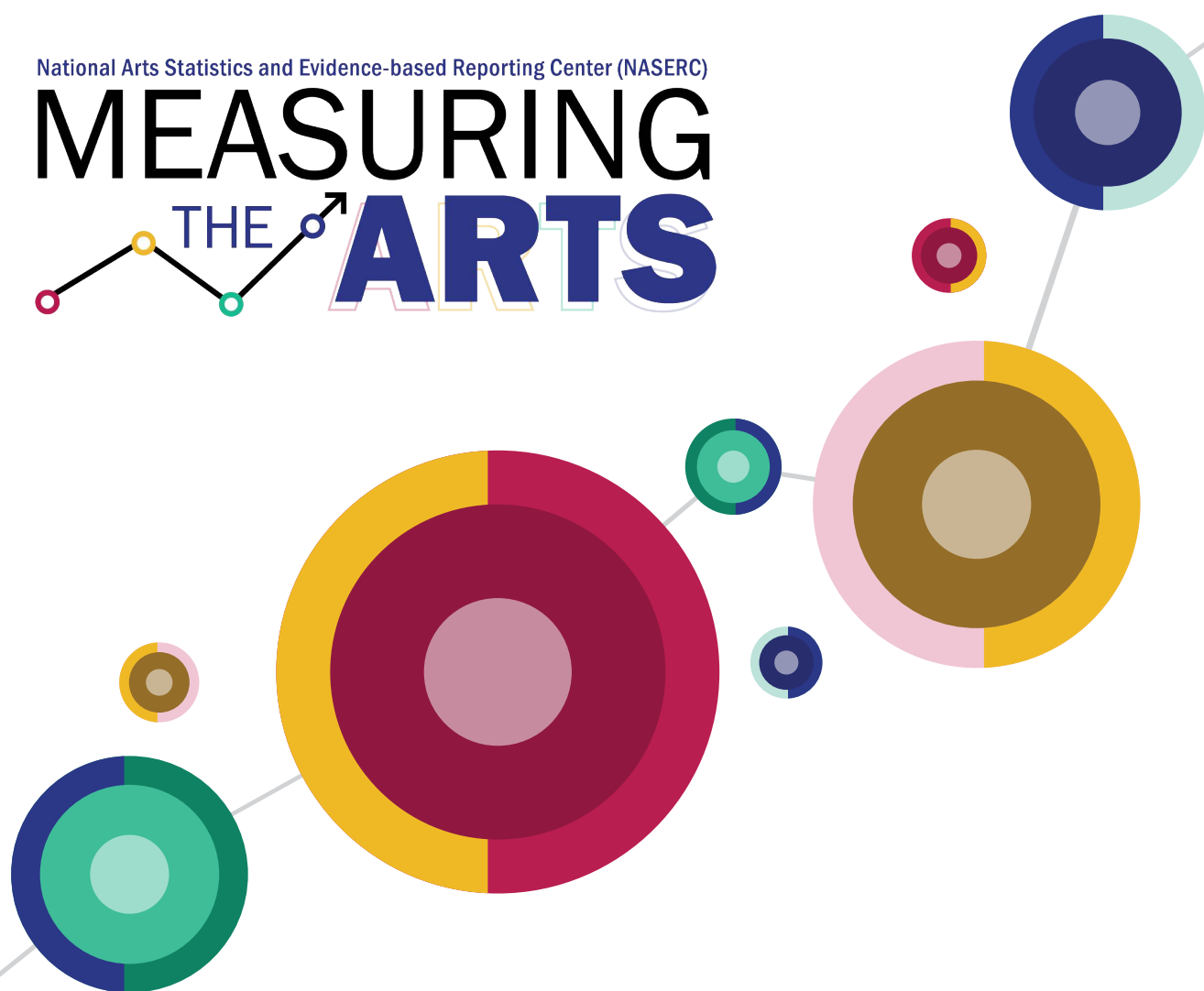


National Arts Statistics and Evidence-based Reporting Center (NASERC)

MEASURING THE ARTS



Domain A

Artists and Other Cultural Workers



Indicator A.4: **What Do Artists and Other Cultural Workers Study as Undergraduates?**

Key Findings

- In 2023, 64 percent of artists, 53 percent of other (non-artist) cultural workers, and 38 percent of all workers had a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Among those with bachelor's degrees or higher, 31 percent of artists, 15 percent of other (non-artist) cultural workers, and 4 percent of all workers had majored in a visual and performing arts field in 2023.
- In 2023, 19 percent of people in the labor force with a bachelor's degree or higher in the visual and performing arts were some type of working artist, and 3 percent worked in other cultural occupations.
- Among artists, musicians (50 percent), fine artists (49 percent), and designers (44 percent) had higher rates of majoring in visual and performing arts fields, compared to workers in other artist occupations in 2023.
- Among non-artist cultural workers, TV and video camera operators and editors (29 percent), broadcast, sound, and lighting technicians (24 percent), and archivists and curators (21 percent) had higher rates of majoring in visual and performing arts fields in 2023.

