

# The Retention of Chicago's Arts Students in Comparative Perspective

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## Highlights:

- ❖ 58 percent of Chicago arts-school alumni took up residence in the city within 5 years of the date of their last attendance. Of the regions compared in this report, only New York City has a greater portion of its arts-school alumni taking up residence in the city within 5 years, at 66 percent.
- ❖ 51 percent of Chicago arts-school alumni were out-of-state applicants who came to Chicago and were still living in the city within five years of their last date of attendance. This is the second highest portion of out-of-state applicants taking up residence in the city of their alma mater. New York City's rate was highest at 54 percent.
- ❖ Of arts-school alumni who searched for work, 38 percent of those attending school in Chicago obtained work prior to leaving their institution; 85 percent obtained work within a year. Alumni from other regions had similar experiences.
- ❖ 50 percent of Chicago's alumni reported that their first job or work experience was "closely related" to their arts-school training. However, alumni from institutions in Los Angeles County, Cleveland/Columbus and New York City reported higher rates of their first work experience being closely related to their arts training.

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Chicago is home to renowned arts schools and training programs, some of which are independent schools while others are programs within larger universities or colleges. Many of the arts schools and training programs within Chicago embrace the notion of "city as campus"<sup>1</sup> — treating the broader city itself as part of the institution's training and learning ground for students. Yet, we know relatively little about whether art students who study in the city's art schools and programs stay on as residents in the city after they leave school. Is any city effective in retaining and employing its arts students, thus

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<sup>1</sup> Haar, Sharon (2011). The City as Campus. Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press.

cultivating its future creative workforce? To inform this question, this brief examines the extent to which arts alumni – those who completed their degrees and those who did not<sup>2</sup> – remain in Chicago, whether attending school in Chicago helped keep them in the area, and where they live now. Additionally, we look at first work experiences, current employment, and the extent to which arts alumni feel their arts-training relates to both. We look at each of these topics in comparative perspective, for New York City, Los Angeles County, the San Francisco Bay Area, the combined cities of Cleveland and Columbus, OH, and Boston and Cambridge, MA. This report aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about attracting and retaining artists in Chicago.

### **Data Source: Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP)<sup>3</sup>**

Founded in 2008, SNAAP is a joint venture between Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research and Vanderbilt University's Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy. SNAAP's mission is to study the experiences and trajectories of arts alumni from participating institutions. After three years of field testing, SNAAP administered its first survey in 2011 to over 36,000 arts alumni of all ages from 66 institutions in the US and Canada. Since then, SNAAP annually administers a 20-30-minute, online-survey to a range of arts alumni – broadly defining the arts to include disciplines such as design, creative writing, illustration, architecture, as well as fine arts, among others.<sup>4</sup> Combined data from 2011 and 2012 includes over 65,000 respondents.<sup>5</sup>

SNAAP does not represent all arts alumni as both the institutions and their alumni opt to participate in the survey, which may introduce selection bias. Hence, readers should be cautious when looking to draw generalized conclusions about all arts alumni within each of the regions studied.<sup>6</sup> However, despite the limitations of the sample, SNAAP provides the largest, most richly detailed and current data source ever available on arts alumni, and we are excited to investigate what can be learned from this new data.

This report analyzes alumni of institutions participating in SNAAP's 2011 or 2012 data collections in six geographic areas.<sup>7</sup> In order to adhere to SNAAP's data protection policies, we look at alumni data of participating institutions in aggregate within each region, which minimally include three institutions, defined below:

City of Chicago (n=4,356)  
Los Angeles County (Los Angeles, Pasadena and Valencia) (n=4,831)  
Bay Area (San Francisco, Berkeley and Oakland) (n=2,433)  
Cleveland and Columbus, OH (n=2,556)<sup>8</sup>  
New York City (n=5,128)  
Boston and Cambridge, MA (n=1,442)

<sup>2</sup> 97% of the Chicago alumni included in these analyses completed their degree. Within each region's alumni examined in this report, over 90% in each region completed their degree.

<sup>3</sup> SNAAP data were used with permission from The Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. (<http://snaap.indiana.edu/>)

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the mission and history of SNAAP, see: [http://snaap.indiana.edu/about/mission\\_history.cfm](http://snaap.indiana.edu/about/mission_history.cfm)

<sup>5</sup> SNAAP's 2013 Annual Report, "An Uneven Canvas: Inequalities in Artistic Training and Careers" can be found here: [http://snaap.indiana.edu/pdf/2013/SNAAP\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2013.pdf](http://snaap.indiana.edu/pdf/2013/SNAAP_Annual_Report_2013.pdf)

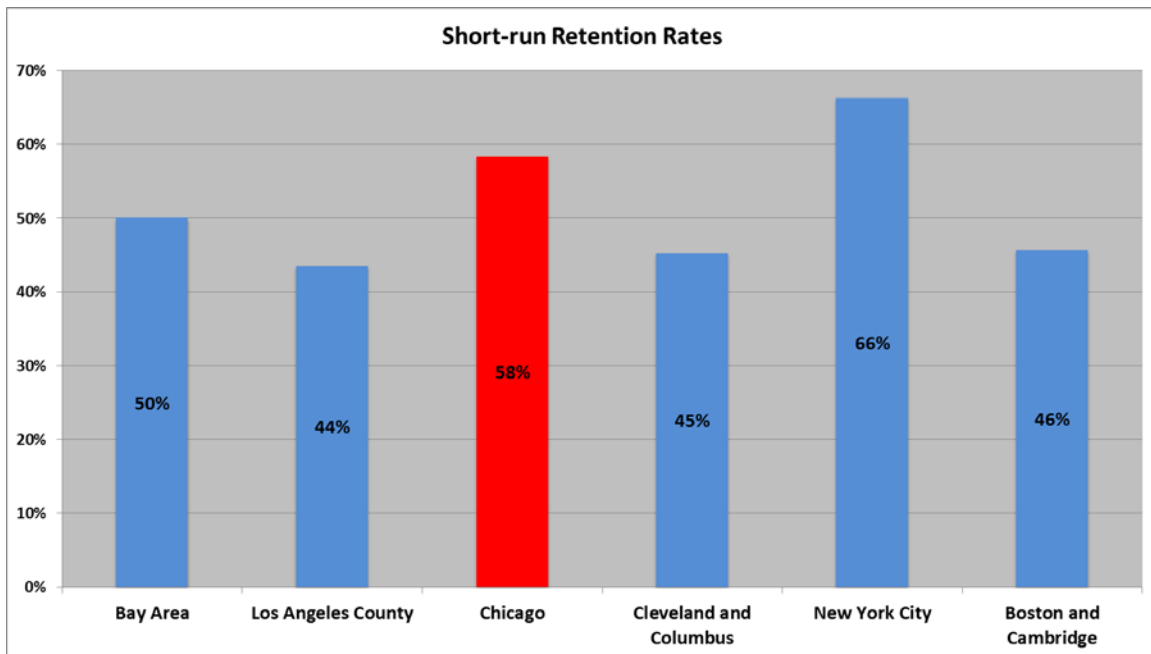
<sup>6</sup> For more information, see: <http://createequity.com/2013/01/arts-policy-library-strategic-national-arts-alumni-project.html>

