



## PREPARING STUDENTS TO BE CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS

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### *Abstract*

The creative sector is a burgeoning global economic powerhouse that is expected to grow rapidly and continuously in the coming years. However, many artistically minded young people struggle to make a living in this field, despite their procurement of academic degrees. In part, this can be attributed to the failure of schools to adequately prepare creative workers for the business world, opting instead to focus on art and design training. Yet, this is unsuitable for such workers, who will more often than not become freelancers. Although a significant number of creative graduates desire to start their own businesses, statistics show that most are not able to achieve this goal. This study demonstrates that artists face difficulties in becoming entrepreneurs due to a tendency to possess, at least with respect to business matters, individualistic temperaments.

Moreover, they often do not perceive that they are adequately prepared during their university educations to take on entrepreneurial risks after graduation.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship, creative industries, the United Arab Emirates, university graduates, art and design

## 1. Introduction

A career in the creative sector was once perceived to be unprofitable; consequently, many parents cautioned their children against pursuing employment in it. However, technological advances and innovations have made creative industries more lucrative, particularly in light of the vast opportunities that they now offer. Some positions in the sector are notably rewarding, namely those in the television and film industries. Creative professionals can earn a comfortable or even very comfortable living, especially if their knowledge of art and design is coupled with entrepreneurial skills. Nevertheless, individuals who complete courses or degrees related to art and design frequently find themselves working in an unrelated field. According to Jenkins (2015), only 28% of performing arts graduates in Britain are able to acquire employment in the arts or media, astonishingly, approximately the same percentage ultimately obtain work in retail sales or catering.

The creative sector is a major emerging force in the world today, a significant contributor to international economic growth, and highly visible in major population centers—both in developed and developing countries. From structural design to magnificent works of art and elegant fashion, the sector's spectrum is expansive. Moreover, it plays an undeniable role in the design and aesthetic value of products from a wide range of other sectors. Increasingly, the creative sector is being recognized as a key strategic component for facilitating economic growth and successful integration into a rapidly evolving global economy (United Nations, 2004). Data from the World Bank (2003) indicates that creative industries accounted for an estimated 7% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2003. Likewise, according to a jointly commissioned report by the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Development

Bank, and the British Council, creative exports reached a global value of 640 billion dollars in 2014 (Inter-American Development Bank, 2014). These significant increases in the sector's reported size could be attributable to the fact that, "authors have gradually broadened the definition of 'creative industries' to include almost every industry that relies on creativity as a strategic resource" (Lyubareva, Benghozi, & Fidele, 2014). Therefore, assessments indicative of rapid growth are to some extent the result of redefinition rather than increased economic output.

In the United Kingdom, the creative sector continues to grow. A report from the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) indicated that in 2012 creative industries directly accounted for approximately 1.7 million jobs, and contributed roughly 71 billion £ to the annual economy, which is equivalent to 5.2% of the country's GDP. Hence, it has grown much faster than the rest of the country's economy, at a rate of 19% since 2010. In addition, close to 222,000 registered companies in the United Kingdom are in creative fields (Luzi, 2014), with about 12,450 concentrating on design specifically (Woods, 2007). Across the Atlantic, educational experts in the United States predict that its prototypical industry will be engaged in creative work in the near future (Lynch, 2008). Furthermore, it has been estimated that there are nearly six million creative positions held by workers in America (J.P.P., 2011). Interestingly, this figure rivals that of all European countries combined, therefore suggesting that the United States possesses a higher per capita job rate in the creative sector (Mietzner & Kamprath, 2013).

The above findings from the United Nations and other organizations are indicative of a strong relationship between art and design industries with more general areas of business and entrepreneurship. This prompts one to question the extent to which universities are preparing young artists for success in business, particularly in terms of personal ventures outside of existing firms. By combining creative industries and entrepreneurship, an alliance can be formed

leading to high-income employment, and the economic advancement of cities and towns wherein professionals in art and design can thrive. Given the abundant demand for creative products and services, there are significant opportunities waiting to be seized. A fashion design graduate, for instance, may be able to obtain a higher income by establishing his or her own clothing line. Similarly, creative professionals such as software and computer game designers, animators, architects, and videographers can likely progress faster by creating their own businesses rather than perpetually seeking outside employment. Thus, a wealth of untapped resources exist for creative workers wishing to pursue goals independently, however this first requires the acquisition of entrepreneurial and business-related knowledge.

### *1.1 Purpose*

This study will attempt to determine the degree of interest held in entrepreneurship by students pursuing a career in the creative sector. In addition, it will examine their perceived preparedness as creative professionals. It is hypothesized that a significant gap will be identified between the former and latter. By investigating these issues, guidance can be obtained and applied for producing solutions to the problems identified.

### *1.2 Research Questions*

First, we seek to ascertain whether Emirati creative art and design students aspire to own and operate businesses after graduating from college. Second, assuming that this desire exists, are they sufficiently prepared to actually pursue such an endeavor. Third, if it is determined that students lack sufficient preparedness, who or what entities should be held accountable?

### *1.3 Research Methodology*

To answer the three aforementioned questions, a survey was administered to students pursuing bachelor degrees in art and design at six universities in the United Arab Emirates

(UAE). The survey's results were analyzed qualitatively in order to gauge participants' feelings with regard to each respective question. However, both quantitative and qualitative analysis was used in examining the third research question; this, subsequently, was used to develop theories concerning the preparedness and/or unpreparedness of students.

## **2. Literature Review**

The creative sector possesses great potential in terms of creating wealth and employment (UK Creative Industries Task Force as cited in Research and Innovation, 2005). Furthermore, it is comparatively unique, as the creative sector is dependent on individual creativity, talent, and skills. Not only are its members frequently self-employed (Carey & Naudin, 2006), but it is a sphere wherein "art and artistic egos rule, managers are 'the enemies,' motely crews turn production processes into mayhem, time flies, and individual success is a result of God-given talent and earthly-earned networks of contacts" (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006, p. 234). Indeed, it is a sector in which creativity defines "the essence of a business's *raison d'être*" (De Miranda, Aranha, & Zardo, 2009, p. 524).