Introduction



Educational attainment and fields of study can vary widely across different occupations. Typically, college-educated workers in a specific occupation have training in a field of study related to their undergraduate major. However, there is not always a perfect match between one's college major and choice of occupation. For instance, not everyone who majors in the arts ends up working in an artist or cultural occupation. Similarly, not all artists and other (non-artist) cultural workers majored in the arts during their undergraduate studies.

Indicator A.4 uses data from the American Community Survey (ACS) to examine the educational attainment of artists and other cultural workers by occupation, as well as the fields of study they pursued for their undergraduate degrees. The ACS provides valuable data that allows researchers to explore the relationship between individuals' bachelor's degree major field of study¹ and their occupations. These fields include not only the ACS-defined "visual and performing arts" but also other areas such as business, communication, education, and the liberal arts. Additionally, Indicator A.4 looks at the occupations held by those with bachelor's degrees in the visual and performing arts. This information is useful for policymakers, arts administrators, and aspiring artists to understand the career prospects associated with degrees in the visual and performing arts.

It is important to note that the ACS category for visual and performing arts does not encompass all fields related to artist occupations, such as architecture. For more detailed information on bachelor's degree fields of study in the ACS, including those in the visual and performing arts, see *Bachelor's degree fields of study in the American Community Survey*. In this and

Bachelor's degree fields of study in the American Community Survey

The ACS asks about the highest level of education a person has completed. For those with a bachelor's degree or higher, it also asks about their major field of study for their bachelor's degree. While respondents can report more than one field of study, Indicator A.4 focuses on the first major reported. The ACS does not ask for the field of study for any other types of degree, such as a master's or doctorate degrees. If an individual has an advanced degree, the ACS does not provide information on their field of study for that degree.

In the ACS, detailed fields of study within the visual and performing arts include the fine arts; drama and theater arts; music; commercial art and graphic design; film, video, and the photographic arts; art history and criticism; studio arts; miscellaneous fine arts; and other visual and performing arts. For reporting purposes, the fine arts and miscellaneous fine arts have been combined. For more information, see https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/tech_docs/subject_definitions/2023_ACSSubjectDefinitions.pdf.



¹ "Bachelor's degree field of study" refers to the specialized area of study (i.e., major field of study) in which a bachelor's degree was awarded. It does not refer to the type of bachelor's degree (i.e., bachelor's of science [B.S.] or bachelor's of arts [B.A.]).

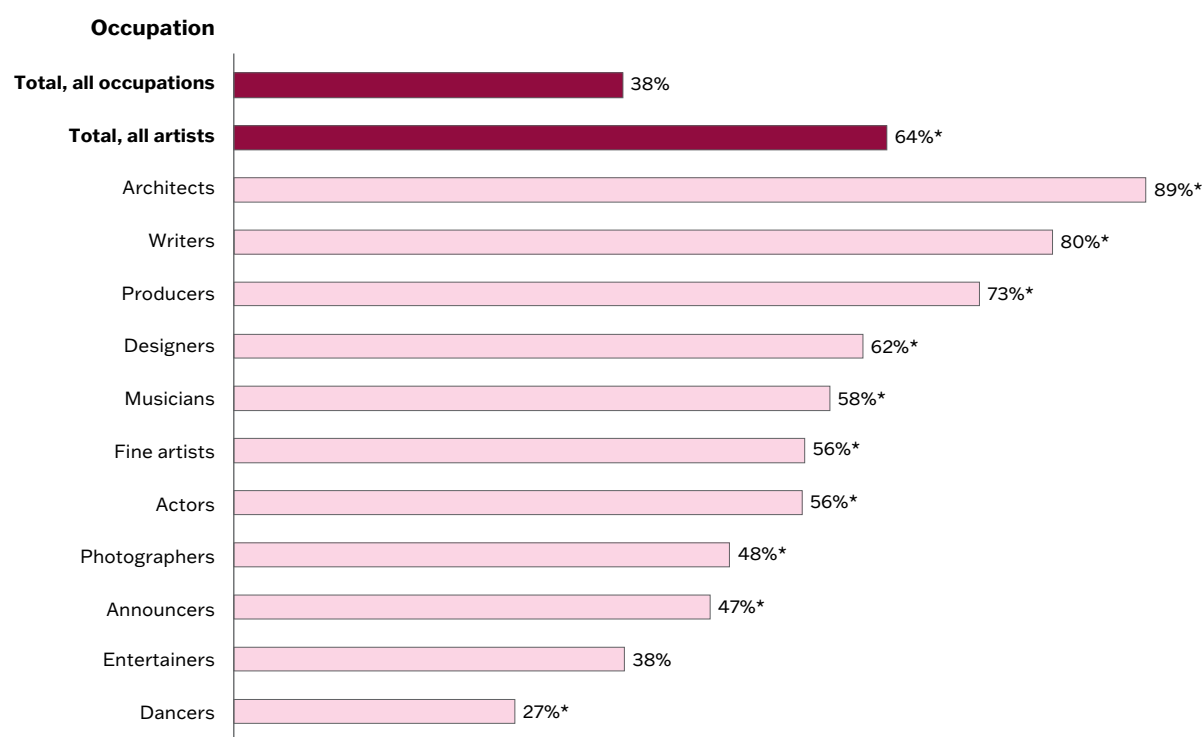
other indicators in this series, artists and other cultural workers have been defined by their self-reported primary occupation.²

For more information on the overall educational attainment of artists and other cultural workers, see **Indicator A.1: Who Are the Artists?** and **Indicator A.2: Who Are the Other Cultural Workers?** Another indicator, **Indicator D.1: Who Majors in the Arts?**, examines the number and percentage of postsecondary degrees awarded in arts and cultural fields of study based on data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.