<sup>7</sup> For more information about participating institutions, see: <http://snaap.indiana.edu/institutions/participants.cfm>

<sup>8</sup> Cleveland and Columbus are combined in order to adhere to SNAAP's data protection policies.

## Short-run Retention

Of the surveyed arts alumni, Chicago has one of the highest short-run retention rates among the regions compared: 58 percent of Chicago alumni took up residence in the city to pursue their career within five years of leaving their institution. Chicago's rate is notably higher than the average rate, or 32 percent, of alumni from institutions in the Midwest who took up residence in the town/city of their alma mater. The Midwest had the lowest retention rate of the regions examined in totality by SNAAP.<sup>9</sup> Of the cities examined in this report, only New York City had a significantly higher short-run retention rate than Chicago's, at 66 percent.

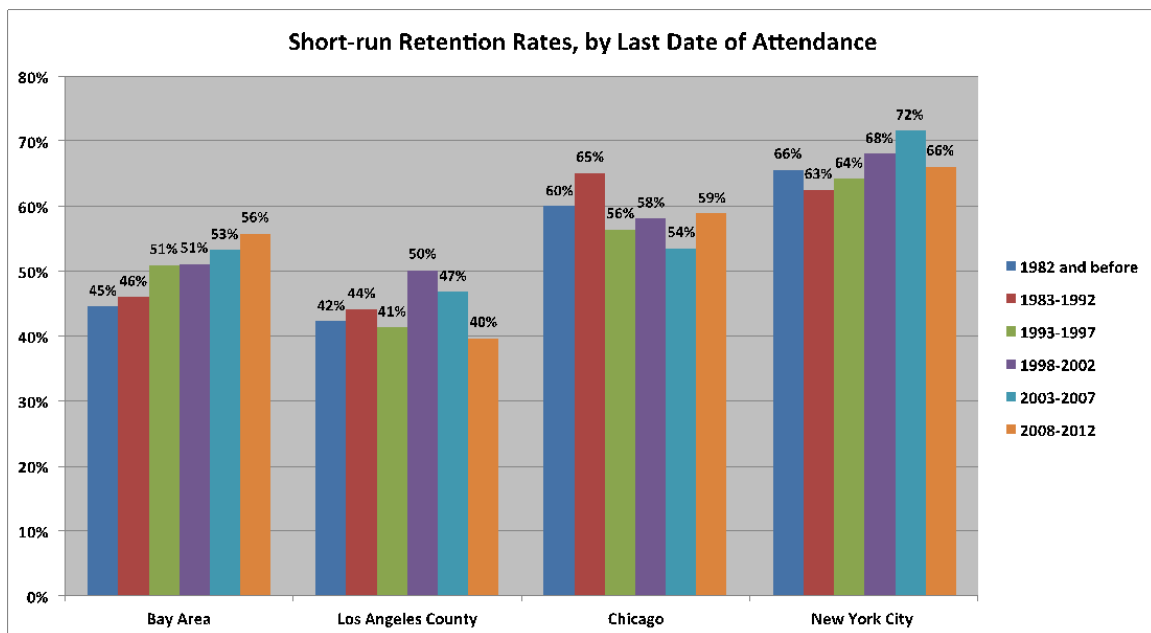


New York City and Chicago are statistically significantly different from each other and greater than all other regions,  $p < 0.01$ . Bay Area's short-run retention rate is significantly greater than Los Angeles County's rate ( $p < 0.01$ )

<sup>9</sup> SNAAP Data Brief. Vol. 1, No. 8 (2013). Accessed: <http://snaap.indiana.edu/databrief/vol1no8.html>

Short-run retention rates varied significantly according to the year the student last attended his or her institution in the Bay Area, Los Angeles County, Chicago and New York City. Both the Bay Area and New York City experienced significant increases in short-run retention rates among more recent alumni cohorts, with the Bay Area experiencing a significant upward trajectory over the past few decades,<sup>10</sup> and the retention rate rising significantly in New York (from 63 percent to 72 percent) for the 1983-1992 and 2003-2007 arts alumni cohorts.

Short-run retention rates of arts alumni in Chicago and Los Angeles County have recently been in significant decline. Among the Chicago alumni cohorts of 1983-1992 and 2003-2007,<sup>11</sup> the short-run retention rate declined from 65 percent to 54 percent. In Los Angeles County, the short-run retention rates of arts alumni declined significantly (from 50 percent to 40 percent) between the 1998-2002 and 2008-2012 cohorts.



