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**A STUDY OF YOUNG ADULT  
ARTS PARTICIPATION**

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**PITT ARTS**  
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

## PITT ARTS

The University of Pittsburgh initiated its PITT ARTS program with several complementary goals in mind. First, of course, was to provide to our students the opportunity to take advantage of the rich cultural opportunities that the city has to offer. "The city is our campus" is the informal motto of the University, and we have developed a variety of programs, ranging from the county-wide bus pass to a comprehensive series of internships, so that our students may extend their educations through a broad series of interactions with the many unique aspects of the metropolitan area. Pittsburgh is a wonderful city in which to go to school, and we want our students to enjoy the experience. We hope that many of them will decide to remain in the region after graduation and continue to contribute to the economic, social, and cultural life of Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh is rich in its cultural and artistic heritage and institutions. It has both the quality and range of institutions usually found only in much larger cities. The arts are an integral part of the education experience, and our students are immeasurably enriched by the opportunities that PITT ARTS and its participating cultural institutions provide. By giving them easy access to these institutions and by ensuring that their experiences are positive and educational, we are together contributing to the education of our students and enriching their lives.

Through the support of the Heinz Foundation, PITT ARTS has been able to advance a second, also very important goal: by providing our students with easy access to those institutions, particularly in their first years, we are developing within them habits of attendance that will last a lifetime. This is not only good for our students, but it also substantially benefits the cultural institutions who have partnered with us. Together, we are producing the next generation of audiences for and supporters of the arts. The significant research that PITT ARTS has conducted with the support of the Heinz Foundation, which is detailed in the monograph that follows, has fully validated the social and educational benefits that our students have received through the program. These findings demonstrate that programs such as PITT ARTS have potential national significance as a model for developing habits of arts participation among college students.

From its modest beginning in 1997 – 1998, PITT ARTS last year gave 22,000 students the opportunity to experience the arts in person throughout the city. These students were distributed across the rich spectrum of organizations and events and provided receptive audiences for the presenters. By building on these initial experiences, the organizations have an unparalleled opportunity to reach critical new audiences. We are committed to doing everything we can to assist the organizations in building relationships with our students that will benefit both.

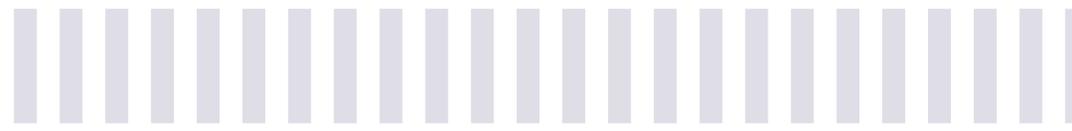
We are grateful to our partners who have made the PITT ARTS program such a success. All of us are the better for it.

– James V. Maher, Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor, January 28, 2003



PITT ARTS ADVANCES THE UNIVERSITY'S EFFORTS TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE  
AND GENERAL EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS, FOSTERING THE MISSION THAT  
"THE CITY IS OUR CAMPUS."





## OVERVIEW

In 1997, the University of Pittsburgh established a major program, PITT ARTS, to connect its students to the cultural life of Pittsburgh and to encourage active student attendance and involvement in Pittsburgh's arts programming. PITT ARTS is a key component of the University's ongoing efforts to improve student quality of life, extending the concept of the campus to encompass the greater Pittsburgh community in order to take advantage of its rich cultural resources.

This program also has an important educational and leadership role; the development of future sophisticated arts audiences that are the life-blood of our cultural institutions. To fulfill on this role, PITT ARTS sponsors free opportunities for students to attend approximately 110 artistic presentations each academic year, rounding out these offerings with free or discounted admission to area museums and through the Cheap Seat Program, where students may purchase heavily discounted tickets to several performing arts venues. In conjunction with the hundreds of free cultural outings, PITT ARTS works extensively with a broad base of arts organizations to provide structured contexts for their presentations, creating a strong foundation for understanding the arts, targeted towards the needs of the college-age student. PITT ARTS is a unique program among universities nationwide, and is a model for what is possible in creating organization-to-organization relationships between institutes of higher learning and the non-profit arts sector.

In August 2000, PITT ARTS began a two-year pilot and study, graciously funded by The Howard Heinz Endowments, to more fully examine young adult arts participation. Utilizing our relationships with eight arts organizations ranging in size from small to large, PITT ARTS embarked on a four-phase project, The Young Adult Arts Participation Initiative, to examine student arts participation by piloting, developing, and implementing approximately 30 socio-educational programs. These socio-educational programs were in conjunction with the organizations' artistic presentations, and serve as the backbone for an emerging philosophy of effective audience development practices. The four phases of the grant were: Research and Initial Organizational Contact, Project Design, Implementation, and Evaluation. The eight participating arts organizations were: two large performing arts organizations; two theaters, one contemporary, one more traditional; two art galleries, one devoted to contemporary art, one to photography; a period music organization; a dance organization.