According to the DCMS, the creative sector encompasses industries such as advertising, architecture, crafts, design, fashion, music, performing arts, publishing, software (including interactive games), computing services, television, radio, film/video, and art/antique markets (Carey & Naudin, 2006). Howkins (2001) divided the creative sector into four subsectors, and structured final products according to copyrights, trademarks, patents, and designs. However, the concept of a creative sector first emerged in early twentieth century Australia. Nonetheless, creative industries were afforded much broader exposure in the United Kingdom during the late 1900s, when the DCMS established a creative industry unit and task force (United Nations, 2004); following this, in 1997, creative industries were officially accepted as part of a distinct

	UK		France		Germany		Italy		Spain	
<b>Creative Industries</b>	<b>VA</b>	<b>Jobs</b>	<b>VA</b>	<b>Jobs</b>	<b>VA</b>	<b>Jobs</b>	<b>VA</b>	<b>Jobs</b>	<b>VA</b>	<b>Jobs</b>
Core	6.2%	5.4%	4.9%	3.7%	4.2%	4.1%	3.8%	3.6%	3.6%	3.5%
Interdependent & Support	3.4%	3.8%	2.6%	2.6%	2.3%	2.8%	2.1%	2.5%	2.0%	2.4%
<b>Total Creative Industries</b>	<b>9.6%</b>	<b>9.2%</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>5.9%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>5.9%</b>
Creative GDP (Billion Euro)	175		142		162		93		62	
Creative Employment (Million)	2.7		1.7		2.7		1.4		1.2	

Table 1. Creative sector contributions by country (“The Entrepreneurial,” 2010, p. 16).

economic sector (Montgomery, 2007). In China, the notion of a creative sector was first presented in 2004 (Keane, 2009), wherein it lies at the crossroads between three other sectors: art, business, and technology (United Nations, 2004). Recently, with the emergence of sophisticated technological innovations, China has better positioned itself to harness the full potential of its creative industries.

In the European Union, the 2020 Strategy emphasized the need to anchor its economic policies onto one of the continent’s key strengths, which is its creative population. Europe is known for possessing a rich and diverse cultural heritage, thereby increasing its potential to host a creative economy (“The Entrepreneurial,” 2010); indeed, a combination of creativity and innovative entrepreneurship has had a significant economic impact on European countries. Table 1, which was obtained through the Utrecht School of Arts, shows the total contributions made by creative sectors in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain in terms of generated GDP and employment.

Statistics from the DCMS indicate that the United Kingdom's creative sector includes industries requiring a high degree of education, with approximately 43% of the sector's employees educated to degree level or higher. In fact, many of these individuals have their own businesses. In 2003, it was reported that nearly one-third of first degree art and design graduates became self-employed six months after completing their studies ("Developing entrepreneurship," 2006). Moreover, people within this sector are capable of establishing and managing diverse enterprises, ranging from freelance operations to owners of major global organizations (Bjorkegren, 1996). However, the DCMS also found that these self-employed creative design professionals were not initially ready to embark on their business ventures, as their courses did not adequately prepare them from the standpoint of commercializing their skills ("Developing entrepreneurship," 2006). In other words, there is a wide gap between the skills gained through higher education and those developed by means of entrepreneurial experience. Furthermore, the DCMS discovered that the entrepreneurship training provided in creative courses was offered on a piecemeal basis through individual organizations, and not within the bounds of the curriculum itself. Consequently, graduates were often unequipped to function in a real world, creative work environment.

### *2.1 Description of Typical Work in the Creative Sector*

Work in creative industries is often on a freelance or short-term contract basis; self-employment is fairly common, more so than in many other fields. Approximately 40% of creative workers in the United Kingdom are self-employed, versus just 12.6% of the general working population (Carey & Naudin, 2006). There is a level of uncertainty in this sector, which can be both a blessing and a curse in terms of sustaining oneself (Dempster, 2006). Careers in the

creative sector are typified by *boundarylessness* (Arthur & Rousseau as cited in Bridgestock, 2011); in that sense, individuals must often fend for themselves on a day-to-day basis, without prospects for stable employment, nor a means to methodically progress to the top. This is largely because the creative sector is dependent on a supply chain relationship involving freelancers (Carey & Naudin, 2006). Moreover, the failure rate of creative enterprises is quite high early on. According to Montgomery (2007), most of these will entail one or two person start-ups requiring, “a [wide] range of support services to help them survive the first difficult three years of trading” (p. 615). Many individuals entering into such ventures will have to learn business skills that are vastly different from those of previous generations, such as conducting virtual conversations with potential clients (Organization and Management, 2005), despite the fact that creative clusters are known for up-close and personal contact.

A significant number of creative businesses flourish through collaborations with individuals or small firms in the same sector, with each supplying the other with complementing services. Many of these collaborations occur in urban clusters, wherein creative firms, “profit from being geographically proximate to each other since proximity generates more opportunities for face-to-face contact and informal knowledge exchange” (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010, p. 347). In many instances, creative clusters develop in formerly neglected urban areas, where artists can rent locations cheaply. These clusters are not only conducive to business transactions in general, but also benefit entrepreneurs specifically, as such areas facilitate mobility and easy travel for work (Leemann, 2010).

Based on cases from the Japanese film industry, Yamada and Yamashita (2006) addressed how the aforementioned forms of creative collaboration complement each other. One example they cited was that of Japanese comedian Takeshi Kitano, who successfully transitioned



into an acting career; consequently, he was afforded an opportunity to direct his own movie in 1989 entitled *Violent Cop*. A staffer he used as an assistant director subsequently decided to launch his own production company, and eventually became a regular producer of Kitano's films. Both parties eventually formed an independent partnership in production and distribution, which quickly became one of the most successful international Japanese production companies (Yamada & Yamashita, 2006). This collaboration illustrates how two creative professionals can combine their talents in order to achieve an exceptionally high level of entrepreneurial success, a phenomenon that is quite common in the film industry (Friedman, 2005). Similarly, other film entrepreneurs have leveraged the Internet to circumvent traditional power structures, and deliver their productions directly to the masses (Kirsner, 2006).