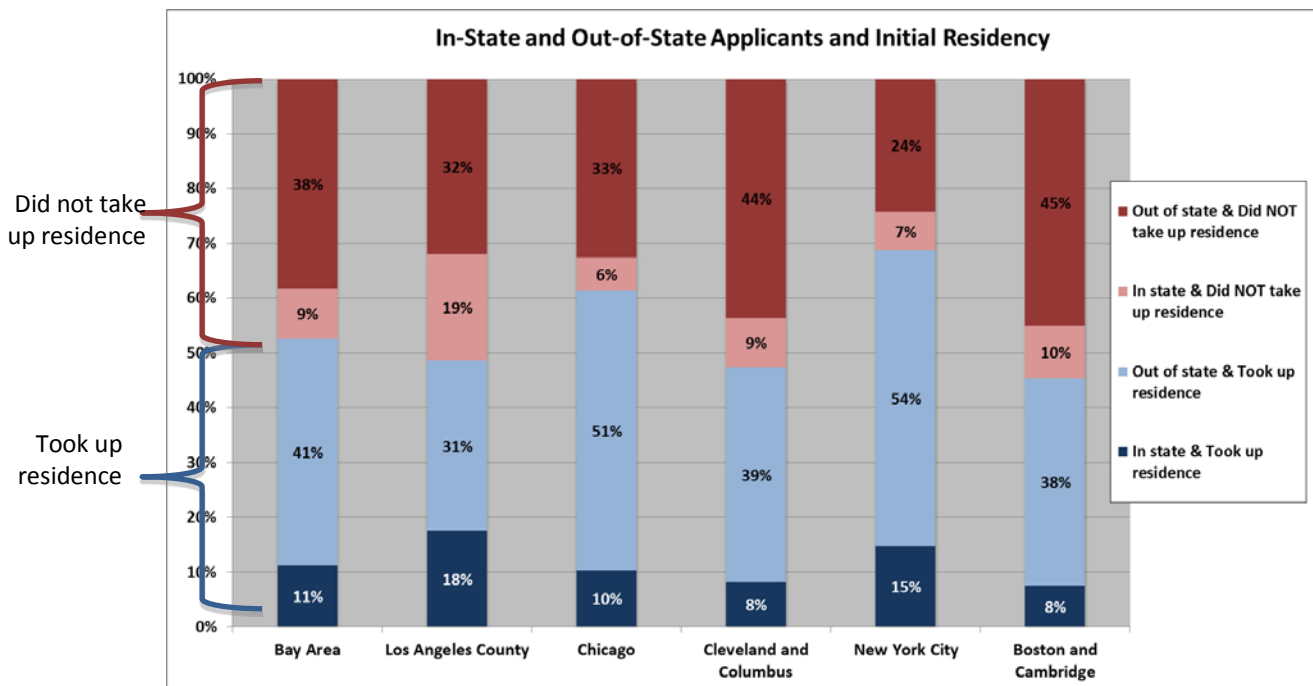
For Chicago and New York City, the difference between 1983-1992 and 2003-2007 cohorts is statistically significant,  $p < .01$ . For Los Angeles County, the difference between 1998-2002 and 2008-2012 cohorts is statistically significant,  $p < .05$ .

<sup>10</sup> For the Bay Area, difference between ‘1982 and before’ and ‘2008-2012’ cohorts is significant,  $p < .01$

<sup>11</sup> We utilize brackets of year cohorts as coded by SNAAP, each containing approximately 15% of the total 2011 and 2012 combined sample data. See: [http://snaap.indiana.edu/pdf/SNAAP11\\_12%20-%20Aggregate%20Report.pdf](http://snaap.indiana.edu/pdf/SNAAP11_12%20-%20Aggregate%20Report.pdf) (p. 8)

## Attracting & Keeping Art Students

People locate to different regions for academic, professional and personal reasons. How do regions compare when we look at in-state and out-of-state applicants?<sup>12</sup> Are some regions better at attracting and keeping out-of-state applicants? Are some regions better at retaining in-state applicants? Chicago and New York have the highest rates of short-run retention for alumni originating from out-of-state.<sup>13</sup> The highest proportions of alumni who came to an art school or program from out-of-state who subsequently took up residence in the institution’s city within five years of leaving school are in New York (54 percent) and in Chicago (51 percent).<sup>14</sup>



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Furthermore, Chicago and New York have the smallest percentages (6 percent and 7 percent) of alumni who applied from in-state and left the area after schooling. This finding suggests that New York City and Chicago are having success in attracting and retaining resident artists beyond their student years — both alumni who applied from out of state, as well as those who applied from in state. By contrast, in Cleveland/Columbus and Boston/Cambridge the largest portion of alumni came from out of state and then left the city after their experience as students.

<sup>12</sup> We use state residence at time of application as a proxy measure for established ties to the area before attending the SNAAP institution.

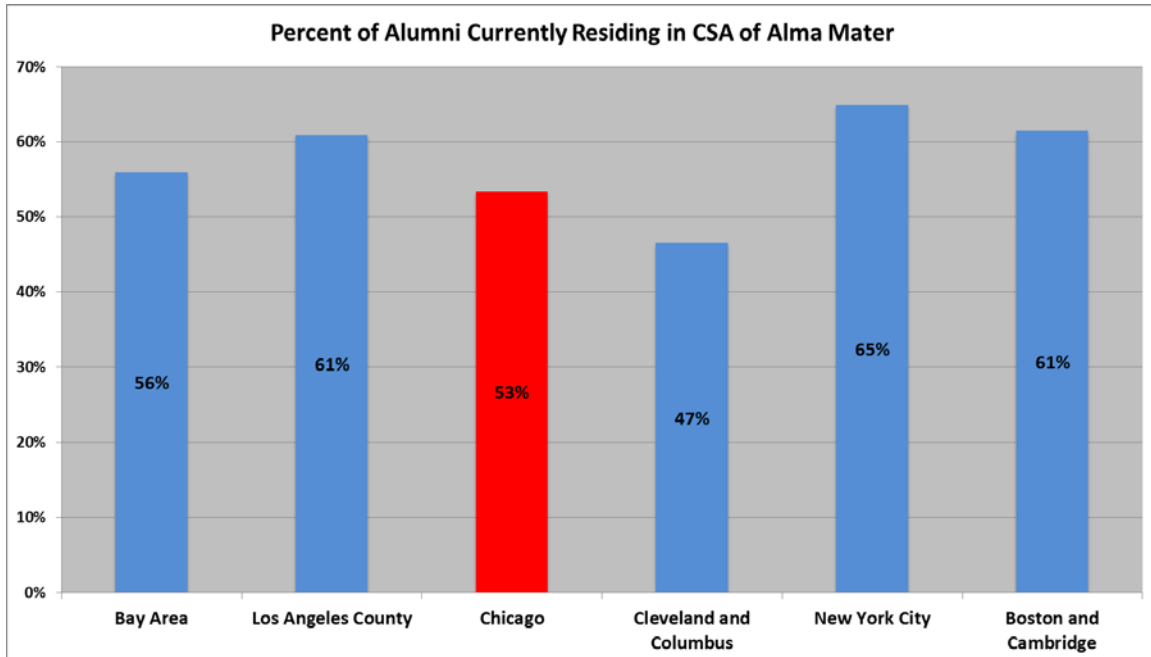
<sup>13</sup> 16% of alumni from Chicago institutions reported living in Illinois at the time they applied to the institution.

