

# OCAD U

## School of Continuing Studies

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### Evaluating the Creative Gig Economy

#### Research Report

June 2024



photo: Lindsay Maynard

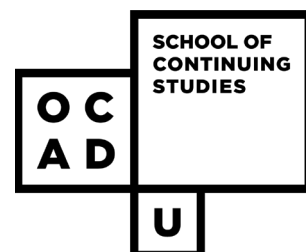
# OCAD U School of Continuing Studies

## Evaluating the Creative Gig Economy

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3D Animation Studio I: Intro to Blender







Sewing Skills Studio

# I. School of Continuing Studies (SCS)

OCAD U School of Continuing Studies (SCS) offers a wide range of courses in art, design, and media. With industry leading instructors, students increase their creative potential, advance their creative career, and explore new areas of self-expression.

Online courses are flexible and support self-directed learning, while in-person courses are held in the inspiring OCAD U studio facilities.

SCS industry relevant micro-credentials help upgrade student skills with a stackable credential for the changing job market.

Students customize their studies with courses and certificates that emphasize design and creativity while gaining software expertise and studio training.





## 2. What We Offer

### a) Courses

The SCS offers over 70 unique courses. The majority of SCS courses are six weeks long at a cost of \$575.

Courses are offered throughout the year, are open to the public, and are all non-credit.

Students can register directly on the SCS website for both online or in-person course options.

The SCS's most popular courses:

- Adobe Creative Cloud Software
- UX Design
- Studio courses such as:
  - Woodworking Fundamentals
  - Sewing Skills Studio

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### Course subject areas

Business, Marketing, Communications

Drawing, Painting, Printmaking

Graphic Design, Illustration,

Advertising

Interior Design, Architecture,

Industrial Design

Photography

Sculpture, Electronics

Textiles, Fashion, Wearable Media

Theory and Criticism in Art and Design

User Experience (UX) Design,

Web Design, Analytics

Video, Animation, Sound,

Game Design

# What We Offer

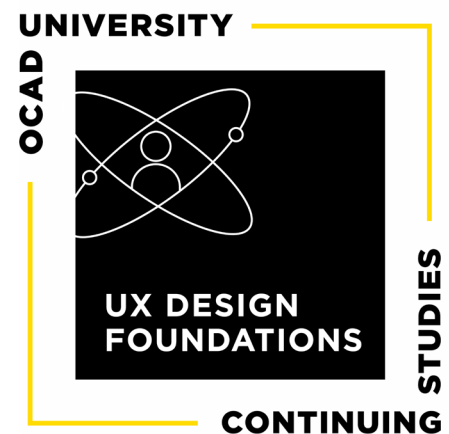
## b) Micro-credentials

The SCS offers 20 micro-credentials. Most micro-credentials qualify for OSAP and are listed on eCampus Ontario.

Each student receives a digital badge upon successful completion of a micro-credential. Micro-credentials stack into the SCS certificates.

The SCS's most popular micro-credential courses:

- Empathy + Social Insight for Human-Centred Design
- Professional Practice for Emerging Artists and Designers (ArtWorksTO students)
- Hiring for Decolonization, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Creative Industries



Digital SCS micro-credential badge for UX Design



# What We Offer

## Micro-credentials cont.

2D Animation Skills

3D Animation Skills

Adobe Illustrator Skills

Adobe Photoshop Skills

Game Design Skills

Photography Foundations

Typography Foundations

User Experience (UX) Design Skills

Video Post-Production Foundations

Becoming a Content Creator: Advanced Social  
Media Marketing for Creative Entrepreneurs

Beyond GLAM Land Acknowledgments: Activating  
Decolonization and Indigenization in Galleries,  
Libraries, Archives, and Museums

Developing Effective Government Relations  
and Advocacy Strategies for Canadian Arts  
Organizations

(in partnership with PAA Advisory)

Navigating Production with the Film and  
Television Industry in Ontario

Introduction to Project Management for  
Creative Professionals

Professional Practice for Emerging Artists and  
Designers



photo: Leilah Dhone

Hiring for Decolonization, Diversity, and Inclusion  
in the Creative Industries

Retaining Diverse Talent in the Creative Industries

Empathy + Social Insight for Human-Centred  
Design

Ideation + Prototyping for Human-Centred  
Design

User Testing + Launch for Human Centred  
Design

# What We Offer

## c) Certificates

The SCS offers 13 non-credit certificates. Each certificate requires students to successfully complete five qualifying courses within three years.

SCS's most popular certificates:

- Digital Media Skills
- Graphic Design and Visual Communication Skills
- UX Design and Development Skills

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## Certificates

Animation Skills

Art and Design Studio Skills

Business Skills for Creative Professionals

Critical Theory and Social Impact in  
Art and Design

Design, Technology, and Fabrication Skills

Digital Media Skills

Human-Centred Design Skills

Game Design Skills

Graphic Design and Visual Communication Skills

Intellectual Property Law for Creative  
Entrepreneurs

Photography and Video Skills

User Experience (UX) Design and Development  
Skills

*Art and Design Professional Skills (internal for  
ArtWorksTO students)*



## 3. Students

There are approximately 12,000 students who opt in to be part of the SCS email database.

### a) Student demographics

- 75% Female
- Ages 25-45
- 60% live in Toronto and the GTA
- Working professionals
- Students are upgrading skills for work, or trying to change careers
- Many new immigrants
- Many students already have degrees



Conceptual Photography Studio

There are approximately **21,000** students total in the SCS registration system.

# Students

## b) Student profiles



Zhino Yousefi, from SCS promotional videos

### Zhino Yousefi

#### Design, Technology, and Fabrication Skills Certificate

*"I'm a software engineer. There were a lot of different students in my classes. You don't feel like an outsider. There are a lot of different age groups, and different types of people, and the instructors are very understanding of the timelines of working people. They know that you have a full-time job. Most of the people who took the classes have full-time jobs. It's a very flexible environment."*



Kiersten Artemenko, from SCS promotional videos

### Kiersten Artemenko

#### Art and Design Studio Skills Certificate

*"I originally thought that maybe I wanted to switch careers, so I started taking classes at OCAD U in Continuing Studies and my schedule didn't really allow me to do an in-class course. So, it was amazing having the opportunity to take things online."*



## 4. Introduction to the Research

### Evaluating the Creative Gig Economy

OCAD U School of Continuing Studies received a CAUCE (Canadian Association for University Continuing Education) research grant to support the evaluation of the creative gig economy for Continuing Education funding opportunities, government advocacy, and improved program design.

The creative gig economy is a labour market characterized by short-term/project-based contracts or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs.

The evidence gathered from this survey will provide data for contract employment metrics, helping to inform Continuing Studies programming, funding applications, and can also be used as a valuable tool for government advocacy. With this data, governments could design innovative programs that support the creative gig workforce.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

##### Research Questions

1. In creative industries where full-time positions are few, how is the experience of contract workers equivalent to full-time employment?
2. For underemployed or low-income workers, to what extent does the creative gig economy offer opportunities for financial stability and career advancement?
3. To what extent are members of equity seeking groups represented in the creative gig economy?

##### Research Design

A mixed-method research methodology was employed. A quantitative survey composed of multiple choice and short answer questions was sent to 12,000 current and former School of Continuing Studies students. Qualitative research was gathered in a focus group with School of Continuing Studies students who are creative professionals working in the gig economy.

# Introduction to the Research



Illustration by Rachel Galang (SCS student, ArtWorksTO)

# Introduction to the Research

## Statement of Objectives

In the gig economy, many creative professionals are self-employed contract workers, employed full-time in a non-creative field and pursuing additional creative contract work, or are underemployed and pursuing additional creative contract work. A recent report released by Statistics Canada found that gig workers across all sectors represented 10% of all Canadian workers and for 25% of these gig workers, contract work represented 89% of their total annual income (Jeon and Ostrovsky, 2020).

Gig workers in the creative industries such as graphic design, user experience design, video production, interior design, illustration, and photography, require ongoing training to keep up with new software applications, industry shifts, and business skills. In the 2021 survey of Continuing Studies students at OCAD University, only 56% identified as being employed full-time.

Government grants and other funding opportunities to develop new Continuing Studies programs often require metrics for full-time employment outcomes. In many creative industries those full-time jobs do not exist, so our programs and students are not eligible for funding. This is a significant problem for Continuing Studies departments across Canada that offer creative industry training programs for self-employed contract workers.



Woodworking Fundamentals Studio

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Jeon, S.-H., Hujun Liu and Yuri Ostrovsky (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on the Gig Economy: Short- and Long-Term Concerns, catalogue number: 45280001, Ottawa: Statistics Canada.



# Introduction to the Research

## Objective 1: Employment Metrics for Current Program Funding

The evidence gathered will provide quantitative and qualitative data for current program funding applications.

The survey will provide Continuing Studies departments with creative contract employment metrics such as work hours, contract duration, expenses, and income. The survey will also provide key demographic data such as education levels, age, gender, and identification with equity seeking groups.



Drawing Skills Studio I

## Objective 2: Government Advocacy for Future Program Development

This research will be a valuable tool for government advocacy. In meetings with municipal, provincial, and federal government, university leaders may cite this research to demonstrate the economic and cultural impact of creative contract labour. With this awareness, governments may design innovative programs that support this significant segment of the workforce.

## 5. Survey

In the Fall of 2023, a survey was conducted among OCAD U School of Continuing Studies students to better understand their activity within the creative gig economy.

The creative gig economy is a labour market characterized by short-term/project-based contracts or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs.

It is intended that the evidence gathered from this survey will provide data for contract employment metrics, help inform Continuing Studies programming and funding applications, and be used as a valuable tool for government advocacy. With this data, governments could design innovative programs that support the creative gig workforce.

