

Who Works in the Arts?

The Demographic Characteristics of Illinois Arts Graduates in Arts Jobs

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The arts ecosystem has a persistent and acute record of exclusion and inequity (Finn, 2023; Topaz et al., 2019; Topaz et al., 2022; and Whitaker and Wolniak, 2022). This is born out in arts education and labor force statistics, which reveal that a disproportionate number of art school graduates, arts managers, and art museum leaders are White (NEA 2022; SNAAP, 2018; and Sweeney et al., 2022) and White, male, able-bodied artists earn more on average than other artists (Finn, 2023 and NEA, 2022). We recognize that equity and justice in the arts are vital to ensuring that our cultural organizations, institutions, and productions represent the voices, perspectives, needs, and experiences of diverse communities, particularly those that have been historically minoritized. In light of this, we ask: Does the lack of diversity and inclusion in arts education carry over into who ends up working in the arts? Our inaugural report *Where Do Artists Work?* used data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) to show that out of the roughly 150 thousand arts graduates in Illinois, only 20% (around 30 thousand) have arts occupations as their primary form of employment.¹ A further 7% (almost 10 thousand) have non-arts occupations in the arts and entertainment industry (for example, a computer technician working for a theater company). **This spotlight issue examines the demographic characteristics of Illinois arts graduates in arts jobs, disaggregating this population by race, ethnicity, gender, and disability status to ask if unequal entry into post-secondary arts education extends to unequal entry into arts careers after graduation.**²

Race and Ethnicity³

Black and Latino arts graduates in Illinois are already underrepresented when compared to the state's workforce (Figure 1). They are even more underrepresented in the segment of arts graduates who end up in arts jobs. Out of the roughly 40 thousand arts graduates in Illinois who have primary jobs in the arts, only 4% are Black and 9% are Latino (13% altogether). This is less than half of the percentage of Black and Latino workers in the Illinois workforce (30% altogether). By contrast, White arts graduates in arts occupations are overrepresented when compared to state's workforce (76% vs. 62%) and are also slightly overrepresented when compared to the graduate population (76% vs 75%). Asian arts graduates in arts jobs are also slightly overrepresented when compared to the arts graduate population.

Figure 1. Arts graduates in arts jobs by race and ethnicity.