<sup>14</sup> The rates of short-run retention for alumni originating from out-of-state for Chicago and New York City are significantly greater than each other region studied,  $p < .01$

<sup>15</sup> For this figure and the following figures about residence and retention rates, we use respondents for whom we have full geographic information - residence at time of application, residence within 5 years of last attendance at institution and current residence ( $n=13,075$ ).

## Long-run Retention Rates & Current Residence

Fifty-three percent of alumni from Chicago institutions are currently living in the Chicago-Naperville Combined Statistical Area (CSA), which refers to a group of neighboring metropolitan areas that have social and economic connections, such as commuting distances, shared media and labor markets, and other kinds of economic and social exchanges and connections.<sup>16,17</sup> However, New York, Boston and Los Angeles each have significantly higher rates of their arts-school alumni living in their respective surrounding metro regions.<sup>18</sup>

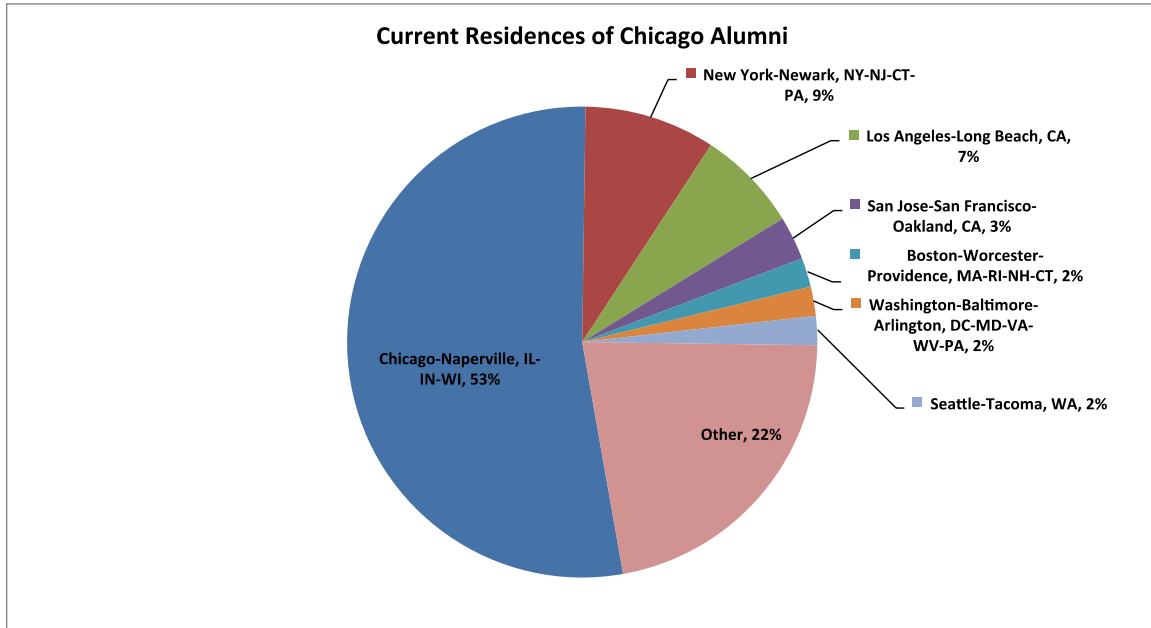


<sup>16</sup> Chicago's CSA includes towns such as Naperville, Evanston and Joliet, and it stretches from parts of Indiana to Wisconsin. See: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/bulletins/2013/b-13-01.pdf>

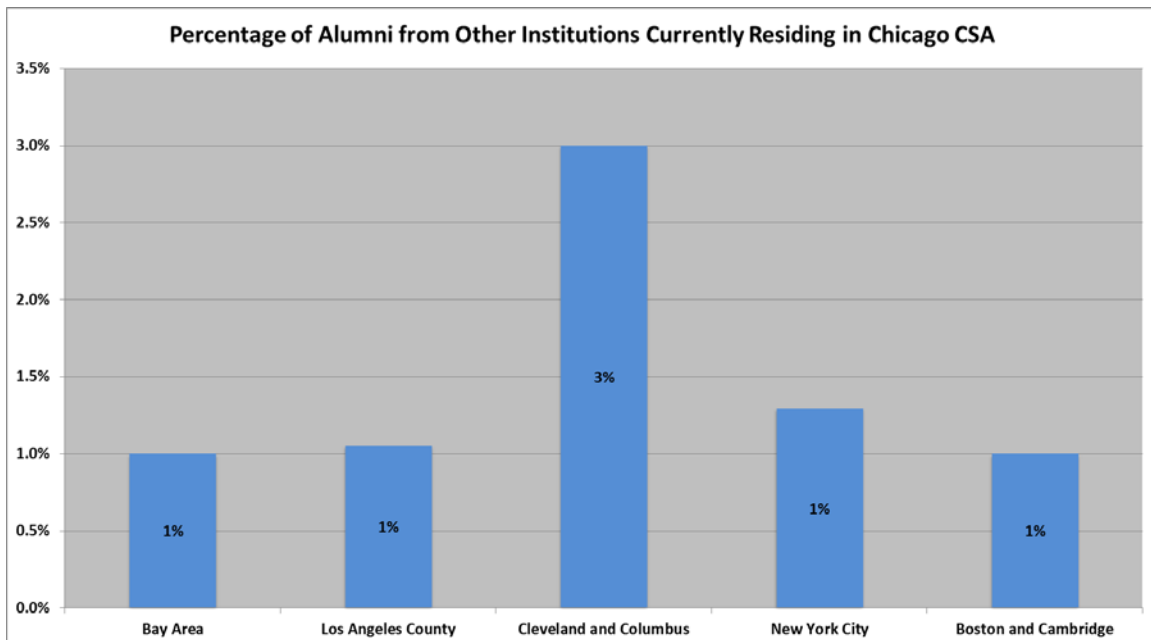
<sup>17</sup> Unlike the survey question about residency within 5 years of schooling, which asks whether an alumnus or alumna took up residence in the town/city of his or her alma mater, current residency is collected by zip code. We utilize SNAAP's recoding of zip codes into CSAs for this portion of the analysis to be more reflective of the potential workforce for a metro region.