With the second largest creative sector in the United Kingdom outside of London (which itself hosts approximately 386,000 creative professionals (Burns, 2012; Lee & Drever, 2013), Manchester is another burgeoning urban creative cluster (O'Connor & Gu, 2010). As in numerous other metropolitan areas, Manchester's creative industries are associated with urban renewal, in this case in a city undergoing a postindustrial transition. In that sense it resembles Woodstock, a suburb of Cape Town, South Africa, where a postindustrial creative sector has also emerged (Wenz, 2012). Elsewhere in Africa, Nigeria's creative sector is slowly becoming a second economic option after oil, although it is nascent and minimal in terms of overall economic growth (Murray, 2007); unlike the aforementioned cities and others like them, Nigeria's creative clusters have not arisen from a postindustrial context.

According to Smit (2011), there are certain factors that attract artistic individuals to creative clusters, such as "inexpensive real estate; [a] central city location; diversity in class, household structure, and ethnicity; and amenities, such as art schools and artists' centers" (p.

168). Smit also noted that by enhancing a district's visual appeal, it can become more appealing to creative minds. Moreover, businesses often seek to position themselves inside creative clusters in order to capitalize on their trendy, thriving atmospheres (Voge, 2014). Although creative clusters do exist outside of major cities, they tend to possess different characteristics. As mentioned by Bertacchini and Borrione (2013), craft-based industries and "creative systems of design" are frequently located in small towns and non-metropolitan areas (p. 135).

## *2.2 Limitations in the Education of Future Creative Industry Entrepreneurs*

The DCMS -organized creative unit and task force identified various factors that limit the entrepreneurial skills of creative graduates. In the absence of such skills, creative workers are often confined to unmanaged careers based on *push and pull*, wherein they produce more when necessity *pushes* them to do so (e.g., due to insufficient family income), or when *pulled* by self-fulfillment or a desire for status and wealth (Carey & Naudin, 2006). In this section, we examine some of the key barriers identified by the DCMS in relation to the ability of creative graduates to obtain appropriate entrepreneurial skills.

Aside from shortcomings in students' college educations with regard to integrating entrepreneurship into creative studies curricula, some cotemporary models and approaches to infusing entrepreneurial learning into creative courses are not well-documented nor understood in terms of their scale, scope, value, impact, and transferability within different creative industries. In fact, the models are generally vague with respect to their applicability to other areas of the creative sector ("Developing Entrepreneurship," 2006). In addition, response levels from graduates are for the most part poor, particularly when traditional or generic forms of business and entrepreneurship-related learning are implemented.

Existing policies in higher education, including those related to funding, lead to a condition wherein students do not receive assistance after completing their studies, thereby creating a gap between knowledge acquired through work and its application in the real world. As such, students desiring to be self-employed and/or venture into business lack a suitable support system to do so. While this is to some extent understandable, greater effort should nevertheless be exerted to transition students from learning about skills to successfully applying them in a business context. This is particularly important in a world where, “advanced nations are shifting to information-based, knowledge-driven ‘creative economies,’ where creativity is a key determinant of economic growth” (Bridgestock, 2011, p. 10).

Furthermore, the creative sector comprises a wide variety of industries; as such, contemporary one-size-fits-all educational strategies are ineffective. A lack of combined training and learning opportunities in creative curricula, the absence of a coherent national policy concerning business opportunities for recent creative graduates, and insufficient incentives for institutions of higher education to promote entrepreneurship among creative graduates, in addition to the previously mentioned barriers, are all issues identified by the DCMS that should ultimately be addressed. Governmental initiatives to assist the creative community are not new. Franklin D. Roosevelt, for example, employed artists during the Great Depression in an attempt to spur economic growth (“Cross-party Patrons,” 2009). Hoping to bridge the divide between entrepreneurship and creative studies, the DCMS similarly devised solutions through its investigating task group. Among the department’s recommendations was the development of a national entrepreneurial learning framework for creative industries that could be incorporated into higher education policies. It additionally suggested comprehensively examining model providers in order to assess their interventions in different creative industries, investments in

curriculum innovation and creative infrastructures, and creating a national enterprise program for the creative industries. The intent of the latter suggestion is to spawn activities and initiatives, and to utilize the expertise of different organizations capable of bolstering the support available to potential entrepreneurs.

### *2.3 Properly Preparing Students as Creative Professionals*

For a student to fully reap the rewards of his or her artistic abilities, training in career management (i.e., skills related to professional development and the procurement of employment) is essential. In creative industries, the workforce is fluid, and competitiveness among recent graduates is high. Therefore, highly motivated graduates with both outstanding job skills and career management expertise will experience better outcomes (Bridgestock, 2011). Likewise, Carey and Naudin (2006) emphasize the importance of instilling creative students with an entrepreneurial spirit, whether through special projects or by interacting with their local creative communities.

An empirical study conducted by Bridgestock (2011) demonstrated the positive effects of dispensing career management skills. However, the level of training provided must exceed that of the typical capstone courses offered in creative degree programs. Embedding students in the creative sector can also assist them in developing prerequisite entrepreneurial skills (Carey & Naudin, 2006). In addition, creative industry entrepreneurs with a business background are more adept at identifying their competitors (Krzyzanowska & Tkaczyk, 2013). Indeed, understanding a given company's position in a broader competitive context is an indispensable skill for ensuring an enterprise's profitability.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Student Survey*

To address the study's three research questions, a survey questionnaire was administered to art and design students; the results were then analyzed quantitatively. Prior to administering the survey, the author identified the UAE's top undergraduate art and design programs in order to determine how well they prepare their students as prospective entrepreneurs. Six universities were subsequently selected based on (a) Times Higher Education and U.S. News & World Report rankings, (b) the local popularity of their art and design departments, (c) the opinions of high school students, and (d) reviews in local media.

