

# The graduates

Professor François Colbert leads the Master of Management in International Arts Management at HEC in Montréal, delivered in conjunction with Southern Methodist University Chair in Arts Management and Entrepreneurship in Dallas, and SDA Bocconi School of Management in Milan. Here he tells *IAM* how postgraduate study can improve the prospects of employees and the companies they work for.

Interview by **Maria Roberts**



Professor François Colbert

**F**or many young people in the arts being employed in the sector is not about securing a good salary, but having pride in what they do and being given plenty of opportunities to grow. Meanwhile for the small and medium-sized arts companies that employ this talent, there is always the question of “who will replace you?” and “how will you find the right person?”

Senior figures can safeguard themselves by recognising young talent and pushing it forward. You should not be afraid to train your employees, give them new tasks and furnish them with the tools to tackle new encounters. Young professionals in the arts are bright and they want to be challenged.

If the question of replacing top-level staff seems too far away to be immediately relevant, look at what can be improved in the medium term. Even if your staff do not replace you, they may well move to replace someone else in another company.

If you are a young professional in the arts, the surest way to succeed is to be the best in your field. Don't be afraid to continue learning as it will equip you with the skills necessary to move up the career ladder. If you can't move up the career ladder, because there are not enough opportunities, then look around and see if there is someone else you can work for or somewhere else you can move to.

Career progression is also about finding your talent: some people have the talent to be a marketing director, while others are good financial managers. Find out what you are good at and invest your time in that.

One way you can develop is through further study. Research in arts marketing is relatively new, compared to other fields like economics and mathematics. In our case, The Master of Management in International Arts Management (mmiam) at HEC in Montréal is a

year-long intensive programme at the level of MBA (though it doesn't come with the title of MBA), that combines the rigour of a business Master's in the context of working in the arts.

Our remit for the mmiam programme is to prepare the next generation of leaders, so we take on promising candidates and hope they pick up a general manager job or a senior job when they leave. Though the mmiam is still in its early years (we are on our fifth cohort), there is evidence that it works because our graduates are progressing in their careers.

All our students come from the arts: be that theatre, music, or film.



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“Although I’m approaching 70, I don’t see myself retiring as I find so much enjoyment in the work that I do”

They all share the common knowledge of what it means to work in the arts, and have the qualities to be a manager, but they don’t yet have the tools. Quite often they find themselves in management positions with no formal training to meet the challenges that come their way.

The average age of our students is between 27 and 28, with most of the cohort aged between 24 and 30, a few older than 30, and a few younger than 24. For each cohort, we always have at least one student that has just graduated from a BA programme without the requisite work experience. Generally, our students are aged 25-30, with three to five years’ professional experience.

In our first cohort, we had a student with volunteer experience that was hired as assistant to the general manager of the Alley Theatre in Houston to help open the theatre to the international market. This summer, she was offered the general manager position at another theatre in Houston and now oversees 15 staff.

Another success story is that of a pianist from Bogotá, who came to us with no managerial experience. After graduating she was first hired by a major theatre in the city for their new fundraising and sponsorship department and then went on to become marketing director at Teatro Colón. Similarly, a candidate came to us from the administration department at Cirque du Soleil and returned to the company after her studies, a year later, to take up a senior role.

You cannot teach somebody how to manage, but you can give them the tools and concepts that provide them with a practical way of solving problems. I’m borrowing from the philosophy of Henry Mintzberg here,

but it really is the case that experience, combined with the tools you need to do the job, make a difference to your success in the workplace.

Nowadays, the business of the arts is more international than ever before because everyone wants to do tours and partner with other companies. mmiam provides these tools, so if a company hires one of our alumni, they do so with the confidence that we’ve equipped them with the knowledge required to effectively tackle problems.

We’ve designed the course to emulate the environment of an international arts company. Our students have the experience of relocating to a new campus every four months: they spend fall in Dallas, winter in Montréal, take a 12-day trip to Bogotá at the end of April, and finish at the end of July in Milan.

Though there are obvious benefits for students in their 20s and 30s, students aged 40 and above can also benefit from enhanced study opportunities. We had a 40-year-old student who was an experienced artistic director of a theatre, but wanted to add to his skillset. Mature students bring a lot to the course as they can immediately identify how a concept can be used in a real-life situation. Very experienced students provide context for younger students and initiate some interesting discussions.

For those looking to carry their academic research further, we offer PhDs. Our Doctoral candidates are currently researching in the fields of arts management and marketing. We have a female student from China exploring the museum sector and the museum experience from the perspective of a Chinese consumer, examining, for example, the importance of a museum shop. Students taking their research through to PhD level will dig into areas like building a brand for a festival, asking questions like ‘who defines the brand of a festival, the consumers or the organisers?’

For the mmiam programme we try to attract the most brilliant students we can by offering bursaries. We are looking out for those with a high Bachelor’s degree, letters of recommendation and those that speak more than one language. It’s a plus if candidates have travelled and worked outside of their country of origin. It’s rare we will give a full bursary; more often we give 20-75% of the USD40,000 (€33,488) fees.

Why invest in yourself? A good career in the arts can last a lifetime. Although I’m approaching 70, I don’t see myself retiring as I find so much enjoyment in the work that I do. The arts sector is a great environment in which to work because first and foremost it’s about the artists and it’s about creativity.

When you work in the arts you must love the artists and you must love what you do because the pay-off is being part of a venture that will transform people and will make them happy. My job at HEC, for example, is very fulfilling: our projects are backed up by the university and our directors, so things happen.

We, as trainers of arts managers, feel we have a part to play in the success of those companies. Even today I remain very involved in the arts outside of the university campus: currently a UNESCO chair, over the years I’ve sat on some 30 company boards in the fields of theatre, dance, music and television. My job is very rewarding and I still have fun doing what I do.

[master-in-international-arts-management.com](http://master-in-international-arts-management.com)

*The Master of Management in International Arts Management at HEC in Montréal has three general admission deadlines each year: 15 November, 15 January and 15 April, with an additional deadline of 1 June for US citizens only (since they don’t need to apply for the first study visa). The programme’s admission requirements are available to view online.*