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Determining Factors for College Music Major Success in Small Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities: Perspectives from Students and Faculty

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by

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Determining Factors for College Music Major Success in Small Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities: Perspectives from Students and Faculty

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Abstract

Deciding to major in music can be daunting for any college student. Students often go through a lengthy audition process, which sometimes includes multiple schools, to receive scholarship offers to major in music. When students arrive on campus, they may experience many challenges that impact their future success in the music major program. These challenges far too often overwhelmed the students and caused them to lose their scholarships, discontinue their studies in music, or switch to another major. There have been studies involving student success within the first year of college. Yet very few studies still measure the success of college music majors through the successful completion of the degree program. This qualitative study examined the challenges students faced from the perspectives of students completing the degree program at a small liberal arts university and faculty at small liberal arts universities. Through these perspectives, this study developed a list of strategies aimed at helping college music majors in a small liberal arts college/university have a higher rate of success and completion of the degree program.

Keywords: Small liberal arts college, music major, music theory, aural skills, first-year college success, music education

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my grandfather, the original Spencer Nance. I am not only named after a person whom I never was able to meet, but I also have been called by his nickname my entire life. People called him “Doc” even though he did not have a doctorate degree, the name kind of stuck with me. Now with the completion of this paper and this program, I will finally be able to live out the name “Doc” as a nickname and a personal achievement.

This paper is also dedicated to my wife, Kelsey Nance, and the many children we have had the pleasure of fostering over these last 3 ½ years. I would not have been able to complete this educational journey without their support.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this paper to my parents whom have supported me on my educational journey from undergraduate at Furman University, master’s at the University of Alabama, to this final chapter here at Liberty University. I appreciate all the help and support along the way.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Most college students attending small liberal arts colleges and universities (SLACU), experience a time of exploring new ideas while also trying to establish themselves in the college community. One thing that separates the college experience at small schools from the experience at larger schools is the sense of community tends to be much stronger at smaller schools.

According to Jeremy Hyman and Lynn Jacobs, there are ten reasons students elect to go to small colleges instead of larger schools. The big difference between what is known as a “research university” and a small college is “a school that has an enrollment of fewer than 5,000 students, doesn’t have a graduate school, and has a student-to-faculty ratio of under 10:1-some are even as low as 5:1.”¹ Hyman and Jacobs highlight the benefit of these smaller class sizes by saying, “the small class environment will give you a much greater opportunity to ask questions, participate in the discussion, and have a professor who knows who you are.”² For many small colleges and universities, this is a primary selling point. Hyman and Jacobs go on to highlight some other reasons students should select smaller colleges including “all the teaching is done by professors, your professors will be more committed to teaching, and you get the feeling that you count.”³ These are just a few examples of reasons why students will choose a smaller college over a large university. One student who attended a small liberal arts college, Katie Paulson, stated that “liberal arts colleges offer a personal academic experience. In my three and a half years here, I

¹ Jeremy Hyman and Lynn Jacobs, “10 Reasons to Go to a Small College,” *U.S. News & World Report*, July 28, 2010. <https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/professors-guide/2010/07/28/10-reasons-to-go-to-a-small-college>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

have never taken a course enrolled with more than 35 students, and most of my courses have fewer students. In these small classes, we fully engage with the subjects we study.”⁴

Coursera defines a small liberal arts college (SLAC) as having less than 5,000 students on campus.⁵ Scott Wilson says, “In the most general sense, liberal arts colleges are institutions that don’t have a distinct vocational or professional track focus, but instead offer a more interdisciplinary education that covers many fields.”⁶ In general, a liberal arts education emphasizes the humanities, encourages exploration of as many interests as possible, provides personal connections with professors, and offers smaller class sizes so that students can thrive in the college environment.⁷ For music students in this environment, it can become overwhelming to try to explore different academic interests while maintaining a firm foundation in the music curriculum.

The author selected three SLACUs in which to conduct research. All four of the colleges selected are in the same general geographical area. It is important to begin by discussing the music curriculum at each of the four small liberal arts institutions. The schools examined were Limestone University, North Greenville University, and Furman University. While these SLACUs differ in terms of their music offerings, the author found differences in the curriculum offerings at some of the liberal arts schools as well. For example, Limestone University offers a Bachelor of Arts in Music, a Bachelor of Arts in Music Education, and a minor in music. Furman University has six music degree programs. They offer Bachelor of Music degrees in Music

⁴ Eleni Smitham, “What is it Like to Study at a Liberal Arts College?,” *Times Higher Education* (October 19, 2017): 1.

⁵ Coursera, “What is a Liberal Arts College?” Coursera, Assessed, September 24, 2023.

⁶ Scott Wilson, “What is a Liberal Arts College,” Liberal Arts EDU, Assessed June 5, 2023.

⁷ Ibid.

Performance, Music Theory, Music Composition, Music Education, and Church Music along with a Bachelor of Arts in Music. North Greenville University offers a Bachelor of Music in Music Education, Music Performance, Worship Studies, and a Bachelor of Arts in Music. Newberry College offers Bachelor of Arts in Music, Bachelor of Arts in Music with Music Theory emphasis, and Bachelor of Arts in Music Education.

It is helpful to examine commonalities shared by students who gravitate toward SLAC as opposed to a large state university. SLACs often struggle to attract the best students. According to Lee Gardner and Audrey Williams June, “Small comes with inherent challenges. Smaller institutions can’t take advantage of the economies of scale that bigger ones can, and they are overly dependent on each student’s tuition dollars.”⁸ Because of this, the music faculty at small liberal arts schools oftentimes have had a more difficult time attracting music students to attend their university. This struggle has often caused music faculty at liberal arts colleges to be less selective than their peers at larger schools. Richard Clothier said this:

While it may be true that the larger institutions of higher learning could not accept into their organization all the instrumentalists on their campuses, the situation in the smaller colleges is considerably different. In the latter schools, bands are rarely as highly selective as those in the universities, and often their directors spare no effort to entice into the organization almost anyone who will participate.”⁹

Due to the type of student that smaller schools inevitably recruit, the perceived talent level of these ensembles is considerably lower than that of the larger state universities.¹⁰

⁸ Lee Gardner and Audrey Williams June, “The Perilous Predicament of the Very Small College,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 17, 2022. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-perilous-predicament-of-the-very-small-college>

⁹ Richard Iven Clothier, “Factors Influencing Freshmen with High School Band Experience to Elect or Not to Elect Band Membership at Five Liberal Arts Colleges in Iowa,” University of Northern Colorado, (1967).

¹⁰ Ibid.

While this may be true based simply on the fact that the recruiting pool may be larger, it can also be a sort of call to arms for the smaller schools to come up with more creative and innovative ways to attract the most talented students. Some of these strategies include giving student's special scholarships to make an all-state band or region band.¹¹ Another way small universities attract students is by hosting honor band clinics and bringing in nationally renowned conductors as guests from which the high school students can learn. These experiences can often leave a lasting impression on high school musicians when it is time to ultimately recruit them to attend the small school.¹² It is the hope of many small liberal arts colleges that, by having a positive experience at these events on campus, the student will be attracted to the small college feel instead of the large state schools for their college education.

Yet another hindrance to small college recruitment is "College band directors find that players have been so saturated with band work in high school, and before, that they are fed up with the whole business. Many fine players do not even apply for band membership."¹³ Joshua Buckrucker recently claimed that "Due to this lack of commitment, small college programs struggle to recruit and retain quality students within their ensembles."¹⁴ The issue many smaller institutions face when trying to recruit music

¹¹ Newberry College School of Music, "Department of Music," Accessed July 1, 2023. <https://www.newberry.edu/academics/areas-of-study/music/music-education>

¹² Limestone University, "Limestone University Department of Music Clinics and Special Events," Accessed July 1, 2023. <https://www.limestone.edu/music/clinics-events/high-school-honor-band>

¹³ Clothier, 4.

¹⁴ Joshua Buckrucker, "Strategies for Creating and Building College Band Programs Within Institutions under a 5,000 Student Population," DME Dissertation, (Liberty University, 2023): 2-3.

students to enroll in their school is sometimes out of their control and has to do more with the facilities the college has to offer, but there are certainly recruitment strategies that smaller liberal arts institutions can employ to become more successful at recruiting a larger amount of students to attend. Scott Edgar wrote “Many variables influence which institution students select for their tertiary education. These involve academic and non-academic elements and could include geographic location, academic strengths/weaknesses, costs/financial aid, extra-and co-curricular activities, collegiate/program reputation, and size of the institution.”¹⁵ With such a vast array of reasons students attend a specific university, small liberal arts institutions feel the need to get creative in how they attract students. Edgar goes on to define some of the most effective strategies as, “campus open house events, campus visit days for high school students, encouraging prospective students to apply on the admissions website, encouraging prospective students to schedule campus visits on the admissions website, and using currently enrolled students in recruitment/marketing.”¹⁶ All of these things should be considered the bare minimum for recruiting prospective music students to SLACs.

A core focus of this research is acquiring perspectives from music faculty members at three SLACs. Ken Bain writes, “The best educators thought of teaching as anything they might do to help and encourage students to learn. Teaching is engaging students, engineering an

¹⁵ Scott Edgar N, “Attracting the next Generation of Music Educators,” *Ohio Music Education Association* Vol 43, (2018): 19.

¹⁶ Ibid, 21.

environment in which they learn.”¹⁷ The key to this is ensuring that music faculty are constantly engaging students and providing the best opportunities to grow in their musicianship. The music theory sequence is often one of the most challenging for any music major in college regardless of type of school. The music faculty must teach this course in a highly engaging manner and be willing to go the extra mile to assist students when they begin to struggle. While many initiatives at colleges and universities focus solely on the student's success in school, it is also important to look at new teaching strategies professors can implement in the classroom that will enable students to be more successful. Some will argue that it is the student's responsibility to adjust to the teaching styles of each professor. While this is certainly true to an extent, some middle ground must be established so that professors and students may meet halfway. Elmira Mangum suggested that “If we are to meet the challenges of learning in this time of change, teaching must be central to our success.”¹⁸ Research has proven that a more engaging teacher benefits the students by providing “freedom to explore the ideas that interest them...opportunities such as research and service learning encourage active participation from students.”¹⁹ Students need to have experiences in the classroom that motivate them to learn the subject further. Furthermore, Wheeler states that “when students are motivated and empowered through engaged learning, retention and graduation rates improve.”²⁰ SLACUs should make it a priority to provide the best

¹⁷ Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, Harvard University Press, (April 30, 2004): 48.

¹⁸ Elmira Mangum, “Teaching and Student Success: ACUE Makes the Link,” *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, Vol 49 (November 2017): 18.

¹⁹ Sarah Wheeler, “Engaged Learning: Setting Students Up for Success,” *IUPUI Division of Undergraduate Education*, November 13, 2019. <https://due.iupui.edu/news/2019-11-13-series-engaged-learning-benefits.html>

²⁰ Ibid.

professional development for the faculty members to stay current with the trends in music education. This will allow the faculty to be better equipped to serve the students.

Megan Darby identifies the many struggles of first-year college music majors taking music theory when she writes, “Implications of this study and resulting project include the potential to improve student outcomes in Music Theory I and the subsequent potential for students to avoid delayed graduation, delayed entrance into the teacher education program, possible financial aid probation or suspension, and possible academic probation or suspension.”²¹ For most colleges, tracking retention and graduation rates of students is a primary focus. Darby points out that, “concern for student retention at the college level is not a new concept nor is it one that has diminished since the early 1970s when the problem first gained the attention of educators and academic researchers.”²² As previously stated, retention rates are a huge concern for all colleges and universities, but the issue is compounded for SLACUs due to their already low enrollment numbers. For some subjects, engaging students in outside projects is easy to establish. For music theory, it can be a little bit more challenging to get students to truly engage with the subject material. According to Janet Bourne, there are a few creative ways to get the students in music theory class to engage with the subject matter. One such suggestion is what she called “Minuets for a Retirement Center.”²³ In this Music Theory I project, “students used early Mozart minuets as models for composing their short minuets for keyboard...at the end of the

²¹ Megan Darby, “Challenges to Student Success in an Introductory Music Theory I Course,” Doctor of Education Dissertation, Walden University, 2018: 155.

²² Ibid, 156.

²³ Janet Bourne, “Outside the Classroom: Community-Engaged Learning Projects in Music Theory,” *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy*, vol. 5 (2017).

semester, students and I went to a local retirement center.”²⁴ This project is helpful because students learn concepts taught in music theory and get the opportunity to compose music for adults living in the retirement center, which can be a special occasion for them.

While most of the existing literature focuses on first-year success for college students, very little follows through with the completion of the degree program. This research shows the culminating success of college music majors as they complete their degrees. Given this information, there appears to be a gap in the literature. While most struggles occur in the first year, it is important to also focus on how these struggles in the first year of college will impact students for the remaining three years and after. Josien Mennen said this about the subsequent years of study, “There is a strong relationship between the study success in the first year and the following three years. The feasibility and representativeness of the first year are, in general, rather sufficient, and therefore there are no barriers to implement selection at the closing of the first year.”²⁵ Given this information, this research needs to select students who are in various stages of degree completion so the researcher can collect equal representation of all music majors.

Problem Statement

Music majors attending SLACUs face many significant challenges throughout their time in the degree program. Probably the most significant time that many students tend to have academic struggles is the first year and mainly the first semester of college. These challenges are

²⁴ Bourne, “Outside the Classroom: Community-Engaged Learning Projects in Music Theory.”

²⁵ Josien Mennen and Marcel van der Klink, “Is the First-Year Predictive for Study Success in Subsequent Years? Findings from an Academy of Music,” *Music Education Research* vol. 19 3 (2017): 10.

often caused by things such as unfamiliarity with a new school, living on their own without parental guidance, and adjusting to the new rigors of the college curriculum. Kirk Kidwell examined the experience of first-year college students and found that “the problem they face in the purgatory of the first year is the product of neither lack of intelligence nor aptitude. Instead, the difficulty they encounter arises from the workload that each course expects of them, what students earn, as well as a transformation in the students’ styles of learning.”²⁶ First-year music major students often experience these challenges in addition to having to adjust to often unfamiliar music curriculum courses such as music theory and music history. These types of courses are not normally offered in high school, aside from those offering an AP Music Theory course. Therefore, students entering a music major will be completely unfamiliar with this type of curriculum. This is often a struggle for many music students as they must complete these courses in conjunction with having an extremely busy schedule of ensemble rehearsals, performances, and weekly applied lessons on their instrument. In addition to the first-year courses in music, a student would be taking general education classes which may include English, math, or an academic inquiry course, which helps students acclimate to the college environment.²⁷ This course load has been shown to add tremendous stress to music students. Tuula Jaakelainen, Guadalupe Lopez-Iniguez, and Michelle Phillips studied the impact of this type of schedule on music majors in higher education institutions. They found that several factors cause music majors to experience more stress. They said that “time management in studying music which includes many additional commitments, such as rehearsals and gigs, compared to

²⁶ Kirk Kidwell, “Understanding the College First-Year Experience,” *Clearing House: A Journal of Education Strategies, Issues, and Ideas*, vol. 78, no 6 (July-August 2005): 253.

²⁷ Limestone University Music Program Handbook 2023-2024, “Limestone University, accessed June 18, 2023, https://www.limestone.edu/sites/default/files/2023-06/music_program_handbook_23-23. Pdf, 38.

other disciplines in higher education and experiences during the first year of study can be a traumatic transition phase in a music student's life."²⁸ The amount of stress that this puts on music students at SLACUs can often become almost too much for them to handle, and therefore many will consider dropping the major.

While the rigorous schedule was one source of the problem, the lack of competitiveness in the individual instrumental studios also seemed to add stress to music majors at SLACUs. Much research has been done on how healthy competition impacts students' desire to push themselves to new heights. Most research on this type of friendly competition is done in the sports arena. Bijan Kholghi writes, "Currently there is a movement aiming to protect children from being involved in a competitive environment...there is talk of eliminating the grading system in schools and college too...the problem is these children will also grow up with no motivation."²⁹ Healthy competition and motivation are closely linked and impacted the students interviewed from each institution. While most studies discuss competition in an athletic context, this can be directly relevant to the music major having self-determination to constantly improve their musicianship to be more competitive in the studio and push for a higher chair placement each semester. At state universities, such as the University of South Carolina, each instrumental studio had ample music majors. Therefore, there were plenty of students to fill out the instrumentation for all the ensembles at the school. Many ensembles at each of the SLACUs are constantly having to find creative ways to reach full instrumentation in each of the ensembles. To

²⁸ Tuula Jaakelainen, Guadalupe Lopez-Inigues, and Michelle Phillips, "Music Students' Experienced Workload, Livelihoods, and Stress in Higher Education in Finland and the United Kingdom," *Music Education Research* Vol. 22, No. 5 (2020): 519.

