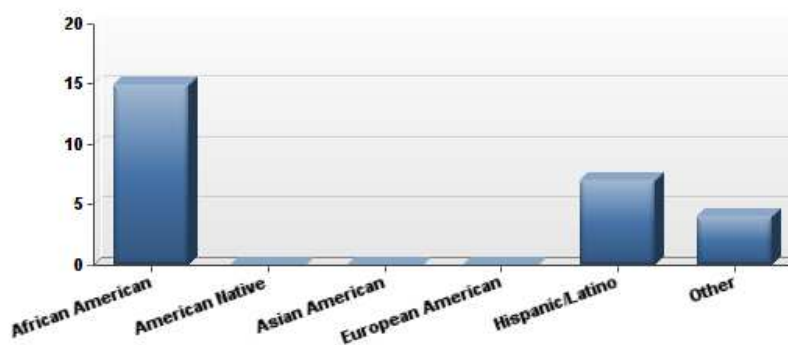


Figure 2

Approximately 50% of alumni earned a bachelor’s, while 46% earned a master’s, and 4% earned a doctorate, as illuminated in Figure 3. Table 1 shows that alumni earned degrees in arts administration/management, business, communications, music, and theatre. Alumni who selected other reported that they earned degrees in music and arts management, journalism, law, film & media studies, among others. The focus group members were seeking graduate or undergraduate degrees in business, journalism, theatre, and social ecology.

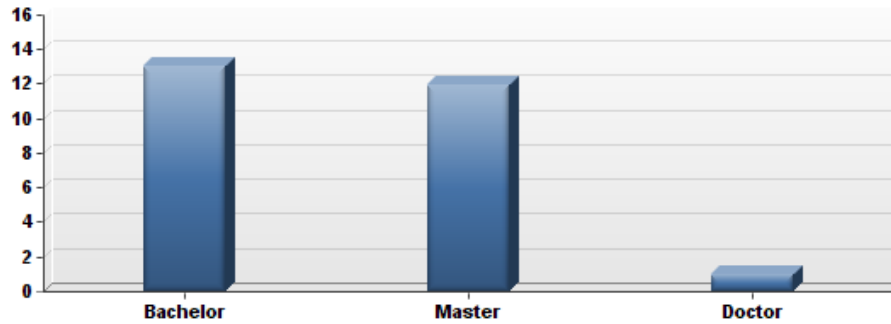


Figure 3

Table 1

Answer	Response	%
Arts Administration or Arts Management	8	31%
Business	3	12%
Communications/Marketing	1	4%
Music	3	12%
Theatre	3	12%
Other	8	31%
Total	26	100%

Table 2 highlights the variety of areas in which alumni completed their internships. Furthermore, Table 3 shows the areas in which alumni currently work. However, 31% of alumni selected other. Alumni who chose other reported sports media, music, education, PR, real estate, tech, law, non-profit arts management, and higher education fundraising as their current area of work. Adding the alum who reported currently working in non-profit arts management with the alumni who reported working in arts administration/management means that 31%, the majority of alumni currently work in arts administration/ management.

Table 2


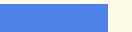











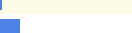

Answer		Response	%
Communications/Marketing		7	27%
Development & Fundraising		6	23%
Education		5	19%
Planning & Initiatives		2	8%
Programming & Production		2	8%
Ticket Services		1	4%
Wolf Trap Opera Company		2	8%
Other		1	4%
Total		26	100%

Table 3

Answer		Response	%
Arts Administration/Arts Management		7	27%
Communications/Marketing		3	12%
Education		2	8%
For-profit Business		3	12%
Non-profit Business		1	4%
Theatre		2	8%
Other		8	31%
Total		26	100%

When asked what they liked most about the *Diversity Initiatives*, alumni responded advanced networking opportunities, housing, making new friends, meeting new people in the DC area, meeting the donors of the program, mentorship, special dinners, and transportation. The focus group affirmed the findings revealed by the alumni. The 2013 class of diversity interns also liked the housing, networking opportunities, and transportation. Two comments were especially thoughtful in articulating what they liked most about the *Diversity Initiatives*:

“I really enjoyed meeting one of the major supporters of the diversity program and learning about their career trajectory. It was inspiring to hear their stories. Meeting successful people who believe in the program and encouraged myself and fellow interns to pursue our goals while they insist they believe we will accomplish them was an invaluable experience. I felt very empowered as a result of this program.”

“I enjoyed having opportunities to interact with other interns and mentors of color who were similarly interested in the arts management world. They provided a different community in which to vocalize issues with arts management and the ways that race/ethnicity/gender/class influence participants in both the management side and the patron side.”

In contrast, when asked what they liked least about the *Diversity Initiatives*, most alumni responded nothing. However, a few alumni expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of interaction with donors, the mentorship component of the program, and networking opportunities. While the focus group struggled with what they liked least about the program, they suggested adding more opportunities to meet arts managers of color at other DC cultural organizations as a way to enhance the program. The following comments help to illustrate the gravity of alumni displeasure with aspects of the program:

“I didn’t have a mentor; the person “assigned” to me was just too busy to connect with.”