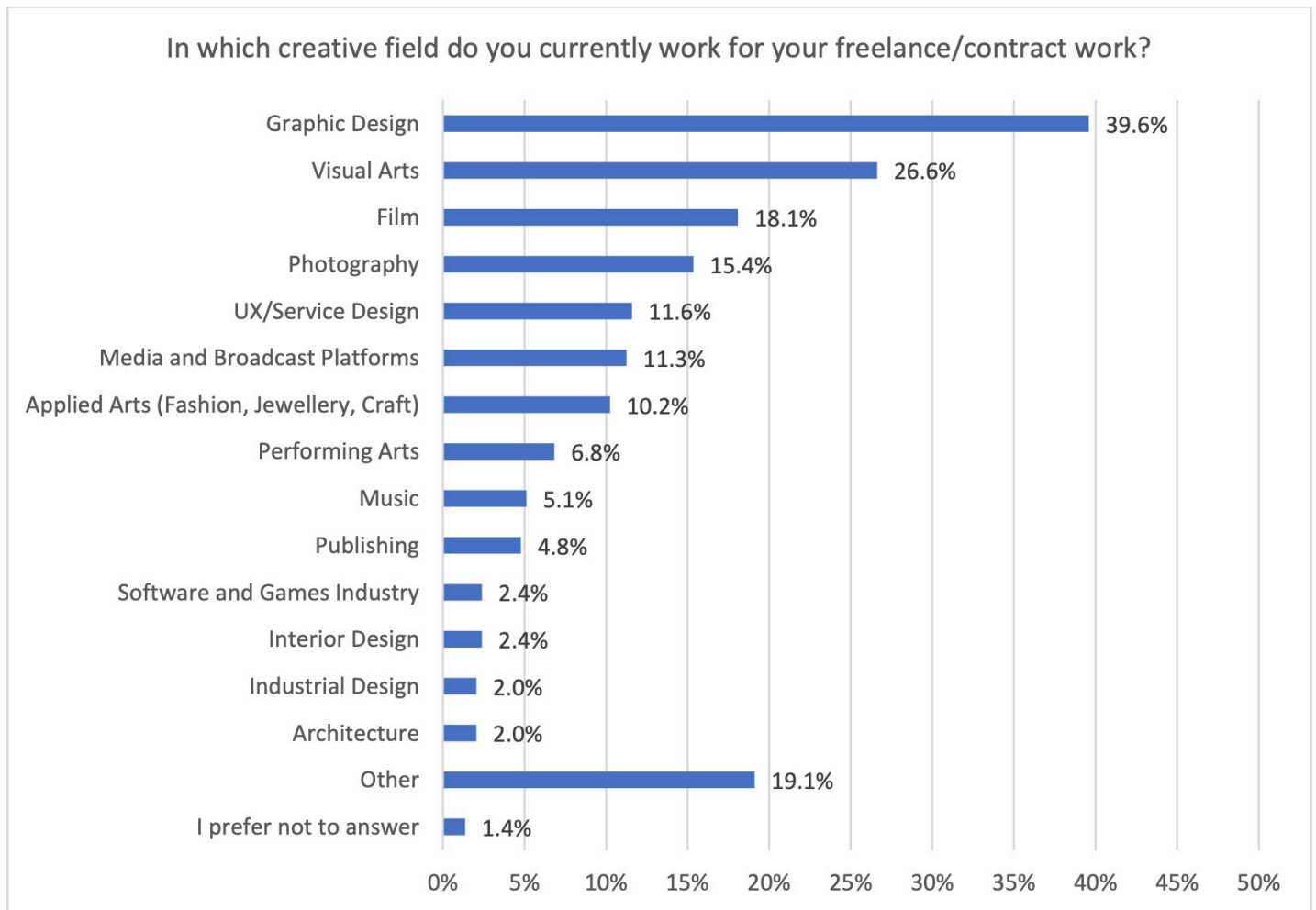
*Student quotes are represented throughout the report from the survey.*

### Survey

293 respondents indicated they participate in the creative gig economy. The results presented here represent their responses.

## a) Employment Experience

### CREATIVE FIELDS

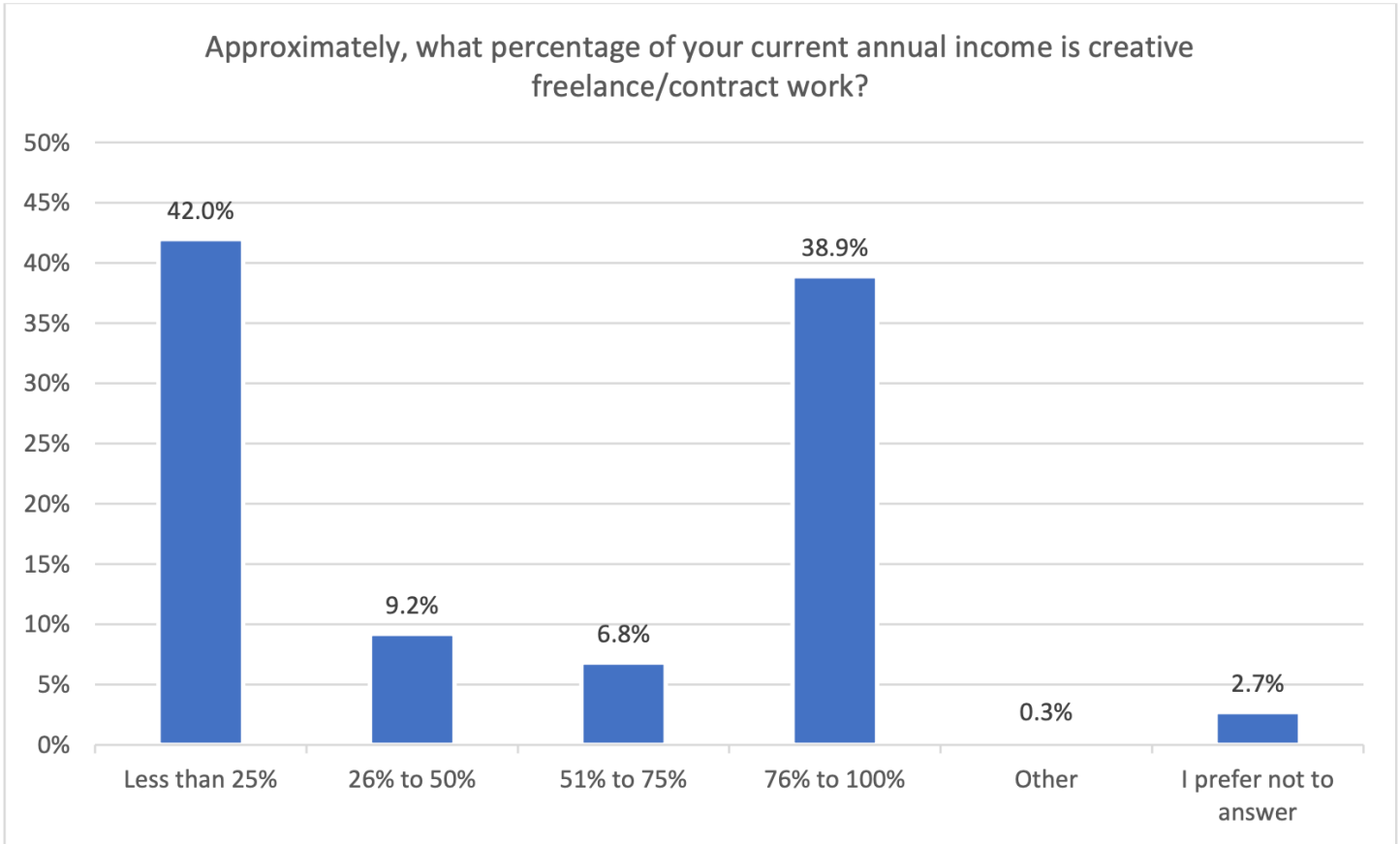


Participants who responded to "other" wrote:

- Beauty Industry
- Garden Design
- Writer
- Tattoo Artist

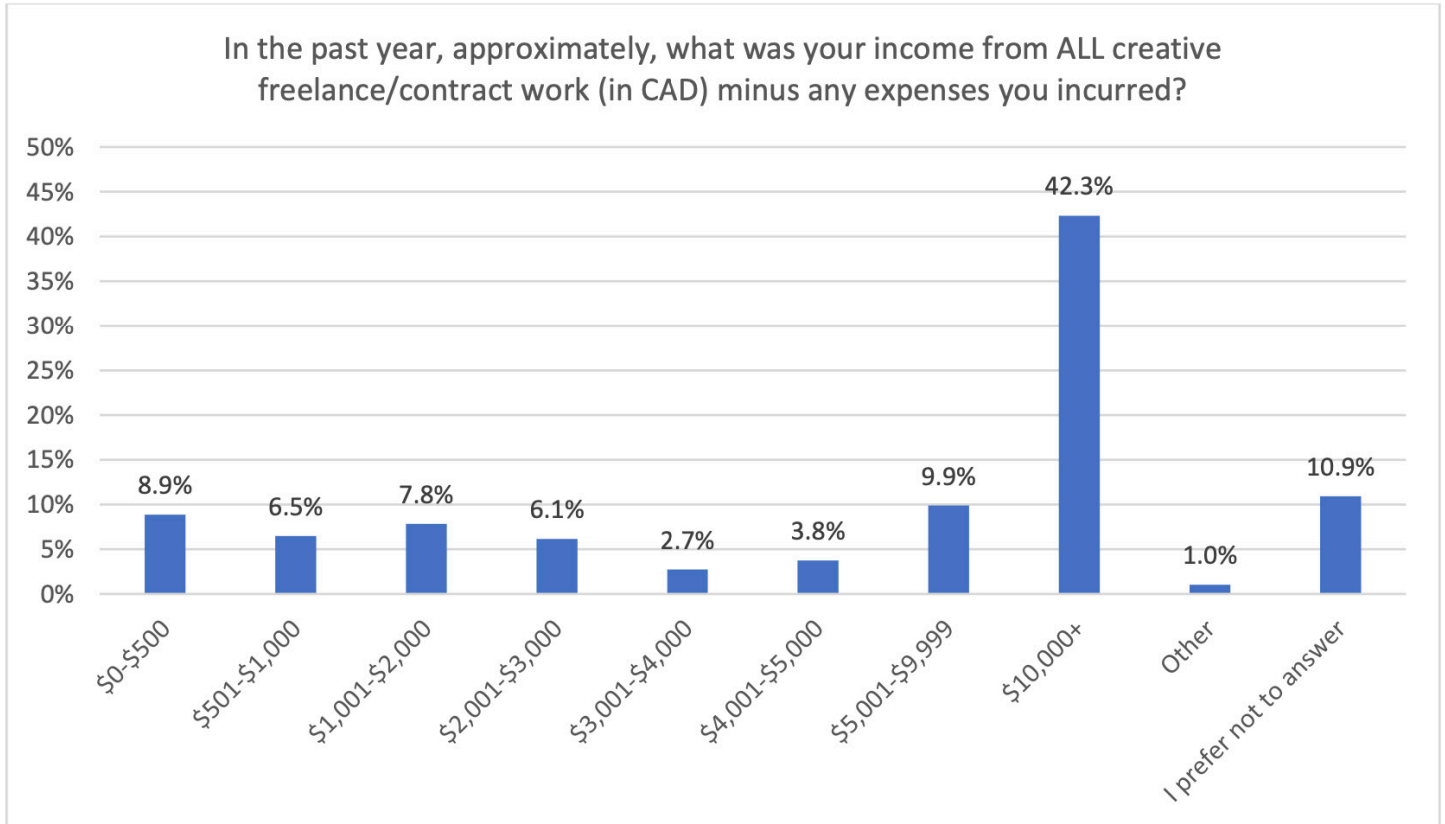


## INCOME



Just over 40% of respondents indicated less than 25% of their income came from creative freelance or contract work, and just under 40% of respondents indicated over 75% of their income came from creative freelance or contract work.