²⁹ Bijan Kholghi, "Is Competition Healthy or Unhealthy Ultimate Guide," *Coaching-Online.org*, Assessed June 23, 2023. <https://www.coaching-online.org/is-competition-healthy-or-unhealthy/>

achieve this, students participate in multiple ensembles each semester, increasing their schedule's busyness. Having more instrumental majors enrolled in the instrumental studios promotes more competition. This competition between music majors can be healthy as they each push their peers to improve their skills on their instrument. Not only does it force students to consistently enhance their skills on their instrument, but it also lessens the pressure placed on a smaller number of students. Therefore, they feel less like they have to pull more weight in their weekly ensemble rehearsals.

This research also identifies some psychological aspects of students' struggles as music majors at SLACUs. This was primarily done by looking at previous literature about the learned experiences of music majors at a small liberal arts university. According to a recent CNN article, "more than 40% of students currently enrolled in an undergraduate degree program had considered dropping out in the past six months...most cited emotional stress and personal mental health as the reason, far more often than others like financial considerations and difficulty of coursework."³⁰ Because of this high percentage of students considering dropping out of college, many colleges and universities have placed a higher premium on providing mental health support for students and try to limit the amount of stress placed on students before it becomes too much for them to handle. Because of this, colleges and universities must expand their mental health services for students. The article goes on to state, "Colleges are uniquely positioned to surround students with a close network of support...create a broader community of care."³¹ Limestone University currently has one mental health care professional on campus for 950 students. This

³⁰ Deidre McPhillips, "Mental Health Struggles are Driving More College Students to Consider Dropping Out, Survey Finds," *CNN Health*, March 23, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/23/health/mental-health-college-dropout-survey-wellness/index.html>

³¹ Ibid.

should be a concern for college administration as the need for mental health care providers has exponentially increased and one person cannot adequately cover a campus of that size. With the mental health care provided by some of the smaller universities proving to be inadequate, some schools must use other methods to make sure that student morale and mental health stay positive. By working hard to build a broader sense of community care, smaller schools may have a distinct advantage when compared to some of the bigger schools. Establishing a strong system of cohorts and promoting success by having more engaging activities on campus to help with student morale and mental health. Another way of building support for these challenges is by tracking progress through self-assessments of daily symptoms and functionality. One of the indicators of struggling mental health is a sharp decrease in class attendance. Attendance is perhaps the first sign that there is an issue going on. Because of the small class sizes, this indicator should be more noticeable to faculty at smaller universities.³²

Purpose Statement

This research aims to identify possible solutions for music majors attending SLACUs to achieve more success. To develop a framework for the study, the researcher needs to define further what justifies a small liberal arts college. The researcher set the framework for a SLACU as a college with below 2,500-day campus enrolled students. The researcher could select SLACUs with a similar student population by doing so. Using enrollment numbers as the baseline for eligibility for this study, the researcher could overlook other aspects of the school culture, such as academic standards, acceptance rates, graduation rates, and diversity measures.

³² McPhillips, "Mental Health Struggles are Driving More College Students to Consider Dropping Out, Survey Finds," March 23, 2023.

This allowed for representation of the students and faculty within the music departments at the SLACUs which were chosen for this research.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

College music majors attending SLACUs with student enrollment numbers under 2,500 face many significant challenges that can derail their potential success. The researcher collected perspectives from students and faculty at three liberal arts institutions. Data was collected from surveys and follow-up interviews via Zoom. The researcher then was able to see themes from the interviews and devise a strategy to help music majors be more successful at SLACUs. The following research questions and hypotheses were the focus of this study:

Research Question 1: What are the challenging factors that college music majors face at small liberal arts colleges that hinder their successful completion of the degree?

Hypothesis 1: Challenging factors that college music majors face at a small liberal arts college include overwhelming performance ensemble schedules, a shortage of peers to spark competitiveness in instrument studios, and an overall difficulty adjusting to college life's social and academic rigors.

Research Question 2: What are some strategies to guide struggling college music majors to become more confident and complete the program music major successfully?

Hypothesis 2: Some strategies to guide struggling college music majors to become more confident and successfully complete the degree program include implementing peer tutoring, a more streamlined curriculum for music theory and history courses, and a standardized measurement of student success when exiting the music program.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The researcher used a qualitative approach to gather and analyze the data collected for this study. The researcher applied for and received permission from IRB to conduct the study and use students and faculty members for interviews to answer the research questions. In addition, the researcher received approval from each of the institution's stakeholders to perform interviews with students majoring in music and music faculty at each institution. The researcher interviewed music major students and faculty at three SLACUs with an enrollment of under 2,500 students. As Creswell states, these schools were selected because “the researcher is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help understand the problem and the research question.”³³ The researcher currently works at Limestone University; therefore, it was necessary to involve other SLACUs to prevent any perceived biases from being present in the research and analysis of the collected data.

Following the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher used Albert Bandura’s social cognitive theory to help show some of the learned behavior displayed in music students. The concept from Bandura’s theory most closely applies to this research is reciprocal determinism. Charlotte Nickerson states that “reciprocal determinism is the central concept of social cognitive theory and refers to the dynamic and reciprocal interaction of people with a set of learned experiences- the environment, or external social context, and behavior response to stimuli to achieve goals.”³⁴ College is a highly socialized environment, and the rise of social media is only making success even more dependent on thriving in the social environment at the university.

³³ John Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, Sage Publication, (Los Angeles, 2018): 184.

³⁴ Charlotte Nickerson, “Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory: Definition & Examples,” *Simply Psychology*, (February, 2023). <https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-cognitive-theory.html>

Modern college students are more connected with social life on campus than ever before. Many researchers have pinpointed the rise of Facebook to an increase in mental health issues in college students. Dylan Walsh pointed out that “according to data from the Centers for Disease Control, the suicide rate among 10-24-year-olds was stable from 2000 to 2007; it then increased 57% between 2007 and 2017.”³⁵ This information is significant because students being so closely linked socially has played a large role in their ability to be successful in college. Many students place a lot of weight on success in both academic and social circles, which plays a role in the student’s overall mental health in college. Nickerson goes on to suggest that “to illustrate the concept of reciprocal determinism, consider a student who believes they can succeed on an exam is more likely to put forth the necessary effort to study...if they do not believe they can pass the exam, they are less likely to study.”³⁶ This data was crucial for the researcher to show how the psychological makeup of music students impacts their success in the music program at SLACUs.

Significance of Study

As stated previously, the primary focus of this dissertation is to guide music students and music faculty at SLACUs and to provide strategies for them to achieve a higher rate of success within the music department. In 2020, the researcher witnessed fifteen music majors enter the school year as freshmen. Now that this class of students is scheduled to be seniors this school year, two music majors remain. Students did not all drop out at once but slowly began to either change their major or drop out of college together. While conducting interviews with the remaining students at Limestone, they listed several reasons that could be causing students not to

³⁵ Dylan Walsh, “Study: Social Media Use Linked to Decline in Mental Health,” *Ideas that Matter* (MIT Management Sloan School), September 14, 2022, <https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/study-social-media-use-linked-to-decline-mental-health>

³⁶ Charlotte Nickerson, “Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory: Definition & Examples.”

complete their major. Some of the reasons they pinpointed were a lack of understanding of music theory and history courses, losing scholarships or other financial aid, and family and personal reasons for dropping the major or dropping out of college. The researcher hypothesized this was the case in the other SLACUs studied in this dissertation. The other two institutions face a similar issue with students leaving their major or school altogether.

Due to this high turnover rate in the music department at SLACUs, the music faculty and the upper collegiate administration should be concerned. The goal of any college or university should be for students to complete their desired degree program and become valuable members of society. However, higher education is about business, and therefore, more than just the music faculty should be concerned about the number of students who are dropping out of college and/or electing not to attend college. A recent study performed by NBC found that “more than 500 colleges and universities show warning signs of financial stress in at least two areas.”³⁷ This should concern college administration at all institutions, but especially tiny schools which typically are funded primarily by students paying tuition. More troubling findings include “nearly 30 percent of all four-year schools brought in less tuition revenue per student in 2017-18 than in 2009-10...and about 190 private four-year institutions saw the size of their endowments fall relative to their costs.”³⁸ With so many students opting not to continue pursuing a music major, change is needed in many areas to help secure a firmer footing with these struggling students and provide them with the tools to be successful in the degree program. The researcher believes that more peer collaboration in the formation of study groups with music majors, team

³⁷ Sarah Butrymowicz and Pete D’Amato, “A Crisis is Looming for U.S. Colleges and Not Just Because of the Pandemic,” *NBC News*, August 4, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/education/crisis-looming-u-s-colleges-not-just-because-pandemic-n1235338>

³⁸ Ibid.

building exercises to get the new students acclimated to the campus life of college students so that they will feel more of a sense of community and belonging, more engaging curriculum and instruction in the music theory and music history classroom, and friendlier peer competitiveness in the instrumental studios. All these things in tandem should help students to become more successful in a small liberal arts music program.

Definitions

1. *Small Liberal Arts College*- A liberal arts college is a four-year undergraduate institution that takes a broader approach to education by focusing on the arts, sciences, humanities, and social sciences.³⁹
2. *Music Major*- “A music major studies music theory, music composition, and music history. Music majors are often heavily involved in some sort of music activity in high school – whether band, orchestra or chorus. Undergraduate music students be passionate about their major because it involves a lot of time and practice dedicated to their instrument.”⁴⁰
3. *Self-Determination Theory*- An approach to human motivation and personality using a person’s psychological needs, which are competence autonomy, and relatedness.⁴¹

Chapter Summary

For most students, attending a college or university is a noble goal as they work toward building a better future. These students are often excited to be away from home and in a new

³⁹ Coursera, “What is a Liberal Arts College?” Coursera.

⁴⁰ Emily Bratcher, “What You Need to Know About Becoming a Music Major,” *U.S. News & World Report*, (May 5, 2020). Assessed July 20, 2024.

⁴¹ Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, “Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being,” *American Psychologist* 55 no. 1 (January 2000): 68.

learning environment. Most of these students will face challenges in the next four years. If they can overcome these challenges, they will be much stronger individuals. Music major students' challenges are significant and can begin the moment they step foot on campus. The main challenges facing these new college students are unfamiliarity with a new campus/town, living away from parental supervision, and adjusting to the academic rigor of a SLACU curriculum. For students to overcome these challenges, they need to be identified early enough so that faculty can intervene and assist students before they get placed on academic probation or potentially lose financial aid status. Typically, once this happens, it is already too late for the student to be willing to continue the program. Therefore, they either drop out of the music major or drop out of college altogether. The researcher identified the main reasons for music majors not completing the degree program were loss of financial aid assistance via music scholarships, failure to complete the music theory sequence, failure to progress on their instrument enough to complete the sophomore qualifier, and other undisclosed personal reasons as being the top reasons for not completing the music program.

This dissertation was not solely concerned with first-year music major success but sought to apply success throughout the entire undergraduate music major curriculum. To accomplish this, a percentage of the students interviewed were students in their last three years of undergraduate study. Each year of study for music students has different challenges to overcome. For example, students completing their sophomore year generally have a jury performance for the entire faculty area to determine whether they can continue the path of becoming a music major. This challenge provides a different perspective on the major than a first- or second-semester freshman music major. The student population interviewed for this dissertation had representatives from each year of study.

The status of many SLACUs is in question following the financial strain placed on these institutions by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is important for these schools to consider recruitment and retention of students as the highest priority. By emphasizing these things, their institutions will be able to thrive and grow in the future. The researcher hypothesized that recruitment and retention are the most pressing issues at SLACUs because of their low enrollment and inability to take advantage of the economic resources that more prominent state universities can use.

By studying self-determination theory and intrinsic motivation, college music faculty should be able to provide a more motivating environment for music students. Applying these principles will improve the retention rate at SLACUs, and students will experience more success in music careers following their college experience. The practical implications of this study will help music faculty, and students become more successful in the small liberal arts college environment. The recommendations from this study should encourage faculty members to bridge the gap in student success.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

Completing a music degree is a difficult task for many students. Between countless hours of rehearsals and recitals performed on their instrument and the coursework requirements of the degree program, the student can quickly feel overwhelmed and ultimately underperform in the degree program. For this study, the researcher conducted an exhaustive literature review about developing the necessary skills to help students succeed in music major programs at SLACUs. Megan Darby writes, “Concern for student retention at the college level is not a new concept, nor is it one that has diminished since the early 1970s when the problem first gained the attention of educators and academic researchers.”⁴² While there is much literature about this topic, there remains very little research on SLACUs with strong music programs. The researcher conducted a thorough review of the literature and found that the literature does not adequately study this sub-population of collegiate music students.

Theoretical Framework

For many, the college experience is a personalized set of learned experiences. Each student will experience periods of intense success and periods of intense failure in their undergraduate journey. There is ample research on ways to improve the college experience.

In 1984, Alexander Astin wrote about student involvement being the most crucial factor in a student's higher education experience. He defines the amount of physical and psychological

⁴² Megan Darby, “Challenges to Student Success in an Introductory Music Theory I Course,” Doctor of Education Dissertation, Walden University, 2018: 156.

energy a student devotes to their own experience on campus.⁴³ Students who are actively engaged in classroom discussions with peers and faculty spend much of their time on campus and are actively seeking extracurricular opportunities. These are typically the students who have the most success as college students.⁴⁴ Astin acknowledges that student involvement theory has many similarities to the Freudian concept of cathexis. Cathexis, according to Sigmund Freud, is a process by which psychic energy is released or used, while anticathexis is the process of blocking inappropriate energy.⁴⁵

Another prevalent theory when discussing college student success is self-determination theory. For a student to succeed in any post-secondary setting, they must possess a certain amount of intrinsic motivation. This is where self-determination theory becomes crucial for the study of success in college. Goldman discusses the difference between the students who are genuinely excited about the class material and the ones who are apathetic about learning, which is not general intelligence but has more to do with the willingness to learn and put in the effort to succeed.⁴⁶ It is evident, through the research, that students tend to be more academically successful if their motivation is intrinsic.⁴⁷ The major challenge is how professors go about motivating students. Goldman acknowledges that his research could be the antithesis to studying

⁴³ A.W Astin, "Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for higher Education," *Journal of college Student Personnel*, Vol. 25, (1984): 518.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Kendra Cherry, "Cathexis and Anticathexis According to Freudian Theory," Very well mind. (July 25, 2023) Assessed, September 21, 2023. <https://www.verywellmind.com/cathexis-and-anticathexis-2795843>

⁴⁶ Zachary W. Goldman, Alan K. Goodboy, and Keith Weber, "College Students' Psychological Needs and Intrinsic Motivation to Learn: An Examination of Self-Determination Theory," *Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (2017): 168.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 170.

how instructors “manage the classroom environment so that students feel intrinsically motivated to learn and perform high-quality work.”⁴⁸ It is much easier for a professor to motivate students via some sort of extrinsic factor such as a grade, but if professors “support students’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness through their behaviors [the students] are more likely to increase their intrinsic motivation to learn.”⁴⁹

The major rationale behind much of his research is that the measurements for gathering and analyzing student motivation already exist; however, they would have to be altered to fit the parameters of his study.⁵⁰ Goldman points out three basic needs that must be met for intrinsic motivation to be present. Goldman states, “At the college level, intrinsically motivated students find academic activities worthwhile and meaningful; thus, they actively seek out the intended benefits of assignments, assessments, and other forms of coursework.”⁵¹ Goldman's concepts can easily be applied to music students. Oftentimes, college music majors struggle with self-determination to practice their instrument. Practicing time on their instrument is extremely important for a music major's success. Some students do not understand the difference between playing in a high school band ensemble and taking private lessons in a college studio. Because of this, they can quickly fall behind and must work extra hard to catch up by the end of the first semester of study. More often than not, music students respond more to teachers who instill autonomy and self-determination than students who experience controlling behaviors from

⁴⁸ Goldman, 187.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 171.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 168.

teachers.⁵² Paul Evans furthermore states that “the self-determination theory framework contends that three psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy must be fulfilled to maintain psychological well-being.”⁵³ Providing a psychological framework for music major wellness further plays into the ultimate success of the music student because the desire for success becomes more of an intrinsic trait instead of always being an external factor to guide their motivation.