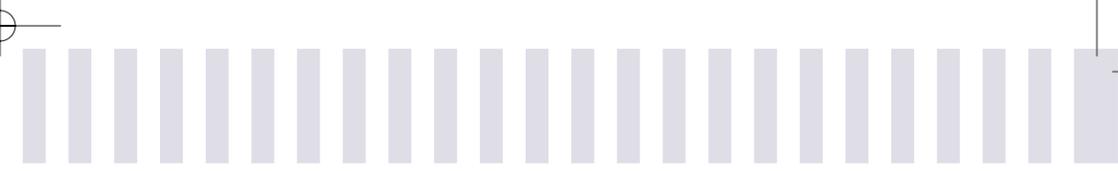


Pittsburgh Public Theater at the O'Reilly Theater.  
Photo credit: Suellen Fitzsimmons

THE PITT ARTS EXPERIENCE INCLUDES SYMPHONY, FILM, OPERA, BALLET, THEATRE, JAZZ, ART GALLERIES, AND MORE.



Silver Eye Center for Photography  
© Andrew Borowicz, Beaver, Pennsylvania, 1996



The goals of this two-year initiative were to examine arts organizations' existing approaches to reaching the young adult; to survey student responses to both these current strategies and our new ideas, and then to integrate this student feedback to invent new avenues for approaching and retaining young adult arts audiences. By examining what students actually value, quality arts experiences were therefore developed. Another key aspect to the Young Adult Arts Participation Initiative was to generate repeatable strategies for arts organizations to use over time, enabling them to consistently access a younger market. The arts organizations are responding by beginning to generate and create a foundation for a greater understanding of this audience's particular needs and offerings. The needs of the young adult are being incorporated into their strategic plans, audience development plans, marketing, and education agendas.

The Young Adult Arts Participation Initiative indeed is a fulcrum, designed to substantively engage our students in their cultural citizenship, and to expose an emerging audience to the many cultural amenities of Pittsburgh. Given these objectives, it is therefore vital to examine what young adults themselves value. In service of that examination, strategies to gather feedback offer valuable perspectives.

A capoeira performance for PITT ARTS students by Nego Gato, Inc.



Carolyn Perteet sings Jobim songs in Portuguese at Silver Eye Center for Photography. Colter Harper accompanies on guitar.



Mattress Factory, Gasworks by James Turrell, 1993



## FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

In 2001, The RAND Corporation, funded by the Wallace Readers Digest Funds, completed a study about arts participation, *A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts*. According to the study's authors, Kevin McCarthy and Kimberly Jinnett, one of the major obstacles to arts organizations' audience development is that institutions "often do not have the expertise and resources needed to design and implement effective approaches. As a result, they tend to use hit-or-miss approaches, ending up uncertain about why what they tried did or did not work and thus unable to draw general lessons from their experiences..." (xi).

To create the resources needed to overcome the fundamental obstacle of knowing what the college student-age arts audience actually wants, PITT ARTS created a feedback-gathering methodology that included focus groups, video interviews, and a consistent and ongoing process of student survey evaluation about the pilot arts experiences designed especially for them. During the Pilot Phase, or Phase II, PITT ARTS began the process of surveying students about what specifically they valued about their arts experiences. Numerous "points of access" were employed to educate and socialize students regarding what they were seeing/ hearing/ experiencing at the eight different arts organizations; these included information sent via email, web links, meetings with artists, dinner or dessert receptions, pre/post-performance interactive discussions, demonstrations or workshops. Afterwards the students were asked to rank these different points of access and to explain their rankings. This provided both quantitative and qualitative data from which to pinpoint exactly what makes comprehensive arts experiences most meaningful and enriching for young adults.

As a result, rather than arts organizations having to rely on a "hit-or-miss" method for spurring student interest in their programs, PITT ARTS shared and analyzed this feedback and information about what college students actually value. Staff from both PITT ARTS and the participating arts organizations discussed and scrutinized data, determining what changes needed to be made in developing age-specific programs. Information gleaned was processed throughout the respective arts organization, integrating these ideas into the fabric of their organizational workings. This is distinct from the RAND findings, where they found that most organizations in the RAND study used informal methods of gathering data about target audiences and not necessarily employing direct feedback from those audiences. As McCarthy

and Jinnett suggest by troubling such scant “fact finding” approaches, PITT ARTS discovered that employing direct and specific feedback to the organization from the student produced more consistent value for the students.