Artists and other cultural workers with bachelor's degrees, by occupation

Compared to workers in all occupations, artists generally have higher educational attainment. In 2023, 64 percent of artists had completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 38 percent of workers in all occupations (**Figure A4-1**).³ Among artist

Figure A4-1. Percentage of artists with a bachelor's degree or higher, by occupation: 2023



* Significantly different ($p < .05$) from all occupations.

NOTE: Artists in the labor force are individuals currently employed in an artist occupation (regardless of work intensity [employed full time or part time] and class of worker [private or wage-salary, government, or self-employed]) or unemployed and looking for work in an artist occupation. "Architects" include architects and landscape architects. "Dancers" include dancers and choreographers. "Fine artists" include fine artists, art directors, and animators. "Musicians" include music directors, composers, and musicians. "Producers" include producers and directors. "Writers" include writers and authors.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2023.

² In this and other indicators in the series, artists and other cultural workers are defined by their self-reported primary occupation. "Primary occupation" refers to the kind of work a person does for pay most of the time. The ACS—the data source on which this indicator is based—asks only about the occupation corresponding with a respondent's current or most recent job or, if they have two or more jobs, the job with the most usual hours worked. For more information see https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/tech_docs/subject_definitions/2023_ACSSubjectDefinitions.pdf.

³ Differences between estimates are stated only when they are statistically significant, based on a 95 percent level of confidence. For more information see **The Arts in the United States: Developing Key National Indicators of Arts Activity** technical report.

occupations, 9 out of 11 had a higher percentage of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher compared to all occupations: architects (89 percent), writers (80 percent), producers (73 percent), designers (62 percent), musicians (58 percent), fine artists (56 percent), actors (56 percent), photographers (48 percent), and announcers (47 percent).⁴ However, only 27 percent of dancers had completed a bachelor's degree or higher, which is lower than the average for all occupations. The percentage of entertainers with a bachelor's degree was not significantly different from the average for all occupations.

Among artist occupations, architects, writers, and producers also had higher percentages of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher (89 percent, 80 percent, and 73 percent, respectively) compared to the average percentage for all artists (64 percent). All other artist occupations had lower percentages than the average for all artists.

For non-artist cultural workers, educational attainment was higher overall, compared to workers in all occupations. In 2023, 53 percent of non-artist cultural workers had completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 38 percent of workers in all occupations (**Figure A4-2**).⁵ However, educational attainment was lower among most cultural occupations:

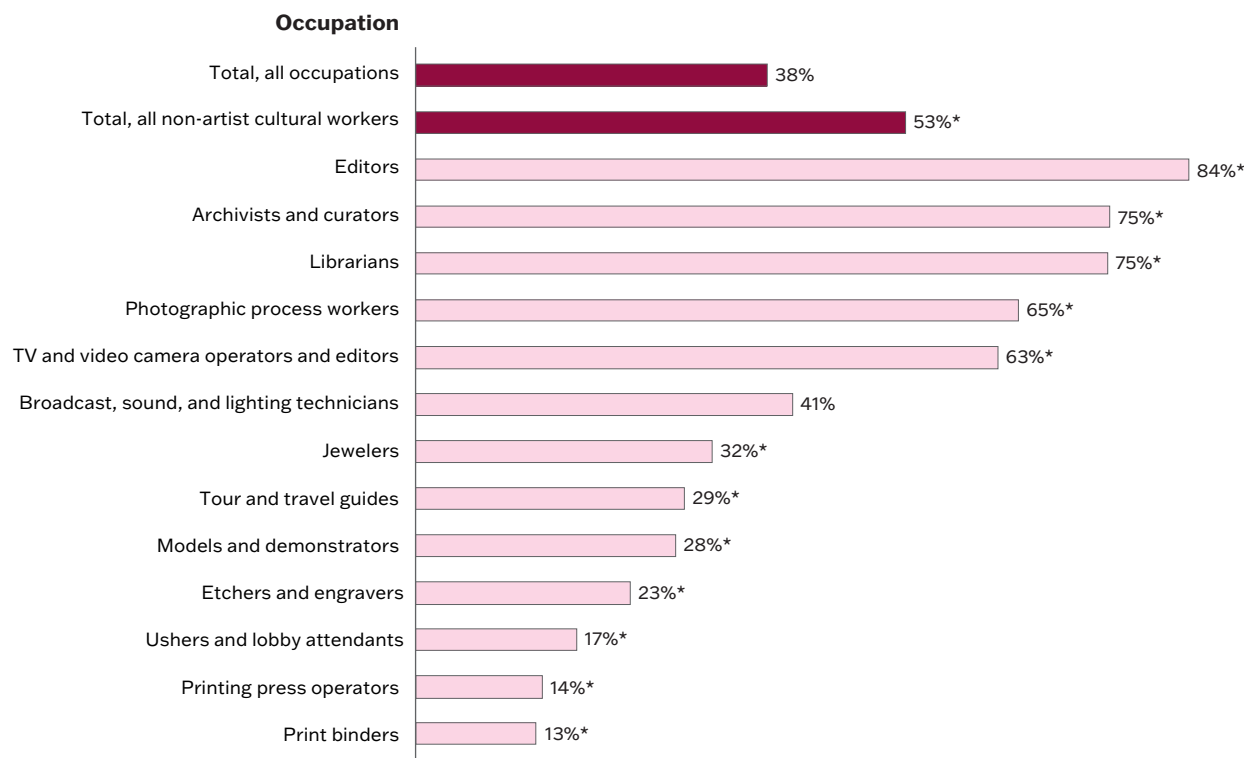
7 out of 13 had lower percentages of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher compared to workers in all occupations: print binders (13 percent), printing press operators (14 percent), ushers and lobby attendants (17 percent), etchers and engravers (23 percent), models and demonstrators (28 percent), tour and travel guides (29 percent), and jewelers (32 percent). On the other hand, 5 out of 13 cultural occupations had higher percentages of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher: editors (84 percent), archivists and curators (75 percent), librarians (75 percent), photographic process workers (65 percent), and TV and video camera operators and editors (63 percent). The percentage of broadcast, sound, and lighting technicians with a bachelor's degree or higher was not measurably different from the average for all occupations.