Due to this, Goldman aimed to create new ways of measuring college students’ psychological needs as well as their level of intrinsic motivation to learn the course material. The result of this was the creation of the Intrinsic Motivation to Learn Scale. This scale is, “a four-item measure that assesses students’ general orientation toward learning tasks.”⁵⁴ The first two items on the scale were directly derived from students’ psychological needs for autonomy and competence. The last two items on the scale are relatedness with classmates and relatedness with the instructor. The results showed a positive correlation between students and intrinsic goal orientation toward schoolwork.⁵⁵

Vincent Tinto writes about student persistence being one of the key contributors to ultimate success. He makes an interesting point when he discusses the fact that for many years the research into student retention has been done from the perspective of the university.⁵⁶ While

⁵² Paul Evans and Ariele Bonneville-Roussy, “Self-Determined Motivation for Practice in University Music Students,” *Psychology of Music* Vol 44, 5 (September 2016): 1097.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 176.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 181.

⁵⁶ Vincent Tinto, “Reflections on Student Persistence,” *Student Success* 8, no. 2 (July 2017): 2.

it makes sense to do this, given the apparent interest and benefit of retaining students for the university, Tinto delves into the student perspective. One key difference is his use of the word persistence instead of motivation. Persistence implies that the student is motivated to push past any adversity they may face while in college to be successful.⁵⁷ He expands upon this idea when he writes, “The question universities should ask is not only what they can do to retain their students but also what they can do to influence student motivation to stay, persist, and complete their tertiary degrees.”⁵⁸ A lot can be learned by analyzing and acting on the student’s perspective. Tinto goes on to describe three crucial factors in student persistence. The first factor is self-efficacy, which he describes as the foundation upon which student success is built.⁵⁹ It is also believed that self-efficacy can be taught to a certain extent. Therefore, Tinto goes on to suggest that it is essential that students are “able to obtain the timely support they need when they encounter early difficulties in meeting the academic, and sometimes social demands of university study.”⁶⁰ To help students, many universities have invested a lot of money into systems that track student behavior and performance from their first year through their successful completion. Tinto points out that most students who encounter challenges, especially in the first year of study, do not reach out for help because they believe it is a sign of weakness. Therefore, the university must try extra measures to get these students to understand that academic struggles are standard for all college students.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Tinto, 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Tinto, 3.

The next factor Tinto discusses is the sense of belonging. This is a crucial factor in overall student success. After all, the goal of a liberal arts education is to be well-rounded and centered on a holistic approach to student success. Therefore, for students to experience success, they must “become engaged and come to see themselves as a member of a community of other students, academics, and professional staff who value their membership.”⁶² Tinto claims that the sense of belonging is where universities can do the most to ensure student success. One such initiative he highlights is the use of cohorts in which students on the same degree track learn together throughout the degree program.⁶³ He also talks about engaging the students in a flipped classroom teaching model in which students are encouraged to take more ownership of their course material.⁶⁴ The most crucial thing universities seek to do to address the sense of belonging is by providing student organizations and social groups that will allow a student a community within the university to create a bond.⁶⁵

The final factor Tinto discusses is the curriculum. Tinto claims that “student motivation to persist is also shaped by student perceptions of the value of what they are being asked to learn.”⁶⁶ He goes on to say that “students need to perceive the material to be learned is of sufficient quality and relevance to matters that concern them now and into their future to warrant their time and effort.”⁶⁷ Because of this, many schools are constantly analyzing and revamping their

⁶² Tinto, 3.

⁶³ Ibid, 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

curriculum and finding ways to adjust to better the student experience. Tinto believes that not enough meaningful connections are made in introductory courses, so students lose focus and motivation quickly.⁶⁸ Applying that to an introductory music course, such as Music Theory, would mean that if students do not feel a connection between the material they are learning and real-life application beyond graduation, they will quickly lose motivation and persistence.⁶⁹ Tinto suggests using project-based learning or contextualization to motivate students to learn the course material.⁷⁰

Related Literature

Literature about recruitment and retention in colleges and universities

First-year college students often have trouble transitioning to a new lifestyle as college students. Usually, there can be challenges in many aspects of their daily life as new college students. Sophie Morlaix and Bruno Suchaut studied these factors and concluded that the rate of student dropouts after the end of the first or second year of school remains a major concern in France. Their primary focus in researching first-year student success was pinpointing the social, educational, and cognitive factors for dropping out of school after only a few years of study. They believe “the capacity to adapt to university life and study is thought to be determined by students’ characteristics at the beginning of their university education, which are linked to a range of personal and educational variables.”⁷¹ The pair concluded that academic skill and

⁶⁸ Tinto, 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Sophie Morlaix, and Bruno Suchaut, “The Social, Educational, and Cognitive Factors of Success in the First Year of University: A Case Study,” *International Review of Education*, Vol. 60, (2014): 842.

cognitive ability do not play a significant role in measuring the success rate but that subject matter plays an important role.

There has been much discussion about the success rate of music majors in universities nationwide. In 2017, Menen and Klink tried to find a correlation between success in a first-year college music major and completion of the degree program. The result of the study found that 20.8% of students succeeded in earning the maximum number of sixty credit hours during their first year of study. Menen and Klink cited previous studies stating, “Gender, age prior education, effort, motivation, planning skills, and expectations have frequently been stressed as student factors that account for study success.”⁷² The study concluded that “there was a strong relationship between the study success in the first year and the following three years. The feasibility and representativeness of the first year are, in general, rather sufficient, and therefore, there are no barriers to implement selection at the closing of the first year.”⁷³

In 2016, Laura Nichols provided context for measuring college success in the first year of study. One significant distinction she identified with student success was whether the family had attended college. She found that first-generation college students often face more obstacles to success than multi-generational students. This impact is felt primarily because first-generation students frequently “have to negotiate between working-class values, ideals, and needs of their families with middle-class assumptions and expectations of college peers and institutions and

⁷² Josien Mennen and Marcel van Der Klink, “Is the First-Year Predictive for Study Success in Subsequent Years? Findings from an Academy of Music,” *Music Education Research* Vol 19 No. 3 (2017): 342.

⁷³ Ibid, 348.

may have to rely more on their skills and attributes.”⁷⁴ Students who are not first-generation but instead continuing-generation college students with highly educated parents tend to have less trouble being successful in college. Her main concern in this study was whether “demographics and human capital differences by educational background of students existed.”⁷⁵ One result of her research was that she found major differences between the overall success of continuing-generation college students in science classes and overall Grade Point Average (GPA) and first-generation college students. The continuing-generation students did significantly better academically in their first year of school. Another vital part of her research was the social capital between first-generation and continuing-generation students. She found that “there were significant differences in students’ quantity of social capital by educational background...continuing-generational students had more help from parents with their college applications, knew more friends and family who graduated from college, and were more likely to personally know a medical doctor.”⁷⁶ Nichols interviewed the participants in her study. There were four distinct areas where the first-generation and continuing-generation students differed in the overall success of their first year. The four areas she identified were parent involvement, language use, interactions with and interventions in institutional practices, and emergent sense of entitlement.⁷⁷ She found that parent involvement was very different between each classification of student. The first-generation students said, “The biggest thing that their parents provided was

⁷⁴ Laura Nichols and Angel Islas, “Pushing and Pulling Emerging Adults Through College: College Generational Status and the influence of Parents and Others in the First Year. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, Vol 3 1, 2016: 62.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 63.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 73.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 74.

support, while continuing-generation students cited multiple instances of receiving specific help from their parents during their first year in college.”⁷⁸ The critical distinction is how the parent's involvement increased the amount of success. The first-generation student's parents are more of a support system for the student and are there when they need support in dealing with the adversity of their first year in college. The issue is that the parents do not have the experience to know how to handle some of the specific problems that come with the transition to a college campus. For example, one of the interview participants in Nichols' study says, “My parents... they never saw any of my applications, but they just made sure I had them in, but it was all I need. They're very involved in the bigger picture, I would say.”⁷⁹ So, her parents did not possess the skills necessary to help her with her college applications, but she was very supportive and willing to help in any way that they could.

Jeffrey Docking and Carman Cutron conducted further research on SLACUs. They make a good case for the critical state most SLACUs face today. Most of their research is geared toward enrollment deficits and how to increase enrollment since most SLACUs rely so heavily on tuition dollars for revenue. Docking and Cutron developed an admissions growth plan to facilitate financial growth in SLACUs. The plan has six critical steps for successful development. They use the pyramid analogy to show how each step builds on the last.

According to Docking and Cutron's six-step process, the baseline step includes, “Do your homework and set goals.”⁸⁰ This is one of the most essential steps in the growth plan because it

⁷⁸ Nichols, 78.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 79.

⁸⁰ Jeffrey R. Docking and Carman C Curton, *Crisis in Higher Education: A Plan to Save Small Liberal Arts Colleges in America* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 36.

requires the university to consider everything to ensure that the plan they put in place will have the most desirable outcomes. Next, the university must “build and upgrade required facilities.”⁸¹ The key here is beginning the upgrades early. Docking noted that “The only thing that keeps our colleges on the front line of progress is constant improvement and the momentum that inevitably surfaces when people know that they are part of a prosperous and thriving institution.”⁸² Moving to the next step, “funding teams and activities fully, hire coaches/faculty and give them recruiting goals.”⁸³ The growth mindset here comes in handy when thinking about the music program at these SLACUs because they need to have a recruitment goal to strive for the yearly growth of the department. Docking uses an example from his time at Adrian College when they started the marching band as a student activity to enhance enrollment. He said, “Students could graduate with a B. A in music, musical theatre, or arts administration, and the program offered a music minor...What Adrian College had at that time was all sorts of ways to get a music degree, but we did not have a marching band.”⁸⁴ Next Docking suggests “focusing on the return on investments and holding recruiters accountable.”⁸⁵ Docking suggested that every coach would actively recruit new students to the university. This would eventually include the music department's faculty as well to grow and maintain a healthy number of students in the department. The next step in Docking’s plan is to “redirect new income to academic facilities and programs. Followed by continuing to build and utilize momentum for further growth.”⁸⁶ Docking’s plan for admissions

⁸¹ Docking, 36.

⁸² Ibid, 41.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 45.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 36.

growth has been proven to be effective at Adrian College. Administrators at other SLACUs should pay attention and try to implement some of the same principles to maintain a high-quality education at SLACUs across the country.

Expanding research on retention rates during the first year of study, Kelly Copeland and Chantal Levesque-Bristol showed that revisions were needed to define student success. They claim that most of the studies have focused more on differences such as race, gender, or socioeconomic status of students.⁸⁷ They suggest that the paradigm shift to student overall satisfaction and success despite their differences. Instead of comparing student success by these variables, Copeland and Levesque-Bristol combine degree completion and student learning outcomes as the primary factors for measuring college student success. This allows administrators, faculty, and students to offer a more holistic approach to measuring student success. Copeland says:

Rather than being the mere completion of a degree, student success can be defined as a complete journey. It begins with a positive learning climate that is aimed at fulfilling the basic psychological needs of each student. This type of environment can facilitate more self-determined forms of motivation, which can then lead to the attainment of desirable learning outcomes such as knowledge, transfer, engagement, and meta-cognition.⁸⁸

Many things are indicators of potential success in college. In the past, some of these indicators have been requiring a certain GPA or test score. However, recently, it has become more apparent that the greatest indicator of potential college success is success in high school

⁸⁷ Kelly J. Copeland and Chantal Levesque-Bristol, "The Retention Dilemma: Effectively Reaching the First-Year University Student," *Journal College Student Retention*, Vol 12 4, (2010): 486.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 487.

coupled with being involved in a college readiness program while still in high school.⁸⁹ While that may be the case, many programs have been incorporated into the high school experience that has helped students be ready to transition from high school to college. Andrea Venezia and Laura Jaeger studied college readiness programs and discussed ways to improve their effectiveness. The primary reasons they listed for students being unprepared for college were “differences between what high schools teach and what colleges expect, as well as large disparities between the instruction offered by high schools with high concentrations of students in poverty and that offered by high schools with more advantaged students.”⁹⁰ While it may be true that specific high school students are afforded better resources, there has to be a way to level the playing field and help more students achieve success in college. Another major part of their research included non-academic indicators. These indicators include family/peer influences outside of school, ethnicity, and gender.⁹¹ They furthermore outlined the academic indicators such as a high Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) or American College Testing (ACT) score as having an innate bias since “wealthier students have better opportunities to prepare for such tests, that the tests do not measure what is learned in the classroom, and that the tests are not strong predictors of how students perform in college.”⁹² Further solidifying this point is that most community colleges do not take the SAT or ACT but are given standardized tests based on their

⁸⁹ Susan Therriault, “Predictors of Postsecondary Success,” *College and Career Readiness and Success Center at American Institutes for Research*, (November 2013): 10.

⁹⁰ Andrea Venezia and Laura Jaeger, “Transitions from High School to College,” *The Future of Children* Vol 23, No 1, (Spring 2013): 117.

⁹¹ Andrea Venezia and Laura Jaeger, 119.

⁹² Ibid, 120.

area of study.⁹³ This is similar to how music education students are evaluated based on their scores on the various Praxis tests.

They furthermore discussed finding the right college fit. Many deciding factors make a college the right fit for a student. Some of the biggest indicators are cost, location, size, student-faculty ratio, and counseling and advising services.⁹⁴ Another issue Venezia and Jaeger acknowledge in their research is that many students will choose less selective colleges to ensure that they are accepted. This happens at many smaller colleges and universities, which are constantly fighting for higher enrollment numbers.⁹⁵

J. L. Stimpert describes some challenges that could hinder liberal arts institutions. Many things he writes about have become a reality for liberal arts institutions. One of the main benefits of a liberal arts institution is the faculty's commitment to teaching instead of focusing more attention on scholarship. Likewise, Stimpert points out that “faculty members also thrive at liberal arts colleges. They have many opportunities to work closely with talented students, their teaching skills are valued, and their scholarly activities and creative endeavors are appreciated and encouraged.”⁹⁶

Stimpert goes on to identify four crucial areas in which liberal arts institutions could potentially struggle. The first critical area is having an institutional identity. He discusses how often not having a solid identity as an institution is problematic because people tend to believe

⁹³ Venezia, 120.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 121.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 122.

⁹⁶J.L Stimpert, “Turbulent Times: Four Issues Facing Liberal Arts Colleges,” *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* vol. 36, (Fall, 2004): 44.

that a mission statement should be the institution's identity when this is not the case.⁹⁷ He later expands upon this and says that having a “compelling identity will...position the college in the higher education marketplace, and it will play a key role in a college’s efforts to communicate with external constituencies, including prospective students and their parents.”⁹⁸

He next highlights the “two worlds of student life.”⁹⁹ Because of the size of the student population, SLACUs often have the advantage of being able to offer students a more personalized student life on campus. This is all part of the liberal arts goal to educate and shape the whole student. The pillars of a liberal arts education often include intellectual, moral, physical, social, and spiritual components.¹⁰⁰ While the smaller student population should give most liberal arts colleges distinct advantages, Stimpert says, “Student life on most small college campuses falls short of its educational potential. All too often, liberal arts college students live in two worlds, the academic world of the classroom and another, seemingly unrelated world outside of the classroom.”¹⁰¹ He mentions a few things that can help elevate the student life program at SLACUs. The first thing that must be present is a campus culture for inclusion and a strong sense of building a community for students to feel like they belong. He also mentions that faculty involvement is critical for these programs' success. Students must see the faculty as more than just professors who lecture or conduct their music rehearsals. Students must know the faculty as a part of the overall campus community.¹⁰² He also mentions that “well-designed new student

⁹⁷ Stimpert, 45.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 46.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, 4

orientation programs, workshops, and other campus activities can also be catalysts for this type of learning and interaction, but these programs alone, no matter how well executed, are insufficient. They must be bolstered by shifts in campus cultures.”¹⁰³

Stimpert then discusses faculty roles and expectations. He points out that liberal arts college professors wore many hats across campus, often acting in more capacities than just teaching courses. The faculty members made the students feel like part of their extended family.¹⁰⁴ He then highlights a shift in focus for many small liberal arts colleges since they are now pushing for faculty to have earned degrees from prominent Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) programs and seek to hire faculty members who are encouraged to take a more active presence in research and development of their field. This brings the faculty member's focus off the day-to-day administrative and governance tasks in which they previously took an active role.¹⁰⁵ This also causes the faculty to become disengaged and more likely to have an independent contractor mentality. Due to this, smaller schools will likely lose faculty involvement in decision-making, which shapes the culture of the university.¹⁰⁶ He gives many reasons for the negative impacts of lower faculty involvement. One of the most important items he brings to light is the recruitment aspect for prospective students and their families. He emphasizes that “face-to-face meetings between faculty members and prospective students can be very influential, and they are an important complement to the professional admission staff’s efforts.”¹⁰⁷ This is especially true in

¹⁰³ Stimpert, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

the music department since the faculty members will interact much more with music majors than some of the other departments on campus.