Permission to conduct the survey was obtained from the deans of each art and design department; the questionnaire was reviewed by appropriate administrators at each school prior to distributing it to students via e-mail, who were informed to expect it. To encourage participation, one respondent from each university was randomly awarded an iPad. Since the goal of the research was to assess how students perceived the relevancy of their university preparation to the prospect of operating their own businesses, and whether or not they felt ready to do so, students in their final year were selected. This is because such students were aware that they would soon be graduating, and were therefore more concerned with their future career prospects. The sample size was  $N = 208$ .

The respondents included students majoring in fields of design (i.e., creative, crafting, graphic, animation, interior, fashion, sound) in addition to the fine arts, creative writing, and photography. Some programs were not available at each of the six universities; for example, two of the schools do not offer degrees in sound design. However, this distinction is not particularly important given the specific aim of this research, which is to determine whether these

universities adequately prepare creative students for entrepreneurship. The student survey itself was very straightforward, and focused on whether learners desired to become entrepreneurs after graduation, if they perceived themselves to be sufficiently prepared for such an undertaking, and to what extent they believed their respective curriculums equipped them to do so.

### *3.2 Semi-structured Educator Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 educators in order to obtain more in-depth information of a qualitative nature. These educators included deans, professors, and associate professors from the six selected universities in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah, as well as two individuals out of seven from the Ministry of Higher Education in Dubai who had initially agreed to be interviewed, as five of the seven later decided that they did not want to participate. Interviewee selection varied between universities based on the willingness of participants to be interviewed. For example, some deans declined to be interviewed, but provided the names of program leaders and professors in their departments who might be willing. Semi-structured interviews were employed to ensure that participants were afforded an opportunity to freely express their opinions. These open-ended questions were designed to elicit responses concerning why art and design curricula fail to equip students with the necessary competencies to assist them in launching their own businesses.

### *3.3 Interview analysis*

Each of the 28 interviews was captured at the participants' workplaces using a digital audio recorder and two small microphones (one microphone for the interviewer and interviewee, respectively). On average, the interviews spanned 30 to 45 minutes. Following every interview, a timeline of the participant's responses was developed as a guide to the structure of each answer. Transcripts were subsequently created and coded against a set of 16 categories that were

generated through discourse analysis, thereby facilitating the comparison of similarly coded speech extracts from the same account and others (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). Relevant materials and comments were gathered to obtain supplementary and corroborative details. A case study was then drafted and sent to participants in order to collect feedback, which was subsequently noted in the final revision. A cross-case comparison of the narratives was conducted using the aforementioned coding structure to generate a conceptual model of entrepreneurial learning.

#### **4. Results**

Regarding the question of whether or not Emirati creative art and design students desire to operate their own businesses following graduation, 89% of the respondents from University A indicated that they would; the remaining students preferred to gain employment at an esteemed company, or merely one in their field of expertise. At University B, 78% of the respondents hoped to become entrepreneurs after graduation, and 14% desired to work for an esteemed company or one in their field of expertise; the remaining 8% were undecided. Of the students at University C, 87% aspired to become entrepreneurs, whereas the remaining 13% wanted to work for an esteemed company or one in their field. Similarly, 97% of the participants from University D were hopeful of becoming entrepreneurs, with the remainder wanting to gain employment with an esteemed company or one in their field. At University E, 65% of those surveyed aspired to become entrepreneurs, and 31% desired to work for an esteemed company or one in their field of expertise; the remaining 4% were undecided. Finally, 74% of the respondents from University F hoped to become entrepreneurs, whereas the remaining students wanted to work for an esteemed company or one in their field. According to these results, most students (on average 4 out of 5) intended to become entrepreneurs after graduation. Figures 2 and 3 provide a summary of these findings.

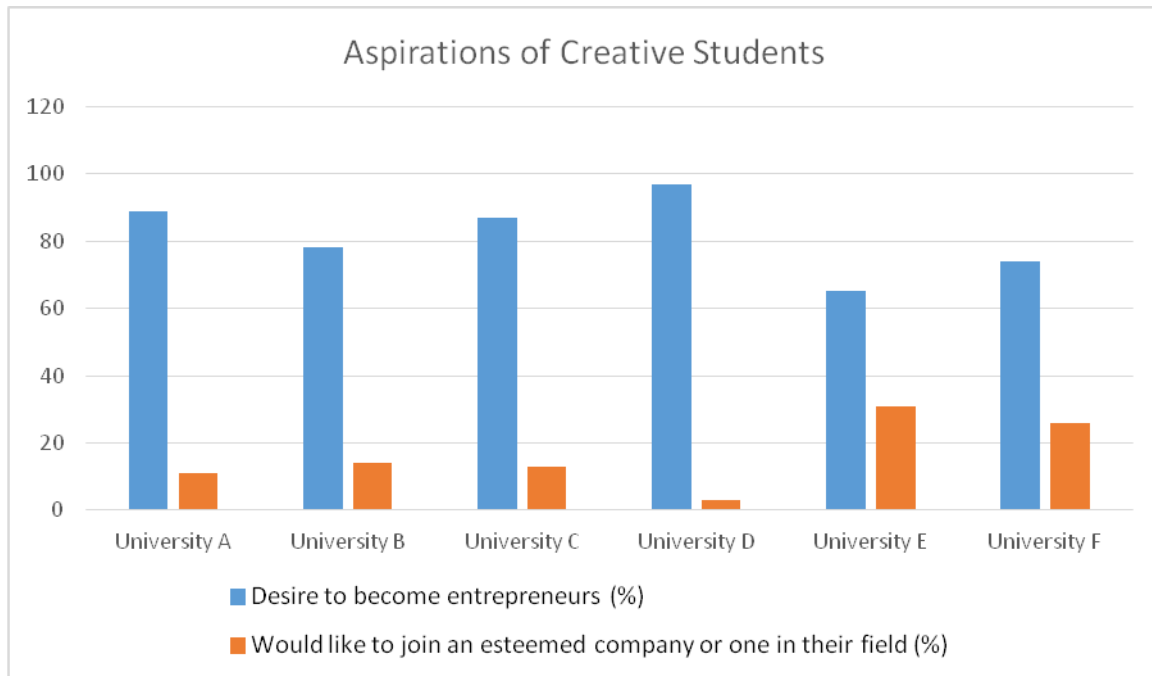


Figure 2. Aspirations of creative students categorized by university.