Heightened consciousness about what students ages 18 – 24 seek in an arts experience fostered an active collaboration of co-designing programs to target this audience niche. PITT ARTS and the arts organizations, over time, developed the right approaches to reaching students by actively integrating student feedback into the next round of programs; over the course of two years, the arts organizations and PITT ARTS then honed in on programs that addressed critical content and context that students wanted, and this resulted in increases in positive survey responses or steadily positive responses. For example, students from earlier programs in the fall of 2001, ranked “direct experience” events, such as having a dance workshop prior to seeing a dance concert, at 86% of all rankings, the most positive ranking, or 3, which translates to “the most informative/entertaining or helpful.” In the spring of 2002, students ranked “direct experience” events at the highest ranking, but this time at 88% of all total rankings, which represents a slight increase in how students value these arts encounter-deepening experiences. Overall, however, the data demonstrate the affirmation of college students’ desire to have a proactive role when they encounter art, i.e., by doing a workshop, or by articulating for themselves their own sense of the significance of the art, while having access to an artist or expert to refine those notions is welcome to young adults, as well.

According to McCarthy and Jinnett, “information must flow in two directions: from potential and current participants to arts organizations, and from arts organizations to potential and current participants” (34 – 35). Similarly, The University of Pittsburgh utilized this grant as an opportunity to forward a symbiotic relationship between the institution of higher learning and the arts community, enlisting the support of the arts organizations as collaborators in serving a community of learners (the students). In order to accomplish this symbiosis, the arts organizations needed to develop a significant paradigm shift with regard to the young adult relationship, from the mindset of ticket sales, to one of audience development efforts. Effecting that shift was a role that presented challenges, but certain data helped PITT ARTS drive it.

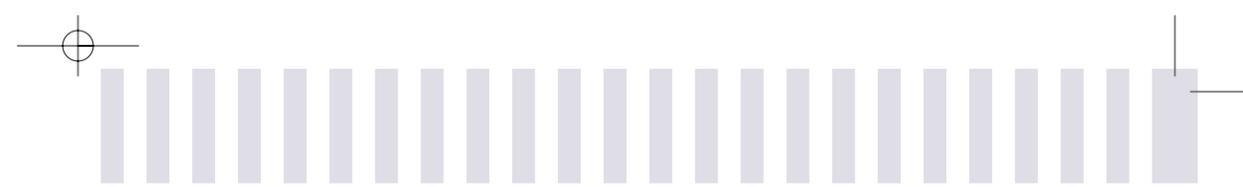
## FUTURE AUDIENCES

The grant’s goals were not only to primarily avail students of more meaningful socio-educational arts experiences, but also to assist organizations develop their own audience development strategies for reaching and retaining the young adult. In the age of a diversified and educated arts market, audience development initiatives are the core of marketing and education programs within the non-profit arts sphere.

With audiences at arts organizations aging nationally and specifically to Pittsburgh’s demographic, it is critical to ask who will represent the next wave of single ticket buyers, subscribers, and ultimately patrons. The Young Adult Arts Initiative was developed to answer that question by developing first an understanding of needs of potential audience members and then to develop a set of tools that effectively match and fit those needs. According to the University of Pittsburgh’s Alumni Statistics, more and more University of Pittsburgh students are graduating and staying in Pittsburgh and the surrounding region, priming PITT ARTS as a springboard for developing future arts audiences among its alumni. Given that PITT ARTS effectively streams 22,000 University of Pittsburgh students annually into various arts experiences, retention of alumni in the Pittsburgh region takes on greater consequences for the arts community. In the year 2000, 41% of all students who graduated from the Oakland (Pittsburgh) campus of University of Pittsburgh remained living in the city after graduation. Tapping into this market niche as a target audience could assist the critical success of audience developments for Pittsburgh’s arts non-profits.

Authors of the RAND study argue that “the more knowledgeable people are about the arts, the more likely they are to participate, because they gain more satisfaction and enjoyment from a given level of consumption than do people who are less knowledgeable” (14). In looking to students as the next potential audience, then, the inquiry arose regarding what exactly was an educational element or program, and specifically, what educational experience(s) would be most meaningful to university students. Traditionally, education departments at non-profits have served educational communities such as K – 12 schools, and this traditional model of “education” within the arts organizations was proving to be ineffective at garnering interest for the young adult audience.

The educational element in student-oriented program design then is key to deepening the knowledge young adults have about their arts experiences and also constitutes a pivotal point in causing greater future arts participation among this group. Once the



students had a foundation for understanding the arts organization and its presenting artists, its mission, and the place for students within the organization, the more likely they were to purchase Cheap Seat tickets, for example, or attend on their own at full price. Another integer of future art participation for this demographic then would be PITT ARTS Cheap Seat Program. The Cheap Seat Program is a self-serve ticketing service whereby students can purchase deeply discounted tickets to several arts organizations, right out of the PITT ARTS office. Approximately 3,500 are sold each academic year. With one of the grant participants, the first year tickets were offered, only a dozen or so sold. The second year that increased by five fold, and current data demonstrate that sales for this organization have exponentially increased, yet again, with figures at the end of October 2002 marking a one third increase over last year's total sales.