Among cultural occupations, editors, archivists and curators, librarians, photographic process workers, and TV and video camera operators and editors had higher percentages of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher (84 percent, 75 percent, 75 percent, 65 percent, and 63 percent, respectively) compared to the average for all non-artist cultural workers (53 percent). All other cultural occupations had lower percentages than the average for all non-artist cultural workers.

⁴ The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has developed a list of 11 specific artist occupations: architects (including landscape architects); fine artists, art directors, and animators; designers; actors; producers and directors; dancers and choreographers; musicians (including music directors and composers); entertainers; announcers; writers and authors; and photographers. These occupations have been used in this indicator, though some categories have been combined for reporting purposes. "Dancers" include dancers and choreographers. "Fine artists" include fine artists, art directors, and animators. "Producers" include producers and directors. "Writers" include writers and authors. For more information, see the 2019 NEA publication *Artists and Other Cultural Workers: A Statistical Portrait*.

⁵ Other cultural workers, also called non-artist cultural workers or simply cultural workers, are individuals whose primary occupation supports the arts but does not include artist-related occupations. This indicator uses 15 occupations that are included in the ACS to capture other cultural workers: archivists, curators, and museum technicians; broadcast, sound, and lighting technicians; editors; etchers and engravers; jewelers and precious stone and metal workers; librarians; library technicians; models, demonstrators, and product promoters; photographic process workers and processing machine operators; print binders and finishing workers; printing press operators; television, video, and motion picture camera operators and editors; tour and travel guides; and ushers, lobby attendants, and ticket takers. These occupations are mostly consistent with those listed in the National Endowment for the Arts 2019 report titled *Artists and Other Cultural Workers: A Statistical Portrait*. Estimates of other cultural workers include all workers employed in these occupations, regardless of whether they are employed within an arts-related industry. However, the definition does not capture non-artists who work in arts and cultural industries. Some cultural occupations have been combined in this indicator for reporting purposes. "Archivists and curators" include archivists, curators, and museum technicians. "Jewelers" include jewelers and precious stone and metal workers. "Librarians" include librarians and library technicians. "Models and demonstrators" include models, demonstrators, and product promoters. "Photographic process workers" include photographic process workers and processing machine operators. "Print binders" include print binders and finishing workers. "TV and video camera operators and editors" include television, video, and motion picture camera operators and editors. "Ushers and lobby attendants" include ushers, lobby attendants, and ticket takers.

Figure A4-2. Percentage of non-artist cultural workers with bachelor's degrees or higher, by occupation: 2023



* Significantly different ($p < .05$) from all occupations.

NOTE: Non-artist cultural workers in the labor force are individuals currently employed (regardless of work intensity [employed full time or part time] and class of worker [private or wage-salary, government, or self-employed]) in a cultural occupation or unemployed and looking for work in a cultural occupation. "Archivists and curators" include archivists, curators, and museum technicians. "Jewelers" include jewelers and precious stone and metal workers. "Librarians" include librarians and library technicians. "Models and demonstrators" include models, demonstrators, and product promoters. "Photographic process workers" include photographic process workers and processing machine operators. "Print binders" include print binders and finishing workers. "TV and video camera operators and editors" include television, video, and motion picture camera operators and editors. "Ushers and lobby attendants" include ushers, lobby attendants, and ticket takers.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2023.

