CultureCase

Lowering the cost of attendance does not necessarily increase accessibility for arts events

This research was conducted by **Jessica Sherrod Hale** and **Joanna Woronkowicz** at **Indiana University, USA**

Summary

This paper looked at the effects of arts programming at a large university campus in the United States. In 2016 Indiana University made a big investment in on-campus arts programming, including festivals with performances, film screenings and exhibitions. The intent was to increase engagement and be more accessible to a wider range of students by making the majority of the programme free to attend. Despite reducing (or eliminating) the cost of attendance, the researchers found that students' backgrounds (and especially their familiarity with the arts) was still 'the strongest predictor of increased arts participation'. It was 'students in arts majors – or with significant backgrounds in the arts – that took advantage of the lower costs to participating'.

Being highly educated is associated with high levels of arts engagement

The actual reasons for this are not well understood, especially given the role of other factors that determine arts engagement (such as ticket prices, someone's income, their previous exposure to arts, etc.).

In this study the researchers took a random sample of just over 2,000 students and asked them about their arts engagement prior to the university's 2016 investment in the arts programming. They repeated the process three years later with an even larger sample.

The data showed that overall arts engagement rates actually decreased between the two surveys

However, they increased specifically for students majoring in arts subjects. The authors suggest that non-price interventions are likely attract a wider audience, and increased engagement from those not already engaged in the arts. For example, programming more directly educational sessions, or work from non-traditional genres or art forms.

Keywords

survey **USA** **price** **festivals** **access**

Title	Evaluating a university's investment in arts programming on student arts participation
Author(s)	Hale, J. S. & Woronkowicz, J.
Publication date	2019
Source	Cultural Trends, Vol. 28, Iss. 5, pp. 366-378
Link	**https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09548963.2019.1679993**
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