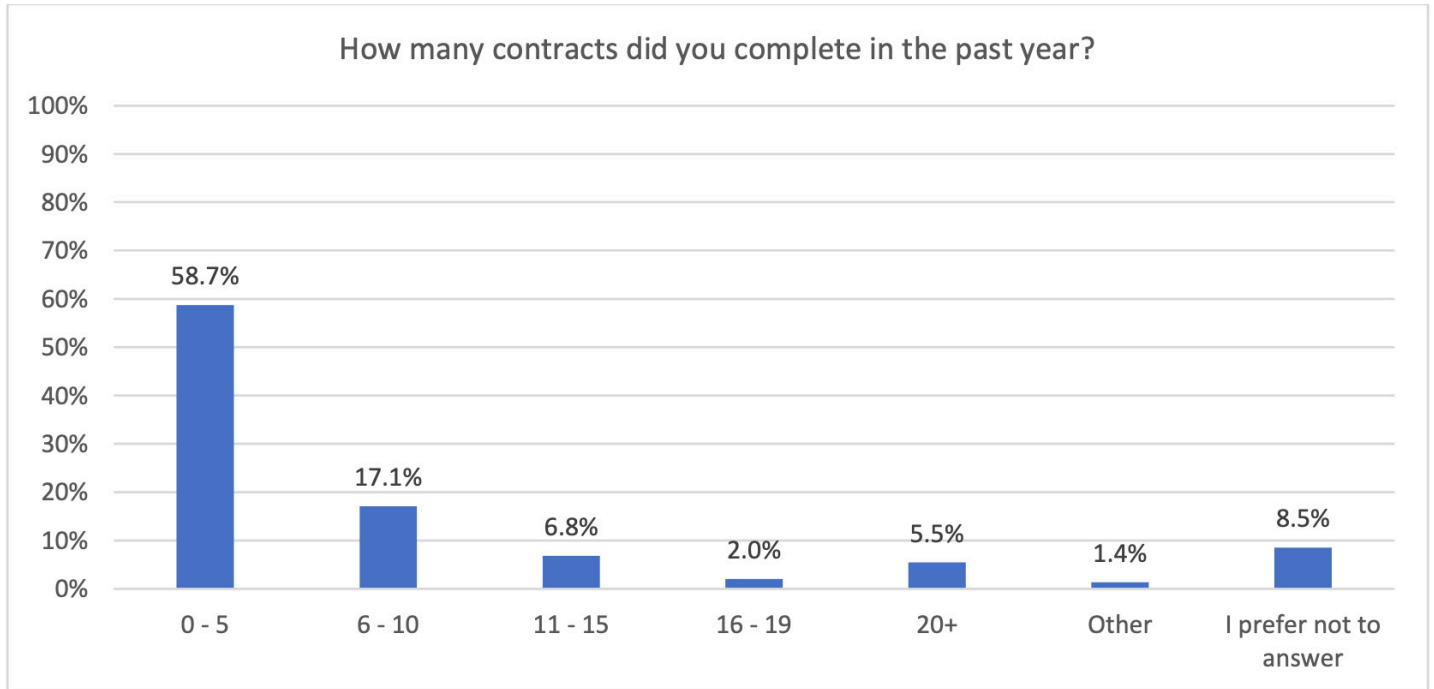
## INCOME CONT.



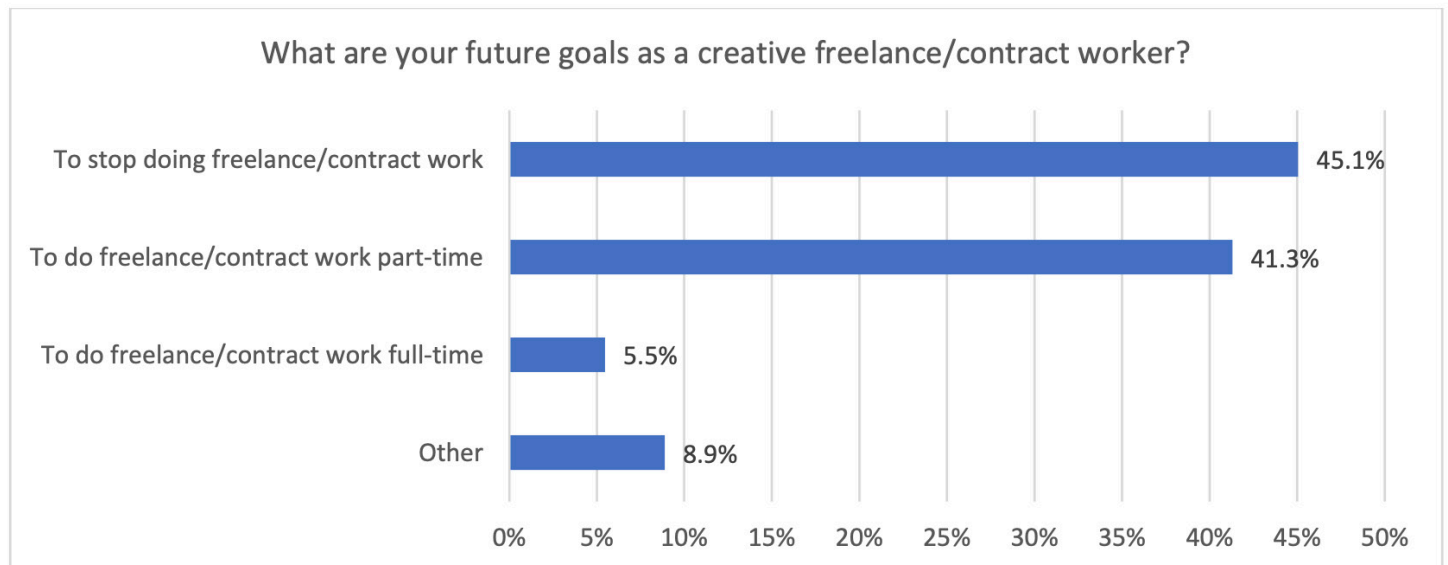
The majority of respondents had an income over \$10,000.

"I want to grow a sustainable business, a brand that will support my creative work. I need the income to be more steady. I am an entrepreneur."

## INCOME CONT.



Over half indicated 5 or less contracts.

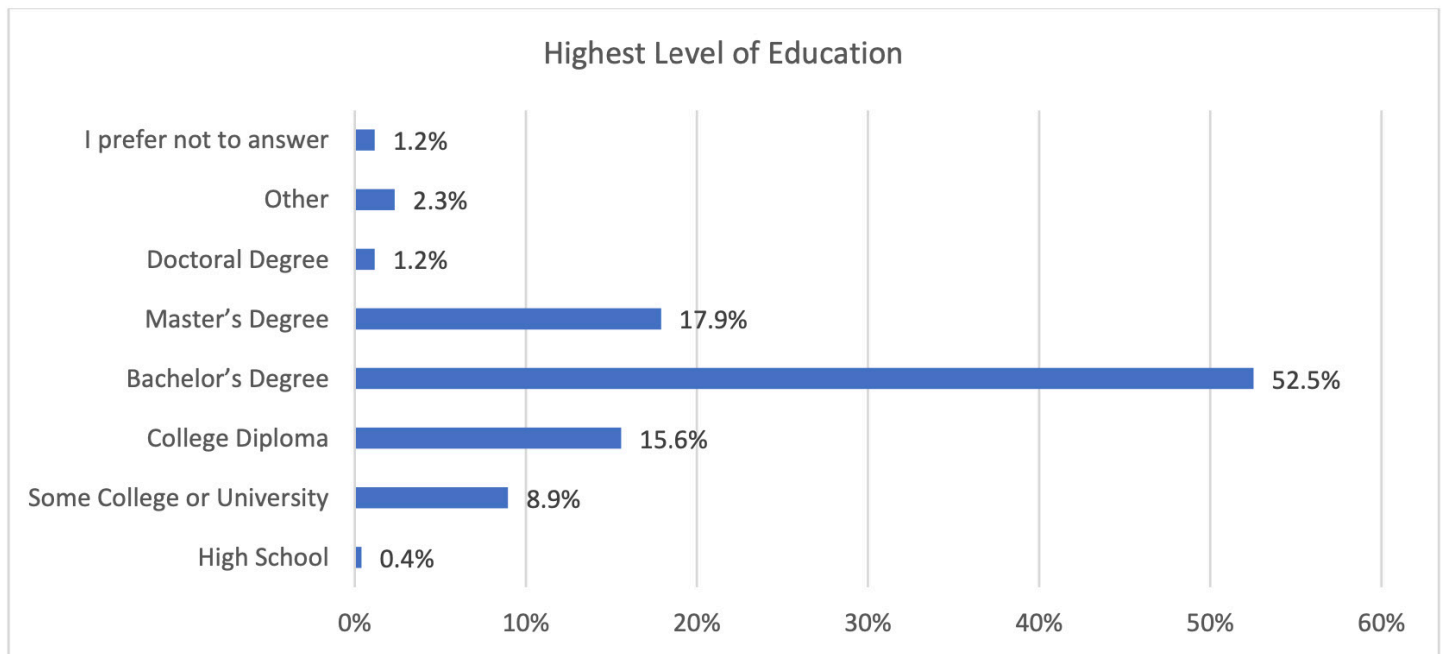


The majority of respondents indicated they planned to stop doing freelance or contract work.