“I didn’t like not being able to meet more African American employees at Wolf Trap.”

“The taxi was very difficult to work with, especially as a Box Office intern when hours did not often lay from 9 – 5.”

Nevertheless, 96% of the alumni answered “yes” when asked should Wolf Trap continue the Josie A. Bass, Los Padres, or other programs similar to it. One alumnus responded inconclusively with “N/A.” These four comments offer explanations to why alumni believe Wolf Trap should continue the *Diversity Initiatives*:

“I would like to see Wolf Trap expand their diversity program to include any minority group, not just Latino and African American. Wolf Trap itself is located in a region with people from all over the world and each year the organization receives applications from people with different backgrounds and ethnicity. I believe the organization would benefit from having a diversity program that includes any minority group.”

“Yes. Without the program I would not have been able to afford to live and commute to the internship site; plus being in this program made me aware that Arts Administration as a career existed.”

“Absolutely! There is still a great lack of people of color working in the arts, and if people of color are committed to seeing this change--and have the finances and opportunities to invest in this change--they should continue to do so!”

“Yes because without that program, I would not have been able to intern at Wolf Trap even if I had been accepted as an intern. My internship at Wolf Trap opened many doors for me, and provided me with skills that I utilize in my current position.”

Table 4 also shows that 96% of the alumni answered yes when asked if they would give a charitable gift to support the *Diversity Initiatives*. In addition, all of the focus group members agreed that Wolf Trap should continue their *Diversity Initiatives*.

They also unanimously agreed that they would give a charitable gift to support this program in the future.

Table 4

Answer	Response	%
No	1	4%
Yes	25	96%
Total	26	100%

Conclusions

This participant-oriented evaluation answered the research question; does a diversity internship in arts management work by assessing if the *Diversity Initiatives* at Wolf Trap: 1) recruited culturally diverse interns, 2) provided quality professional development in arts management valued by participants of the diversity internship, and 3) placed and retained diverse interns in careers in arts management. Based on the perceptions of participants, this evaluation determined that the *Diversity Initiatives* at Wolf Trap works. Wolf Trap's *Diversity Initiatives* recruits culturally diverse interns, provides quality professional development in arts management valued by participants of the diversity internship, and places and retains diverse interns in careers in arts management.

Although the *Diversity Initiatives* seems to work, it is important to ask if the alumni who majored in arts management would have attained careers in arts management without participating in Wolf Trap's program. Given their trajectory based on their major, it is highly likely that this group of alumni would have achieved the same outcome without participating in the program. Future evaluations of diversity internships may need to exclude interns studying arts management from the sample population. Conversely, evaluators might include interns majoring in arts management, but probe deeper by asking them how their career paths might have changed if they had not participated in the program.

This evaluation also revealed knowledge that could enhance Wolf Trap's *Diversity Initiatives*, as well as diversity internships at other cultural organizations. A few alumni expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of interaction with donors, the mentorship component of the program, and networking opportunities while other alumni found these aspects of the internship what they liked most. Instead of assigning mentors, cultural organizations should arrange a "meet and greet" between interns and carefully selected mentors. This will allow interns to choose their own mentors, but also encourage mentor/mentee relationships that will form naturally. As noted by the focus group, the group of carefully selected mentors should include local arts managers from diverse cultural backgrounds (Stein, 2000).

Cultural organizations should also find ways to stimulate advanced networking experiences. Quality education in marketing through the internship is not enough. If possible, cultural organizations should connect interns with professionals in the areas in which they intern. Lastly, cultural organizations should encourage further education in arts management, particularly for interns majoring in other areas. Introducing interns to graduate programs could help to solidify their career interest, track them into careers in

arts management, and provide them with the credentialing needed to make them more competitive in the arts management workforce (Brandi, 2004; Cuyler, 2013; and Stein, 2000). Nevertheless, a major limitation of this evaluation is its sample size.

A larger sample may have produced different results. Incomplete contact information made it difficult to attain more alumni participation in the survey. Cultural organizations that provide diversity internships would do well to proactively collect and maintain current and accurate contact information on their interns. Still, this evaluation is important because, before now, no known empirical examination of the practice of using diversity internships to recruit, professionally develop, place, and retain people from diverse cultural backgrounds in arts management existed (Cuyler, 2013). This evaluation allowed me to critically assess the practice of using a diversity internship to recruit, develop, and retain culturally diverse arts managers.

Although this evaluation examined only one diversity internship program, it has implications for all diversity internship programs in cultural organizations. As shown in the data, the participants of the *Diversity Initiatives* valued their experiences in the program. If well designed, diversity internships in arts management can provide culturally diverse arts managers with the informal network, mentoring, and professional development needed to have meaningful and successful careers in arts management.

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