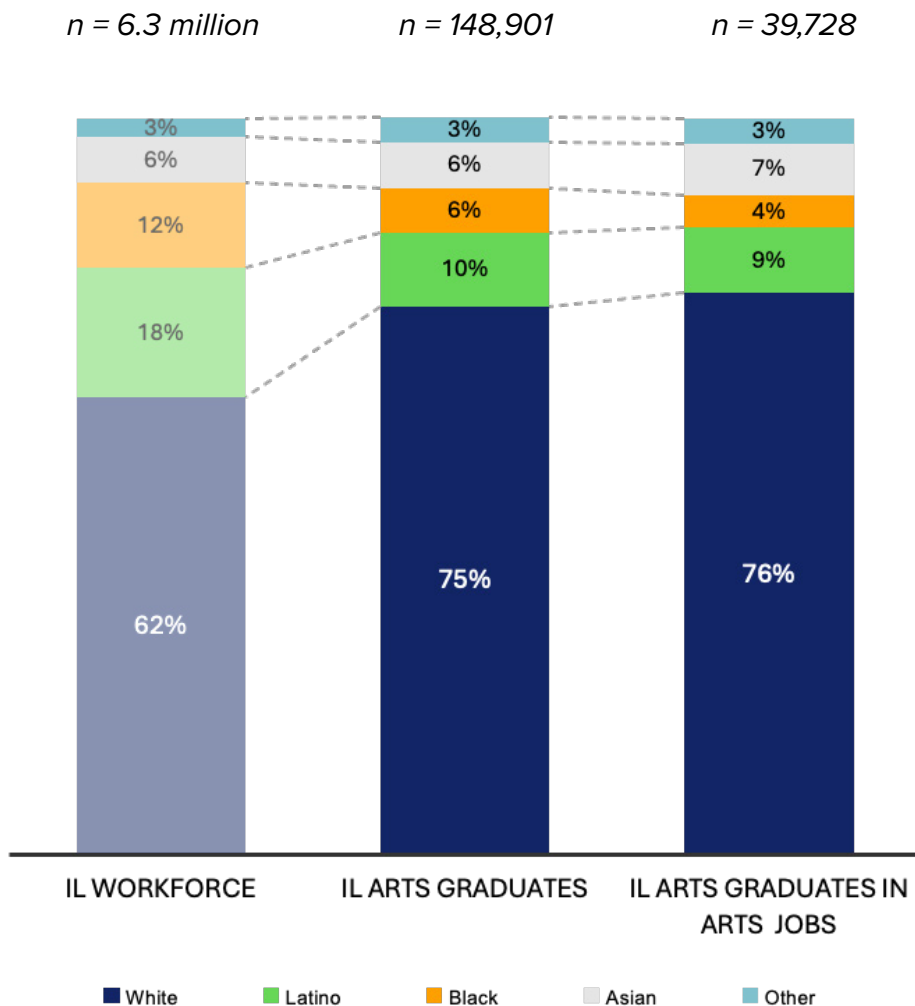