<sup>18</sup> Chicago is significantly different from the rates for New York, Boston, Los Angeles and Cleveland/Columbus ( $p < .05$ ).

After Chicago, the largest percentages of Chicago alumni currently live in the New York-Newark CSA (9 percent) and Los Angeles-Long Beach CSA (7 percent). Twenty-two percent of surveyed alumni from art-degree granting institutions in Chicago are spread across many regions, with each CSA being home to 1 percent or less of Chicago's alumni. Some of these other CSAs include: Denver, Detroit, Philadelphia and Portland, OR.



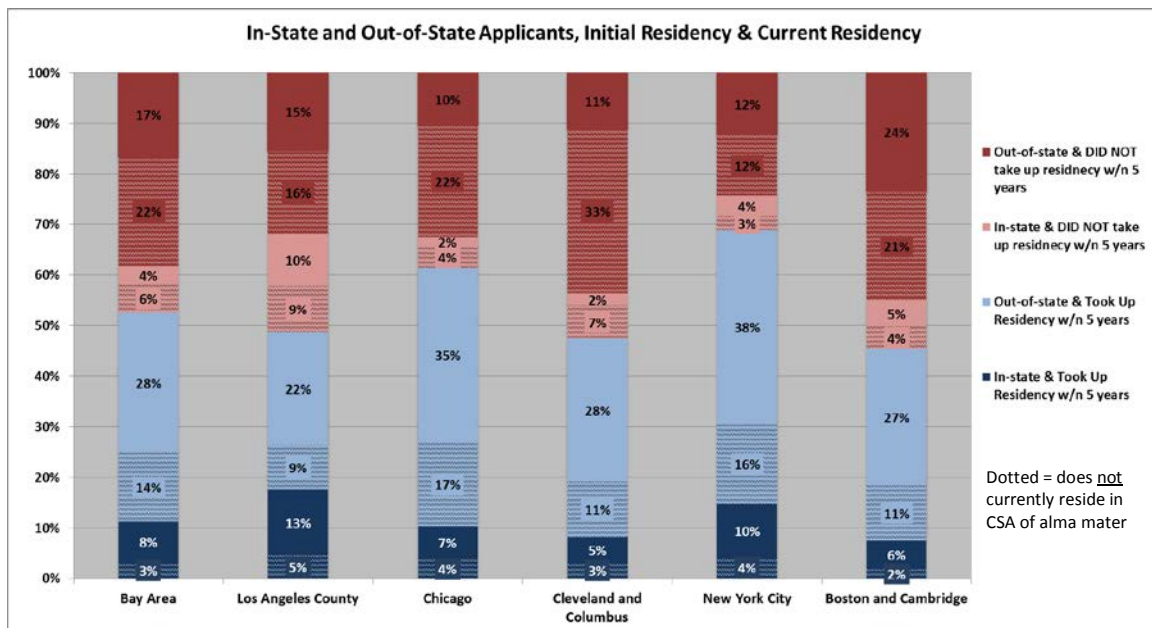
Alumni from institutions in the regions analyzed in this report have also migrated to Chicago. Of all of the surveyed alumni from Cleveland- or Columbus-based institutions, 3 percent currently live in Chicago. Approximately 1 percent of the alumni from other regions currently live in Chicago.



## Summary of Retention Rates

To investigate whether Chicago is attracting and retaining artists — potential new recruits to the city’s creative workforce — the figure below describes the portion of alumni from each region in terms of their residence prior to attending arts-school, whether they took up residence in the city within five years of leaving school, and whether they currently reside in the CSA of their alma mater.

Ten percent of Chicago alumni who came from out-of-state and who did not take up residence in the city within five years returned to the area later, and currently live in the Chicago-Naperville CSA. Thirty-five percent of Chicago’s out-of-state applicants who took up residence in the city after leaving school currently live in the CSA of their alma mater.<sup>19</sup> This is the second highest percentage of retained arts graduates, and only a few percentage points lower than the 38 percent who stay in New York City.



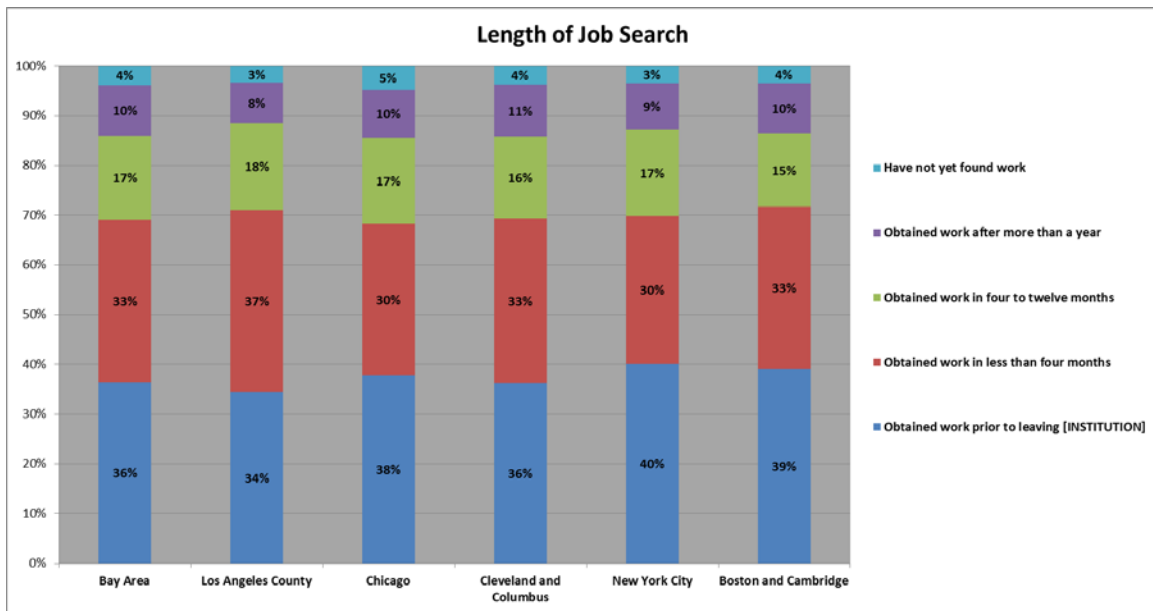
<sup>19</sup> Based on the available data, we cannot determine if these alumni continuously remained in the area. Also, please note that in our discussion of current residencies, we take the surrounding areas into account, not solely the city of the institution.