Overall, the educational attainment of artists, non-artist cultural workers, and all workers has increased from 2015 to 2023 (see [Table A4-4](#)).⁶ Among all workers, the percentage with a bachelor's degree or higher increased from 32 percent in 2015 to 38 percent in 2023. The percentage of artists with a bachelor's degree or higher increased from 61 percent in 2015 to 64 percent in 2023. This increase was slower than

for all workers and non-artist cultural workers, but it is important to note that attainment among artists has already reached a very high level compared with these other groups. Between 2015 and 2023, the percentage of non-artist cultural workers that earned a bachelor's degree or higher increased from 45 percent to 53 percent, outpacing the increase for all workers and artists.

⁶ Data from 2015 are included for long-term trend comparisons to 2023 data.

Artists with bachelor's degrees or higher, by field of study

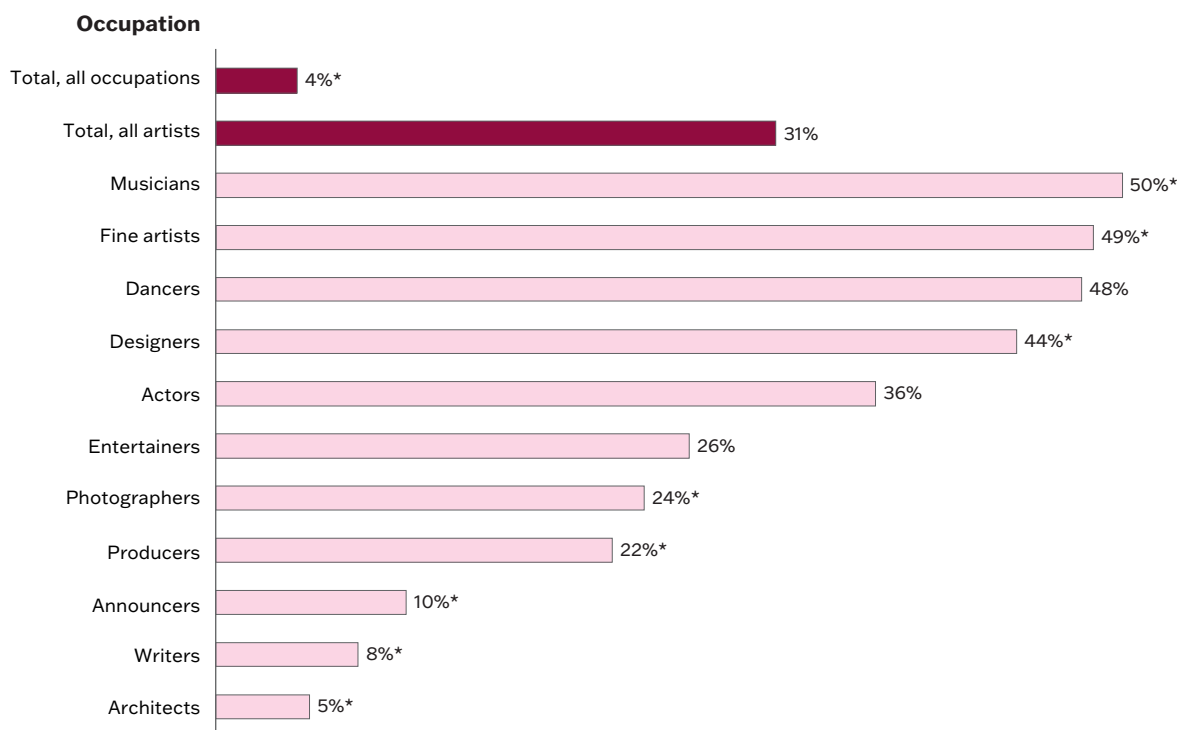


In 2023, 31 percent of artists who had completed a bachelor's degree or higher majored in a visual and performing arts field of study (**Figure A4-3**). This percentage is not measurably different from the percentage in 2015, which was 32 percent (see **Table A4-4**). Across all occupations, only 4 percent of the workforce held a bachelor's degree or higher in the visual and performing arts.

The percentage of artists with a bachelor's degree or higher in the visual and performing arts varied by artist occupation. Musicians (50 percent), fine artists (49 percent), and designers (44 percent) had higher rates than all artists. On the other hand, announcers (10 percent), architects (5 percent), photographers

(24 percent), producers (22 percent), and writers (8 percent) were less likely to have majored in the visual and performing arts and more likely to have majored in fields of study that more closely aligned with their occupations. For example, the majority of architects with bachelor's degrees or higher had majored in architecture (59 percent), which is considered an arts-related field of study but not part of the visual and performing arts. Similarly, 32 percent of announcers, 30 percent of producers, 20 percent of writers, and 17 percent of photographers had majored in communications, compared to 12 percent of all artists, and 24 percent of writers with a had majored in literature and languages, compared to 6 percent of all artists. The rates for actors, dancers, and entertainers who had majored in the visual and performing arts were not measurably different from the rate for all artists.

Figure A4-3. Percentage of artists with a bachelor's degree or higher in the visual and performing arts, by occupation: 2023



* Significantly different ($p < .05$) from all artists.

NOTE: Artists in the labor force are individuals currently employed in an artist occupation (regardless of work intensity [employed full time or part time] and class of worker [private or wage-salary, government, or self-employed]) or unemployed and looking for work in an artist occupation. "Architects" include architects and landscape architects. "Dancers" include dancers and choreographers. "Fine artists" include fine artists, art directors, and animators. "Musicians" include music directors, composers, and musicians. "Producers" include producers and directors. "Writers" include writers and authors.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2023.