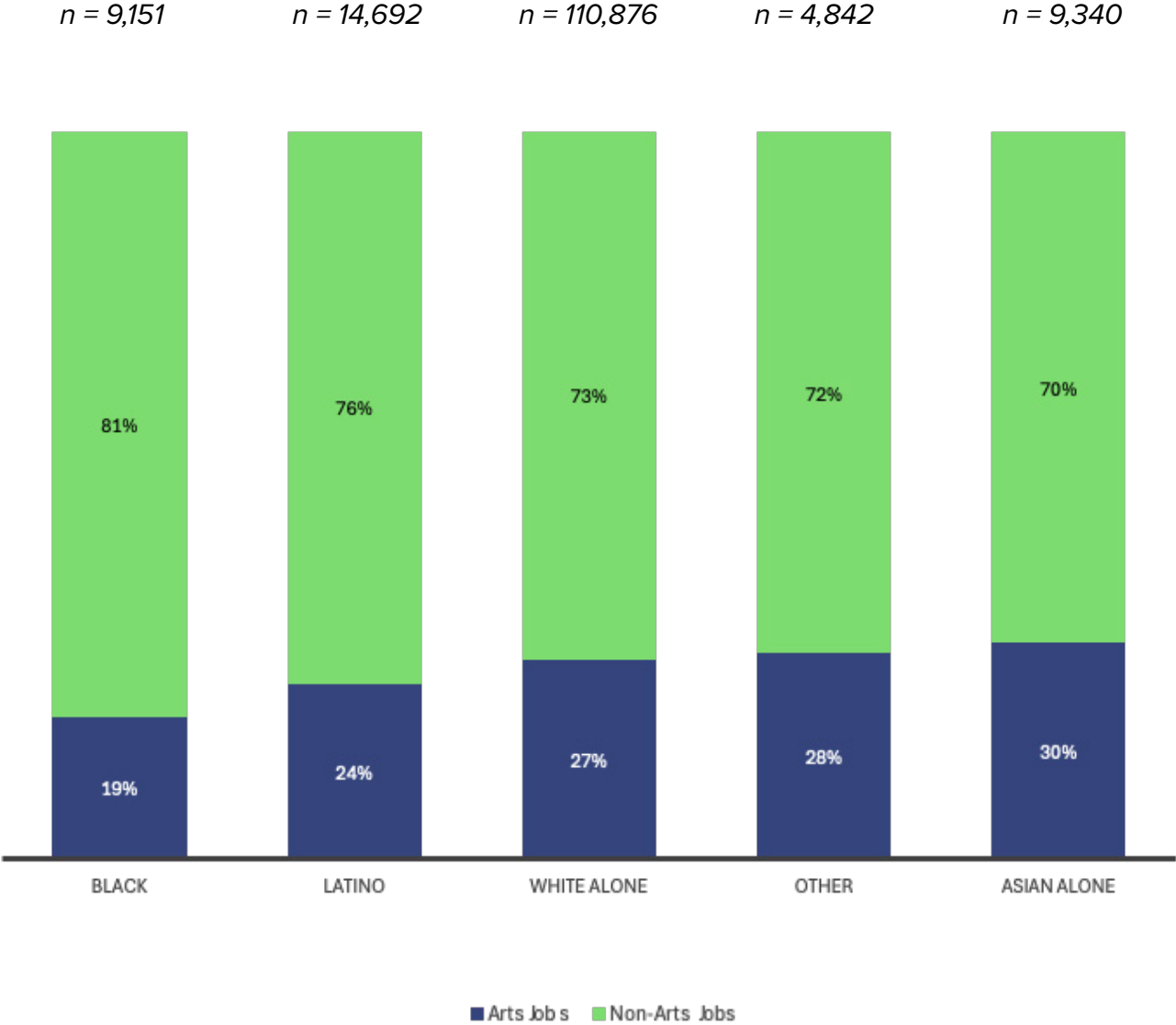