## Arts-Training & First Job or Work Experience

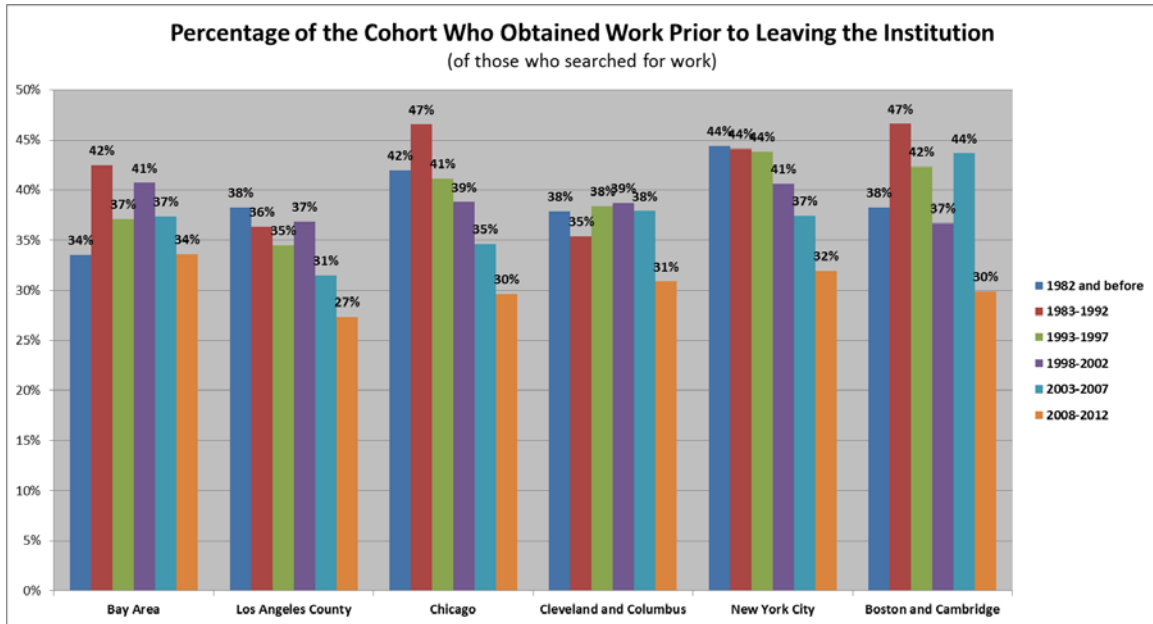
### *Finding A Job*

Alumni from the regions studied in this report share a similar pattern of getting a job. Of those who searched for work, on average 37 percent of arts students obtained work prior to leaving their institution, and 87 percent found work within one year. Overall, the picture tends to be the same across the six regions: a little more than a third find work before leaving school; approximately one third obtain work in less than four months after leaving; and, of the final third, slightly over half find work within a year.



On average, students who obtained work before leaving their institutions were 1.3 times as likely to take up residence in that city within 5 years than those who did not have a job before leaving the institution.

In every region, there has been a decline<sup>20</sup> in the ability of the most recent alumni to find work prior to leaving their institution. On average, across all regions, the percentage of alumni who found work prior to leaving schools has declined to 31 percent in recent years. Thirty percent of Chicago’s most recent alumni (2008-2012) were able to obtain work prior to leaving their institution, significantly down from 47 percent of alumni from the 1983-1992 cohort.



However, this downward trajectory is not specific to arts alumni. Since the recession of 2008, recent graduates of all disciplines and degrees are having a more difficult time obtaining work. Unemployment remains high for college graduates in the post-2008 recession era (3.9 percent in November 2012; 1.8 percent in November 2006), but it is less than half of the unemployment rate for laborers with only a high school degree (7.3 percent).<sup>21</sup> For all workers under the age of 25, the unemployment rate is usually twice as high as the overall unemployment rate.<sup>22</sup>