Joshua Buckrucker conducted recent research on building stronger college band programs in small colleges and universities. Most of his research deals with the challenges facing colleges with under 5,000 students enrolled to build a strong and consistent band program. He cites lack of commitment as one substantial hurdle that small college band programs must overcome. Smaller schools struggle to compete with the larger state schools for funding and facilities. However, the allure of the small school is never how lovely the building is, but it should be about the atmosphere the small universities create. This should be the primary focus of recruiting students to SLACUs. Buckrucker states that the impossibility of judging how many students a building brings to campus ignores the enrollment at small colleges and their need to reflect on accountability.”¹⁰⁸

Throughout the study, sub-populations of students appeared to be at a higher risk of not completing the music major. One such group of students was the first-generation college music majors, who seemed to have more difficulty adapting to the life of a college music major. Laura Nichols suggests that “First-generation college emerging adults frequently have to negotiate between working-class values, ideals, and needs of their families with middle-class assumptions and expectations of college peers and institutions and may have to rely more on their skills and attributes than continuing generation students who may have access to a large number and

¹⁰⁸ Joshua Buckrucker, “Strategies for Creating and Building College Band Programs Within Institutions under a 5,000 Student Population,” DME Dissertation, Liberty University, 2023.

variety of resources.”¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, relating to this dissertation was Joseph Earp’s study of first-generation college music education majors in which he identified challenges and ways to overcome those challenges. Earp’s study falls short of including all music major students and focuses just on music education students. Much of his research deals with the various programs the school provided for first-generation college music majors. These programs are designed to help students be successful in college. Some of the resources proved to be ineffective at helping some of the students be successful primarily to a lack of quality. Earp writes, “Student dissatisfaction due to a lack of quality in support services offices generates potential retention issues.”¹¹⁰ Earp goes on to say, “Communicating relating to first-generation college students’ self-determination must form a bridge between students, faculty, staff, and administrators to assist with the challenging transition to college.”¹¹¹ Because of this specific sub-population of students many colleges and universities have “invested time and effort into developing and providing resources for FGCS. Quality resources the college provides can increase students’ satisfaction with resource levels along with academic and social confidence.”¹¹²

Miguel Antione-Julius Bonds wrote about developing recruitment and retention strategies at Talladega College in Alabama. One of the crucial steps for the retention of members was what

¹⁰⁹ Laura Nichols and Angel Islas, “Pushing and Pulling Emerging Adults Through College: College Generational Status and the Influence of Parents and Others in the First Year,” *Journal of Adolescent Research*, Vol 3 1, (2016): 62.

¹¹⁰ Joseph Benjamin Earp, “First Generation College Students’ Lived Experiences in an Undergraduate Music Education Program: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study,” DME Dissertation, Liberty University, (2020): 60.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 68.

¹¹² Ibid, 60.

he calls marching band development. Things such as creating community within the band. He says the “main objective of creating a family environment is to ensure each student feels that they are essential and significant contributors to the organization.”¹¹³ Students must feel like they belong to a particular college or university, and the smaller school setting certainly helps them to feel welcomed. He goes on to lay out a plan for academic success. Students cannot be successful in college without performing well in their academic courses. With the small school size at Talladega College, the two band directors can act as “intervention agents,” as they call themselves if a student is struggling academically. To grow the band program, especially at a small university, retention of the current members must be a priority.

Bonds further shows a guide to success in the following ways: a positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, long-range goals, seeking strong support for success, and demonstrated knowledge of the marching band. The marching band at Talladega College emphasizes the marching band being an active learning community. The “concept of community was based upon the idea that students needed to thoroughly understand that the music experience, at its very foundational organization, has intrinsic and extrinsic factors.”¹¹⁴ The directors work closely with the school's student success coaches to ensure that students experience academic success, which will allow them to remain in school and retain their scholarships. Because of these initiatives, the marching band has some of the highest retention rates of any student organization on the campus at Talladega College.

¹¹³ Miguel Antoine-Julius Bonds, “Strategies for Recruitment, Growth, and Retention through Marching Band Enrollment at Talladega College (2011-2021),” DME Dissertation, Liberty University, 2021: 60.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 73.

Scott Edgar wrote about recruitment strategies for the next generation of music educators. He says that students choose to be music education majors because of “the influence of K-12 music teachers, love of music, and wanting to be a role model for future students.”¹¹⁵ He further recognized the challenges of growing a small college music department. His case study deals with Lake Forest College. The challenges he described were things like a lack of reputation, resources, and a sufficient budget for recruitment.¹¹⁶ He also points to a critical issue with a lot of small college music programs. The fact is that the recruitment of students is solely done by the music faculty since the school does not have as many resources in the admissions office. In one of the interviews he conducted with a faculty member at the college, Jennie says, “It’s a department that takes recruitment into its own hands. People will come for business. They’ll come for pre-med. Fewer people want to be in music education so therefore the people who teach in music education are aware of that.”¹¹⁷ Because of these limitations, it is imperative that smaller schools also develop a list of selling points that show prospective students why the value of the education they provide is better than larger schools. The selling points for Lake Forest College’s music education program are geographic location, ample scholarships and financial aid opportunities, broad curriculum, rigor of the music education major, practical fieldwork experience in K-12 schools, experienced faculty, and small college program and community.¹¹⁸

Mary Rees outlined the importance of faculty participation in recruiting future music students. She points out how different trends in college admissions can predict a period of high

¹¹⁵ Scott Edgar, “Attracting the Next Generation of Music Educators,” *Contributions to Music Education* vol. 43 (2018): 20.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 27.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

enrollment and potential pitfalls in enrollment. In 1983, when she published the article, the United States was experiencing a decline in college enrollment. For instance, she mentioned that the general population would increase, and the number of students electing to attend four-year colleges and universities would show a decline. One probable cause for this decline was the poor economy, which led more students to enroll in vocational schools or enter the workforce directly after graduating high school. She predicts that “large research universities and the selective liberal arts institutions have the best chances of survival.”¹¹⁹ She cites things such as “having a good image, being selective in their admissions procedures, having large endowments, and having a strong faculty flexible enough to adapt to the new needs.”¹²⁰ While these things are indicators of potential success for the larger state schools and selective liberal arts schools, they are not indicative of success for smaller less selective liberal arts schools. She goes on to say that the factors that will prevent these schools from being as successful during times of lower enrollment are the fact that these schools “generally only attract students from nearby communities, tend to be middle to lower-income families, have a high acceptance rate, rely heavily on tuition to finance the school, and being located away from major population centers.”¹²¹ For SLACUs to not be caught with the decrease in enrollment numbers, all the faculty must participate in the recruitment process. Reese outlines different steps that were taken to involve more faculty members in the recruitment process, such as increasing the number of off-campus contacts, increasing involvement in music conferences, and planning the annual

¹¹⁹ Mary Anne Rees, “College Student Recruitment: The importance of Faculty Participation,” *College Music Symposium*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Fall, 1983): 39.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid, 40.

audition process earlier than other schools so that students receive their scholarship offers first.¹²² The results of Reese's study was that the implementation of the recruitment plan tripled the size of the music department in under two years. She concluded that the technique that made the most impact was the numerous high school visits that each of the music faculty went on as well as the informal parties for the students and their parents which were crucial in bringing more music students to campus.¹²³ This only reinforces the fact that personal contact with students can be a truly powerful thing, which works in the small college and university's favor.

Along those same lines, Don Crowe studied to find if music ensemble participation had an impact on student retention rates. He found that "the students who enrolled in music ensembles during the fall of their freshman year returned for the subsequent 3 years at a significantly greater rate than those who did not...this indicates a long-term effect."¹²⁴ Crowe's research deals primarily with students who are non-music majors, but there still may be some correlation between student activities on campus and overall student success.

It is difficult to discuss retention rates without mentioning historically marginalized groups. Kate Fitzpatrick analyzes these marginalized groups and offers some perspectives to make access and retention easier for these music education students. Fitzpatrick finds that certain groups of students often encounter barriers to access to music education degree programs. The main goal of her research is to find out what kinds of experiences students from these

¹²² Reese, 42.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Don R. Crowe, "Retention of College Students and Freshman-Year Music Ensemble Participation," *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, Vol 17, 3 (November 2015): 375.

marginalized groups have when they are determining which college to attend for music education as well as what kinds of obstacles they face when trying to complete the degree program. She discusses African American students, Hispanic students, lower socio-economic students, students with parents who did not complete high school, and first-generation college students as being the most historically marginalized population.¹²⁵

Literature about music coursework

Some of the most challenging music courses occur during the first two years of study. At most colleges and universities, the first two years of music study are when students complete the music theory and history sequences. These sequences include several courses in each subject and are often the most challenging for students to complete. The theory sequence will take four semesters to complete. The theory sequence comprises aural skills courses, written theory courses, and piano proficiency courses. The theory sequence could also contain form and analysis courses as well. The music history sequence often takes four semesters to complete as well. There is generally an introduction type of course in which students get acclimated to how music history is taught. This course generally covers a large time and offers a general overview of the various periods during music history. Subsequently, the students take a course that is more focused on a specific time in music history.

A significant component of the music theory sequence involves students taking courses in aural skills. There have been a few studies done on the effectiveness and student perspectives of aural skills instruction. One such study was conducted by Nathan Buonviri. He provides insight

¹²⁵ Kate R. Fitzpatrick, Jacqueline C. Henninger and Don M. Taylor, "Access and Retention of Marginalized Populations Within Undergraduate Music Education Programs," *Journal of Research in Music Education*, Vol. 62 no. 2 (July 2014): 107.

into three music education majors' experiences with the aural skills course. One of the critical components of his research was finding that “undergraduates, the majority of whom were music education majors, rated ‘error detection’ as their least confident component from a list of 18 conducting and rehearsal skills. Similarly, McDowell found that students preparing to student teach were concerned about not being able to hear mistakes in the music.”¹²⁶

Another important course in the music theory sequence is Music Theory I. For many colleges, this course is thought of as a gatekeeping course for entrance into the music major. Megan Darby identifies the challenges faced by students taking Music Theory I in the fall semester of their freshman year. She indicates that many students have minimal music theory knowledge before beginning the music major. Because of this, these students are already at a disadvantage because they have a higher learning curve to be successful in the course. Darby writes, “Implications of this study and resulting project include the potential to improve student outcomes in Music Theory I and the subsequent potential for students to avoid delayed graduation, delayed entrance into the teacher education program, possible financial aid probation or suspension, and possible academic probation or suspension.”¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Nathan Buonviri, “Three Music Education Majors’ Journeys Through Aural Skills 101,” *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, Vol 25, (2015): 96.

¹²⁷ Darby, 156.

Literature about Small College Music Departments

In 1965, Don Bisdorf studied the small college music department. His primary research question was, “Is the small college able to provide quality training in music and music education?”¹²⁸ He goes on to cite things like scheduling, lack of personnel, and financial limitations as being the primary forces hindering smaller college music departments from providing an adequate music education for students.¹²⁹ While initially, he seems very candid about small music departments not providing the same quality of music education as larger state-funded institutions, he offers several suggestions to help smaller music departments provide a better education. Regarding insufficient instrumental personnel, he emphasized key instruments where there may not be musicians available to play, such as double reeds or French horn.¹³⁰ This may create issues with performing specific repertoire. In 1965, flexible instrumentation in instrumental ensembles was not considered. Today, the band director can play most of the standard repertoire via these special arrangements.

In the spring of 2020, with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, many composers started to develop new ways of making flexible instrumentation arrangements of their pre-existing music. Composers like Frank Ticheli and Robert Ambrose formed the Creative Repertoire Initiative.¹³¹ Flexible instrumentation was not necessarily a new phenomenon, however the need for such a thing during the pandemic greatly increased the availability of the

¹²⁸ Don Bisdorf, “The Small-College Music Department,” *Music Educators Journal* 51, no. 4 (1965): 107.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Adam Friedrich, “Flexible Music: A History of and Its Application for the Wind Band Medium Through an Overview of Two Flexible Works,” MM Thesis, Ball State University (2021): 3.

music from many publishers. Composers such as Frank Ticheli and Robert Ambrose formed the Creative Repertoire Initiative.¹³² This group's primary mission was to create special arrangements for groups with limited instrumentation but would still be able to play challenging music. The SLACU ensembles that traditionally have a hard time fielding a complete wind ensemble or symphonic band would be able to perform these musical compositions and not have to worry about not having a full instrumentation.

Bisdorf states, “Instrumental groups need not be large to be successful; there has been a decade of discussion concerning a new trend in the smaller concert band. The wind ensemble idea is successful with fewer instrumentalists, and in a small-college situation, the Baroque orchestra should prove quite interesting.”¹³³ He says this about the financial strains of small music departments: “Instrumental performance usually suffers greatly with budget problems. It is no wonder instrumentalists withdraw interest when they reach college only to find equipment and facilities inferior to their high school situation.”¹³⁴ Bisdorf concludes his article with this, “While the problems of scheduling, personnel, and finance in the small college music department are real, the challenge to solve them is stimulation. It should be observed that certain problems may be turned into advantages in the training of prospective music teachers.”¹³⁵ One possible advantage to not having as many instrumentalists to cover certain parts is the fact that music education students would be able to perform on secondary instruments. This would give them

¹³² Friedrich, 3.

¹³³ Bisdorf, 108.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 109.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 110.

experience performing on those instruments and give them valuable experiences to use in the classroom when they become educators.¹³⁶

As mentioned previously, the factors that attract students to small colleges are normally things such as proximity to home, ability to get accepted, being awarded scholarships, and low student-faculty ratio. Most students want to feel that they can connect with faculty about academic issues. Irene Beattie and Megan Thiele studied how these interactions had positive and negative impacts on students attending large state schools and those attending smaller schools. The results of their study showed that class sizes had a significant effect on how much academic interaction students had with professors, but also showed that students were less likely to discuss class material with their peers.¹³⁷

Chapter Summary

While a large amount of literature is available about college student success as well as music major success, there remains very little about the challenges of being a music major at a small liberal arts college. This research aims to fill in the gaps and provide a pathway to success for all music majors attending these SLACUs. The author seeks to provide research that will be easily implemented and have practical applications for music faculty and music students at SLACUs to thrive and achieve a greater level of success. Therefore, by acknowledging the research that has already been done, the author emphasizes key areas that need improvement if these small liberal arts college music departments are going to be successful.

¹³⁶ Bisdorf, 110.

¹³⁷ Irene R. Beattie and Megan Thiele, "Connecting in Class? College Class Size and Inequality in Academic Social Capital, *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 87, no. 3, (May/June 2016): 353.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study is to provide music students and faculty members with substantial data to help music majors at SLACUs achieve a greater level of success within the music program. The information gathered from surveys and interviews with both music students and faculty members will be helpful to prospective music majors to know how to best achieve success in these small music programs. This chapter will explain the different methods the researcher used in order to collect data from students and faculty members and explain how the data was interpreted to identify a list of recommendations.

Design

Survey Design

The researcher designed two separate surveys for participants to complete. The surveys were very similar and asked participants to answer some of the same general questions involving the success of music majors at SLACUs. The primary difference between the two surveys was the perspective that the researcher was trying to gain from each participant. One survey was conducted exclusively for music majors at SLACUs, while the other survey was conducted exclusively for music faculty members at SLACUs. By conducting these surveys simultaneously, the researcher received feedback from both points of view. The primary purpose of this research is to identify the challenges that inhibit music major success at SLACUs and provide strategies for the students and faculty members to best implement these strategies to increase the level of success for music majors.

Interview Design

The interview portion of the research is designed so that the researcher may develop a list of themes based upon the answers given by the participants. Like the survey portion, the researcher developed two lists of questions. One set of questions was used in the student participant interviews, and the other was used for faculty participants. The list of interview questions for the student participants can be found in Appendix E, and the list of interview questions for the faculty can be found in Appendix F. Each participant in the interview portion was asked all the questions to keep the outcomes of the interviews consistent. After the interviews, the researcher took the transcripts of each interview and began to find commonalities amongst the student participants and faculty participants. The purpose of this was to find interview themes for both the student participants and faculty participants and to come up with a list of recommendations for practical implementation after the research.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the challenging factors that college music majors face at small liberal arts colleges that hinder their successful completion of the degree?

Research Question 2: What are some strategies to guide struggling college music majors to become more confident and complete the music major successfully?