## b) Education Experience

### HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION

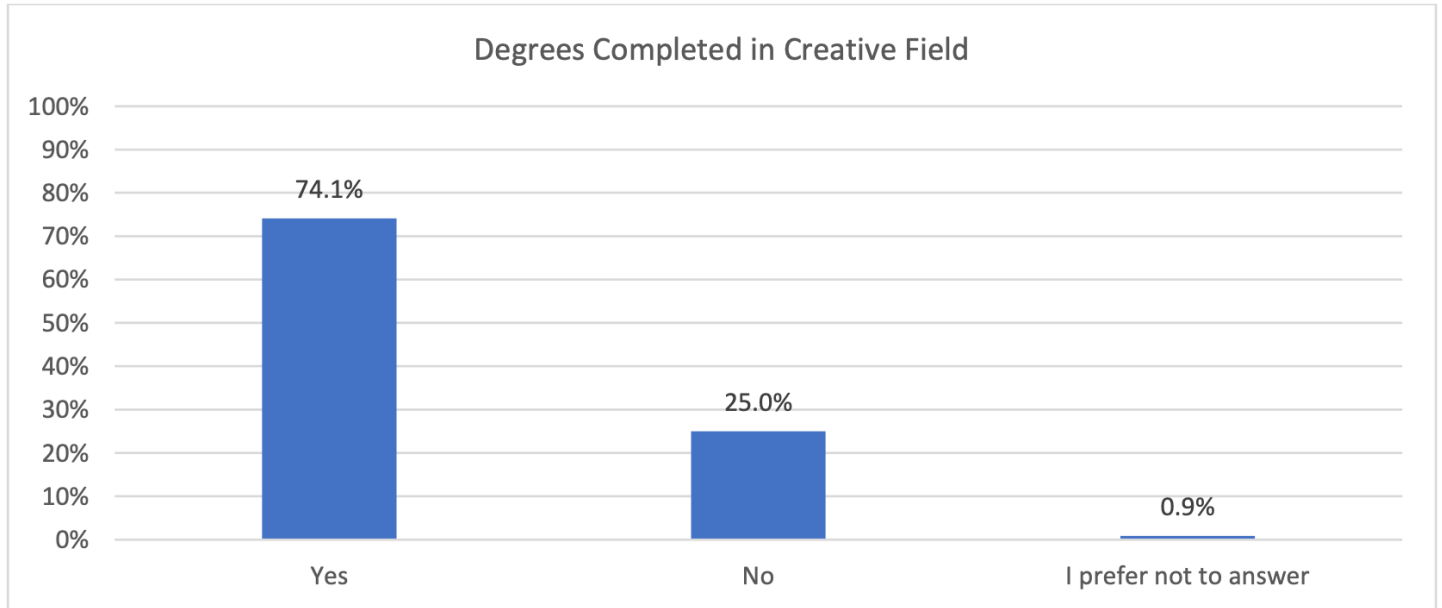


Just over half of respondents had a Bachelor's degree. The second most common degree was a Master's degree, closely followed by a college diploma.

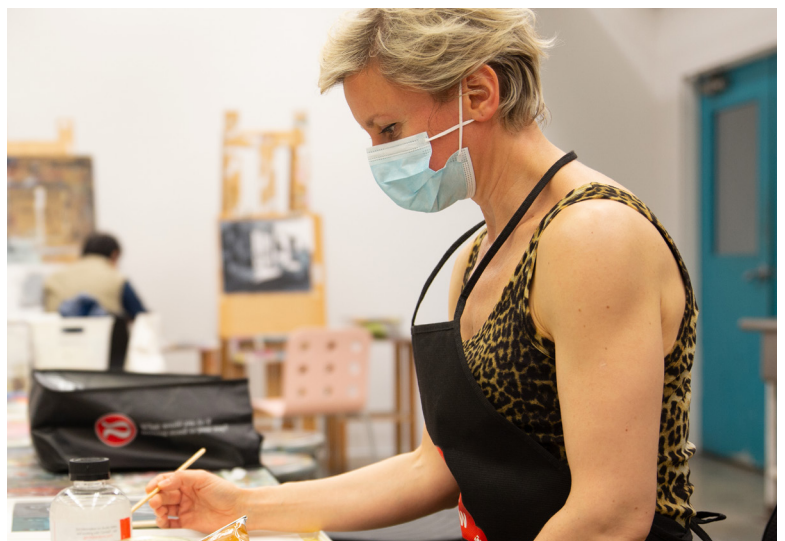
"I want to have a stable full-time creative job. I don't want to have to rely on the gig economy, but there are so few permanent creative jobs that it seems impossible."

# Survey

## HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION CONT.

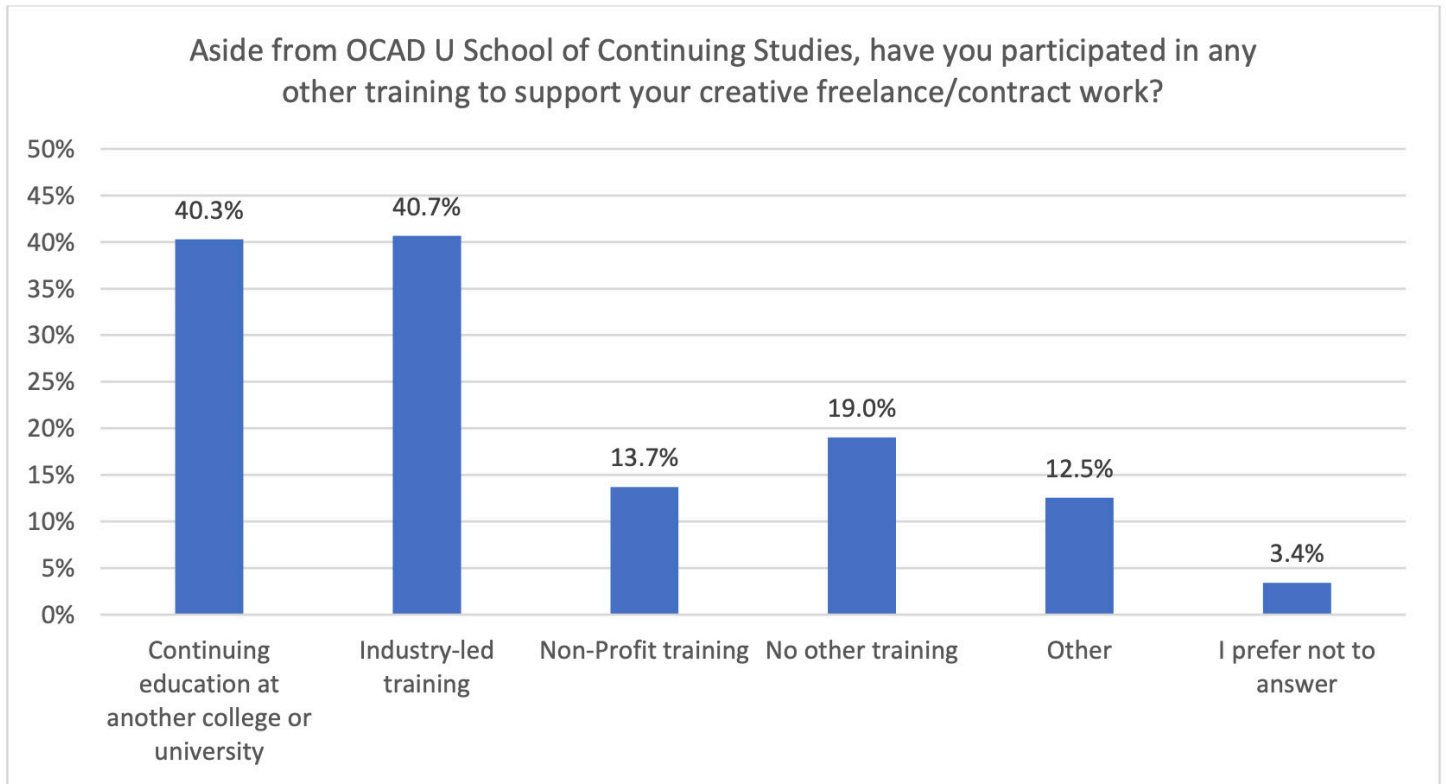


Almost three quarters of participants completed their degree(s) in a creative field.



Oil Painting Techniques

## OTHER EDUCATION

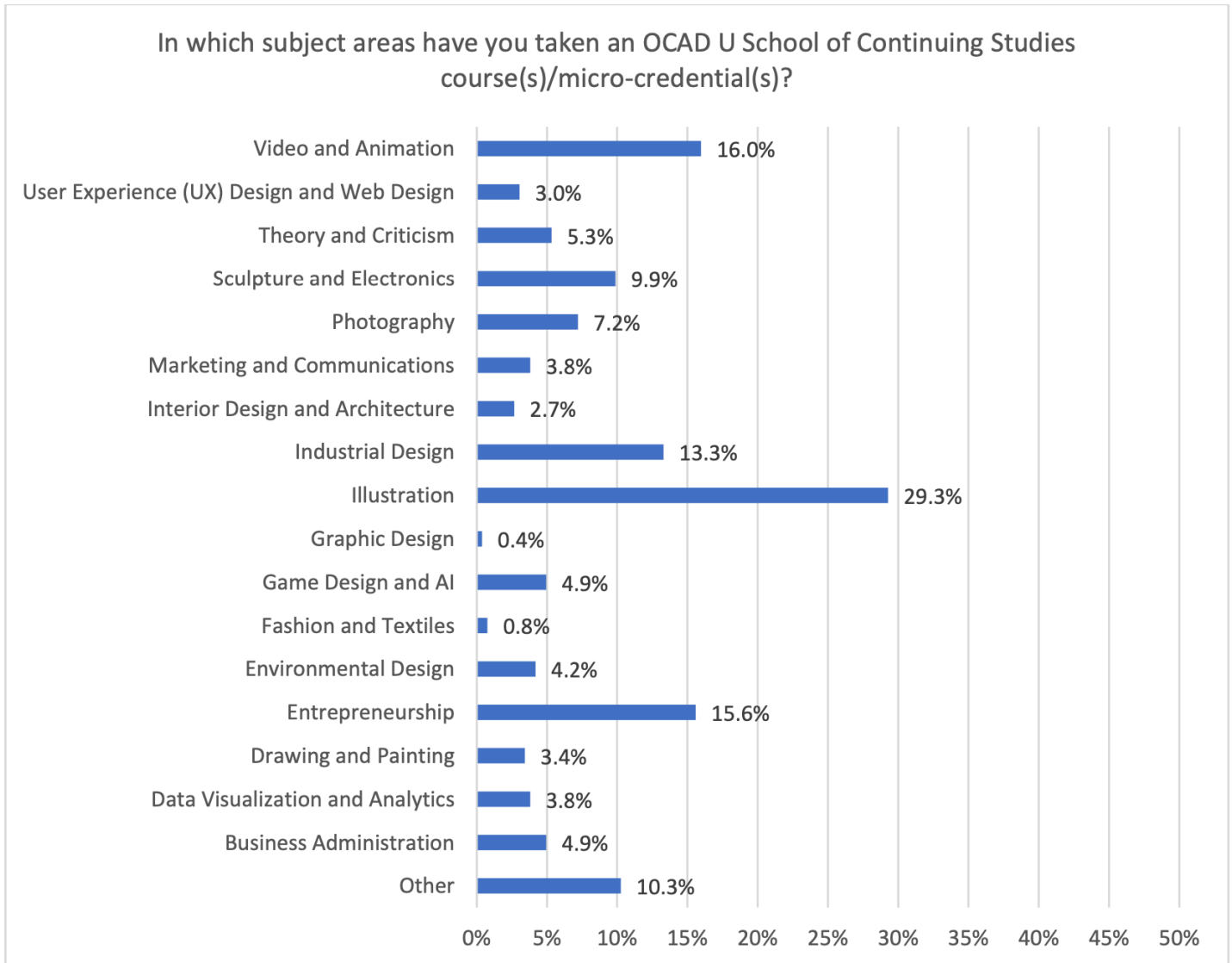


Participants who responded to "other" wrote:

- LinkedIn
- Coursera
- MasterClass
- Skillshare
- Domestika
- Online courses run by artists



## CONTINUING STUDIES: COURSES AND MICRO-CREDENTIALS

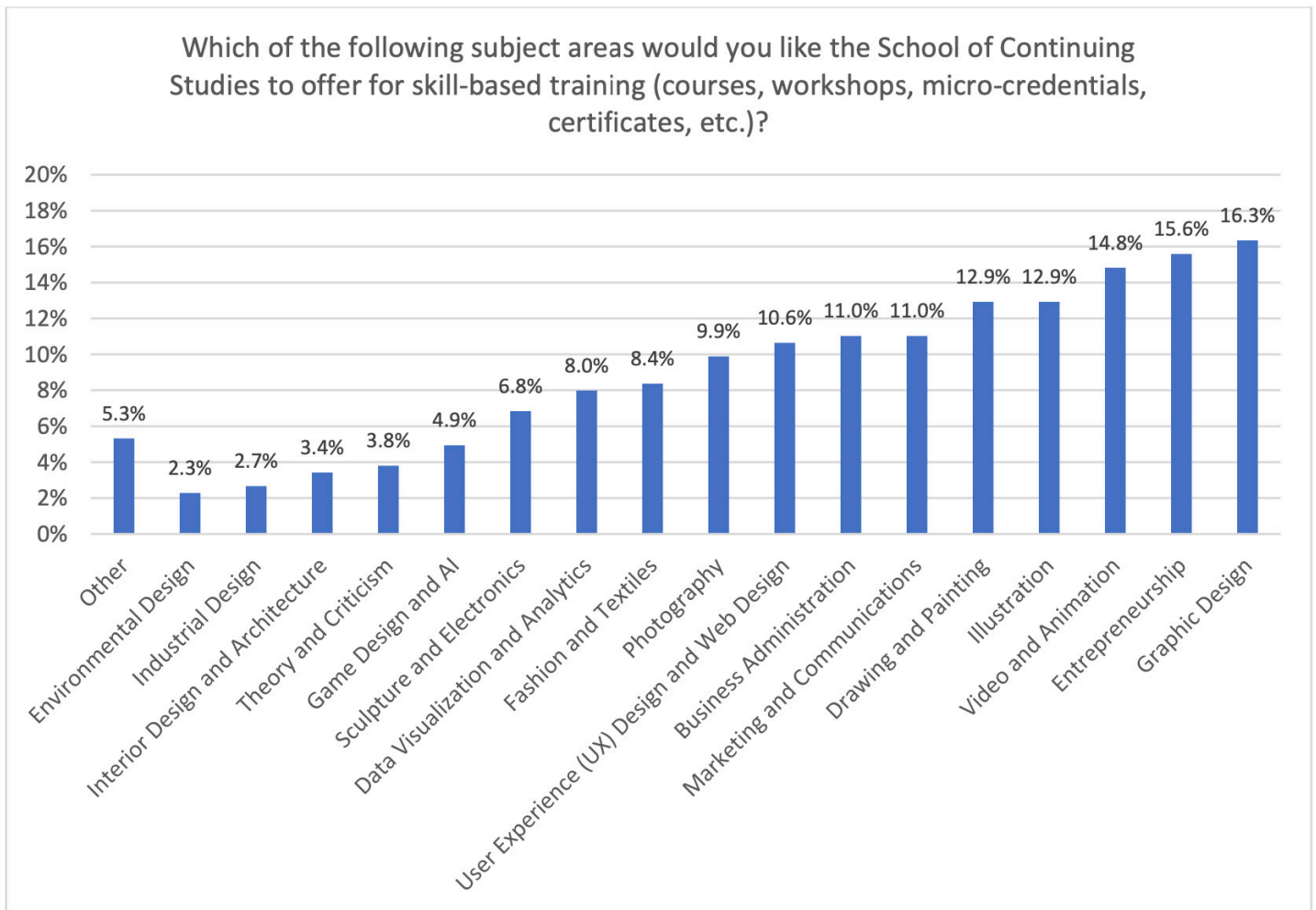


## CONTINUING STUDIES: CERTIFICATES

35.7% of respondents indicated they had completed a certificate(s) with OCAD U School of Continuing Studies.

## CONTINUING STUDIES: SUBJECTS

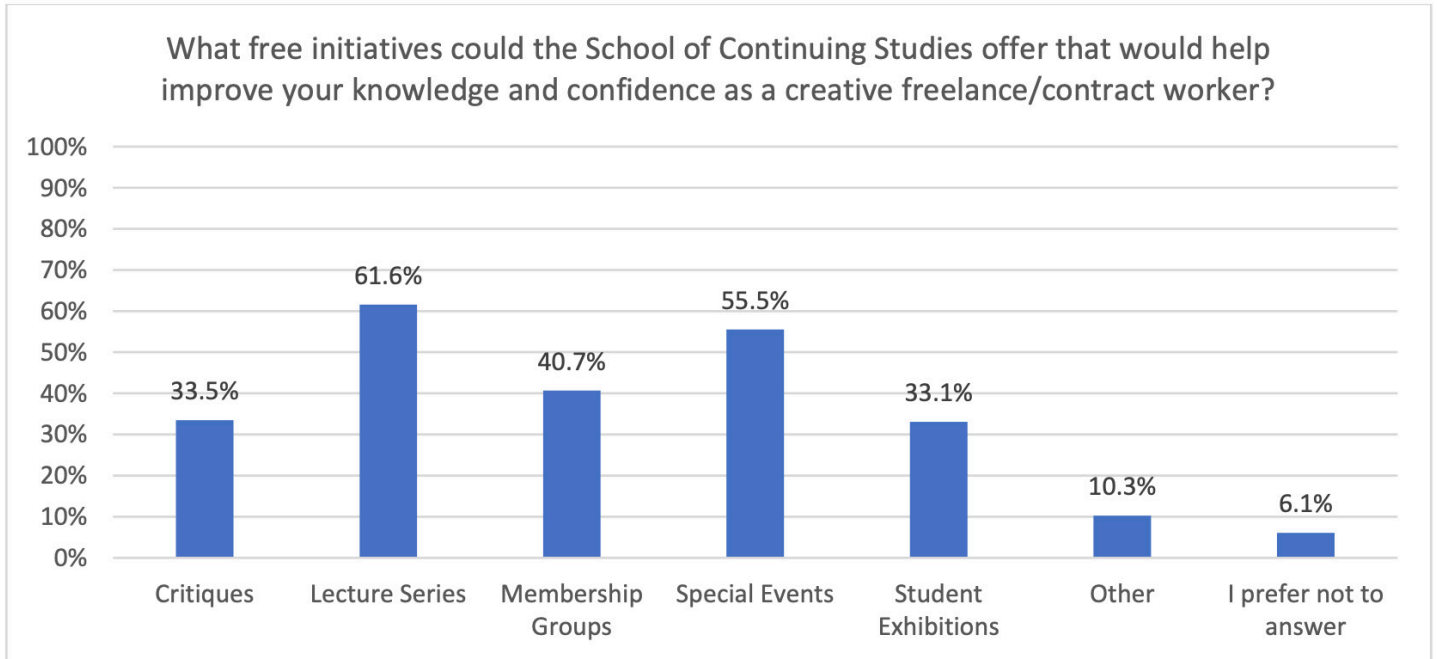
To get a better idea of how the School of Continuing Studies can better support student success as a creative freelance/contract worker, participants were asked to indicate what creative fields and subject matter they were interested learning about.



Participants who responded to "other" wrote:

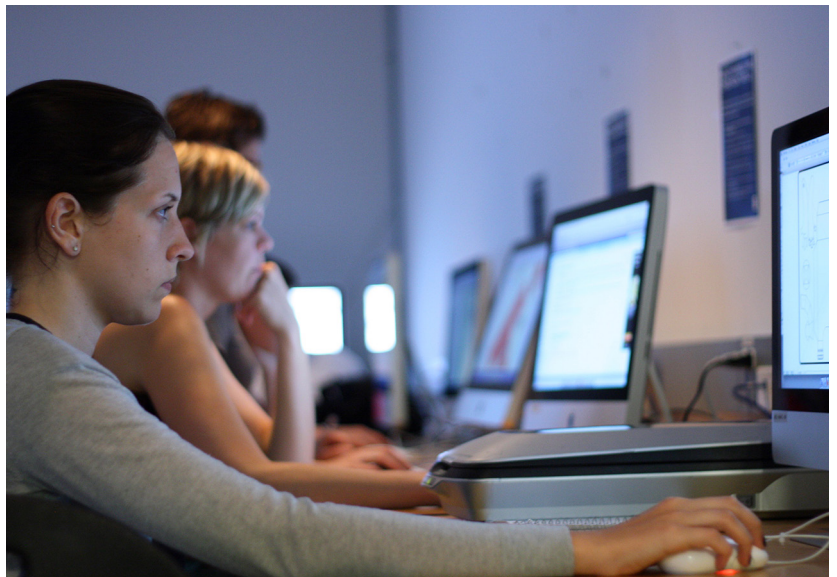
- **Generative AI; AI and Design**
- **Portfolio Building**
- **Business and Entrepreneurship; IP; How to Freelance; Negotiating Contracts; Taxes and Accounting; How to Start a Creative Business; Managing and Balancing a Creative Business**
- **Latest Art Trends**
- **Industry Experts for Animation; Advanced Animation**
- **Technical Illustrations**

## CONTINUING STUDIES: OTHER OPPORTUNITIES



Participants who responded to "other" wrote:

- **Networking Events**



Intro to Adobe Photoshop

## CONTINUING STUDIES: SUGGESTIONS

Participants were also given the opportunity to provide additional comments or suggestions about OCAD U's School of Continuing Studies.