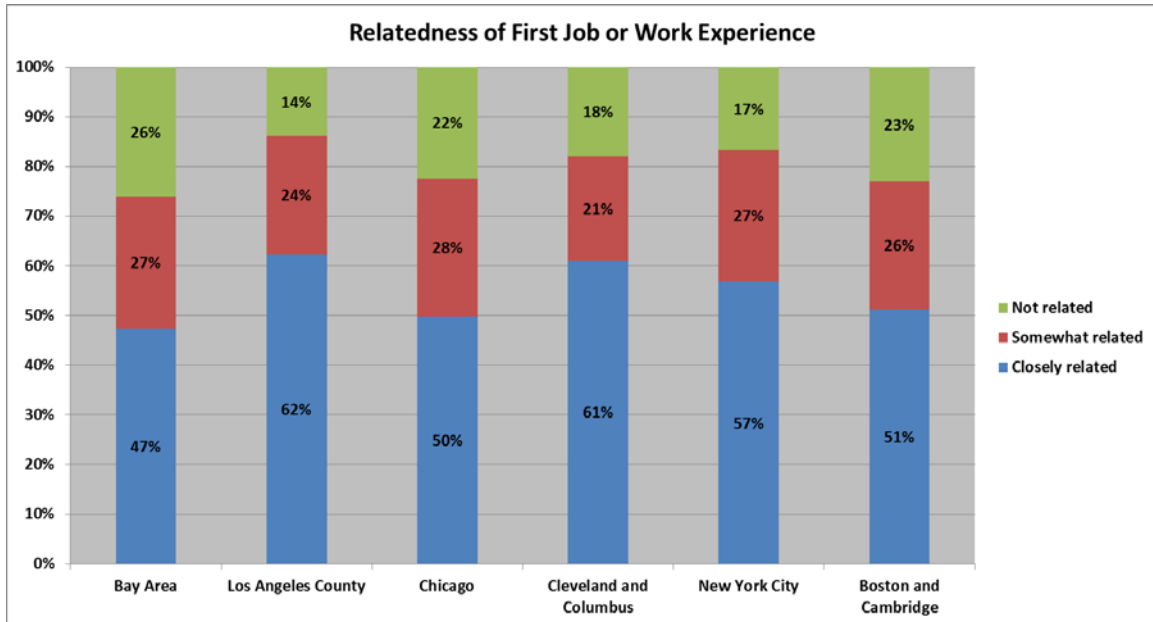
<sup>20</sup> Declines in the Bay Area and in Cleveland/Columbus are not statistically significant.

<sup>21</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. Accessed December 12, 2013. <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/surveymost?ln>.

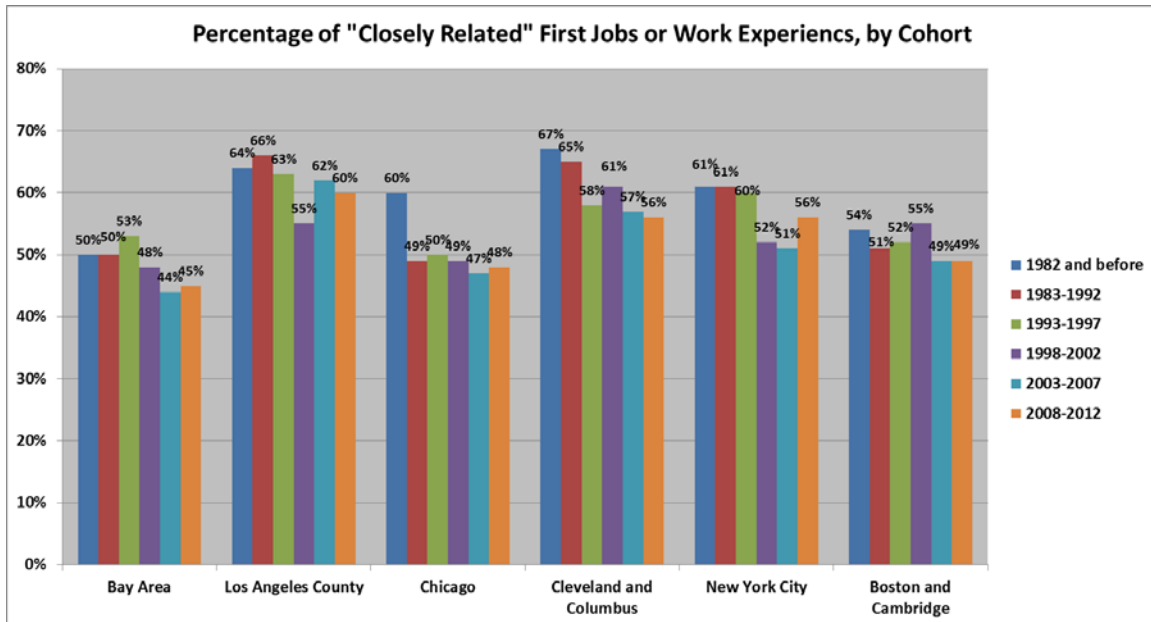
<sup>22</sup> Shierholz, Heidi, et. al. May 3, 2012. “The Class of 2012.” Economic Policy Institute. <http://www.epi.org/publication/bp340-labor-market-young-graduates/>.

### Type of Job

Among Chicago’s arts alumni who searched for work after leaving school, 50 percent found work “closely related” to their training. Los Angeles County, Cleveland/Columbus and New York City each had significantly higher percentages of alumni who found work closely related to their training, at 62 percent, 61 percent and 57 percent respectively.



When taking cohorts into account, there has been a decline in the percentage of the cohort whose first job or work experience is “closely related” to their training.<sup>23</sup> This is not unique to arts alumni. Many college graduates, no matter their discipline, are having a more difficult time finding work in their field than cohorts prior to the recession. Recent research suggests that only 27 percent of recent graduates are working in a field related to their major.<sup>24</sup> In this regard, despite facing a difficult job market, arts alumni studied from the six regions included in this report are, on average, doing better at finding work relevant to their schooling than are other graduates.