Figure 2 shows the proportion of arts graduates from each racial and ethnic group who end up in arts jobs compared to those who end up in non-arts jobs (non-arts occupations in non-arts industries). While Asian arts graduates and those from Other racial and ethnic categories make up only 7% and 3% of the total population of arts graduates in arts jobs respectively, the largest proportion of Asian and Other arts graduates end up in arts jobs (30% Asian and 28% Other). The smallest proportion of Black arts graduates end up in arts jobs (19%).

Figure 2. Proportion of arts graduates in arts jobs by racial and ethnic group.



Gender⁴

The number of male and female arts graduates in arts jobs is roughly equal (Figure 3). Indeed, female arts graduates in arts jobs are slightly overrepresented compared to the percentage of female workers in the Illinois workforce (50% vs 47%). That said, the percentage of female arts graduates working in the arts as their primary job is lower than the percentage of females in the arts graduate population in Illinois. Why are we seeing this drop?

Looking at the occupational outcomes of male and female arts graduates individually reveals that although there are fewer male arts graduates in Illinois, a larger proportion of them end up in arts jobs (30% male vs. 24% female) (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Arts graduates in arts jobs by gender.

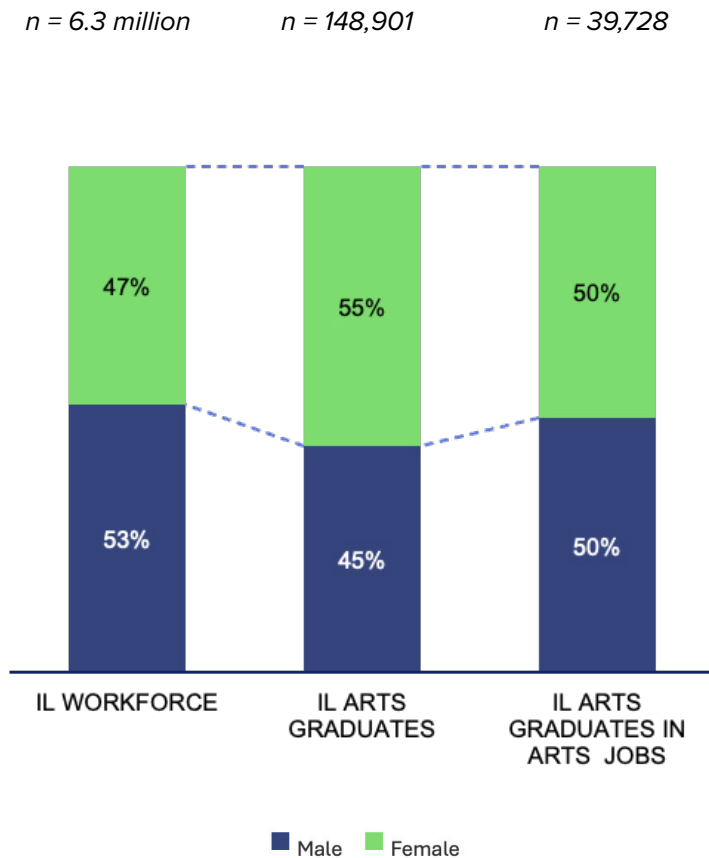
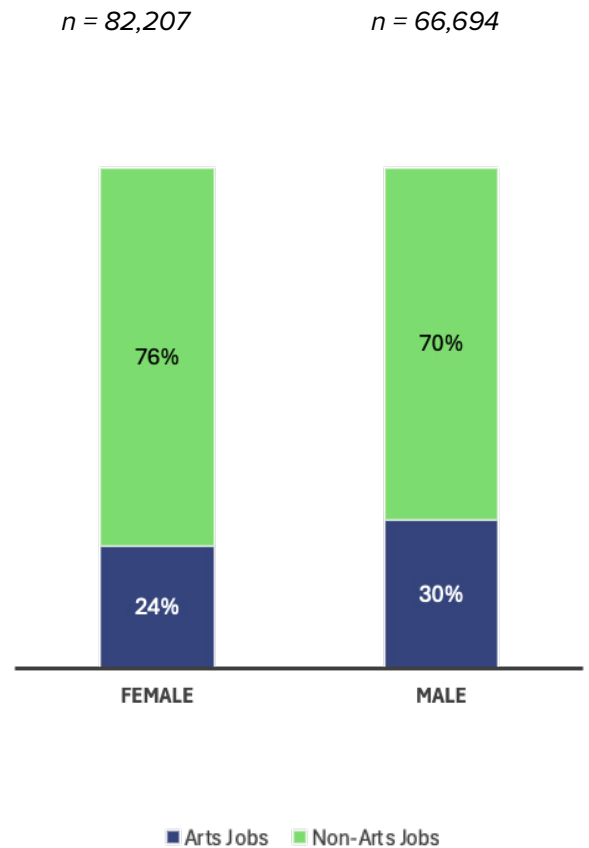