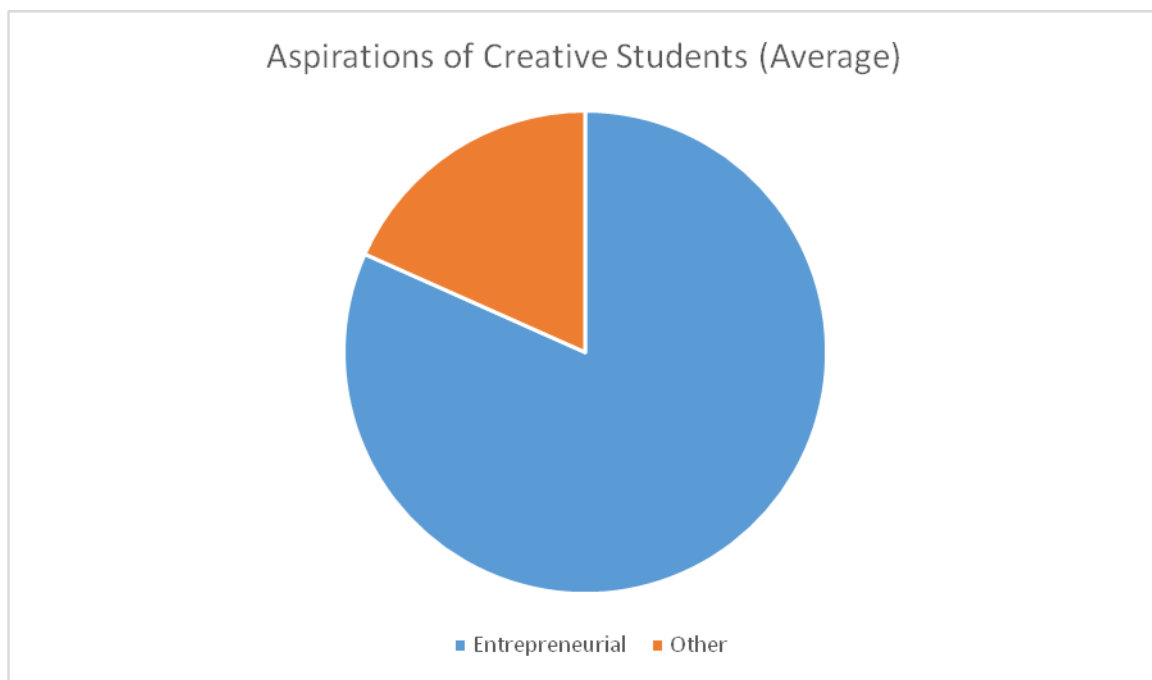


Figure 3. Overall aspirations of creative students.



In terms of whether students felt prepared to start their own businesses, 86% of the respondents from University A did not feel ready to do so; in contrast, the remaining 14% did feel prepared. Likewise, most (91%) students at University B did not believe that they were ready to establish businesses, whereas 9% were confident that they could do so. Of the students at University C, 98% did not deem themselves prepared to operate a business, although the remaining 2% did consider themselves prepared. At University D, 93% of those surveyed were not confident that they could start their own businesses, whereas the remaining 7% deemed themselves capable of doing so. Similarly, most (88%) participants at University E did not believe that they were ready to establish businesses, however the remainder (12%) did believe that they were capable. Finally, 81% of the respondents at University F felt prepared to operate their own businesses, whereas only 19% perceived themselves as able to do so. A summary of these findings is provided in Figure 4.

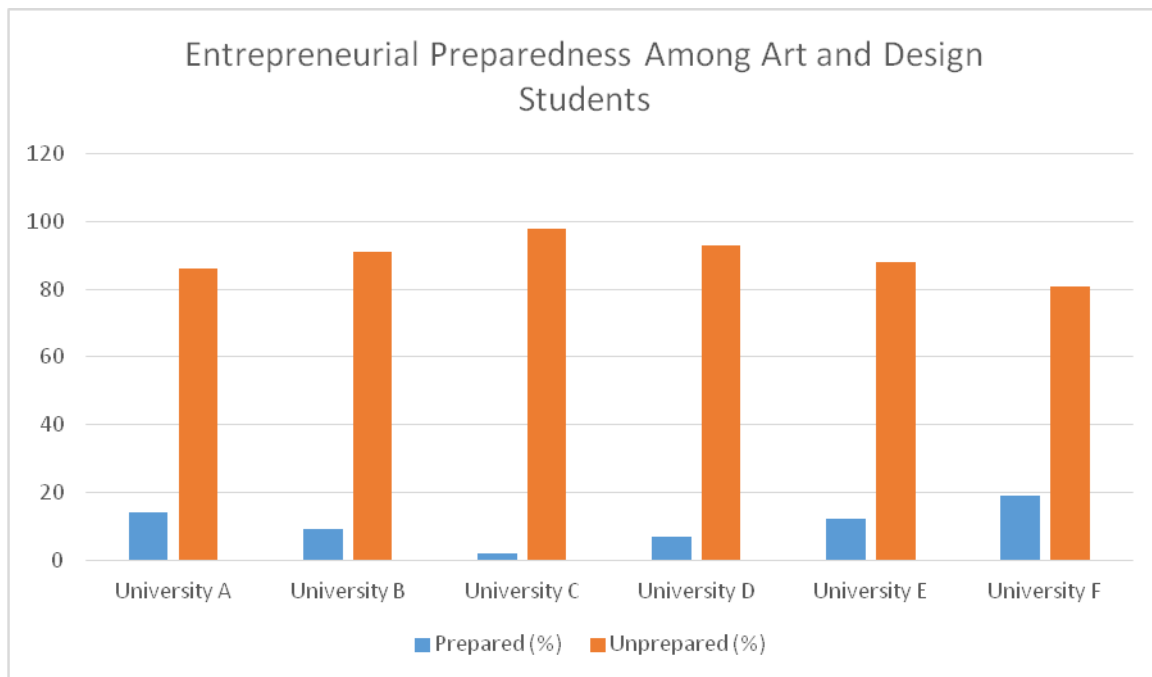


Figure 4. Perceived entrepreneurial preparedness categorized by university.