Participants who responded wrote:

- More marketing and visibility
- Flexible online courses
- Critiques for creative work
- Access to studio and shop spaces at OCAD U
- Short workshop courses

"The CS courses I took at OCAD U changed my life. I have been able to apply what I learned to a wide variety of jobs. Having the technical skills needed to make my clients look good has been amazing. It also helped to have access to an Adobe CC license at a discounted price."



## CONTINUING STUDIES: STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Participants were asked how the School of Continuing Studies courses supported or helped their creative freelance/contract business.

"Better understanding of the industry as well as increased confidence."

"I use CS courses to keep pace with changes to the industry. As new platforms and technologies are developed these courses support my business by acting as an additional resource to supplement my existing knowledge base."

"Greatly improved my independent freelance and business skills, pricing for art, knowledge of colour theory, and confidence navigating social media."

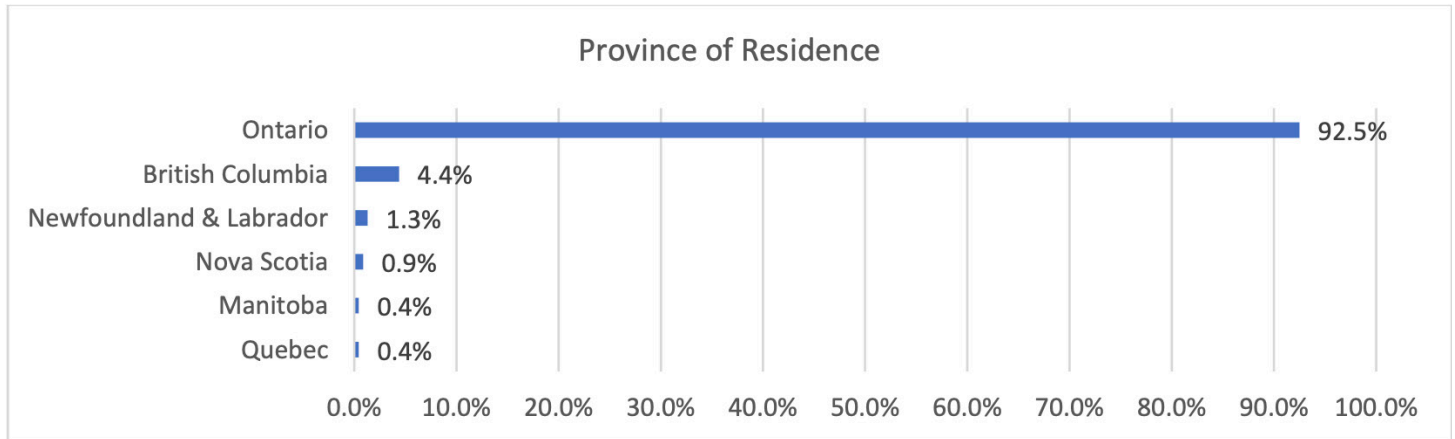
"I have learned a lot in Wearable Media, it has contributed to my creative practice, and made me want to pursue an MFA at OCAD U."

"I'm still taking my Design Thinking course and although it was not what I was looking for it has opened my eyes and my mind to new perspectives. I will most likely be taking further courses."

"A lot of my experience at OCAD U has been inspiring, being with like minded creators, collaborating and sharing ideas and passions."

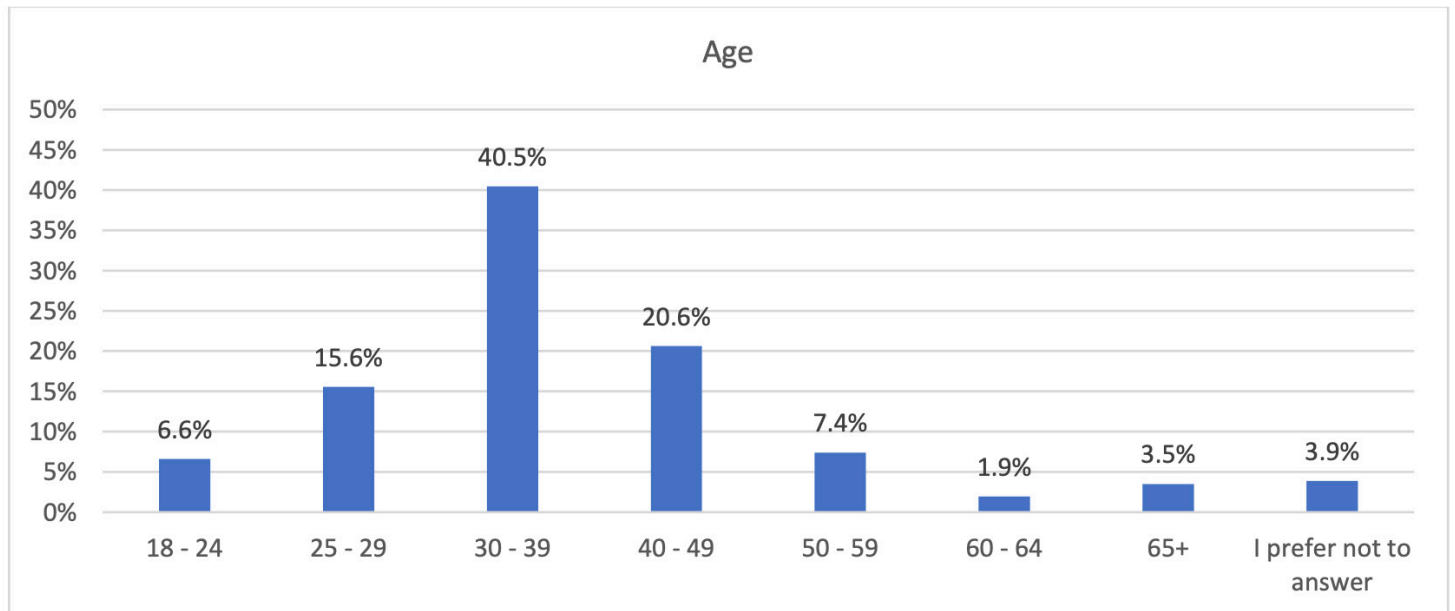
## c) Demographics

### RESIDENCE



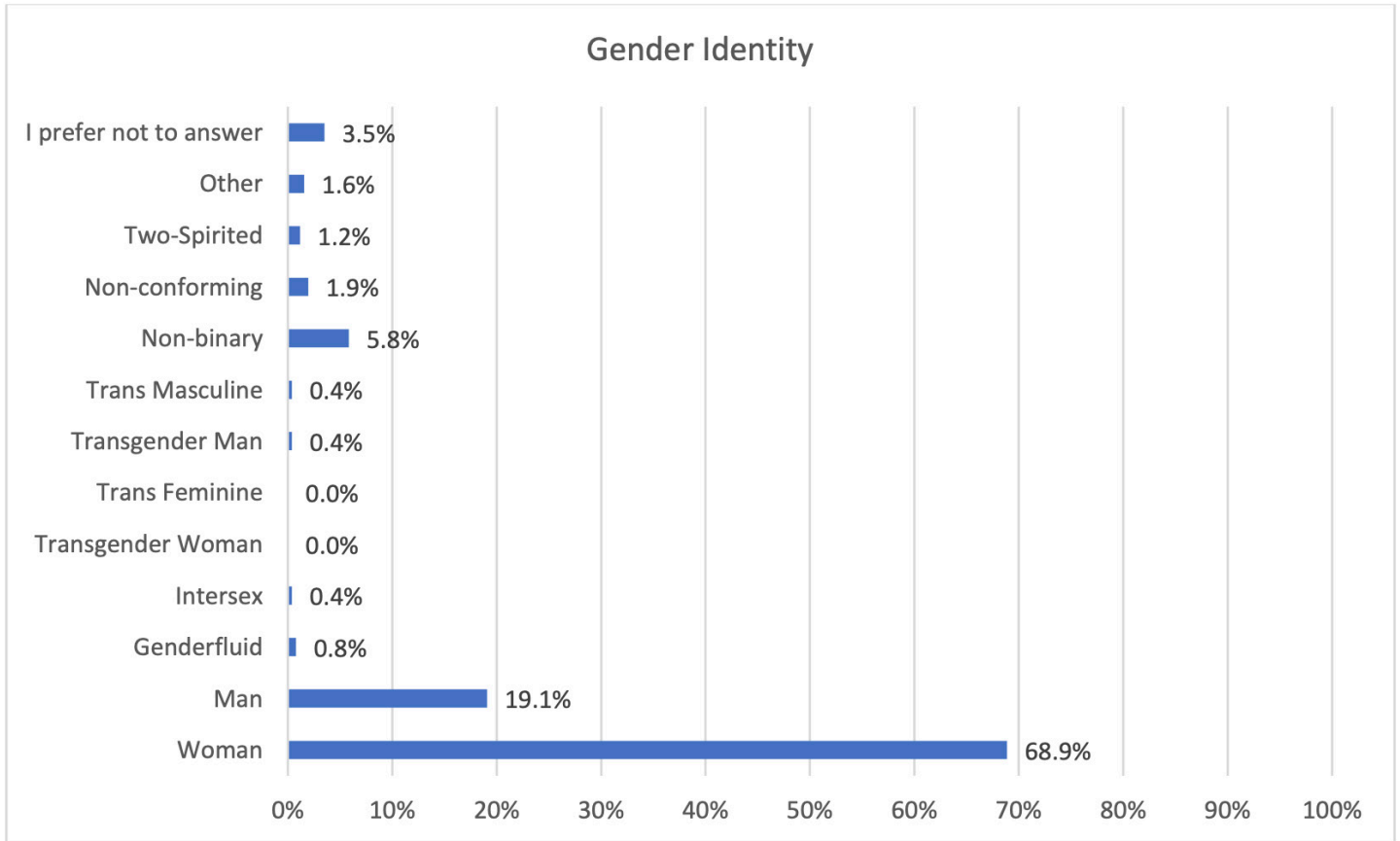
98.1% of respondents live in Canada. 92.% of respondents live in Ontario

### AGE



The majority of respondents are between the age of 30 and 39. The second largest age group was between 40 and 49.