Figure 4. Proportion of arts graduates in arts jobs by gender.

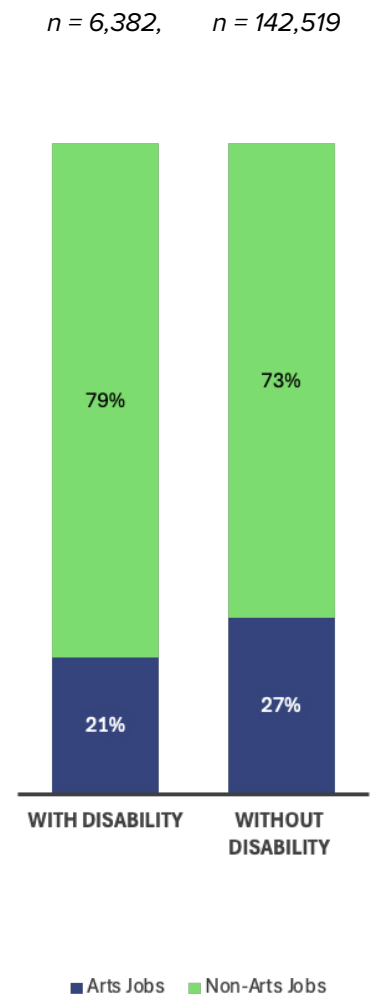
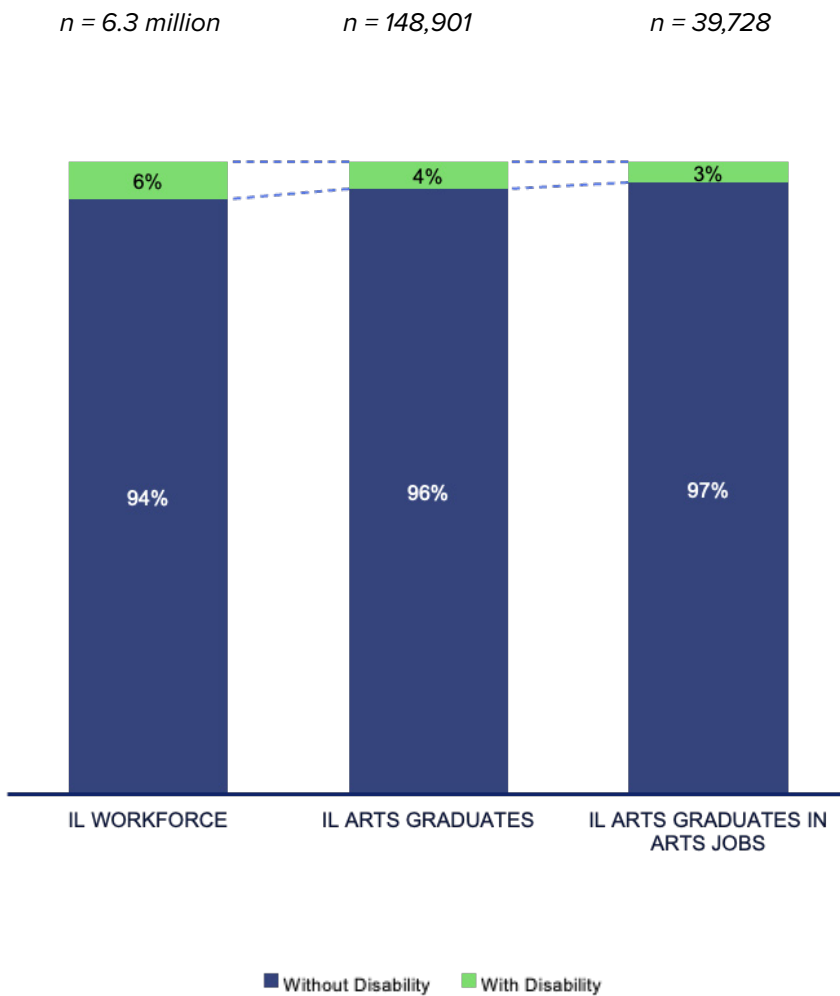