Based on the above results, the vast majority of those surveyed did not believe that they were prepared to form companies. Figure 5 compares the number of students who expressed a desire to operate their own companies with those who felt unprepared. The differences are stark. At one university the ratio of prospective business owners to perceived unpreparedness was nearly 50:1.

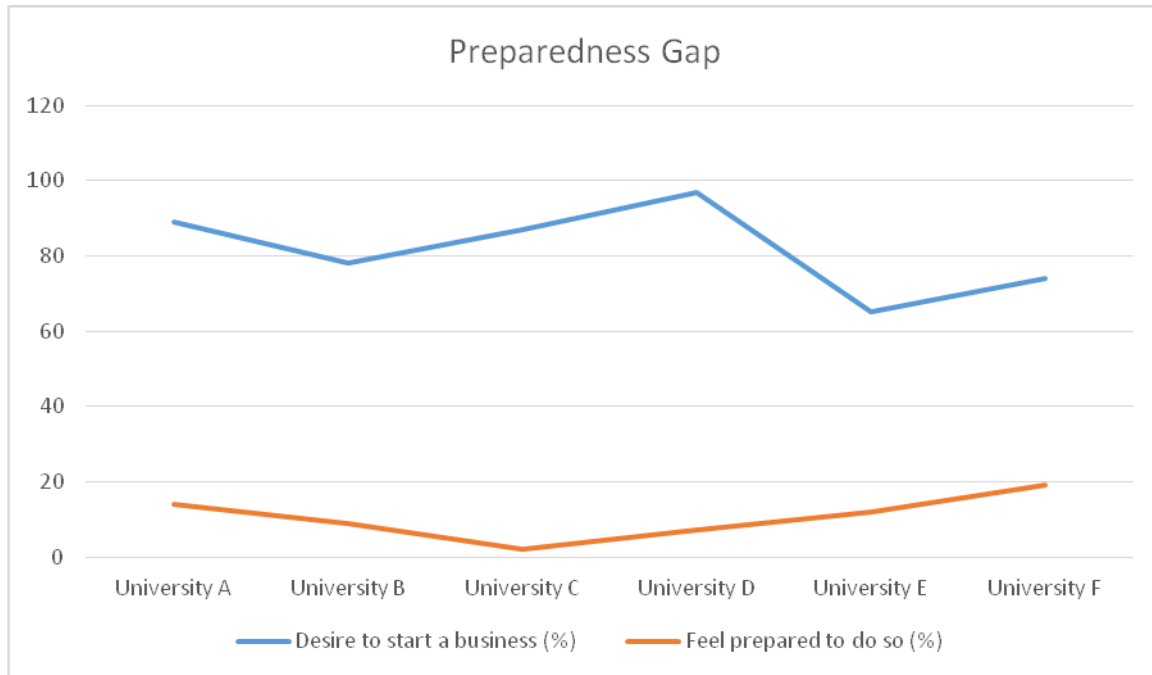


Figure 5. Gap between students’ desire to start a business and their perceived preparedness.

Regarding the third research question (i.e., if students lack sufficient preparedness, who or what is the cause?), a definitive answer could not be obtained from the questionnaire results alone, although one potential source was identified. In responding to questions about learning the fundamentals of business, 88% of those surveyed indicated that they “hated” to study business-related materials (see Figure 6). However, 12% of the respondents did not object to learning about business, provided that the materials were not “boring”; among this group, half expressed

that they would be willing to learn about business basics, so long as they were related to their respective fields.