When examining the occupation of workers with a bachelor's degree or higher who had majored in the visual and performing arts, about 19 percent of workers were employed in artist occupations (see **Table A4-3**). This is relatively low compared to other fields. For example, about 60 percent of those who had majored in health professions were employed in healthcare practitioner and technical occupations; 52 percent of those who had majored in education were employed in educational instruction and library occupations; and 41 percent of those who had majored in computer and information sciences, mathematics, and statistics were employed in computer and mathematics occupations.

Within the visual and performing arts, the distribution of majors among artists with a bachelor's degree or higher varied. For example, 13 percent of artists with a bachelor's degree or higher had majored in commercial art and graphic design; 6 percent in the fine arts;⁷ 4 percent in music; 2 percent in film, video, and the photographic arts; 2 percent in drama and theater arts; and 1 percent in studio arts, art history and criticism, or other visual and performing arts fields (see **Table A4-1**).⁸ Outside the visual and performing arts, the largest bachelor's degree field for artists was communications (12 percent), followed by architecture (10 percent), business (9 percent), and literature and languages (6 percent).

Concentrations within the visual and performing arts fields varied by artist occupation. In many cases, these fields of study aligned with their occupation. For instance, while just 4 percent of all artists with a bachelor's degree or higher had majored in music, the rate was 46 percent among musicians. Similarly, 32 percent of designers had majored in commercial art and graphic design; 25 percent of actors and 8 percent of entertainers had majored in drama and theater arts; 22 percent of fine artists had majored in the fine arts; and 11 percent of photographers and 9 percent of producers and directors had majored in film, video, and the photographic arts. Additionally, while there is no explicit field of study for dance, 43 percent of dancers had majored in other visual and performing arts fields, compared to 1 percent of all artists. This category likely includes dance majors.

There were also artist occupations with significant concentrations of bachelor's degree recipients in fields outside the visual and performing arts. As noted above, in the case of announcers, architects, photographers, producers, and writers, these fields of study (architecture, communications, and literature and languages) were closely aligned with their occupation. In other instances, the field of study was not directly aligned with their occupation. For example, 13 percent of musicians with a bachelor's degree or higher had majored in education, compared to 4 percent of all artists, and 17 percent of photographers had majored in business, compared to 9 percent of all artists.

⁷ "Fine arts" includes the fine arts and miscellaneous fine arts.

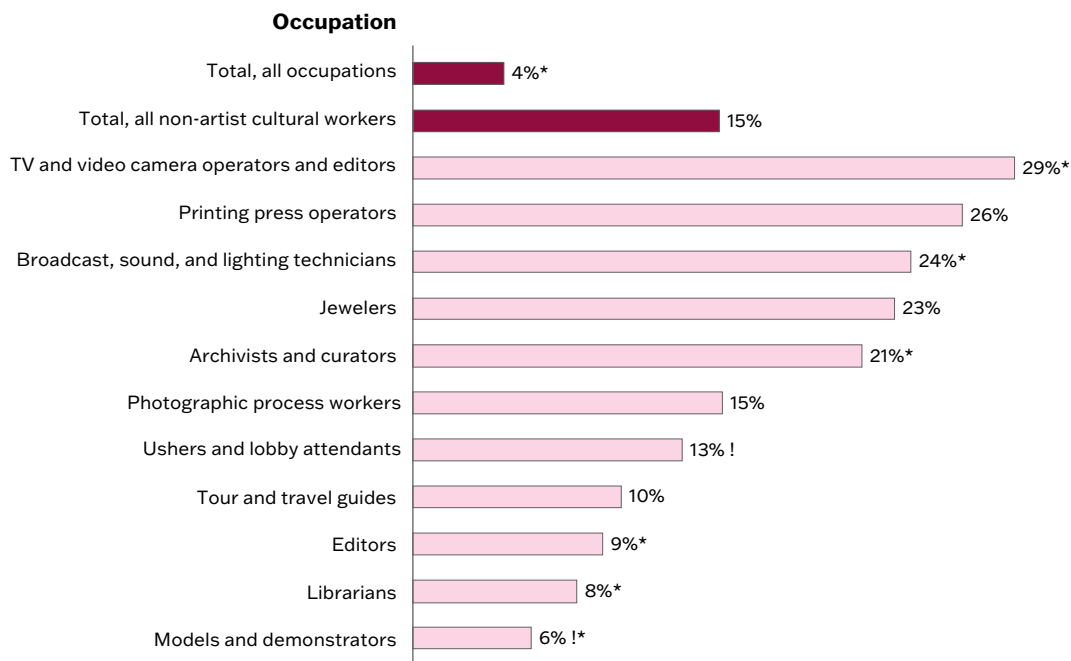
⁸ "Other visual and performing arts fields" includes individuals who reported a bachelor's degree major aligned with the visual and performing arts but not captured in any of the detailed fields of study within this category.