Site

Three different institutions that met the criteria of a total enrollment below 2,500 were selected, and music major students and music faculty were then asked to voluntarily participate in a survey and interview to pinpoint some of the struggles they encountered. The liberal arts institutions selected were Limestone University in Gaffney, SC, which had 1,680 in the fall of 2022 according to U.S. News best college poll. Other statistics that helped Limestone stand out were a 13:1 student-faculty ratio as well as 78% of classes having fewer than twenty students enrolled.¹³⁸ Limestone's cost of attendance with tuition and fees is \$27,500, with an average cost of \$22,047 after aid. The four-year graduation rate at Limestone is 21%. Limestone's music department offers a Bachelor of Arts in music education, a Bachelor of Arts in music, and a music minor. There are currently twenty-three total music majors in the department. There are four full-time music faculty members as well as one full-time music staff member.

North Greenville University has an undergraduate enrollment of 1,839 students as of the fall of 2022.¹³⁹ The student-to-faculty ratio is 13:1, and 75% of classes have fewer than twenty students enrolled. Tuition and fees at North Greenville are \$24,500. The four-year graduation rate at North Greenville is 44%.

Furman University has an undergraduate enrollment of 2,283 as of the fall of 2022.¹⁴⁰ The cost of tuition and fees is \$58,312, and the acceptance rate is 67%. The student-to-teacher

¹³⁸ U.S News and World Report, "Limestone University," Assessed June 20, 2023.
<https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/limestone-college-3436#:~:text=Overview,a%20semester%2Dbased%20academic%20calendar>.

¹³⁹ U.S. News and World Report, "North Greenville University," Assessed April 8, 2024.

¹⁴⁰ U.S News and World Report, "Furman University," Assessed April 9, 2024.

ratio is 9:1, and 78% of classes have fewer than twenty students. The graduation rate at Furman is 78%. Furman's music department offers six degree programs in music.

Participants

The participants of this study were selected based on their attendance at a SLACU and majoring in music. The researcher did not specify which subsection of music major the participants had to be to qualify but did specify that they could not be pursuing a minor in music. Music faculty members at the same three SLACUs were also selected to participate in this study. A total of fifteen surveys were collected from student participants for this study. In addition, interviews with a total of seven student participants were conducted via Zoom. A total number of sixteen surveys were collected from faculty participants for this study. Lastly, a total of nine interviews were conducted with music faculty members at the three schools via Zoom.

Procedures

Procedures for this study included securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, recruiting student and faculty participants for surveys and interviews, gathering data, and compiling a list of suggestions to help improve the success rate for music majors at small liberal arts colleges and universities. Before conducting surveys or interviews, the researcher sought IRB approval from Liberty University. The process by which IRB approval was granted from Liberty University was submitting a completed IRB application through Cayuse and waiting for revisions from the IRB board. Conditional IRB approval was secured from Liberty University on the understanding that each of the three institutions with participants also approved research being conducted on their campus. The researcher then secured approval to research each of the three campuses. These approvals may be seen in Appendix G, H, and I.

Recording Procedures

A variety of recording procedures were used for this study. The first action that participants were asked to complete was a brief survey. This gave the researcher baseline data on the participants, such as their role in the music department, and some basic information on their perspectives on music major success at the small liberal arts college. The last question of the survey asks participants if they are interested in participating in a follow-up interview where they can expand upon their answers in the survey and come forward with more information that they feel may help the researcher. The interviews were conducted via Zoom to allow the researcher an easy platform to video record the interview for his research. The interview was then transcribed using an AI assistant to ensure it accurately recorded the participant's responses.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher has many ties to SLACUs. He received his undergraduate degree from a liberal arts college in upstate South Carolina. He also understands the demands that are often placed on music students at SLACUs. Having lived experiences like those of the participants helped the researcher empathize with them, and this is one of the reasons for conducting this research. The researcher is also currently employed by SLACU and teaches music courses. The researcher's role in the study was to present an unbiased account of music major's perspectives on multiple aspects of the music program at SLACUs. While each student and faculty member has slightly different experiences as a music major at one of these small liberal arts institutions, several commonalities can be gleaned from the researcher conducting surveys and interviews with the participants.

Data Collection

Two different methods of data collection were employed for this study. Before participating in either the survey or interview portion of the research, each participant had to complete a consent form. Participants were first recruited to fill out a survey. Participants could then decide if they were interested in interviewing with the researcher over Zoom. The survey was constructed so that it took around fifteen to twenty minutes to complete.

Surveys

Participants completed surveys electronically via Google Forms, an online survey database that aided the researcher with compiling survey results in an easy-to-read document. The survey questions were compiled in a way they could be easily followed up on if the participant elected to also do the interview portion of the research. Two separate surveys were developed by the researcher. One was sent to music major students at SLACUs while the other was sent to music department faculty at those colleges.

The questions for the student survey are divided into three main components. Questions 1–4 are preliminary questions to find out a few details about the participant. Questions 5–8 are designed to see how many extra things the student is involved in. Most schools require that students participate in a certain number of ensembles. These questions give the researcher an idea if the number of required ensembles is being exceeded by the participant. Questions 9–19 are the main data collection points of the student survey. These questions are geared toward the recruitment and retention of music students at SLACUs. Some of the questions are open-ended to allow the participants to form their responses, but most of the questions ask the participants to rate certain aspects of being a music major at a small liberal arts college. Lastly questions 20–22

deal with student interaction with their peers in the individual instrumental and voice studios. The questions here are also a mix between open-ended responses as well as a rating scale. This allows the researcher to get a glimpse into the dynamics of the studio teachers and students at a particular school and formulate some follow-up questions if the students volunteer to participate in the interview portion. See the appendix for a complete list of faculty survey questions.

Like the student survey, the faculty survey is divided into three main components. Questions 1–6 are asked to get some background information about the faculty member, and which courses they are teaching. Questions 7–13 are the main data collection points for the faculty survey. These questions deal primarily with the student's ability to manage the stressful environment of being a music major and the individual faculty member's involvement with the recruitment and retention of music students. Questions 14–15 deal with the overall competitive spirit of the instrumental/voice studios at the college. These questions may not apply to all the faculty members completing a survey or interview.

Interviews

The interview portion was also voluntary. The interviews were conducted via Zoom to allow the researcher an easy platform for recording them for later transcription. Each interview lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes. A predetermined sequence of questions for both students and faculty members was established to minimize any perceived bias and to eliminate any unexpected differences from one interview to the other. See Appendix E for a complete list of student interview questions.

The interview questions for the student participants are designed to supplement the answers they provided while completing the survey portion of the research. Questions 1–2 is

designed to get the participant to give a little bit more background information and to see how much musical training they received from their high school or if they studied music outside of the typical school day. Questions 3–5 are designed to see how the participant views attending a SLACU. Questions 6–9 ask the participant to expand upon answers they gave in the survey to extrapolate more relevant information that will help the researcher better understand the answers provided in the survey. Questions 10–12 ask the participant about being recruited to attend SLACUs. This recruitment generally happens by multiple music faculty members, and question twelve asks the participant how much recruitment by their private lesson teacher ultimately affected their decision to attend. The remaining questions deal with the participant's ability to manage the stress of being a college music major.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this qualitative study is derived primarily from John and David Creswell. Their book recommends that the researcher “look at qualitative data analysis as a process that requires sequential steps to be followed, from the specific to the general, and involving multiple levels of analysis.”¹⁴¹ Following the conclusion of each interview, the researcher then transcribed each interview with the help of an Artificial Intelligence (AI) assistant to ensure the accuracy of what the participant said during the interview. The researcher then checked the transcripts with the recording to ensure the accuracy of the AI assistant. The AI assistant was successful in recording each participant’s response accurately. The AI assistant made some grammar mistakes. The researcher then corrected some of the grammar mistakes but was careful to preserve what the participant said in each interview. The transcript was then kept

¹⁴¹ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, (Los Angeles: Sage Publication, 2018), 193.

in a separate document to ensure the safety and confidentiality of the participants. After the researcher had concluded all the interviews for both student and faculty participants, he then used thematic analysis to extrapolate themes from both sets of interviews. Stephanie Jones defines thematic analysis as “a way of producing themes from texts such as interview or focus group transcripts. The method makes sense of large amounts of information so that responses to a research question can emerge.”¹⁴² This research followed the deductive model in which themes were predefined by the researcher’s hypothesis, but unexpected themes can appear throughout the research as well.¹⁴³ The researcher followed Jones’ five-step process to complete the thematic analysis. This process involves familiarizing yourself with the data, generating an initial set of codes from the first review, starting to search for themes in your codes across the entire data set, reviewing and refining your themes, and finally reporting.¹⁴⁴ The researcher achieved this by reading through the interview transcripts and identifying themes that seemed to appear across different interview participants. The researcher then defined these themes as recurring at least during two separate interviews. Next, the researcher used MAXQDA to help interpret the data set from student and faculty participant interview transcripts. The researcher was very careful using this type of model due to the perception of perceived bias. Great care was taken to ask very open-ended questions throughout the interview and allow the participant to present their findings.

¹⁴² Stephanie Jones, “Interpreting Themes for Qualitative Data: Thematic Analysis,” EVAL Academy, Assessed May 21, 2024. <https://www.evalacademy.com/articles/interpreting-themes-from-qualitative-data-thematic-analysis>.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Ethical Considerations

It is important to follow certain ethical criteria when conducting qualitative research. Patricia Munhall writes, “Fieldwork that is existential and authentic involves the negotiation of trust between the researcher and the participants. Entering fields in the various roles of participant-observer is a privilege.”¹⁴⁵ Each of the participants in this study filled out a consent form (see Appendix J). By filling out this form each participant gave their informed consent to the researcher to participate in the study. The risks and benefits are spelled out for each participant in the consent form along with “a statement that the participant has the opportunity to ask questions and that the participant is free to withdraw at any time without penalty.”¹⁴⁶ All of the participants in the interview portion of the research were given a \$25 Visa gift card following their participation. The researcher also took great care to ensure that each participant was asked similar questions and given a fair chance to elaborate on any of the answers he or she gave.

Chapter Summary

The researcher has designed both the survey and interview portions of this research so that it may have a positive effect on music major success at small liberal arts colleges. The researcher will use this qualitative study to encourage students and faculty to have a more positive experience while attending a small liberal arts college and majoring in music. The aim of the research is to provide music faculty and students with a list of ways to improve the overall rate of success of music students at small liberal arts institutions. By doing this, the researcher

¹⁴⁵ Patricia L. Munhall, “Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Research,” *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, no. 2 (1988): 156.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

hopes to help the students attending these schools to be more successful but also have a more enjoyable experience attending these smaller institutions.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This study aims to enlighten both music students and faculty at SLACUs about the challenges of being a music major at a SLACU versus a large state-supported institution. This information will be shared with students, faculty, and administration at SLACUs in the hope that they will better understand the challenges and be able to support music majors effectively and ultimately see them succeed. Chapter Three discussed the procedures for data collection and recruitment of participants for the study. This chapter will describe each participant and describe the findings of the research.

At the very least, each participant participated in the anonymous survey provided for students and faculty members. The last question of each survey asked the participants if they would volunteer to be interviewed by the researcher via Zoom. This chapter also provides descriptions of each participant in the interview portion of data collection. Each participant is identified as a student participant or faculty participant, and a number of interviews were conducted. The goal of the interviews is to show consistent themes from both faculty and student participants and to answer the researcher's main research questions. The main research questions for this study are as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the challenging factors that college music majors face at small liberal arts colleges that hinder their successful completion of the degree?

Hypothesis 1: Challenging factors that college music majors face at a small liberal arts college can include overwhelming performance ensemble schedules, a shortage of peers

to spark competitiveness in instrument studios, and an overall difficulty adjusting to the social and academic rigors of college life.

Research Question 2: What are some strategies to guide struggling college music majors to become more confident and complete the music major successfully?

Hypothesis 2: Some strategies to guide struggling college music majors to become more confident and successfully complete the degree program include implementing peer tutoring, a more streamlined curriculum for music theory and history courses, and a standardized measurement of student-perceived success when exiting the music program.

Interview Participants

Student Participant 1 is a sophomore music education major. His primary instrument is the saxophone. He comes from a very rural part of the state, and there was not much opportunity for music instruction outside of the instruction provided by his high school band director.

Student Participant 2 is a senior music education major. Her primary instrument is the trumpet. She aspires to teach either middle school or high school band. She was homeschooled but participated in band and could participate in district and honor bands throughout the state in middle school and high school.

Student Participant 3 is a junior music education major. His primary instrument is the clarinet. He also spends lots of time playing secondary instruments in multiple ensembles to foster a more well-rounded music education.

Student Participant 4 is a freshman music education major. His primary instrument is the clarinet. He had very little musical training outside of band throughout middle school and high school. He was raised in the town in which he attends college.

Student Participant 5 is a sophomore vocal performance major. His primary voice part is baritone. He also has experience performing in the orchestra and is allowed to perform with both ensembles concurrently.

Student Participant 6 is a senior music education major. His primary instrument is trumpet, but he has performed on multiple different instruments and in many of the ensembles that the school provides. His career goal is to become a high school band director.

Student Participant 7 is a senior music major at a small liberal arts university. His primary instrument is trumpet, but he has also performed in many ensembles on trombone. His career goal is to become certified to teach in the state and become a music educator.

Table 1 shows a visual representation of the background of the student participants.

Table 1: Student Participants		
Student	Area of Study	Year
Participant 1	Music Education	Sophomore
Participant 2	Music Education	Senior
Participant 3	Music Education	Junior
Participant 4	Music Education	Freshman
Participant 5	Vocal Performance	Sophomore
Participant 6	Music Education	Senior

Participant 7	Music	Senior
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Faculty Participant 1 is a music faculty member at a small liberal arts college in South Carolina. He teaches several music education courses and has seven years of teaching experience in higher education. He also has experience teaching at a large state school as well.

Faculty Participant 2 is a faculty member at a small liberal arts college in South Carolina. She has over thirty years of experience teaching at a small liberal arts university. She has primarily been teaching choral music education and music theory. She also has the unique experience of attending a small liberal arts college for her undergraduate degree in music education.

Faculty Participant 3 is a music faculty member at a small liberal arts college with twenty-two years of teaching experience. All his higher education teaching experience has been at the same institution. He teaches applied saxophone and is the director of jazz studies.

Faculty Participant 4 is a retired music professor at a small liberal arts college. He has close to thirty-five years of teaching experience, most of which was at the same small liberal arts university. He also has experience teaching at a larger state institution.

Faculty Participant 5 is a music faculty member at a small liberal arts college with close to twenty years of experience. He has experience at both small liberal arts colleges and a few different state institutions. He is currently the applied trombone professor and also conducts the wind ensemble.

Faculty Participant 6 is a music faculty member at a small liberal arts college and teaches primarily applied piano, music theory, aural skills, and music history. He has experience being an

adjunct instructor at a small liberal arts college in a different geographical location than the other participants. He also had a few years teaching experience at a larger state university prior to coming to his current position.

Faculty Participant 7 is a music faculty member and primarily teaches applied trumpet lessons. He has one year of teaching experience at a large state university prior to his appointment at his current small liberal arts university. He has also enjoyed a professional performing career that has allowed him to travel all over the United States and is well respected throughout the professional trumpet community.

Faculty Participant 8 is a music faculty member and the current head of the music department at his college. He has experience teaching as a high school band director as well as two different small liberal arts colleges. His primary responsibilities are overseeing the music department, directing the wind ensemble and marching band, and coordinating the music industry degree program.

Faculty Participant 9 is currently the Associate Director of Bands at a small liberal arts university. He had the unique experience of attending the same university as an undergraduate music education major. He returned to that university to begin his teaching career after acquiring his master's and doctorate from a large state university.

Table 2 shows a visual depiction of the faculty participants.

Table 2: Faculty Participants		
Faculty	Title	Years of Experience
Participant 1	Director of Music Education & Instrumental Music	7
Participant 2	Director of Choral Music Education	31
Participant 3	Director of Jazz Studies and Saxophone Professor	22
Participant 4	Retired Director of Bands & Coordinator of Music Education (Instrumental)	35
Participant 5	Applied Trombone Professor & Director of Wind Ensemble	25
Participant 6	Applied Piano Professor Music Theory, Music History, Aural Skills Professor	4
Participant 7	Applied Trumpet Professor	3
Participant 8	Head of Music Department & Director of Wind Ensemble	5

Participant 9	Associate Director of Bands	2
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Survey Responses

The researcher was able to collect thirty surveys. Sixteen faculty surveys and fourteen student surveys were completed. The data collected from these survey responses was very helpful in shedding some light on possible themes for the participants to expand upon once the research moved on to the interview portion.

Student Participant Survey Responses

Fifteen students completed the student participant survey. Table 3 shows a visual representation of the general demographic of those students' majors.