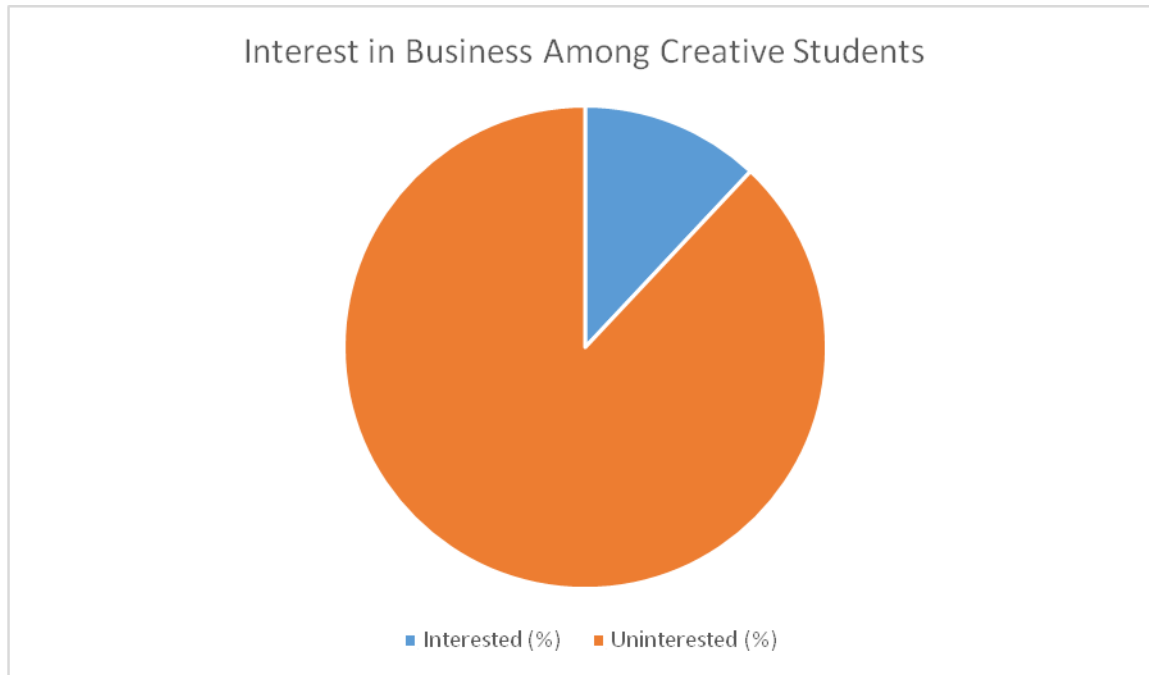


Figure 6. Interest in learning about business among art and design students.

#### 4.1 Interview Results and the Broader University Picture

Three recurring themes emerged during the interviews with educators involving (a) lack of attention from institutions of higher education, (b) lack of student interest, and (c) failed attempts to implement business curriculums. These themes are discussed in greater detail in the sections that follow.

#### 4.2 Lack of attention from institutions of higher education

Even though the UAE's creative sector is among the fastest growing in the Middle East, aspiring entrepreneurs who graduate from the country's art and design programs continue to experience significant problems. This is despite the fact that the government and other organizations (e.g., the Khalifa Fund, the Dubai SME 100, and the Dubai Entrepreneurship

Academy) have invested heavily in promoting entrepreneurship, both through funding and consultation services. Evidence repeatedly suggests that university graduates generally lack the basic skills required to meaningfully engage in entrepreneurship. This is particularly troubling given that student career support has been relegated to universities by the ministries of higher education in the nation's major cities, such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah. However, this is insufficient since, "art students need to be developing their enterprise awareness alongside their practical skills and creativity, which cannot be done [separately]" (Carey & Naudin, 2006).

Indeed, the government must pay close attention to career support among creative graduates, and also recognize its importance. This point was reiterated by an associate professor of fine arts who stated that, "authorities in higher education do not understand the importance of supporting universities and standing by their side...in order to better prepare students for the [job] market." Concerning this matter, an official from the Ministry of Higher Education Scientific and Research in Dubai believed that the government's efforts are, in fact, sufficient:

I believe that we offer a lot of help and support to public universities. I hate it when anything involving new business starters arises. The blame is put on us when in fact we did all that we can. It is the job of academic institutions to tackle student career preparation, not ours.

Moreover, a professor at one university's department of architecture and interior design noted that while creative businesses, particularly new ones, do receive some kind government support, it is nonetheless, "nothing compared to [what] international enterprises [are given]."

Concerning the notion that authorities place greater emphasis on supporting foreign creative industries when compared to local businesses, an educator and member of a Dubai-based training and research center for small and medium sized enterprises pointed out that

foreign industries in the UAE, “have zero intention to support or provide the required knowledge for students to be successful entrepreneurs...[since] they do not know how and [because] they do not want to encounter any future competition.” In addition, he noted that entrepreneurial skills are difficult to teach, and that more research should be conducted to fully understand the kinds of entrepreneurial skills required in the local market.

#### *4.3 Lack of student interest*

As the questionnaire results indicated, there is a general lack of interest among Emirati art and design students in learning about business; nevertheless, only a couple of the universities recognized the immediacy of this problem. These institutions became aware of this issue through feedback, and in at least one case based on direct, annual contact with their alumni in order to check on their progress. Regarding this, a program leader in the department of interior design at one university remarked that deficiencies in business knowledge were commonly found by his school’s alumni relations department among individuals struggling to break into the job market.

It should be noted, however, that some efforts were made to teach students about managerial concepts using different methods; even so, students remained uninterested, and failed to appreciate the importance of the courses offered by their school’s business department. One program leader from a creative arts department voiced frustration regarding his attempts to pique students’ interest in business concepts. A few years prior, the dean of his school requested that program leaders place greater emphasis on business approaches, although that effort has since been suspended due to a lack of funding. Regarding the reasons for disinterest in studying business among creative students, the professor noted that such learners prefer “artistic, inspirational challenges” whereas “business classes are solid, and filled with straightforward materials that leash creativity boundaries.”

#### *4.4 Failed attempts to implement business curriculums*

As discussed above, some of the universities attempted to address deficiencies in students' entrepreneurial preparedness. The school of liberal arts and design at University B surveyed its students in order to determine who among them wished to start a business; afterward, students were made aware of practical business and managerial skills that were prerequisite to their success in doing so. Initially, students were receptive to this program; however, their interest waned as accounting and management courses were introduced.

Based on earlier research findings, University B attempted to embed a customized business curriculum into its art and design courses that focused on four key domains: marketing, accounting, strategic thinking, and business communication. This initiative was developed through a collaborative effort between the school's business professors and outside entities such as companies and practitioners. Despite the energy invested into this seemingly well-thought out program, a lack of funding from the school itself ultimately halted its implementation, as outside funding alone proved to be insufficient. Regarding this, one associate professor involved in the project expressed the opinion that, if the initiative was for a business school, many companies would have been willing to provide funding.

Therefore, it is clear that some universities did make sincere efforts to raise awareness of business concepts among their creative students so that they might understand its importance in relation to their careers—particularly for those hoping to become entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, these initiatives were not fully supported, particularly from a financial standpoint, and consequently did not flourish.

## 5. Discussion

Most art and design students, and indeed many artistic people in general, look forward to starting their own companies, where the untidy commercial aspects of their crafts can be handled personally, and transactions can be made directly, on one's own terms. This is logical given that anti-business, anti-corporate sentiments are commonly found in artistic communities. Nevertheless, whether or not many of the students surveyed in this study will be able to achieve this goal remains unclear. Considering that only 40% of Britain's creative professionals are self-employed, it seems unlikely that 80% of our respondents will be able to accomplish the same, even when economic and societal differences between the UAE and UK are accounted for. Regardless of one's location, starting a business is a difficult endeavor, and even more so in niche creative industries, wherein acquiring customers requires both time and diligence.