Non-artist cultural workers with bachelor's degrees or higher, by field of study

In 2023, 15 percent of non-artist cultural workers who had completed a bachelor's degree or higher majored in a visual and performing arts field of study (Figure A4-4). This percentage is not measurably different from the percentage in 2015, which was 14 percent (see Table A4-4). Similarly to artists, the percentage of non-artist cultural workers with a bachelor's degree or higher in the visual and

performing arts varied by cultural occupation. The percentage ranged from 6 percent among models and demonstrators to 29 percent among TV and video camera operators and editors. TV and video camera operators and editors (29 percent); broadcast, sound, and lighting technicians (24 percent); and archivists and curators (21 percent) all had higher rates than non-artist cultural workers overall. In addition to the visual and performing arts, the largest bachelor's degree fields of study for non-artist cultural workers were literature and languages (14 percent); communications (14 percent); business (9 percent); and liberal arts,⁹ social sciences, and education (all 8 percent each; see Table A4-2).

Figure A4-4. Percentage of non-artist cultural workers with bachelor's degrees or higher in the visual and performing arts, by occupation: 2023



* Significantly different ($p < .05$) from all non-artist cultural workers.

! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.

NOTE: Non-artist cultural workers in the labor force are individuals currently employed (regardless of work intensity [employed full time or part time] and class of worker [private or wage-salary, government, or self-employed]) in a cultural occupation or unemployed and looking for work in a cultural occupation. "Archivists and curators" include archivists, curators, and museum technicians. "Jewelers" include jewelers and precious stone and metal workers. "Librarians" include librarians and library technicians. "Models and demonstrators" include models, demonstrators, and product promoters. "Photographic process workers" include photographic process workers and processing machine operators. "TV and video camera operators and editors" include television, video, and motion picture camera operators and editors. "Ushers and lobby attendants" include ushers, lobby attendants, and ticket takers. Separate data for etchers and engravers and print binders and finishing workers were not available. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2023.

⁹ "Liberal arts" includes liberal arts, history, and humanities.

While a smaller percentage of non-artist cultural workers with bachelor's degrees or higher had majored in the visual and performing arts compared to artists, concentrations varied by occupation type. As with artists, these fields of study often aligned with their cultural occupation. For example, 19 percent of TV and video camera operators and editors had majored in film, video, and the photographic arts, compared to 2 percent of all artists and 4 percent of all non-artist cultural workers. Similarly, 11 percent of jewelers had majored in the fine arts, 11 percent of printing press operators had majored in commercial art and graphic design, and 7 percent of archivists and curators had majored in art history, while a further 7 percent majored in the fine arts.

Several cultural occupations also had relatively high concentrations of bachelor's degrees in fields outside the visual and performing arts. For example, 28 percent of editors had majored in literature and languages, and a further 22 percent had majored in communications. Similarly, just over half of librarians had majored outside the visual and performing arts: 19 percent in literature and languages, 16 percent in education, 12 percent in liberal arts, and 4 percent in library science. Among archivists and curators, 16 percent had majored in the liberal arts and a further 11 percent in the biological, agricultural, or environmental sciences. In addition, 22 percent of photographic process workers had majored in computers and mathematics;¹⁰ 22 percent of jewelers had majored in business; and 11 percent of broadcast, sound, and lighting technicians had majored in engineering.¹¹

Concentrations of bachelor's degrees awarded in the visual and performing arts to people who chose other occupations

Another way to examine data on those with bachelor's degrees or higher in the visual and performing arts is to consider what proportion of

them work as artists or non-artist cultural workers versus in other jobs entirely. In 2023, 19 percent of all workers in the labor force with a bachelor's degree or higher in the visual and performing arts were working as artists and 3 percent worked in other non-artist cultural occupations (**Figure A4-5**). The remaining 78 percent of these degree recipients were working in other occupations entirely.¹² Within the latter category, 13 percent each of bachelor's degree-holders in the visual and performing arts were in management,¹³ educational instruction,¹⁴ and library occupations; 8 percent each were in office and administrative support positions or business and financial operations; and 7 percent were in sales and related jobs.

Within the visual and performing arts, the distribution of bachelor's degree recipients varied by major (see **Table A4-3**). For example, 16 percent of those who majored in the fine arts worked in an artist occupation and 3 percent worked in other non-artist cultural occupations, while 14 percent each worked in either educational instruction and library occupations or management. Similarly, 11 percent of those who majored in drama and theater arts worked in an artist occupation and 3 percent worked in other non-artist cultural occupations, while 15 percent worked in management, 14 percent in educational instruction and library occupations, and 10 percent in office and administrative support positions. For those who majored in music, 15 percent worked in an artist occupation and 3 percent worked in other non-artist cultural occupations, while 24 percent worked in educational instruction and library occupations and 11 percent in management. Among those who majored in commercial art and graphic design, 33 percent worked in an artist occupation and 1 percent worked in other non-artist cultural occupations, while 13 percent worked in management. Seventeen percent of those who majored in film, video, and the photographic arts worked in an artist occupation and 10 percent worked in other non-artist cultural occupations, while 14 percent worked in management.

For those who majored in art history and criticism, 8 percent worked in an artist occupation and 7 percent

¹⁰ "Computers and mathematics" includes computer and information sciences, mathematics, and statistics.