Table 3: Student Participant Majors		
Degree	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Music Education	11 students	73.3%
BA Music	3 students	20%
Music Performance	1 student	6.7%

Table 4 shows the primary instruments for the student participants.

Table 4: Student Participant Primary Instrument		
Primary Instrument	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Trumpet	5 students	33.3%
Saxophone	3 students	20%
Clarinet	3 students	20%
Oboe	1 student	6.7%
Trombone	1 student	6.7%
Euphonium	1 student	6.7%
Baritone (Voice)	1 student	6.7%

Several students also indicated that they perform often on secondary instruments. In fact, 73.3% of the students surveyed said that they often perform on secondary instruments. The student participants make up a diverse field of amount of college experience. Table 5 shows the breakdown of the grade levels of the student participants.

Table 5: Student Participant Year Classification		
Year in School	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Freshman	2 students	13.3%
Sophomore	4 students	26.7%
Junior	4 students	26.7%
Senior	5 students	33.3%

The next question on the student survey asked them to estimate the number of hours they spent practicing in each week. Table 6 shows their responses.

Table 6: Student Participant Average Number of Practice Hours Per Week		
	Number of student responses	Percentage of student responses
Less than 10 hours per week	4 students	26.7%
10-15 hours per week	9 students	60%
15-20 hours per week	1 student	6.7%
20-25 hours per week	1 student	6.7%
Greater than 25 hours per week	0 students	0%

Table 7 shows the students' responses to the number of ensembles they generally participate in during a given semester.

Table 7: Student Participant Number of Ensembles Per Semester		
	Number of student responses	Percentage of student responses
1-2 ensembles	0 students	0%
2-3 ensembles	4 students	26.7%
3-4 ensembles	8 students	53.3%
Greater than 4 ensembles	3 students	20%

Table 8 shows the student participant responses to the question: When considering post-secondary schools, did you have options to attend state schools or SLACUs?

Table 8: Student Participant Option to Attend Other Schools		
Response	Number of students	Percentage of students
Yes	11 students	73.3%
No	1 student	6.7%
Maybe	3 students	20%

The next question on the survey required students to answer with an open-ended prompt. The question read, “What was ultimately the biggest determining factor in attending a small liberal arts college?” Of the responses collected for this question, three students said something to the effect of the large amounts of scholarships the school could provide. Three students commented on the availability of the professors. Two students mentioned the fact that it was a local university. One student suggested that already knowing several of the current students and having a positive interaction with them was a determining factor in them choosing to enroll. One student suggested that they could grow more at a small liberal arts school.

The next question in the survey was also an open-ended prompt that asked the students what the biggest benefit of attending a small liberal arts school was. The overwhelming majority of student answers to this question were the individual attention that the students receive from the professors coupled with the closeness that they feel with their classmates.

The following question asked the student to indicate what they felt was the biggest challenge of being a music major at a small liberal arts college. The responses from this question

varied greatly. One student said that there is a “simultaneous lack and overabundance of opportunities.”¹⁴⁷ One student discussed time management between assignments, practice time, and performance ensembles as being their biggest challenges. One student expressed having doubts that they were not as prepared as students attending larger schools with more resources. Another student indicated that there could be a disparity between student commitment levels in some of the ensembles due to non-music major participation in ensembles. Several students indicated that their biggest difficulty is being asked to do everything within the music department due to insufficient amounts of music students attending the university.

The next question asked the student participants to rank the overall environment of the music department at their school on a scale from one to five with one being the worst and five being the best. Table 9 shows the data collected from this survey question.

Table 9: Student Participant Ranking of the Overall Environment in Music Department		
Response	Number of students	Percentage of students
1	0 students	0%
2	1 student	6.7%
3	6 students	40%
4	4 students	26.7%
5	4 students	26.7%

¹⁴⁷ Student survey response. (see appendix)

The survey then asked the student participants to rank how supportive the music faculty is when a student is struggling in a music course from one to five. Table 10 shows the student responses to this question.

Table 10: Student Participant Ranking Response from Faculty on Struggling Student		
Response	Number of students	Percentage of students
1	0 students	0%
2	0 students	0%
3	4 students	26.7%
4	5 students	33.3%
5	6 students	40%

The survey then asked the students about the university's involvement with students who are struggling academically. They were again asked to rank these support systems from one to five. Table 11 below shows the results of the student responses.

Table 11: Student Participant Ranking of University Support Systems		
Response	Number of students	Percentage of students
1	0 students	0%
2	4 students	26.7%
3	5 students	33.3%
4	5 students	33.3%
5	1 student	6.7%

The next question asked the students to rate their individual ability to handle the stress of being a college music major on a scale from one to five. Table 12 shows the student response to this question.

Table 12: Student Participant Ranking of Management of Stress		
Response	Number of students	Percentage of students
1	1 student	6.7%
2	3 students	20%
3	5 students	33.3%
4	4 students	26.7%
5	2 students	13.3%

Next was another open-ended prompt question that asked the students to list some things that they would typically do to ensure that they understood the material presented in their music courses. There was a varied list of answers to this question. Some themes that stood out were making sure they finish their assignments early enough so that they can get help from their professors if needed. Studying the material with classmates and visiting with professors during their office hours. There was one student who indicated being a hands-on learner, so they will apply whatever they are struggling with in a music course to their primary instrument or piano.

Next, the students were asked to indicate their most challenging music courses. A large majority of the students indicated that music theory and music history were the most difficult music courses for them. One student indicated that a lyric diction course was challenging to them because the instructor did not follow a set schedule. A few students also indicated that aural skills

courses were challenging to them because of their lack of prior knowledge about the subject and their general lack of understanding of how to improve their skills in that class.

As a follow-up to the previous question, the survey then asked the students to indicate which music courses were least challenging. Several students indicated that the techniques or methods courses were the least challenging. Some students indicated music theory as being the least challenging. Some students indicated musical ensembles as their least challenging.

The next set of questions dealt with the students' primary instrumental or vocal studio experiences. The size of the instrumental/vocal studios for the student participants ranged from three students indicating that they are the only student in their studio to one student indicating that their studio has twelve. Students were then asked to rank the competitiveness within their studios. Table 13 shows the results of that question.

Table 13: Student Participant Response to Competitiveness in Studio Class		
Response	Number of students	Percentage of students
1	5 students	33.3%
2	1 student	6.7%
3	6 students	40%
4	0 students	0%
5	3 students	20%

The last question of the survey asked the students an open-ended prompt about the interaction between them and the instrument/voice teacher. Most of the responses given were

very positive and discussed how the “friendly competitiveness” of the students pushed each other to improve as musicians.

Faculty Participants Survey Responses

A total of sixteen music faculty members participated in the survey portion of the research. Their job titles varied based on what institution they were from, but some of the job titles represented included assistant professor of piano and music theory, director of athletic bands, coordinator of music education, music industry chair, director of jazz studies, music education program coordinator, department chair visual & performing arts, and professor of choral/vocal music. The faculty survey participants were very diverse and represented all aspects of the music department at their small liberal arts colleges. The faculty participants were also diverse in their primary instrument/voice parts. The highest concentration was four faculty members who indicated the trumpet as their primary instrument. Three faculty members indicated the trombone as their primary instrument. Three faculty participants each indicated saxophone, piano, and clarinet, respectively, as their primary instruments. Cello, percussion, and soprano each had one faculty participant. Additionally, the faculty participants had a wide variety of years of experience in higher education. Table 14 shows the years of experience of the faculty participants.

Table 14: Faculty Participant Years of Experience in Higher Education

Response	Number of faculty	Percentage of faculty
2-5 years of experience	4 faculty members	25%
5-10 years of experience	1 faculty member	6.3%
10-15 years of experience	2 faculty members	12.5%
15-20 years of experience	2 faculty members	12.5%
Over 20 years of experience	7 faculty members	43.8%

The courses that the faculty participants taught were also very diverse. In general, most of the faculty participants had an extremely full load of teaching requirements. These include but are not limited to, conducting ensembles, teaching music education courses, music appreciation, jazz history, music theory, conducting, chorus, vocal ensembles, music history, and literature topics, and instrument-specific studios as well.

When asked about the different degree concentrations provided within the music department, most of the answers given centered around degree concentrations in music, music education, and music performance. There were some discrepancies between schools on whether the degree in music education a Bachelor of Music degree or a Bachelor of Arts degree is. That primarily is a function of the structure of the university and how they chose to define their degree tracks. One school offers a Bachelor of Science in music therapy. One school offers degrees in theory, composition, and church music.

Next, the faculty participants were asked to rank on a scale from one to five how successful music majors are at their school. Table 15 shows the results of that question.

Table 15: Faculty Participant Ranking How Successful Music Majors Are

Response	Number of faculty	Percentage of faculty
1	0 faculty members	0%
2	2 faculty members	12.5%
3	4 faculty members	25%
4	8 faculty members	50%
5	2 faculty members	12.5%

When asked their opinion on the biggest challenges of teaching at a small liberal arts college, the faculty participants had a variety of answers. From these answers, the researcher can see a few trends and pinpoint a few generalizations about the challenges. One of these themes is the time commitment of being a college music major coupled with the intense academic demands at small liberal arts colleges. Additionally, the lack of qualified students to fill out ensembles means that many students are participating in multiple ensembles per semester. This leads to a high rate of burnout among the students. Yet another common theme is the cost of tuition for most small liberal arts colleges is higher than state schools. Some faculty members brought up some unique difficulties. An example of this was one faculty participant who stated, “Many to most [students] do not have the requisite musicality and academic acumen to be there, yet are accepted because of lack of interest of qualified candidates.”¹⁴⁸ Another faculty participant also

¹⁴⁸ Faculty Participant response to survey question.

said that a difficulty would be “being competitive in the real world with students who have the latitude to practice a whole lot more than our students.”¹⁴⁹

Next, the faculty participants were asked to rate how supportive they were as a collective faculty for music students who are struggling with music courses. Table 16 shows those results.

Table 16: Faculty Participant Support for Struggling Music Students		
Results	Number of faculty	Percentage of faculty
1	0 faculty members	0%
2	2 faculty members	12.5%
3	3 faculty members	18.8%
4	5 faculty members	31.3%
5	6 faculty members	37.5%

When asked about things that the music faculty at their school typically do for struggling music majors, a variety of answers were given. Some common themes that the faculty participants showed were meeting with students one-on-one during office hours to provide extra help, conducting after-class help sessions and study groups for students that need additional help, assisting students with prioritizing their time, and frequent effective communication with the students. Some faculty participants gave good specific examples of how they attempt to help struggling students. One faculty participant wrote, “I have a Google document that faculty members can complete if any of my music education students and/or band students are struggling. I will actively work with those faculty members and students to help find a healthy

¹⁴⁹ Faculty Participant response to survey question

solution for all parties.”¹⁵⁰ Additionally, another faculty member provided this advice for struggling students, “Depends on how they’re struggling. Direct them to the writing center, extra help outside class, or direct them to the counseling center, meeting with student’s advisor.”¹⁵¹

Next, the faculty participants were asked about how much time a week they average on recruiting new students. Table 17 shows the results for this question.

Table 17: Faculty Participant Average Hours Spent Recruiting Per Week		
Time	Number of faculty	Percentage of faculty
No hours spent recruiting	1 faculty member	6.3%
1-2 hours spent recruiting	5 faculty members	31.3%
3-4 hours spent recruiting	4 faculty members	25%
4-5 hours spent recruiting	4 faculty members	25%
5-6 hours spent recruiting	1 faculty member	6.3%
Over 6 hours spent recruiting	1 faculty member	6.3%

The next question asked the faculty participants to rate their music students’ ability to manage the stress of being a music major. Table 18 shows the results of that question.

¹⁵⁰ Faculty Participant response to survey question.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Table 18: Faculty Participant Ranking Student's Ability to Handle Stress

Rating	Number of faculty	Percentage of faculty
1	0 faculty members	0%
2	5 faculty members	31.3%
3	8 faculty members	50%
4	3 faculty members	18.8%
5	0 faculty members	0%

On the question about which courses tend to most difficult for your students, all the faculty participants answered some level of music history and music theory as being the most challenging for the students at their school. Given that information, it can be stated that those two courses are traditionally the most difficult for students to be successful but are two of the most crucial courses for a music major at all schools regardless of size of the school.

The researcher further divided the pool of faculty participants with the last two questions by asking if the faculty participant is an applied studio teacher. Seven (43.8%) of the faculty participants indicated that they were not an applied faculty member and therefore did not participate in the next question. The next question for applied studio teachers dealt with the competitiveness of the studio. The studios at these small liberal arts schools were by and large not very competitive. Only ten faculty participants answered this question. Table 19 shows the responses to this question.

Table 19: Faculty Participant Response to Competitiveness in Instrumental/Vocal Studio

Response	Number of faculty	Percentage of faculty
1	1 faculty member	10%
2	8 faculty members	80%
3	1 faculty member	10%
4	0 faculty members	0%
5	0 faculty members	0%

Individual Interview Responses

By conducting interviews, the researcher could pinpoint several consistent themes throughout the interview process. The themes varied from the student participants to the faculty participants. By examining both perspectives on student success, the researcher was able to identify these themes.

Student Interview Themes

Several things became consistent throughout the interview process, particularly with the student participants. One of the first themes that seemed to take precedence with most of the participants was the lack of prior music theory or music history training before they began college. The first question of the student interviews asked them to recount for the researcher a little bit about their musical training prior to attending college to become a music major. This question was asked to try to get a feel of how much prior musical training each student had prior to entering the degree program. One student recounted that his music training “was very like base level. I could play the saxophone, but I couldn’t really. I didn’t understand how it worked. I

just knew I blew air into it, and sound came out. But before coming here, I could not play my scales I didn't know how to go about playing. My rhythms, my sight reading, and any reading in general were awful.”¹⁵² An overwhelming majority of student participants discussed having little to no formal training in music theory. Out of all the students who participated in the interviews, only one student indicated that they had taken a music theory course in high school. This statistic is consistent given that only 17,834 students took the Advanced Placement (AP) Music Theory course nationwide during the 2022–2023 school year.¹⁵³ Given the information that most high school students do not take any type of course in music theory or music history, it is likely that those courses would be the most challenging for students entering a music major in college. Most of the student participants were shocked by the number of assignments that they were required to complete for both courses.

Even without taking a music theory course in high school, one of the student participants indicated that they focused a lot of attention in high school band class on the development of aural skills and sight reading. He said, “We focused on theory, sight reading, and aural skills. It took a lot of the class time. We switched from doing most of our repertoire to doing theory and aural skills...That really helped us too because that helped us develop technically and being able to identify errors faster.”¹⁵⁴ Another student recounted that they “had a couple of music theory lessons. There was an AP music theory class, but they canceled it before I could join...so I really didn't have music theory experience, mostly just performance experience from high school.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Student Participant 1, interview by author, South Carolina, February 24, 2024.

¹⁵³ College Board, Student Score Distributions. Assessed March 3, 2024.
<https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/ap-score-distributions-by-subject-2023.pdf>.

¹⁵⁴ Student Participant 3, interview by author, South Carolina, February 27, 2024.

¹⁵⁵ Student Participant 6, interview by author, South Carolina, March 7, 2024.

Some students indicated that they learned some basics of music theory prior to entering college. However, the most frequent answer to that question alludes to the fact that students do not get very much music training outside of performance-based training in high school. This can sometimes be problematic for music students in their first few years of being a music major.

The student's decision to attend SLACU and major in music was another topic of discussion in the interviews. The researcher asked each participant what the most important factor was in their choosing to attend an SLACU. There were several common answers given. One of the themes presented was the availability of the professors. According to one student, "I looked at what would give me the most opportunity, where I would be able to shine more. In doing so, I saw that somebody who had no experience and no training going into USC was not a viable option and it wouldn't allow me to grow."¹⁵⁶ Another student had this to say "But I didn't really want to go anywhere big because in smaller colleges you, I don't want to say better training, but you get more one-on-one time, and I feel like that's really crucial. Especially in teaching moments and being able to learn if you get that extra one on one time like that just really helped me."¹⁵⁷ Another student added that "I feel like they give you more scholarship money to go to the smaller schools because everybody wants to go to the bigger schools, you know and so they don't have to give you as much at the bigger schools because everybody goes there and they get a lot of money and a lot of students paying tuition and all that kind of stuff."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Student Participant 1, interview.

¹⁵⁷ Student Participant 3, interview by author, South Carolina, February 27, 2024.

¹⁵⁸ Student Participant 2, interview by author, South Carolina, February 15, 2024.

Most of the student participants were in agreement with the SLACU being the best fit for them due to the individualized attention they receive.