It is clear that this trajectory is in part because the grant served to focus on this organization's visibility among the student body. To address this, specific educational on-campus programs were created by the organization. These were highly visible on-campus visits where performers would play right in the lobby of a major residence hall, a completely non-academic setting. Free food was offered, and staff from the arts organization and PITT ARTS roamed the crowd, speaking directly with students about the organization's pending concert. At that concert, which was the next day, 5% of the audience responded in a survey self-conducted by the organization, that they heard about the concert through PITT ARTS. To top it off, this was not even one of the PITT ARTS free programs; students had to purchase tickets on their own to attend.

Consistent with this is additional data from a PITT ARTS Cheap Seat survey, where students stated that the number one reason for purchasing tickets was the artist. Only one person out of approximately 120 surveys said that they purchased Cheap Seats for the number one reason that the tickets were inexpensive. Students are seeking out interesting and engaging artists and the Cheap Seat Program offers the organization visibility on the campus, thereby addressing the perceived barrier of lack of information, a barrier which was identified by participating organizations in the RAND study.

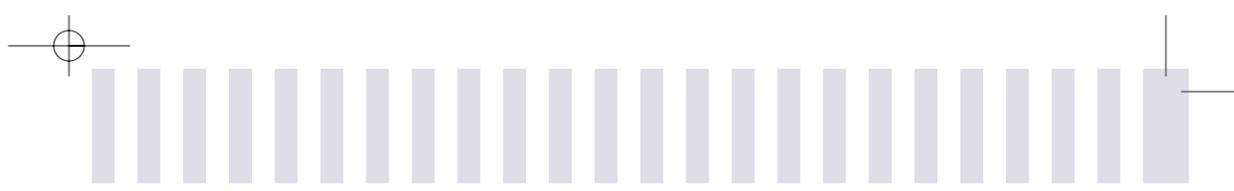
## WHAT YOUNG ADULT AUDIENCES VALUE

Through student surveys and feedback, it was determined that several socio-educational strategies reached students when it came to how young adults valued their arts experiences.

Though students clearly valued an intellectual preparation that could be acquired through email or in-hand information; the primary area that truly enhanced their experience was direct experience programming. This could encompass a variety of activities and workshops, such as a hands-on painting workshop before seeing a play about painting, a Kung Fu demonstration and workshop before a Kung Fu dance performance, or a pre-program tour of the set and backstage before seeing a play. These types of in-situ engaging activities, most of them just before the arts event, extremely enhanced the overall arts experience for these young adults. These activities were highly energetic and interactive, a different kind of approach than the rote pre-concert talk or the lecture geared towards the aficionado. An important item of note is the proximity of experts and famous artists and arts professionals to the students, for example Emanuel Ax having direct conversation with students, or Midori playing a private 15-minute mini-concert for the students. These kinds of experiences are truly unforgettable and unique, potentially making a significant impression in the young adult. In surveys, students have stated that major reasons for attending the arts are the social and educational elements that complement the exhibition or performance, not just so they could have an entertainment experience. Current data prove that young adults value a balance of entertainment and enrichment from their encounters with arts events.

Additional activities highly ranked by program participants were the social components of an arts evening. Receptions and opportunities to gather together for food and informal talk were greatly enjoyed by University of Pittsburgh students. Research has established that "an individual's reaction to the experience will be influenced by a number of factors, including knowledge of the particular type of art, the value he or she gives to the social aspect of the experience" (27). Further, it is argued in the study that frequent "positive experiences can stimulate a person to participate more often and in more ways. Frequent participants are also more likely to participate in multiple art forms" (28).

It is important to note that the general age of a PITT ARTS program participant is 19, an age where people are transitioning out of an adolescent social interaction into an adult one. Students have noted in surveys that they appreciate the opportunity to build



bonds with one another outside the traditional social constraints offered by Universities, such as fraternities. Students also noted their interest in socializing before and after an arts event as a member of the general public and not simply only with other students. In addition, surveys have shown that students have made a clear break from participating in events with those just slightly younger, such as high school students just two years their junior. For example, when young adults were mixed with high school students in an educational activity at one of the large organizations, several Pitt students wrote on their surveys that they felt talked down to; one such comment embodies this: "I felt like she was talking to us like we were kids." It therefore became apparent, that when dealing with college students, they value being treated both as a specific niche and as an adult.

Given the research and line of argumentation, one would imagine that the partnerships between PITT ARTS and arts organizations ranging from quite small to large would enable an easy collaboration to make "space" for the young adult within the organizations' audience development strategies. In fact these partnerships encountered several barriers to overcome.