¹¹ "Engineering" includes engineering and engineering technologies.

¹² Artist and cultural occupations are counted separately and excluded from the other occupation groups.

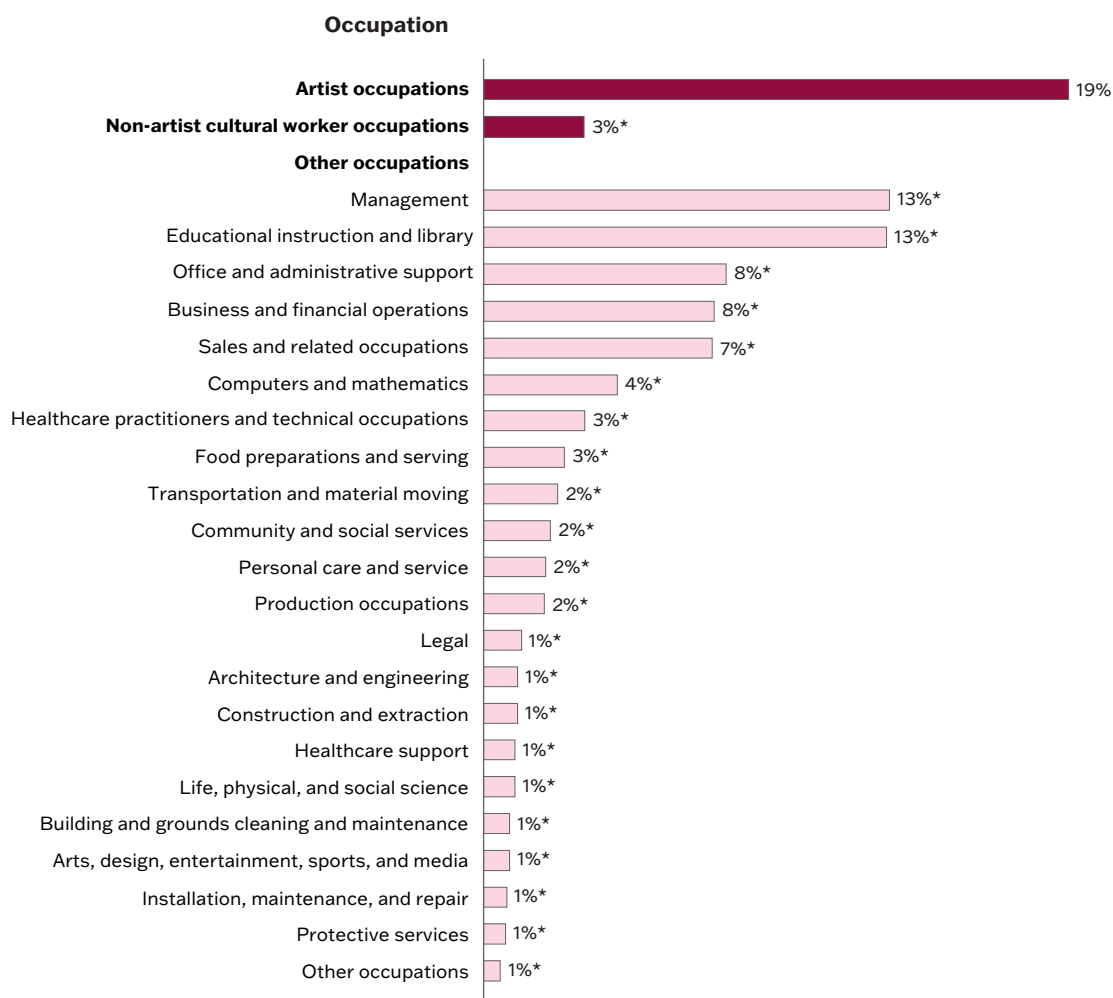
¹³ Managers are not classified as artists but may be classified as arts managers if they are managers in arts-related industries. See **Indicator A.6: Who Are the Arts Managers?** for more information.

¹⁴ "Educational instruction includes teachers and assistants at the preprimary, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels.

worked in other non-artist cultural occupations, while 16 percent worked in management and 10 percent each worked in either educational instruction and library occupations or business and financial operations. Fifteen percent of those who majored in studio arts worked in an artist occupation and 4 percent worked in other non-artist cultural occupations, while 17 percent worked in educational instruction and library

occupations and 13 percent in management. Finally, 13 percent of those who majored in other visual and performing arts fields worked in an artist occupation and 2 percent worked in other non-artist cultural occupations, while 21 percent worked in educational instruction and library occupations and 13 percent in management.

Figure A4-5. Percentage distribution of U.S. workers with bachelor's degrees in the visual and performing arts, by occupation group: 2023



* Significantly different ($p < .05$) from artist occupations.

NOTE: "U.S. workers" includes individuals in the labor force currently employed (regardless of work intensity [employed full time or part time] and class of worker [private or wage-salary, government, or self-employed]) or unemployed and looking for work. "Other occupations" does not include artist and other cultural worker occupations, which are counted separately. Separate data for farming, fishing, and forestry and military-specific occupations were not available.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2023.

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