Each of the student participants had encountered academic struggles at some point in their college careers. Some of these academic adversities can be linked to the students not understanding the work that they need to do. However, some of the adversities could be described as self-inflicted struggles. One participant indicated that they were “struggling with doing schoolwork because I wasn’t used to the amount that I had, and it took me a minute to get on track.”¹⁵⁹ This student participant is struggling with a preconceived notion of how much work he would have to complete in a college music major. The workload is seemingly more than what he was expecting it to be. A big part of the college experience is learning how to overcome academic struggles and push to thrive in the college environment.

Student Participant 2 discussed the fact that passing the Praxis Core test is one of the biggest struggles for them in completing the music degree. The Praxis Core test is the test that all music education majors must take to receive K-12 certification. The student participant indicated that she had gone through a lot of adversity with taking the test. She said, “Academically, I struggle with reading comprehension...so that’s really what kept me from passing it and until I did enough studying and tutoring, I finally passed it.”¹⁶⁰ When asked about the college preparing her to be successful on the Praxis test she said “The first time I had to take it to pass principles of education, which I passed the class, but I didn’t pass the test.”¹⁶¹ She then went on to discuss the

¹⁵⁹ Student Participant 1, interview.

¹⁶⁰ Student Participant 2, interview.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

various independent tutors she sought after in order to better prepare herself to be successful on the test. She mentioned Khan Academy, Kathleen Jasper, and individual tutoring through the school tutoring service as being the most helpful for her finally achieving success and passing the test. Overcoming adversity in these situations really depends upon the work ethic each individual student possesses.

Going along with the theme of academic struggles, Participant 3 indicated that there had been times in every semester so far that they have struggled academically. They said, “I would say probably freshman year was when I struggled the most because I wasn’t really sure of how college was going to be...I wasn’t sure how the environment was going to be...so just the transition phase from high school to college because a lot of people took a gap year and I didn’t.”¹⁶² Students often struggle in college because they are underprepared in high school. Andrea Venezia says the main reason for students being underprepared is, “differences between what high schools teach and what colleges expect, as well as large disparities between the instruction offered by high schools with high concentrations of students of poverty.”¹⁶³ The gap year gives some students perspective on adjustment to college, but oftentimes provides a year where the student is out of a routine that mirrors school. This can greatly inhibit their success when they do decide to go to college the next year. Another important thing to note is the unfamiliarity most students have with the college environment both social and academic. As Student Participant 3 said earlier, they did not really understand how college would work. This

¹⁶² Student Participant 3, interview.

¹⁶³ Andrea Venezia, “Transitions from High School to College,” 117.

disconnect can cause students to feel stressed and can cause them to experience some adversity until they learn how to thrive in the college environment.

When students are struggling academically, the professors are often their first contact from which to get help. The availability of the professors at a small liberal arts college seemed to have helped the students interviewed. One student participant said “The faculty here are awesome. You can almost always find your professors. They have open-door policies where if I’m struggling, I can come in their office and we will sit down and they will help me to really understand.”¹⁶⁴ Another participant said, “Yeah, I feel like they would care more. It does depend on the professor, but I feel like with so many faculty and so many students at big universities... they’d be more likely to just dismiss and not really pay attention or meet the student’s needs.”¹⁶⁵

Another theme from the student interviews deals with their ability to handle the stress of being a college music major. This is important because all the students interviewed expressed that they have encountered adversity in their degree programs. The ability to appropriately manage the stresses of being a music major is one of the key measures of them eventually either succeeding or failing the music major. One student participant said that they approach a stressful situation with “confidence in myself that I can handle all the stuff that’s being thrown at me no matter how ridiculous. I believe that mindset is the first thing.”¹⁶⁶ Dealing with academic stress has a lot to do with student mindset, and he continues, “I’ve had struggles along the way, but at

¹⁶⁴ Student Participant 3, interview.

¹⁶⁵ Student Participant 2, interview.

¹⁶⁶ Student Participant 6, interview.

the same time, I knew confidence was the main thing that really helped me. It helped me have a drive to push through all the things that were being thrown at me.”¹⁶⁷

As Vincent Tinto pointed out the three key dimensions of student persistence are self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and curriculum.¹⁶⁸ This was further shown to be true by the student interviews for this research. The most important aspect of was self-efficacy. Each of the students who were interviewed showed signs of having to overcome adversity in their college career. Some of them experienced adversity in terms of scheduling difficulty or time management while others encountered mental health struggles. The most successful students interviewed have a high sense of self-efficacy that allows them to push past any adversity and accomplish their goals. A strong sense of belonging was also shown throughout the student interviews specifically when students were asked about their primary determining factors for selecting a SLACU. A strong sense of belonging is also linked to the music department forming a strong cohort of students. Tinto says, “The result of a sense of belonging is often expressed as a commitment that serves to bind the individual to the group or community even when challenges arise.”¹⁶⁹ Tinto goes on to advocate that schools develop a sense of belonging in both academic and social settings. He suggests that they do this by developing strong cohorts as well as implementing more problem-based learning in the classroom. As far as the sense of belonging in a social context, he says that it must be done very early and try to find at least one social organization that each student can become a part of. The last modality that relates to the student interviews is the curriculum, which is where SLACUs may excel. There were several of the student

¹⁶⁷ Student Participant 6, interview.

¹⁶⁸ Tinto, “Reflections on Student Persistence,” 3.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 4.

participants that identified this as a strength of the SLACU. The faculty are much more accessible and can provide feedback to students that are struggling to understand the curriculum. Also, the fact that many of the courses are taught by the same professor provides a sense of continuity in learning throughout the music major helps SLACU. For example, a student that takes an intro to music education course in their first year of study at an SLACU will likely have the same professor when they take an advanced music education course in their senior year. This type of familiarity is rare at larger institutions and helps the student with a sense of belonging.

Faculty Interview Themes

A total of nine faculty members participated in interviews. From those interviews, the researcher was able to see both commonalities and a few differences in the answers in which they provided. Based on these interviews the researcher was able to pinpoint some general themes from the faculty participants.

The first faculty theme is that the general lack of knowledge before entering university plays a significant role on how successful students are in the music major program. One of the faculty participants said, “The biggest challenge seems to me to be lack of good preparation early on. If they haven’t had private lessons, they don’t even know what a lesson feels like...so it’s kind of their blissful ignorance. They just don’t understand and so if – they don’t understand the importance of practicing and applying everything that they’re learning.”¹⁷⁰ Later when asked which courses students struggle in the most, the same participant said the course they most struggle with is the fundamentals of music theory citing the “lack of preparation in public

¹⁷⁰ Faculty Participant 1, interview by author, South Carolina, February 15, 2024.

schools before they get here.”¹⁷¹ Another faculty participant described music theory as the “weed-out course similar to if you want to be a doctor, chemistry is the course where they weed students out.”¹⁷² The goal is not to approach music theory as a weed-out course and he said this about the theory department at his school “It’s always in a state of flux trying to find the right proportion in order to make someone who has not had a lot of experience in theory and make them more successful because if you can’t get through the theory program you’re going to get discouraged about continuing as a music major.”¹⁷³

Smaller universities inevitably have fewer resources and fewer faculty members available to teach. This oftentimes means that one faculty member is teaching multiple disciplines within the music department. For example, one faculty member might be responsible for teaching both music theory and music history to multiple different groups of students and students at various stages in the degree program. This creates a challenging scenario because that faculty member can only teach so many classes per semester. Therefore, the smaller schools are often forced to only offer some courses on a rotation. One faculty participant pointed out that “you, as the faculty person, understand how important it is that the students succeed in those classes the first time they take them. I understand the consequences.”¹⁷⁴ The consequences of failing a course required for the major is the inability to take that course the subsequent semester. Therefore, that student must wait until the next time in the rotation that the course is offered. In some instances, this can put the student behind up to two or three semesters. Faculty Participant 1 continues, “it’s

¹⁷¹ Faculty Participant 1, interview.

¹⁷² Faculty Participant 4, interview with author, South Carolina, February 27, 2024.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Faculty Participant 1, interview.

hard to see them not be able to afford to come back or get so discouraged that they don't come back."¹⁷⁵

Additionally, since smaller schools have fewer full-time faculty members, most are forced to hire adjunct professors to be able to teach all the required classes for music majors. While these adjunct positions are entirely necessary for the music school to be able to function, this can create additional challenges for smaller institutions that may not be present at the larger schools that are able to hire full-time faculty positions for each instrument in the school of music. One faculty participant said "At a school like ours, we're lucky to have as many applied faculty as we did. But obviously, you couldn't cover everything with a full-time teacher, so you'd have to have adjunct teachers teaching those instruments... What was critical there is trying to hire the people who saw recruiting as a part of their survival."¹⁷⁶ Some of the adjunct faculty lack a certain sense of buy-in to the university because some of them are teaching at multiple smaller institutions in order to make enough money, and it also creates a conflict of interest in the recruitment of new students to the university. Faculty Participant 2 continues, "Now the problem with that is adjuncts don't get paid very well. Adjunct teachers get paid by the hour and you're not going to get paid for any time that you spend recruiting. However, if you don't do some recruiting, you're not going to have any students to teach."¹⁷⁷

A theme among the faculty participants who were applied teachers was the lack of competitiveness in their studios. There are multiple examples of applied studios at larger schools,

¹⁷⁵ Faculty Participant 1, interview.

¹⁷⁶ Faculty Participant 2, interview.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

and the competition within them creates an almost defeating mentality for the students in the studio. Several teachers would foster this sort of stiff competition between the students to act as external motivation for the students to improve. One faculty participant felt that he has “a couple of different types of students. You have the ones that are very competitive and then you have the ones that might be competitive, but they might give up, and then you’re going to have the ones that won’t compete.”¹⁷⁸ One way that this participant builds studio chemistry and develops a sense of community within his studio is by requiring each student to participate in studio class performances on a weekly basis. Obviously, students will be at different levels of competency with different performance techniques. He says, “I make everybody participate. Everyone has to bring something to the table, but the thing is there can be some variety in that. So, if we’re doing jazz standard day, I give the option of playing twice through or you can improvise if you choose to.”¹⁷⁹ This helps to create a safe place for students to perform for their peers and receive feedback without the added pressure to perform. However, at smaller schools the competition within the studios seems to be less vicious and more of a nurturing and helpful environment. One faculty participant said this about the competitiveness in his studio “I try as hard as I possibly can to make my studio a community and not a cutthroat competition. I don’t think that environment always serves everybody as well. However, I also have a studio that has some students who are doing a BA in music and something else for their career.”¹⁸⁰ At this point it becomes more of a strategy to place students on the right part and in the right opportunities to foster the most positive musical growth. Faculty Participant 3 goes on to say, “I like to think that

¹⁷⁸ Faculty Participant 7, interview.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Faculty Participant 3, interview.

there are opportunities for everybody to kind of participate and contribute and feel like they're giving their best version of themselves...I think the fact that I can cover a lot of ground as a studio teacher musically allows me to have lots of different kinds of students."¹⁸¹ He goes on to discuss how each of his students is a little different and how psychology plays a big role, especially when you are teaching in an applied studio scenario. When giving students opportunities he says, "I think they're going to be feeling some way because they're not going to play principal in this, and they did last year but now they're not because they got passed up but I have to give them something so let's have them play soprano in the quartet or have them play a feature in the big band."¹⁸²

Another faculty participant wrote this about competitiveness in his trombone studio "I don't set up scenarios that create competition, but if there's a healthy competition there, I'm not going to squash it unless it becomes bad. I would say right now are four of the least competitive people I've ever met in my life. They just do their thing, and they support each other."¹⁸³

Participant 5 also continued talking about his experience in a very competitive studio "That was an exceptionally competitive studio. There was a real pecking order, and we had auditions every year, and that carried a lot of weight. I think that if I could eliminate one thing in music, it would be the competitive musical experience."¹⁸⁴ It can be difficult to pinpoint where the competitive spirit in music comes from. Participant 5 goes on to mention this about the competition in music mindset "High school marching band for the trophy or getting a superior at concert festival or

¹⁸¹ Faculty Participant 3, interview.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Faculty Participant 5, interview.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

something like that, I think that it creates just a rough situation, and it's not just the kids. It's mostly the band directors that are very successful on the marching band field that haven't taught music in years."¹⁸⁵

One faculty participant viewed the lack of competitiveness in the studio in a negative light. When asked what inhibits student success the most at small schools, he said, "Lack of competition, and maybe a camaraderie that comes from the example of an upperclassman. You don't have that model of student to look up to and aspire to be like when there aren't very many students in the studio."¹⁸⁶ Therefore, the low number of students in each studio would greatly impact the level of competition. It is important to note that this particular indication would vary between schools and instrumental studios as well. He goes on to state, "If you're the only clarinet player, you don't have any others who are maybe working a little harder than you and creating that environment where you have some healthy competition. If you're the only one, you can kind of do whatever you want and still be the best."¹⁸⁷ Participant 6 had a lot to say about what unhealthy competition in an applied studio looks like. He said, "The unhealthy competition would be if lots of really advanced students, and maybe there are actual competitions shared where they are competing, and there is only going to be one winner...so if you never get the opportunity to shine, I will say that would be an unhealthy side of it."¹⁸⁸

Music education has changed over their time spent on the faculty and they try their best to adapt to the needs of the current students. These needs do not always align with the needs of

¹⁸⁵ Faculty Participant 5, interview.

¹⁸⁶ Faculty Participant 6, interview.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

students when they first started teaching or the needs of the students when they were an undergraduate music major. One faculty participant discussed how the biggest difference he saw in the music students throughout his thirty-four-year career teaching at the college level was the social environment on campus. He described how students used to seem to be of a unit but with the emergence of new technologies the students have become “fractured even amongst themselves...I remember later on, like probably 2013, walking into my conducting class and everybody sitting there silent looking at their phone I felt that was sad because they weren’t even talking to each other...Whereas before that time, you’d walk into a classroom and it would be a buzz with people talking.”¹⁸⁹ Another faculty participant said, “I think students are exactly the same as they’ve always been I think what’s changed is the world around them and kind of the way the world works...I think that if I had the internet and YouTube when I was their age, I would be doing the exact same stuff that they are doing now.”¹⁹⁰ So he acknowledged that the students fundamental ability to adapt to the challenges of being a music major had not changed, but the world around them and the influences on them have changed. He goes on to say, “I don’t think we as teachers have adjusted the way we do it so instead we like to blame the kids today.”¹⁹¹

Small music schools have a smaller pool of students from which to pull to participate in ensembles. So, the number of ensembles that the students are participating in in a small school environment can sometimes be detrimental to their ability to have time to increase their musicianship in the practice room. One faculty participant said, “The negative side is students

¹⁸⁹ Faculty Participant 4, interview with author, South Carolina, February 27, 2024.