## BARRIERS

### Instability

The primary issue that presented the most difficulty to accomplishing the grant's goals was the relative instability of personnel at the partnering non-profit arts organizations. For example, one contact person at one of the large performing arts organizations moved on to another position at another non-profit. Unfortunately, our collaborative work was not sufficiently transmitted to the new staff. We had to begin anew with the new Education Director there, and consequently it was difficult getting them on board in a timely manner that represented the trajectory of the initial partnership.

Another example of organizational instability affecting the fulfillment of the grant was the restructuring of the dance organization, leaving our contact person out of a job, and the new contact unavailable and uninterested in pursuing the grant's goals. There are numerous more examples of this type of instability. Unfortunately, due to the non-profit framework and the changing face of arts organizations, this barrier is both unpredictable and not subject to a control element. One possible way of averting this issue is to adopt an egalitarian position within the arts organization; that is to say, working with a team of arts organizers, and/or ensuring that more than just the contact person has both buy-in and knowledge of the grant's outcomes and how they are working within the arts organizations' greater goals. However, working with a team of people is not always feasible, largely in part because of the understaffed resources so common at many arts non-profits.

McCarthy and Jinnett discuss these difficulties:

... arts institutions must also be mindful of their resource constraints and other institutional goals. Indeed, failure to consider the broader institutional and community contexts can create conflicts within the organization and make setting priorities and goals very difficult. Thus, our framework suggests that institutions must determine how participation-building efforts fit with their overall purpose and mission, their available resources, and the community environment in which they operate. In other words, arts organizations must take an integrative approach to building [arts] participation...(xiii)



Students share ideas at Silver Eye Center for Photography



Principal trumpet from the Pittsburgh Symphony, George Vosburgh, belts out passages from the Haydn Trumpet Concerto on campus at The University of Pittsburgh



### Human Resources

Human resources are at a premium in most organizations. Some smaller arts organizations operate on a skeleton crew. Even medium-sized organizations have staff that are periodically strapped while they account for a plenitude of tasks or changes that are inevitable with the current economic climate, one of which is thinking about how to accommodate young adults. Accommodating this target population frequently falls to the bottom of the priority list, particularly because it requires much more of a commitment on the part of the staff to facilitate the more complex issues surrounding the design and implementation of an integrated program for a specific audience. McCarthy and Jinnett caution:

“Be aware that building participation is not a straightforward task and can involve developing different tactics for different target audiences. Recognize that limited resources will often require tradeoffs among competing goals” (57).

Another issue is the fact that most arts organizations have not regarded the 18 – 24 year old as a specific target audience until recently; the majority of education departments cater to the elementary or high school classroom teacher or have a disparate relationship between their education and marketing departments. In which case, developing initiatives within the arts organizations to consider the young adult as a priority is difficult, especially when the staff is already tapped out working with elementary age students. Considering young adult feedback as provided through our surveys and then integrating this information into an approach of programs to complement the arts performances and exhibitions requires a real shift in pedagogy which may be too demanding for some education staff.

Larger organizations can face such obstacles as a burdensome load of additional productions with no increase in staff. Additional concerns may arise due to a pitched hierarchy or highly stratified structure, that require employees to have many sign-offs or approvals for even small decisions. This can result in research initiatives taking a back seat to basic ticket sales and producing shows.

### Economic Resources

The Young Adult Arts Initiative funding has enabled some smaller organizations to attain greater visibility on our campus, mostly through programs that offered free lunchtime presentations with live musicians, slide shows of exhibitions, and theatrical improvisations. Marketing staff from the arts organizations attended these fun experiential

programs and highlighted the learning experience with free ticket giveaways, prizes, and literature about their upcoming shows.

Resources are always an issue at arts organizations. The collaboration between PITT ARTS and these organizations enabled support not only in the domain of human resources, but also of economic resources. Organizations took advantage of special presentations with honoraria and receptions funded by PITT ARTS. The RAND study states that “establishing strategic alliances with the other institutions and individuals within the community [is] a way to expand available resources” (48). These alliances benefited University of Pittsburgh undergraduates, but also place in top-of-mind the audiences of young adults and the development of a space for them in the strategic, marketing and education plans of partnering arts organizations.

However successful these programs were (such as the time when 5% of one organization’s audience found out about the show through PITT ARTS), there was a concern about how much these organizations were capable of implementing these kinds of programs, on their own, especially once the grant completed its cycle. Would outreach funds be made available to continually target young adults? Even if they received such funds, could their staff handle it? Would they be able to make a significant enough space in their strategic plan for college students? Furthermore, there is the all-pervasive culture of the under-financed, under-resourced non-profit; how does this internal perception within many of the organizations play out in their ability to think creatively and perhaps beyond their current resources structure? These are questions that require continual attention, in order to have organizations address critical issues of programming sustainability and reproducibility. To buttress this concern, authors of the RAND study suggest that organizations need to “Recognize that building participation is hard work and requires serious commitments of time and other resources” (57).