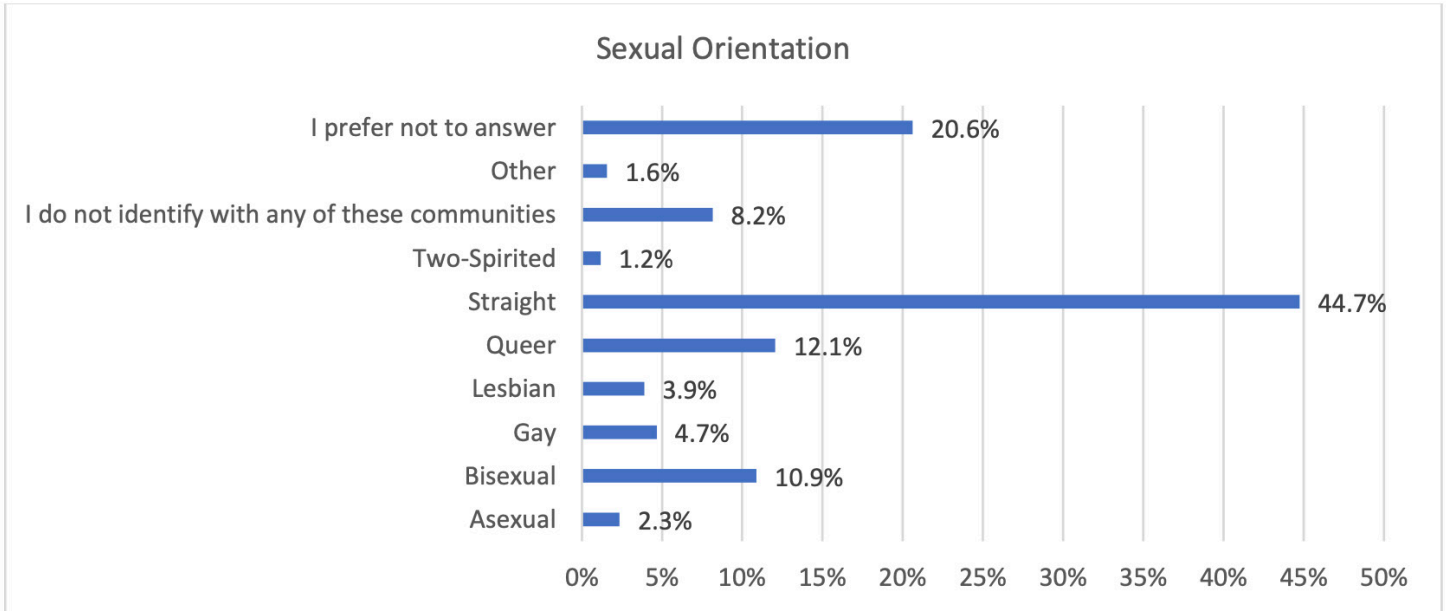
## GENDER IDENTITY



The majority of respondents identify as a woman.

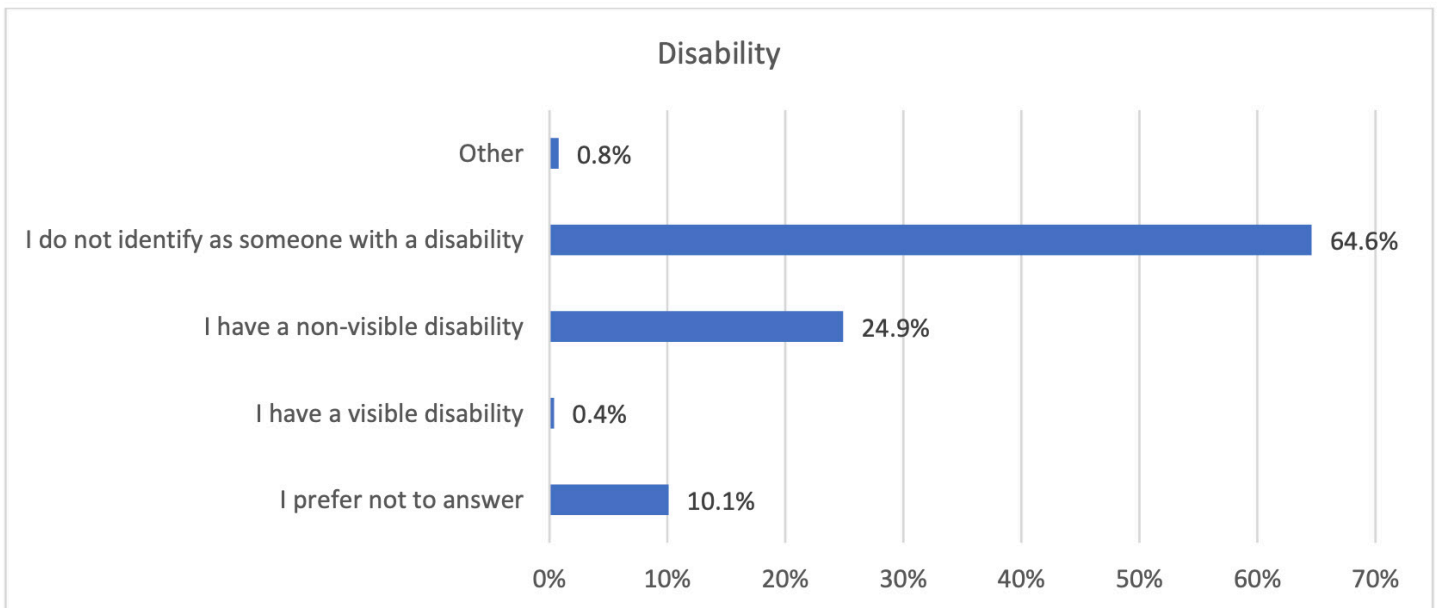
"CS courses added some formal credentials to my on-the-job experience and training, and looks good on my resume and LinkedIn. Beyond that, they offered some theoretical grounding to the experience I've been able to amass on my own, and helped identify growth areas I could work on."

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION



Just under half of respondents identify as straight.

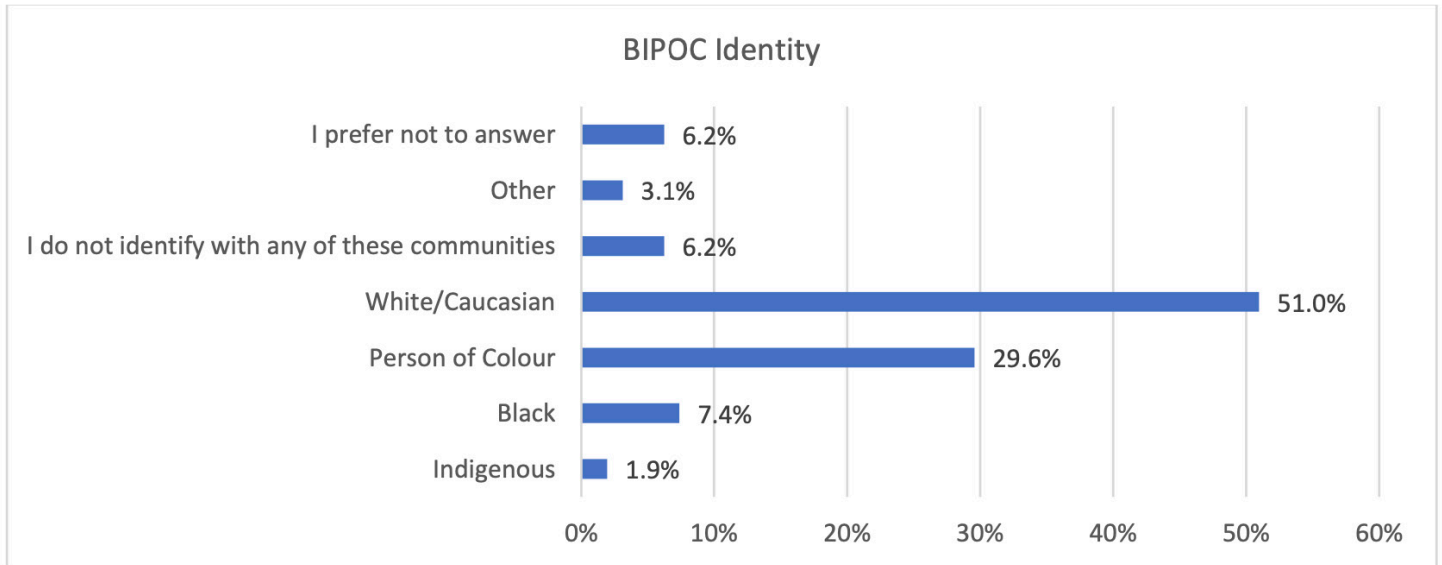
## DISABILITY



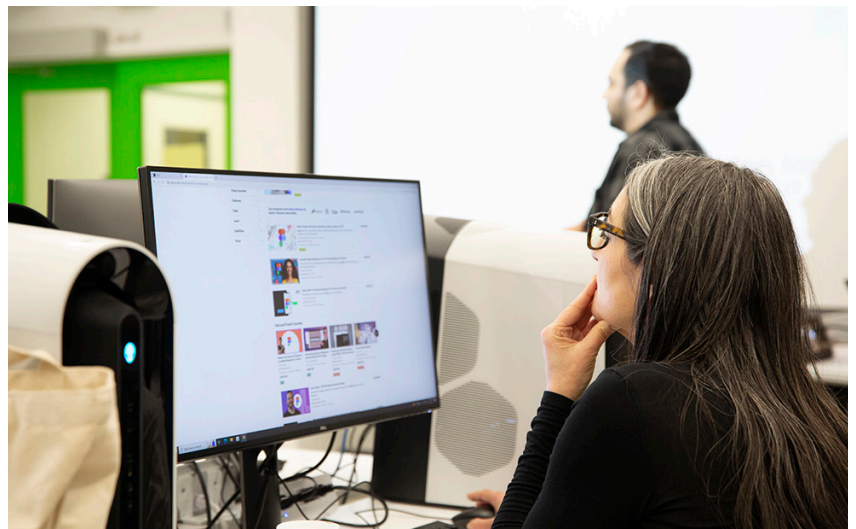
Just under 25% of respondents identified as having either a non-visible or a visible disability.