Disability Status⁵

Arts graduates with disabilities are underrepresented when compared to the state’s workforce (4% vs. 6%). Arts graduates with disabilities with primary jobs in the arts are even more underrepresented when compared to the Illinois workforce (3% vs. 6%) (Figure 5). Breaking this down further reveals that a smaller proportion of Illinois arts graduates with disabilities end up in arts jobs than arts graduates without disabilities (21% vs. 27%) (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Arts graduates in arts jobs by disability status.

Figure 6. Proportion of arts graduates in arts job by disability status.



Employment Outcomes by Arts Major

To ascertain whether some arts programs lead to a greater diversity in arts jobs than others, outcomes for different majors were disaggregated by race and ethnicity, gender, and disability status (Figures 7-9).⁶ The percentage of graduates in arts jobs (represented by bar J) was compared to the demographic characteristics of the Illinois workforce (represented by the dotted line) and the demographic characteristics of each major population (represented by bar G).

Race and Ethnicity

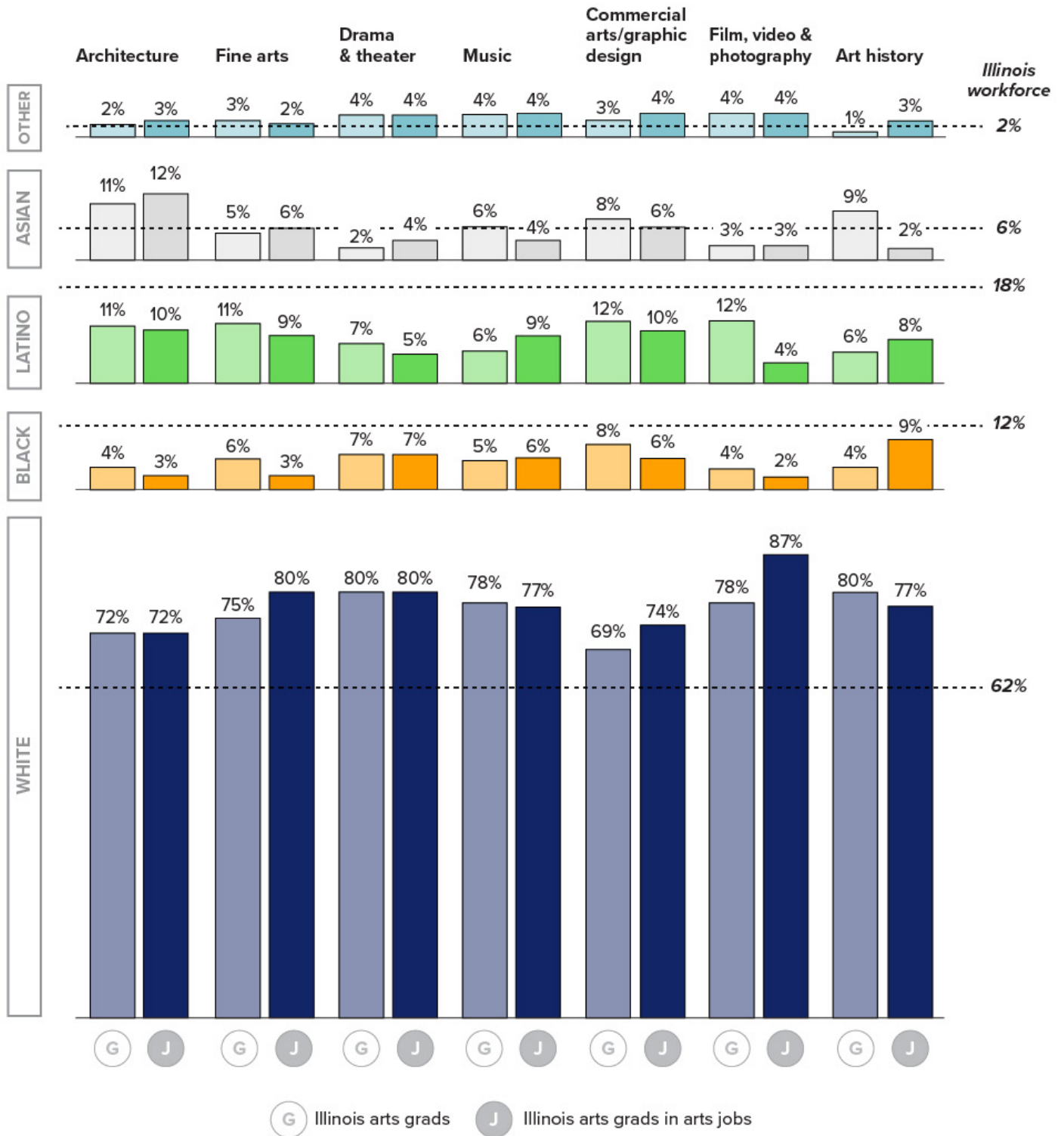
Comparison to Illinois workforce: Figure 7 reveals that White arts graduates in arts jobs are overrepresented across all arts majors when compared to the Illinois workforce. This is especially true for Film, Fine Arts, and Drama. Conversely, Black and Latino arts graduates in arts jobs are underrepresented across all majors. Black graduates are especially underrepresented in Architecture, Film, and Fine Arts. Latino arts graduates are particularly underrepresented in Drama and Film. Asian arts graduates in arts jobs are underrepresented in Drama, Music, Film, and Art History, but overrepresented in Architecture when compared to the Illinois workforce (12% vs. 6%).