### Stereotypes

One of the main barriers facing the PITT ARTS program in general, and certainly within the scope of the Young Adult Arts Participation Initiative, are overwhelming stereotypes about college students. For example, considering that a student may want to wear jeans to a symphonic performance directly contradicts the true student feedback, which is that they enjoy dressing for the occasion. Some arts administrators were under the preconceived notion that all college students wish to do in their leisure time is exercise their fake ID, sleep in, or attend sporting events. After several hundred successful arts programs

and an annual participation rate of 22,000 students, PITT ARTS can attest to the contrary, and is gaining partners in understanding the “real” college student.

As mentioned previously, a key goal for the Young Adult Arts Participation Initiative became creating a paradigm shift in the thinking of these organizations, and using hard data to back a portrait of student life contrary to stereotypes. For example, while it is true that young adults represent a potentially transitional client, that being of the college student, it is also true that in the year 2000, 1,669 University of Pittsburgh students stayed in the city of Pittsburgh upon graduating. Thirty five percent of the graduates chose to live within Allegheny County or the nine-county surrounding region. As well, 48% of those PITT ARTS participants surveyed are not majoring in the fine or liberal arts, but are majoring in engineering, information science or the hard sciences. Lastly, the survey proved that “reading” beat out “partying/going to the bar” as the third likeliest leisurely activity of PITT ARTS participants, while “attending a cultural event” beat out both. The number one leisure activity was “going to dinner.”

Students have expressed that the arts are an important feature of their overall Pittsburgh experience, and surveys over multiple years show that Pitt students fall into the medium-users group of arts participants — they attend on average one arts/cultural event per month. Furthermore, surveys have shown that over the past four years of intense PITT ARTS programming, “attending a cultural event” has moved from the #4 choice out of the top five choices of students’ leisure activities to spot #2. This exemplifies the power of systematically, via programs and education, establishing the arts as an important component to a college student’s quality of life and general education. Students value the arts and can therefore potentially move into a greater investment in the arts; marketing research has shown that, on a scale of arts consumption, it is easier to move medium users into a heavier consumption because they are already engaged. It is more difficult to move a light user, who may have more competing interests, into a medium users group. Here at University of Pittsburgh and at PITT ARTS, is a group of educated young adults primed to be the next avid arts patrons.

Most of the organizational contacts have been in the form of education personnel, for whom the traditional and primary focus is K – 12 programming. When someone turns 18, they are not simply then a “general adult” — so understanding the social, educational, and economic needs of the college student is key to realizing meaningful and educational experiences to accompany arts programming. One basic challenge has been convincing arts organizations that college students are actually interested in the arts, are

Pittsburgh Opera, Elektra



Agnes R. Katz Plaza, Photo credit: Clyde Hare

a group of future arts consumers, aren’t simply a transient audience. A prime example is the Education Director of one large performing organization who felt that college students are “on hiatus from the arts.” The 22,000 participation rate at PITT ARTS programs annually, the enormous increase in Cheap Seat sales, and the overwhelmingly positive student response to the quality of programs offered failed to convince her otherwise. With over 70K alumni living in Allegheny County alone, it is clearly not outrageous to suggest that the current college population is a viable target audience. This flagrant act of stereotyping has occurred in lesser degrees with other organizations, for example, thinking that serving pizza and beer is acceptable reception fare.

#### Top-Down Alignment

In keeping with the discussion of education personnel, it was learned that it is not sufficient to have alignment with Education and Marketing Directors alone, but rather it is critical to the success of university-arts organization’s partnerships to have top-level management and artistic staff also aligned on the overall intent of reaching and retaining young adults as a critical audience of the future. One of the issues, for example, at one large performing arts organization is that the upper-level management still conceived of our relationship with them from the group sales perspective, and the top-level artistic staff still had not made a commitment to making a real place for young adults within their organization. In this case, one can anticipate that young adult arts education would take a back seat to the K – 12 programming.

Conversely, a main reason for PITT ARTS’ overall success is the ongoing and extremely critical support from the top offices at the University of Pittsburgh. This includes being housed in the Office of the Provost, being consistently endorsed by the Chancellor, and forming critical interdepartmental relationships with Deans and Department heads. Within its own institution, then, PITT ARTS has an important place within the broad University goals of strategic planning, recruitment, and retention issues.

## SUCCESSFUL RESULTS

### Increase in Cheap Seat Sales

Consistent with an integrated approach to garnering student interest in these organizations' programs, PITT ARTS annually offers 110 free programs, and sells Cheap Seats for 5 out of the 8 partnering organizations. The purchase of Cheap Seats is one way of tracking of how these Heinz programs have had a positive impact on student responsiveness to the organizations. Cheap Seat sales increases were exponential in the final semester of the grant over all semesters and years of previous sales. For example, the Cheap Seat sale increase for one large performing arts organization was approximately 80% over last year.