# Survey

## IBPOC IDENTITY



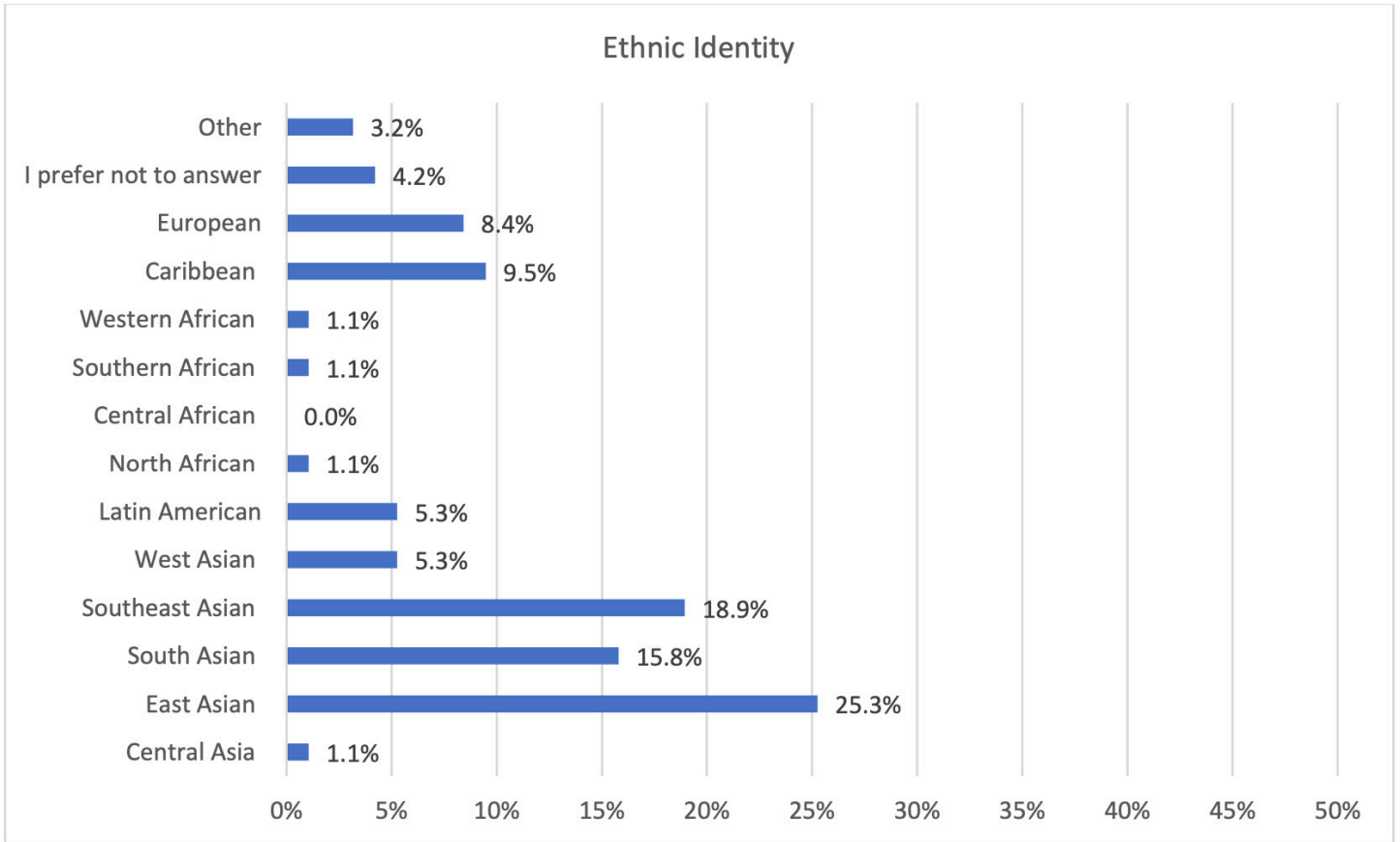
Just over half of respondents identify as white or Caucasian.



Intro to UX Design



## ETHNIC IDENTITY



Just under 30% of respondents identify as a Person of Colour, and of those respondents just over 25% identify as East Asian.

"I have been able to quickly learn new skills in areas I'm hoping to expand into and I can now offer more services to my clients. I've been able to use what I've learned in my courses at OCAD U in personal projects as well which can serve as marketing tools for me."

## 6. Focus Group

In the Winter of 2024, an online focus group was conducted among OCAD U School of Continuing Studies students to better understand their activity within the creative gig economy.

Questions were asked about their professional background and education, the type of contract/freelance work they do, why they are doing contract/freelance work, does their contract/freelance work provide enough income, what are their work/career goals, and what Continuing Studies can do to better provide support for their contract/freelance work?

The discussion is summarized anonymously with the letters A, B, C, and D representing each of the focus group participants. The same letter corresponds to the same individual.

### Focus Group

4 Continuing Studies students based in Toronto participated in an online focus group to discuss their creative gig work and Continuing Studies experience.

# Focus Group

## Creative Gig Work

Focus group participants discussed the type of creative gig work they do.

**A:** Graphic Design: brand identity and design; print and web design; editorial design.

**B:** Design: design thinking strategies and consultations; AI and how to streamline work processes.

**C:** Visual Arts and UI/UX: illustrations for books, articles, advertisements, and small businesses; live paintings at events; body painting for photo shoots; Etsy Shop for illustrations.

**D:** Documentary Film Making: analogue and experimental film making; teaching workshops on film making.

## Educational Background

Participants discussed their educational backgrounds.

**A:** OCAD University, BDes; SCS course, *Intro to Designing AI Applications*.

**B:** York University/Sheridan College, BDes; SCS *ArtWorksTO* participant, *Art and Design Professional Skills Certificate*.

**C:** BA in Illustration; Humber College, Certificate in UI/UX; Edna Manley College, Certificate in Jewellery Making (Jamaica); various business courses (ex. Guerrilla Business course); SCS course, *The Cost of Creative Work: Pricing Products and Services*.

**D:** University of Toronto, BA in Literature; Emily Carr University of Art and Design, BA in Film; mentorships through various film organizations; SCS course, *Woodworking Fundamentals*.

## Other Work

Focus group participants agreed that they can't afford/take the risk to do their creative gig work full-time in Toronto. They discussed other work that supports/helps support their income.

**A:** Marketing at a Healthcare Tech and IT company (full-time).

**B:** Digital Design at a Finance Company (full-time).

# Focus Group

**C:** Numerous freelance jobs related to visual arts and UX design.

**D:** Visual artist; community worker in film industry; grant and festival applications; relying on savings.

## Creative Gig Work Goals

Focus group participants discussed their career goals related to creative gig work.

**A:** They want the control to run their own business, exploring creativity and diversifying their work projects.

**B:** They are excited to be a designer on their own terms and want to open their own design studio or agency in the future. They come from an entrepreneurial background.

**C:** They are focused on UI/UX gig work in order to become more sustainable. They want to overcome financial strains and continue their entrepreneurial dreams step-by-step. They want to continue to be creative.

**D:** They want the freedom to experiment, explore, and be creative. They are continuing to figure out how to be compensated enough.

## Creative Gig Work Challenges

Focus group participants discussed the challenges of their creative gig work.

**A:** Their full-time job allows them to pay bills, invest, and save. It can be mundane and not creative enough, but the economy makes it very hard to transition from gig work into a full-time small business.

**B:** Their full-time job is repetitive with little creative control, but they are worried about scaling up their gig work and losing their fixed income and security.

**C:** They are just surviving right now and feel very pressured by financial constraints. There are many challenges and learning curves such as: the time it takes to complete projects/project management, being a student and an entrepreneur, managing client expectations, negotiating contracts and rates, getting paid, and balancing the creation of original work versus custom work.

**D:** They are looking for more sustainable sources of income

# Focus Group

because of health and financial concerns. The film industry, especially documentary film, burns artists out. What they are doing is also very niche. They have expensive medical bills and find it very difficult right now.

## Continuing Studies Experiences

- Focus group participants felt the SCS courses they took were useful and gave them a competitive edge in their market.
- They would like to see more business-related courses that focus on how to make money with their creative gig work. Participants were interested in more information on how to apply for grants, loans, and other types of funding.
- They wanted to improve how they negotiate with clients, and how to create contracts and set rates.
- Participants would also like more UI/UX and AI courses.
- They suggested that SCS create a job board.



Intro to UX Design



## 7. Summary

### Evaluating the Creative Gig Economy

Many research participants indicated that they are struggling with their creative gig work. Some want to pursue it, but can't make it work financially, others want more stability and less financial stress, but creative full-time positions aren't available.

The majority of survey participants would like to stop doing creative gig work. Focus group participants would like to scale up their creative gig work into something full-time but need to make more money and have more security.

The majority of research participants had positive experiences with SCS courses, but want more networking opportunities and business related courses that focus on how to make money or apply for funding.

This research project is the start of looking at the creative gig economy. There is more detailed information to be learned about contract versus full-time work, opportunities for low-income workers, and representation in equity seeking groups.

# Summary



Illustration by Charissa Olano (SCS student, ArtWorksTO)

# Summary

## Creative Gig Work

*Survey Summary (293 participants)*

- Just under 40% of respondents do Graphic Design as their creative gig work.
- Just over 40% of respondents indicated less than 25% of their income came from creative freelance or contract work.
- Just under 40% of respondents indicated over 75% of their income came from creative freelance or contract work.
- The majority of respondents had an income over \$10,000 annually from creative gig work.
- Over half of respondents indicated doing 5 or less contracts annually.
- The majority of respondents indicated they planned to stop doing freelance or contract work.
- Just over half of respondents had a Bachelor's degree. The second most common degree was a Master's degree, closely followed by a college diploma.
- Almost three quarters of participants completed their degree(s) in a creative field.



3D Animation Studio I: Intro to Blender

# Summary

## Demographics

*Survey Summary (293 participants)*

- 98.1% of respondents live in Canada.  
92.% of respondents live in Ontario.
- The majority of respondents are between the age of 30 and 39. The second largest age group was between 40 and 49.
- The majority of respondents identify as a woman.
- Just under 25% of respondents identified as having either a non-visible or a visible disability.
- Just under 30% of respondents identify as a Person of Colour, and of those just over 25% identify as East Asian.
- Just over 7% of respondents identify as Black.
- Just under 2% of respondents identify as Indigenous.
- Just over 35% of respondents identify as either Queer, Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Asexual, or Two-Spirited.



Sewing Skills Studio

## 8. Contributions

### **Research Lead:**

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### **With contributions from:**

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*Senior Institutional Analyst, OCAD U*

**Anna Suzuki**

*Program Coordinator, School of Continuing Studies, OCAD U*

**Miriam Kramer**

*Executive Director, Government and Community Relations and Public Policy, OCAD U*

**Dr. Alia Weston**

*Associate Professor of Creative and Business Enterprise, OCAD U*

**Alexandra Hong**

*Project Officer, Centre for Emerging Artists and Designers, OCAD U*

**Laura Metcalfe**

*AI/Supervisor, Youth Development Unit, Social Development, Finance and Administration,  
City of Toronto*

**Evan Tapper**

*Dean, Extended Studies, California Institute of the Arts*

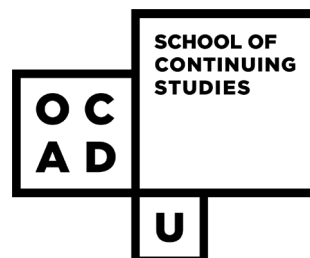
**Research Ethics Board and Research and Innovation, OCAD U  
REB # 2023-54**

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