Comparison to major population: In addition to being underrepresented in relation to the Illinois workforce, Black and Latino arts graduates in arts jobs are also underrepresented across all majors compared to the graduate population for each major, with the exception of Drama, Music, and Art History.⁷



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Figure 7. Major population and arts graduates in arts jobs by race and ethnicity.

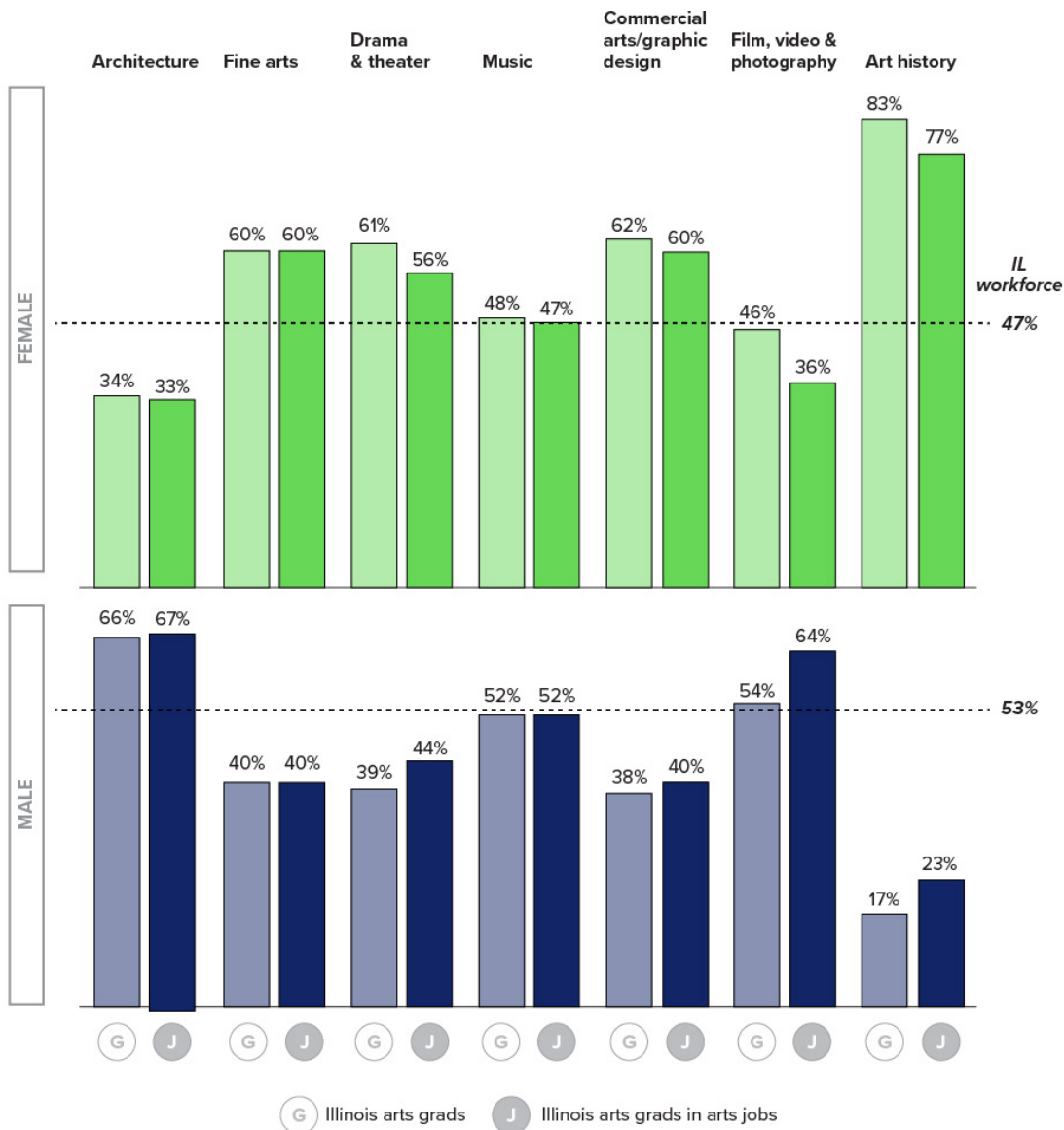


Gender

Comparison to Illinois workforce: Across most arts majors, female arts graduates in arts jobs are either on par with the Illinois workforce (Music) or overrepresented (Drama, Commercial Art, Art History, and Fine Arts) (Figure 8). Only female Architecture and Film graduates are underrepresented in arts jobs.

Comparison to major population: Female arts graduates in arts jobs across most majors are underrepresented when compared to major populations, especially in Film and Art History. The only exception is Fine arts, where the percentage of female arts graduates in arts jobs is on par with the major population (60%).

Figure 8. Major population and arts graduates in arts jobs by gender.