PITT ARTS is sometimes criticized for sponsoring completely free artistic excursions, citing that unless students pay their own way, they will not develop the true habit of being arts consumers. This has been shown to be untrue, realizing that offering students an opportunity to experience an art form they may have never experienced and tailoring the opportunity to be a fully enriching evening can reap positive future benefits. PITT ARTS works to lay the foundation for understanding the function and place of the arts in society, and helping students come into their own taste for appreciating and patronizing the arts.

Cost is not the major barrier for students in attending the arts, but rather accessibility and time. For three years in a row prior to the current economic downturn, time beat out cost 2 to 1 in the annual PITT ARTS student survey as the number one barrier to attending the arts. The Cheap Seat Program offers students a quick way to reserve a seat by simply taking the elevator to the ninth floor of a centrally located campus building, filling out a form and handing over cash, check or credit card. No finding a phone number, worrying about not having a credit card to reserve tickets by phone, waiting on hold for a ticketing agent or standing in line holding one's breath for the possibility of "student rush" tickets. Time is important to students, so planning in advance is as essential for them as it is for a couple trying to find a babysitter for their evening out at the theater. Also, the fact that a campus organization sells these tickets clearly indicates to students that there has been a place for them in the scheme of that arts organization; they have been endorsed and are therefore accessible and "safe".

### Top-Down Alignment

Top-Down Alignment is both a barrier and a successful result; while some organizations have yet to implement a top-down strategy and an organization paradigm shift still is needed to address this new potential audience, some organizations really have made this shift.

For example, it was not a coincidence that there was an 80% increase in Cheap Seats sold to the aforementioned large performing arts organization. From the top-down, the organization made a commitment to making a place for students. One top-level artistic director had stated numerous times that anytime that University of Pittsburgh students attended performances that he wanted to meet with them. This has included some phenomenal opportunities for young adults, including meeting world-class soloists and composers. The students have had an extremely positive response to these interactions, stating that it greatly enhanced their experience and understanding of the art.

Another example of successful programming due to top-down alignment was at the contemporary art gallery. The contemporary visual arts had been much more abstract for PITT ARTS students compared to the performing arts, which could be more readily housed in the domain of entertainment, particularly "blockbuster" musicals or venues hosting artists of international repute. To combat the "mystery" surrounding contemporary visual works, the curator made himself completely available to personally facilitate student-initiated discussions about the exhibitions, often with the artist themselves as the co-facilitators. This is not only an example of top-down alignment but also an example of an evolving strategy of placing emphasis on direct student-led discussion, instead of the traditional "lecture from an expert," which students have on a daily basis in their classrooms. In addition, this inquiry-based approach is sound pedagogy, since students retain a good deal more of what they do than what they hear.

More successes would be made with arts organizations if a top-down approach were to be taken. Buy-in from artistic directors, particularly in the canon-focused organizations, would provide an in-road to developing key experiences for young adults, especially if they facilitated direct meetings and experiences with the presenting artists themselves.

### Increased Participation

Since the beginning of the implementation phase of the grant, there have been marked increases in participation at all of the partnering organizations. In addition, historically, several of the smaller organizations had minimal visibility for students. For example, one small art gallery was the only organization at which not one student showed up to a PITT ARTS event. Now, thanks to the grant and to the commitment to creating greater visibility for that organization, there are regularly thirty to fifty participating students at each event there. Further, last year it was difficult to get ten people to attend an event at one of the small performing arts organizations. Again, now this organization has between twenty to thirty-five participants for each student event and their Cheap Seat sales increases have been exponential, at 1400%. This is not only true for the smaller organizations, but there have also been increases at the large organizations and also at mid-sized organizations.

It should also be noted that while increased participation has obvious direct benefits for the participating organizations, it also has a significant impact on student quality of life and integration of academic and leisurely aspects of the student experience. Increased participation in PITT ARTS activities creates the opportunity to more fully engage our students in the Pittsburgh arts community as a whole, because as research shows, those who have a positive experience at one arts organization are more likely to inquire into another arts organization's offerings. This raises the possibility of this region's ability to retain young talent, an initiative that not only the University of Pittsburgh embraces, but is on the agenda for long-range urban planning for the city of Pittsburgh.

### Improvement in Rankings

As participation skyrocketed at the partnering organizations' art events, so positive rankings increased. It was notable that when integrating direct feedback from student surveys, rankings improved. Constant self-evaluation, monitoring of surveys and debriefing those surveys with the arts organizations was an ongoing process and proved to be the key component in directly impacting the increase in participation.

