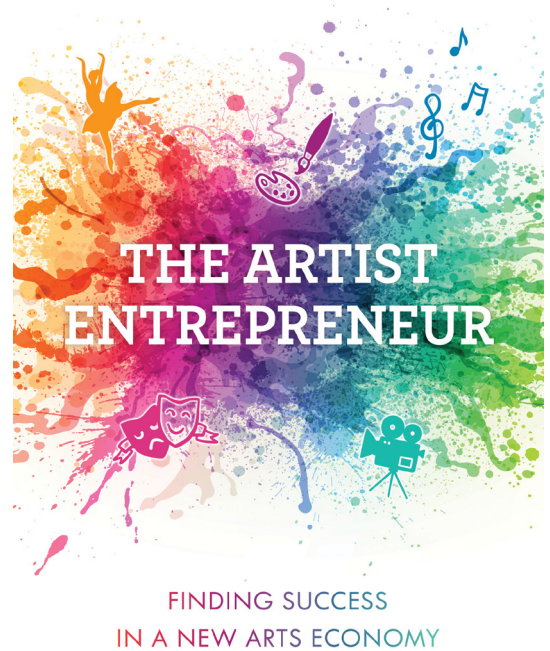


Preparing Clemson students for the new arts economy

Ronald C. McCurdy, Richard E. Goodstein, and Eric J. Lapin



by Eric Lapin Ph.D. '13

My first arts job out of college was working with the Charleston Symphony Orchestra. I was an operations and personnel associate. I primarily did things like help staff the orchestra with substitute musicians, work with benefits administration, handle instrument insurance, work with the union representative and provide general office support. I got the job by reaching out to the Operations Manager and asking about any available opportunities. They had an unpaid internship spot coming open and I took it. A few months later, the paying job opened up and I moved into my new position. I did not truly realize how unqualified I was.

At that time, I had recently graduated with a Bachelor of Music degree in clarinet performance. In that type of program, along with your typical general education, you study your instrument, music history and music theory. I spent countless hours on scales, arpeggios, etudes and literature studies and loved every second of it.

But there was a problem, aside from random and unpredictable gigging, my first arts job was as an

operations and personnel associate in an orchestra business office. And while it helped that I was familiar with a symphony orchestra, the tasks I was assigned at work didn't involve playing my Eb Major scale. I needed more skills and knowledge than just scales and arpeggios.

In November 2019, Ronald C. McCurdy (University of Southern California), Richard E. Goodstein (Dean Emeritus of the College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities at Clemson) and I published "The Artist Entrepreneur: Finding Success in a New Arts Economy." The book outlines the variety of skills needed for success in today's modern arts landscape. Largely, the music performance curriculum of my undergraduate experience was designed for a musical job market that no longer exists. Full-time careers in symphony orchestras are certainly still possible, but they are few, far between and exceptionally competitive.

A modern artist needs a much broader set of skills for a successful and sustainable arts career. Concepts like business principles, marketing strategies, technology



Ron McCurdy and Eric Lapin speak at the Jazz Education Network conference.

integration, law, copyright, licensing, grant writing and social media development are essential to preparing students for their arts futures.

Since this project launched, we have been published in publications such as the "Chronicle of Higher Education," "Inside Higher Education" and the College Music Symposium, and presented our ideas for arts professionals at places like the College Music Society, the Jazz Education Network and the International Conference of Fine Arts Deans.

Our performing arts major here at Clemson is a perfect example of these ideas at work. Be it music, theater or audio technology, our students receive expert instruction in their craft. But they also take performing arts core classes and electives where they learn many of these essential skills they will need for success in their careers.

I had to learn many of these new skills the hard way and was fortunate enough to be able to do it on the job. As our Clemson performing arts program prepares graduates for a modern arts economy, our students won't have to learn the hard way. 🏠



Eric Lapin is director of artistic initiatives at the Brooks Center and a senior lecturer of music in the Department of Performing Arts. He recently published the article "Arts Curriculum for the Actual Arts Economy" in "Inside Higher Ed."

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