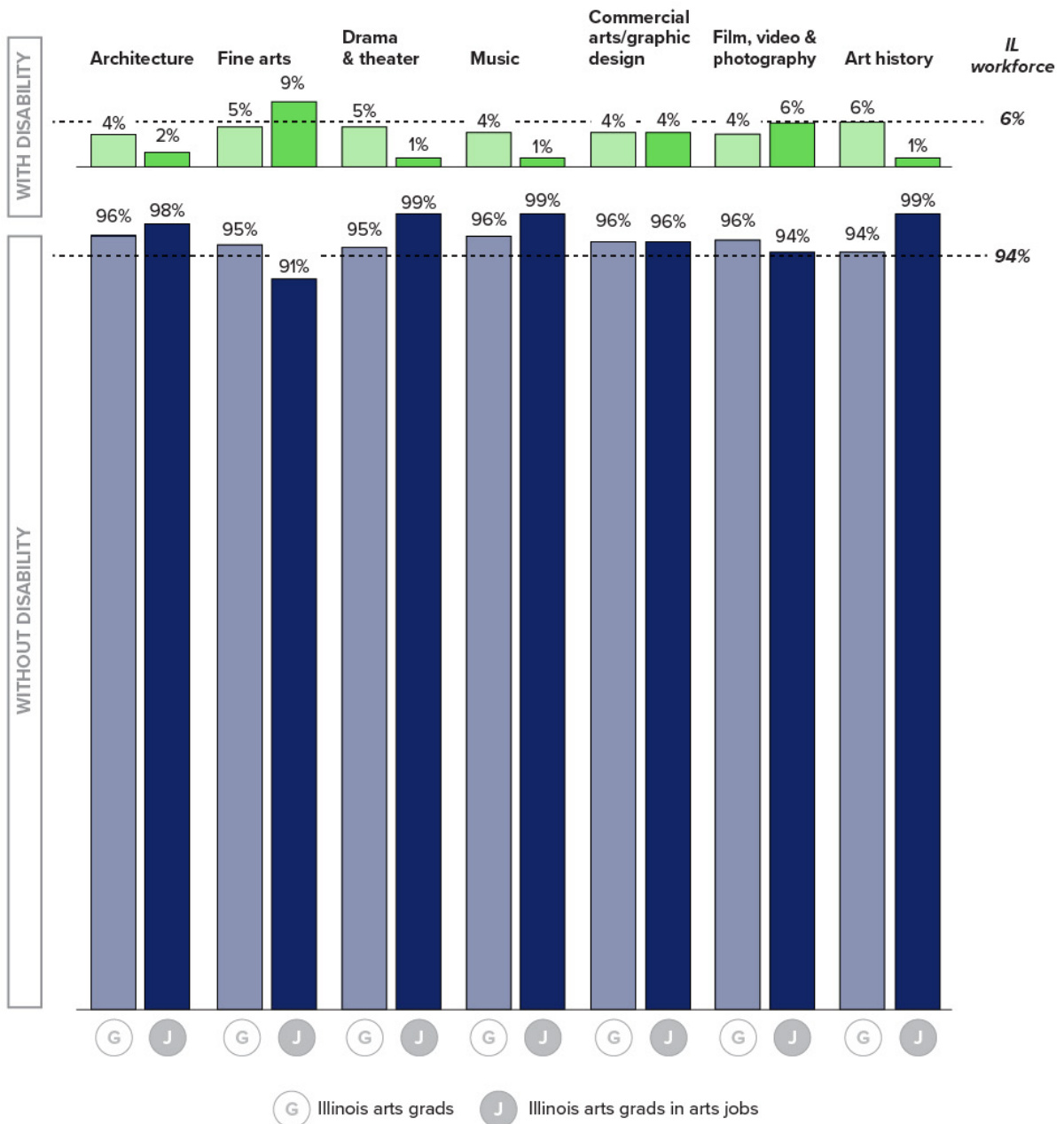


Disability Status

Comparison to Illinois workforce: Arts graduates with disabilities are underrepresented in arts jobs across almost all majors, particularly Drama, Art History, and Music (Figure 9). The only exceptions are Film and Fine Arts, where graduates with disabilities are either on par with or slightly overrepresented in arts jobs when compared to the state’s workforce.

Comparison to major population: When compared to major populations, graduates with disabilities in arts jobs are also underrepresented across most majors, particularly Art History. The only exceptions are Fine Arts, Commercial Art, and Film.

Figure 9. Major population and arts graduates in arts jobs by disability status.



Conclusion

This spotlight issue has shown that among arts graduates in Illinois, the likelihood of working in the arts is highest if you are White, able-bodied, and male. Black, Latino, and disabled arts graduates are underrepresented in art jobs in comparison to the Illinois workforce, and this is true across most majors. Female arts graduates are underrepresented in comparison to the major population across most degree fields, and a smaller percentage of all female arts graduates end up in arts jobs. While the barriers preventing more arts graduates from gaining access to employment in the arts will be explored in subsequent reports, the data presented here makes it clear that these barriers seem to be amplified for arts graduates who either belong to a historically minoritized community or have a disability. Further research is needed on how the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, income, as well as other factors such as spatial equity or immigration status, impacts employment opportunities for arts graduates in our state.



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Endnotes

1. For a list of arts and culture occupations used for the purpose of this study, see Appendix A in Aisha Motlani, *Where Do Artists Work? Exploring the Careers of Arts Graduates in Illinois and the U.S.*, Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative (IWERC), Discovery Partners Institute (DPI), University of Illinois, 2024. https://omsdpiprod.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/FINAL-COPY_ISSUE-BRIEF-1.pdf
2. In this report, "arts jobs" refer to primary arts occupations in any industry combined with primary non-arts occupations in the arts industry. It does not include teaching jobs in the arts as these cannot be accurately measured using ACS occupation or industry data.
3. In this report, "Black" refers to the U.S. Census Bureau's category of "Black or African American," and "Latino" refers to the category of "Hispanic or Latino." American Indian and Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Two or More Races, and Other Race have been combined under Other because of the small amount of data available for these groups.
4. ACS respondents can either choose "male" or "female." Currently, the survey does not allow respondents to specify non-binary, agender, genderqueer, transgender, or other gender identities.
5. ACS questionnaires cover six disability types: hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and independent living difficulty.
6. The category of Dance is not included in this analysis as the ACS Field of Degrees does not contain a separate category for Dance. It may be included with Visual and Performing Arts but because of the breadth of this category and the possible overlap with Drama and Fine Arts we have not included it in our analysis of the occupational distribution of Illinois arts graduates by arts program.
7. Latino drama graduates but not Black drama graduates are underrepresented in arts jobs relative to the major population.

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