As before discussed, one large performing arts organization decided to include high school students with University of Pittsburgh students in the pre-performance experience. The young adults were unforgiving in their survey commentary, stating that they felt they were dumbed-down, and treated like "children." Incorporating this feedback

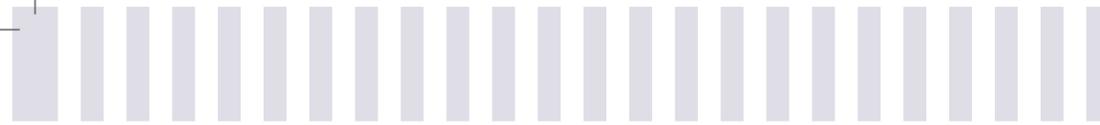
into the next program enabled the Education Director there to create far more age-appropriate activities. In the second program, students ranked the organization, its programs and its treatment of college students in a far better light.

Additionally, survey rankings enabled the PITT ARTS staff to direct the design of not just the educational activities, but also the social components — everything from the bus ride to the food selection to the number of program participants. The more specific the programs were tailored, the better the rankings. Students had the experience of the program being designed just for them, and this specialized treatment was well received. Vegan and ethnic food, hands-on interactive education and more intimate group settings were some of the points brought into the next iteration of programs and were thus given improved rankings in the respective surveys.

### Spontaneous Collaborations

A benchmark of success is the desire for other local colleges to participate with PITT ARTS in the educational programming that has been put in place with partnering arts organizations. In one case, a local college participated in an educational event that corresponded to a concert. Another local university had students present at an event that PITT ARTS coordinated with the one of the larger arts organizations.

Additional exciting developments include the collaboration between grant partners with each other. The Executive Director of a small early music organization struck up a spontaneous collaboration with the Education Director of a large music organization and worked together to create exciting programming for students with members of another non-partnering organization. Two violinists worked with students; one led a workshop for students in Renaissance Dance and the other played violin for them. This brought another Executive Director of an early music organization into the mix as well. The grant has also increased the contact on Pittsburgh's South Side between two partners, a small art gallery and a theater, that had previously little interaction. They have collaborated on their "Cultural Sunday on the South Side" which included Starbucks coffee and a private viewing of one of the gallery's exhibitions and culminated in a delicious catered brunch at the theater with a matinee showing of one of their plays.



## CONCLUSION

The University of Pittsburgh, in its efforts to positively impact student quality of life, to integrate academic and leisurely segments of the student experience, and to aid in student retention, developed the innovative program, PITT ARTS.

More significantly for the arts community, young adults who attend arts events via the 110 free arts programs, or for a nominal fee, use the Cheap Seat Program, have substantially reinvigorated Pittsburgh arts audiences. One recent result that emerged directly from these PITT ARTS initiatives was a special University of Pittsburgh subscription to one of the large arts organizations and partner from this grant. Current figures show that 30 eight-performance subscriptions have been sold in the two months since the subscription was first offered. There are numerous touchstones that mark how many young adults are independent arts consumers already, and how the others, having been brought to the point of real passion for the arts, are poised to participate on their own. This study clearly articulates a call to arts organizations in Pittsburgh and in other cities around the nation to realize the long-range value of making a real place for, and educational commitment to, young adults in their arts organizations. PITT ARTS exists because of the vision of the University of Pittsburgh's Provost; the Young Adult Arts Participation Initiative was able to make a contribution to the Pittsburgh arts community and to University of Pittsburgh students, due to the generous support of the Heinz Endowments. If programs and projects like these are going to succeed, then the support of foundations, individuals, and universities will have to perform crucial functions. Bringing a vibrant, educated, young, and entirely new audience to arts organizations will only ensure the future well-being of those arts non-profits.

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### About the Authors

Annabelle Clippinger received her M.F.A. from Syracuse University in Creative Writing-Poetry. She has had two books of poetry published, both by Potes & Poets Press, *Sky Frame* and *Cloud Banner*. She sits on the Advisory Board for the International Poetry Forum, and edits two literary journals, *Palimpsest Review* and *Poethia*. She spearheaded PITT ARTS' Heinz Endowment grant from 2000 – 2002 from which the findings of this monograph derive. Since 2002, Annabelle has been the Director of PITT ARTS. She is also an Adjunct Professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh.

Jen Saffron is an artist and community activist, and is the Assistant to the Provost for Enrollment Management and Film Studies Adjunct Faculty at the University of Pittsburgh. Her projects and interests have focused on using the arts to assist community development, including teaching service-learning programs for Amizade, Inc., serving on the board of her community council and leading collaborative social documentary projects. As the founding director of PITT ARTS, she established the University of Pittsburgh as a leader in developing college arts audiences. She exhibits and performs her work nationally, and received her M.F.A. in photography from the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College.