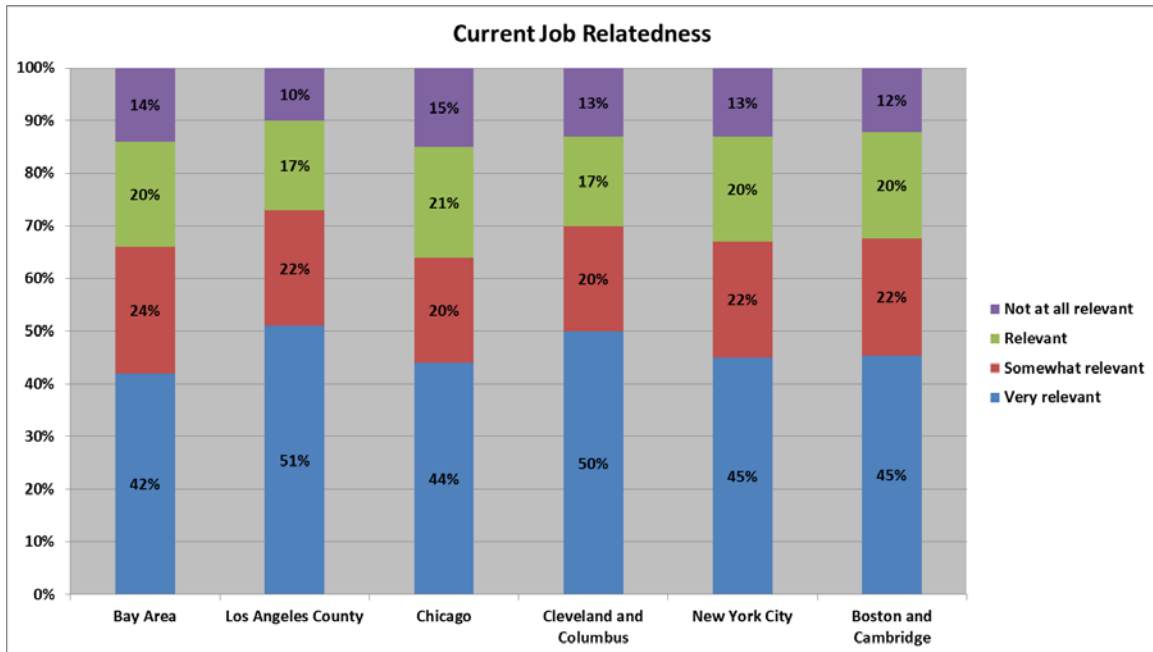


<sup>23</sup> Declines are not statistically significant across cohorts of last attendance in Boston/Cambridge and the Bay Area.

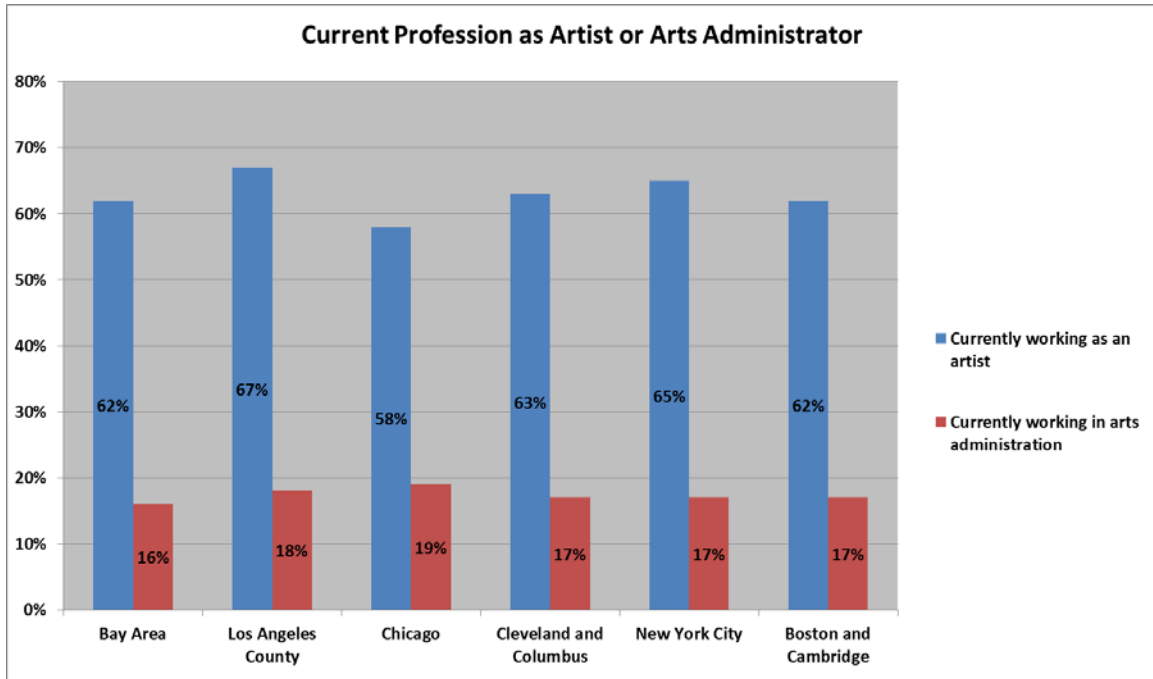
<sup>24</sup> Abel, Jaison R. and Richard Deitz. May 20, 2013. “Do Big Cities Help College Graduates Find Better Jobs?” Federal Reserve Bank of New York. <http://libertystreeteconomics.newyorkfed.org/2013/05/do-big-cities-help-college-graduates-find-better-jobs.html>

## Arts-Training & Current Employment

There is a similar picture of arts alumni currently employed in a position related to their training in each of the six regions studied. When asked how relevant a current job is to the training received, 44 percent of Chicago arts alumni state that their current job is “very relevant” to the training they received at their institution. Only 15 percent of Chicago arts alumni responded that their current position is “not relevant.” These findings are similar across the regions studied.



The majority of arts alumni in this study are working as artists, from a high of 67 percent in Los Angeles County to a low of 58 percent in Chicago.<sup>25, 26</sup> Alumni who are currently working as artists responded “yes” to two questions: the first having to do with their intention to work as an artist, and the second about their current employment in creating or performing their work. On average, 17 percent of alumni from across the six regions currently work as arts administrators.<sup>27</sup>



<sup>25</sup> The percentage of Chicago alumni currently working as artists is statistically different than Los Angeles County, New York City and Cleveland/Columbus.

<sup>26</sup> Statistically different from Los Angeles County and New York City at  $p < .01$ .

<sup>27</sup> Differences in rates across regions are not statistically significant.

## Conclusion

The data made available from the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project allow a valuable new snapshot view of the employment and residency patterns of Chicago's arts alumni. Among the comparative sample of cities and regions included in this report, Chicago is second only to New York City in its short-term retention rates of arts alumni—both those who were drawn to art schools and programs from within the state and the out-of-state students who stayed in Chicago after leaving school. And, despite the employment challenges stemming from the recent economic recession, the majority of Chicago's arts students are able to find work that is closely related to their training within a year of graduation.

As Chicago and other cities seek ways to support their current creative industries and develop new ones, recent arts graduates represent an important pipeline of creative workers with critical skills for this growing sector of the economy. The ability to produce, attract, and retain creative workers in the future will be one of the defining characteristics of international economic competitiveness, and tracking where arts alumni live and work will provide cities with one valuable measure of their creative workforce.