Furthermore, the students' schools did not sufficiently prepare them to strike out on their own—at least from their own point of view. Even though learners' skills were being refined in their respective crafts, sparse efforts were made to prepare them for basic business administration. This observation initially seems strange, although not so much when art and design is viewed in light of other specializations, such as chemistry, math, or engineering, which similarly omit business concepts from their curricula. It must be understood, nonetheless, that creative professionals are different, and possess a more individualistic or artistic inclination when compared to other college graduates. Whereas recipients of other degrees are likely to accept or even prefer working for a large corporation, business-wise, creative professionals generally opt to “do their own thing.” Hence, it is imperative for art and design programs to incorporate some form of basic business education into their curriculums. This might include, for example, a two-semester course concerning entrepreneurial skills in the creative sector.

Likewise, the enormous discrepancy between art and design students' career preferences and how they are trained must be addressed. Responses to the questionnaire indicated that students could be their own worst enemy in this regard, as only 12% of those surveyed expressed a desire to learn about basic business concepts. Therefore, steps must be taken to ensure that students recognize the difficulties that they will face in successfully monetizing their skills if a fundamental understanding of business principles is not obtained.

In addition to the questionnaire, which was designed to acquire quantitative data from students specifically, open-ended interviews were conducted with educators and government officials in order to gain greater insight from a qualitative perspective. Despite some institutionalized attempts to integrate basic business concepts into art and design curricula, these efforts were by and large unsuccessful. Still, it should be noted that many interviewees recognized the urgency of such initiatives; consequently, a solution to this matter could be on the horizon.

### *5.1 Limitations of the Study*

This study focused solely on students from the UAE; as such, its global applicability is limited. A comparison could not therefore be made, for example, between the UAE and United States in terms of which nation invests greater time and/or energy into teaching creative students basic business concepts. Even so, an attempt was made to provide a general overview of the global creative sector. Ideally, data should have been collected from locations other than the UAE, although the cost of doing so prevented this.

### *5.2 Suggestions for Future Research*

To gain a more complete understanding of the entrepreneurial desires of creative students, in addition to the perceived efficacy of their respective programs, the results obtained



from this research could be combined with those of other nations. As a global leader in the creative sector, the United States would be an ideal candidate for comparison. Likewise, greater effort could be exerted to identify which business skills creative professionals deemed to be most essential for success (e.g., budgeting, marketing, finance), including those that would have been beneficial to know ahead of time.

## **6. Conclusion**

Insufficient attention has been afforded to the importance of career management skills in the education and training of creative professionals. Furthermore, remarkably little has been written concerning these abilities, which are prerequisite to competing in the job market (Bridgestock, 2011). Even though some schools are attempting to address deficiencies in their students' entrepreneurial preparedness ("Orme Leads Creative," 2004), the gap between learners' career expectations and their interest in business fundamentals remains disproportionate, as indicated in Figure 6.

As concepts, entrepreneurialism and artistic expression are not necessarily at odds; in many instances, succeeding at the former can allow for greater focus on the latter (Spohr, 2004). Nonetheless, scholars do not unanimously agree that creative professionals should attempt to mimic their traditional business brethren; in fact, some argue that the rising significance of the creative sector offers them an opportunity to pursue more sustainable business paths (Poettshacher, 2010). To some extent this makes sense, and is consistent with the notion of a culture-centric business, wherein the historical conception of arts, culture, and creativity is "beyond' or 'better than' the marketplace" (Andres & Chapain, 2013, p. 162).

Regardless, artistically inclined people must be capable of using their skillsets to generate income—an undertaking that often proves difficult (Smiers, 2010). This predicament to a degree

can be attributed to the dismantlement of the basic educational curriculum, which has resulted in overspecialization and, consequently, students who lack fundamental skills prerequisite to success. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is not only manifest at the university level, but at many secondary schools as well. Hence, educational institutions should return to teaching basic skills prior to focusing on specialization.

Since statistics demonstrate that art and design students are more likely than others to be self-employed, it is crucial for universities to regard them as prospective business owners. In addition to integrating business courses into creative curriculums, schools might consider inviting successful artists and creative professionals to speak to students specifically about the business related aspects of their careers. Doing so may have a motivating effect on learners, while also emphasizing the importance of acquiring essential business skills.

Although it may be true that universities could do more to assist creative professionals in procuring employment in their respective fields, it is ultimately the student's responsibility to do so, not a schools. Moreover, it certainly is not a university's duty to assist an individual in obtaining employment if they refuse to act upon sound advice. Indeed, the questionnaire results clearly indicated that most students were uninterested in learning about the fundamentals of operating a business. This finding was mirrored in interviews conducted with frustrated professors, who tried unsuccessfully to instill the importance of learning business skills into their current students by relating to them the struggles encountered by others.

In addition to integrating business-related concepts into creative curriculums, universities might also consider providing recent and soon-to-be creative graduates with some form of job placement assistance. Likewise, schools could also assist students who prefer to be self-

employed by providing them with the contact information of relevant local businesses, who might be seeking freelancers from the creative sector.

Concentrated efforts by universities, combined with well-trained students, are likely to boost the amount of creative work performed by self-employed creative professionals; consequently, additional small businesses will be created, thereby weakening larger companies, as complacency decreases among graduates who no longer feel unobligated to work for someone else. In general, these changes should increase variety and quality for customers, result in greater satisfaction among creative professionals, and possibly give rise to higher average wages in the creative sector. Furthermore, the existence of a larger number of self-employed creative professionals should ensure that profits are more evenly distributed among competitors, and also spur innovation. Hence, if students fortunate enough to attend college graduate with strong entrepreneurial knowledge, the prototypical starving artist may become a thing of the past.

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