¹⁹⁰ Faculty Participant 5, interview with author, South Carolina, February 28, 2024.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

get spread really thin because in a small program, in order to have a band, choir, jazz ensemble, and marching band, everybody has to contribute. You really have to pull from everybody to make things happen.”¹⁹² While this is true of most small college music programs, this faculty participant also thought it could be seen as a positive attribute to when he said, “But it has a good side. If the student is a music education major, they’re walking out and probably have participated in both band and choir and if they’re going to go be a teacher in a school where they have to teach both, they’ve at least experienced being in both of those ensembles.”¹⁹³ Furthermore, dealing with the students feeling like they are being stretched thin. This creates a sense of difficulty in scheduling performances from the faculty perspective. One faculty participant said, “When you try to do big things in a small place, I think we have to be aware of how taxing that is on students, particularly at a place where they’re also trying to explore other academic disciplines. In fact, we encourage that, and it’s rigorous and it can seem overwhelming at times.”¹⁹⁴

Recruitment at small liberal arts colleges is often difficult for the music department. The lack of resources plays a big role in this effort. Large state schools have seemingly endless amounts of funding to support the recruitment effort of musicians to the university. It is imperative that the music department take a more active role with the admission office at smaller schools to assure that communication is making it to prospective students. One faculty participant had this to say about working with the admissions department “The people that are in the admissions office and the recruiters are a revolving door. They typically come in with no

¹⁹² Faculty Participant 6, interview with author, South Carolina, February 29, 2024.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Faculty Participant 9, interview by author, South Carolina, March 14, 2024.

experience. Maybe they graduated from that institution. Because of that you're always having to re-educate them and they're never going to fully understand your area."¹⁹⁵ So the admission office can create a difficult scenario for the music department if they are not communicating accurate information to prospective students. This faculty participant also adds, "[As the director] you need to be building relationships and maintaining relationships with the high school band directors. Just like with the students that you demonstrate that you care about their success, you've got to demonstrate that you care about the success of the high school programs."¹⁹⁶ Furthermore adding to the difficulty, he continues, "Typically the smaller colleges and universities it's not the student's first pick or they're not ready to go or built to go to a larger school. So, for some students, it's kind of is a challenge, but it also turns into a success if they get into the small school situation. It's where they will thrive."¹⁹⁷ He goes on to discuss additional challenges that exist with first-generation college students. There is often a large population of those at smaller schools because they are attracted to the individualized attention they can receive. However, with being a first-generation student, he says they have challenges with things like "navigating different offices on campus like the business office or counseling...so that's probably the biggest thing. When you get to the smaller institutions, they just don't have the support system they need."¹⁹⁸ Another faculty participant said, "There are different levels of the recruiting thing...I've been here 22 years and I still have no idea. It's a roller coaster. Things get

¹⁹⁵ Faculty Participant 8, interview by author, South Carolina, March 8, 2024.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

good, then they're not. You try hard to recruit this kid and they never come and then you don't try with this student and then here they are."¹⁹⁹

One issue that causes more difficulty in recruitment is the cost of attending small liberal arts institutions. Sometimes universities will decide to increase their tuition by a certain percentage each year. This can quickly cause them to have a much higher price than the average student can pay, making it difficult to continue recruiting a student from a certain socio-economic background. Therefore, the faculty members must adjust their recruitment strategies. One faculty participant said, "In the early 2000s they were able to stay within a tight price frame that was still expensive but wasn't as expensive as the most expensive schools...but then decided to increase the tuition by 10% every year for about five years which brought us up to or close to the level of Duke...and you put that in for music education students to go to a school like that is a hard sell."²⁰⁰ Furthermore, in order to offset some of the increases in tuition, small schools rely heavily on the amount of scholarships being given to students to increase as well in order to act as a bridge to keep the price of attending manageable for music students. This was not the case in this faculty participants scenario. He said, "We had people in our development and admissions who decided that they were going to decrease the amounts of scholarships. So actually, our scholarship pool decreased during that time period."²⁰¹

While recruitment of new students is necessary, the retention rate of the students when they get in the program is always a concern for small liberal arts colleges and universities. One

¹⁹⁹ Faculty Participant 3, interview by author, South Carolina, February 19, 2024.

²⁰⁰ Faculty Participant 2, interview.

²⁰¹ Faculty Participant 2, interview.

faculty member said, “The retention issue is always there, and it's more in your face than if I were in a larger university where you just teach the class, and then if they make it, they do, and if they don't.”²⁰²

Oftentimes small liberal arts schools place a high premium on the quality of instruction that the students receive. They often pride themselves on low faculty-to-student ratios but also make it clear to the faculty that their primary mission is to provide the students with a great classroom experience. One faculty participant said, “One of the things I was impressed with at Furman is when I first came here, it was very obvious to me that the most important part of my job was teaching, and that it was very valued... it was expressly explained to me here that I was not here to be a researcher or anything like that I was here to be a professor and teacher.”²⁰³

One thing that the small college environment provides is a sense of continuity for students and a more personal relationship with professors. For example, one of the faculty participants had this to say about his own personal small college experience as an undergraduate “One of the benefits for me as a music education major was that the same person who taught my conducting class was my conductor in ensembles, and I was able to make connections across my learning by seeing in practice the same thing I was being taught in pedagogy...so in terms of my student experience, that was a big part of it.”²⁰⁴

In addition, the advantage of attending a SLACU is the students receive a well-rounded education. One faculty participant said, “I chose to go to a conservatory. I chose to do as little

²⁰² Faculty Participant 1, interview.

²⁰³ Faculty Participant 2, interview.

²⁰⁴ Faculty Participant 9, interview by author, South Carolina, March 14, 2024.

non-music coursework as I possibly could get away with...I took almost all my non-music stuff pass-fail. As a 51-year-old, I look back at that, and I'm like, man, I kind of blew an opportunity to learn some stuff...I could have taken some classes that might have been interesting to me."²⁰⁵ Another faculty member had a similar view when he said, "I especially enjoy liberal arts education. You know, as somebody that came from a conservatory background I think that liberal arts is just much more useful on every single level, not only in terms of music, but just developing as a human being."²⁰⁶ The author then asked him to expand upon the difference in the environment at a conservatory and a liberal arts school. He said, "I think the biggest difference is that when I was at Eastman, all my friend groups had essentially the same major. We were also all from the same socio-economic backgrounds, so I was surrounded by, in a lot of ways, some people very similar to myself, and their career goals and paths were the same."²⁰⁷ He later continued by saying, "So I feel like while I was hyper-prepared on the music side, I was completely unprepared for just kind of life side of working especially in general."²⁰⁸ So, the availability to explore other academic interests is a key selling point for most liberal arts colleges.

When students are experiencing difficulties in music classes, at small schools, it is oftentimes up to the faculty members to provide help them find different ways to understand the material. This sometimes involves student success coaching or tutoring as some schools will label it. However, sometimes the music faculty will attempt to assist the student struggling in

²⁰⁵ Faculty Participant 3, interview.

²⁰⁶ Faculty Participant 5, interview.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

house so to speak. When asked about the students who are struggling to meet the degree requirements, Participant 6 said, “We have a couple of things in place that I think are nice structures, and I’ve already seen them be effective. One is a document for the music faculty members to have documentation for a struggling student. It is sort of an accountability thing for record keeping.”²⁰⁹ The Music Student Support Plan (MSS) that Faculty Participant 6 is referencing can be referenced in Appendix K and provides a step-by-step action plan to support students who are experiencing difficulties. It provides opportunities for multiple faculty members to get involved with the student and to help them be successful via a collective effort. Faculty Participant 6 goes on to state, “These are the goals we would like to set for them, and these are the faculty members who are keeping the student accountable and then communicating with each other, and the consequence for it if the student isn’t meeting those goals. One consequence is taking away or a reduction in the amount of scholarship award.”²¹⁰

When students continue to struggle, there are oftentimes more robust measures through the university that provide academic support. Faculty Participant 3 discussed how much his university invests in student success and how at smaller schools sometimes he must act as the student’s parent at times if they are struggling. He says, “We have a system here called Starfish. It’s a website, and I can go and raise a flag on any student I want at any time, and then the whole university support system automatically kicks in. I’m amazed at how much Furman allocates resources to all that stuff.”²¹¹ He goes on to talk about how he has to counsel students who are struggling often. He says, “I’ve had numerous students who have had any number of different

²⁰⁹ Faculty Participant 6, interview.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Faculty Participant 3, interview.

kinds of issues where they need me to kind of help them see what options they have, what pathways they have for any number of issues...and especially mental health like you'd be surprised how many students are on medication for mental health on campus.”²¹²

Outliers

While there were certainly several themes that developed through the course of both the student and faculty interviews, there were a few things that were mentioned that may be unique to certain school settings in the liberal arts institutions. The first thing that came up was that the lack of faculty members to teach the required music classes was so low that the institution was not able to offer the required courses every academic year. Therefore, students who are not successful in their first year must sometimes wait an additional three to five semesters to retake the course. Furthermore, the courses must be taken in sequence which means that the student is not allowed to move on in the sequence until he/she is able to repeat the course. This causes some students to get very behind in the degree program and leads to retention issues at the institution.

The other outlier is the fact that the faculty at small liberal arts colleges oftentimes make multiple exceptions or bend the degree requirements to sort of push students along the degree track. This can happen in many ways and ultimately causes more distress on the part of the student. Whether it is by giving them multiple opportunities to pass the degree requirements at checkpoints such as the junior qualifying exam or granting them acceptance into the music program when it is clear that they do not possess the skills needed to be successful, the music faculty at these smaller schools tend to be more accommodating of student's needs such as

²¹² Faculty Participant 3, interview.

this.²¹³ This can ultimately do a disservice to the student because they are then not equipped to be a successful musician upon completing the degree program. This will cause them to go out into the job market and be unsuccessful performing or teaching and can ultimately be a poor reflection on the school. This can create issues with both recruitment and retention of future students as well.

Results

By combining the data extracted from the surveys with the themes from the interview participants, the author was able to show some of the main challenges facing the music students at small liberal arts institutions. The challenges from the student perspective can be boiled down to the lack of perceived practice time needed to constantly improve their musicianship, the number of academic requirements that the institutions require stretches the students thin and makes them unable to focus as much attention on musicianship, and a general lack of enough students to maintain a roster of ample students to participate in all of the ensembles offered without very much overlap in student participation. The challenges from the faculty perspective are difficulty with recruiting students to attend SLACUs because it is oftentimes not the student's first choice or tuition cost can be detrimental to recruitment when compared to other larger universities. Many students do not have any background knowledge in music theory or history prior to attending these schools for music, and the quality of music students can suffer because faculty members are so hard pressed to find students to attend their school.

Table 20 shows the themes from both the student and faculty participant interviews. Themes were constructed from two or more participants having similar answers to specific

²¹³ Faculty Participant 5, interview.

interview questions. Outliers were constructed from just one participant including that in their answer to an interview question.

Table 20: Interview Themes/Outliers

Student Interview Themes	Faculty Interview Themes	Outliers
Lack of prior knowledge with music history and music theory.	Students are stretched too thin and it doesn't allow enough time for the practice.	Lack of available full-time faculty members and number of students force each course not to be offered each semester.
The availability of professors is a key reason for attending a small liberal arts college.	Faculty members need to adjust teaching styles to better support changing student learning styles.	Students are given too many opportunities to successfully pass degree requirements and faculty are often pushing them through in order to have numbers needed in the program.
Each student has encountered academic adversity in their time as a music major.	Faculty struggle with recruiting students because it is not necessarily the students first choice of school.	
Being able to show resiliency in overcoming academic adversity and thrive in the music program.	Healthy competition in studios is a powerful thing, but the studio experience needs to be supportive and nurturing as a whole.	
Amount of ensemble performances required for small school can become major stress for music majors.	Lack of knowledge base gained from public school band, chorus, and orchestra in music theory concepts is a big reason student struggle in music theory and history classes during their first few semesters in college.	
Students feel more of a sense of continuity when developing a personal relationship with faculty members. The same faculty members that teach them conducting also will conduct their ensemble rehearsals.	Primary focus of faculty members is teaching instead of research or other priorities that can take their attention away from the classroom and student success.	

	Students get a well-rounded education by attending a liberal arts school	
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Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the author presented data that was collected from surveys and interviews with both students and music faculty from three different small liberal arts colleges. The author analyzed the data collected from each of the sources to show the various challenges facing small liberal arts college music departments and the students who attend them. Through the analysis of interview transcripts, the author presented six themes from the student participants and six themes from the faculty participants. Some of the themes had a crossover with both student and faculty participants. The author was able to identify two relevant outliers because they dealt with student achievement at small liberal arts institutions. The goal of assembling such data is to come up with a list of recommendations for improvement in these areas so that music students at these institutions can experience a higher degree of success.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The final chapter presents summary of the study's purpose and procedures. Most importantly, the findings will be discussed, as will their implications for practice. The goal of this research is to have something tangible to guide students and faculty at small liberal arts college music programs and aid in their overall success.

Summary of Study

This study, Determining Factors for College Music Major Success in a Small Liberal Arts University, was largely designed because of the researcher's interest in SLACUs. The researcher attended an SLACU as an undergraduate and now works at one, so the study applies to his current career trajectory. The study aims to help students majoring in music at small liberal arts institutions become more successful in their careers as musicians or music educators.

Summary of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to identify challenges that music majors attending small liberal arts colleges face and to present solutions for those students to help them be more successful in that environment. The goal is for the findings to be helpful to music students and faculty at SLACUs to see some of the common challenges and the best possible way to overcome them.

Summary of Procedure

To conduct this research, the researcher identified three SLACUs with a total enrollment of 2,500 or fewer students. The researcher then recruited music majors and music faculty

members at these SLACUs to gather data. Data was collected by both student and faculty surveys as well as student and faculty interviews. The surveys and interviews are different for each set of participants. The reason for collecting data in both ways is to provide complete anonymity for individuals who did not wish to be part of the interview process but wanted to provide feedback. All the participants took turns in the survey. Then, the survey participants could then volunteer to participate in the interview portion. There were nine faculty members and seven students who participated in the interview process. The interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom and each of them lasted around thirty minutes. The interview transcripts were kept on a separate document, which only the researcher had access to. The researcher then analyzed the transcripts for various themes from both student and faculty participants. The researcher also analyzed the transcripts for outliers that went against the various themes from the other interviews conducted. Following the data analysis, the author compiled a list of suggestions for students and faculty to improve the amount of success for music students. The results from this data analysis are presented in chapter four.

Summary of Findings and Prior Research

There were a great number of challenges present for SLACU music students that are not present in some of the larger state universities. With these challenges present, however, there are many opportunities for these students to thrive in the smaller school environment. They just may need some assistance to nurture their musical growth. As seen in chapter two, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to the success of music majors in small liberal arts institutions. There is research about being music majors in a general sense, but as seen by the interview process there are additional challenges that exist in the SLACU music department. The biggest challenges that were identified throughout the interview process were the difficulty with

scheduling and time management from having to participate in so many performance ensembles, the high academic rigor that most SLACUs have, and the struggle with recruiting students who may not have indicated the SLACU as their first choice. While challenges exist for students attending SLACUs, there are opportunities as well. These opportunities include the availability of the professors if students need extra help, the premium put on quality teaching at SLACUs, and a sense of continuity for students when the same professor teaching a conducting course runs a wind ensemble rehearsal later in the day.

Limitations

The researcher understands that there are inherent limitations to any research. One main limitation of this study is the fact that the participant pool did not end up being as diversified as previously thought. Mainly, there were not enough faculty participants from different areas of music, such as theory, composition, and even music technology, to give insights into how to help students in those disciplines to be successful at SLACUs. Perhaps a reason for this limitation is a lack of SLACU in the geographical region that offers majors in those subjects. Out of the sites that were examined and recruited for participation, only one of them had a music theory or composition major. None of the sites had a music technology major. There was also not as much of a diversified student population as previously hoped. Out of all the students who participated in the survey, one of them was a vocalist and performance major. Many of the students that participated were music education majors. One possible reason for this would be the popularity of the music education degree at each of the three SLACUs that participated.

Another perceived limitation to this research is the inability to quantify what a successful music major looks like post-graduation. There would need to be research that tracks the music

majors that have graduated from a particular school for many years following and come up with some way to measure how successful they are.

Recommendations for Future Study

One potential idea for further research would be to find a way to diversify the field of participants even more and find a way to involve more SLACUs. By involving more colleges and universities from different geographical regions, the researcher would be able to get a larger sample of how music majors operate in this environment. This would be beneficial for all the participants to see what other schools are doing to prepare their music majors to be successful post-graduation.

Post-graduation success was identified earlier as one of the limitations of this research. For someone to achieve this type of research, the researcher would have to find ways to track the music majors following graduation. Success could be measured by whether they get a public-school teaching job or their acceptance rate to graduate schools. There would be many ways to frame that kind of research, and it would be interesting to see how some of the SLACU music students' successes are compared to the music majors at larger state universities.

Implications for Practice

The information learned in this study through surveys and interviews with students and faculty members would be worthless without a true plan to implement improvements. Based on the themes of the student and faculty participant interviews, the researcher makes seven main recommendations to help music majors at SLACUs be more successful.

The author's first recommendation is to continue developing a strong sense of cohorts of students in each class. Oftentimes, music majors will tend to form bonds with their cohort, and if

the correct social dynamics are present, the cohort can become almost like a support system for any students who may be struggling. This is extremely important at smaller schools because the lack of the number of students creates a finite number of students with which these bonds may be developed over time. Forming cohorts is equally important at larger universities with more music majors but given that there are so few music majors at SLACUs, the opportunity for the bonds between students to be closer is much greater. The faculty at these schools must acknowledge and nurture this to be successful.

The second recommendation is to eliminate the student's need to seek employment outside of the university. As mentioned previously, the cost of tuition at SLACUs is frequently much greater than at state schools. However, there needs to be more emphasis placed on getting music majors a financial aid package with which they can comfortably be able to attend school and will not feel pressured to seek outside employment opportunities. Some students may elect to seek employment to have extra disposable income. However, there are far too many instances of students seeking employment outside of the university to pay for the cost of tuition and/or room and board. Universities offer federal work-study programs. However, there are some students that do not qualify, but still feel the pressure to be able to pay for school. Furthermore, the amount of these work-study positions is inherently lower at a small school solely based on the student population being lower. Therefore, it is the researcher's recommendation that the music faculty members actively pursue available scholarships for students that are coming to these small schools to major in music.

The next recommendation deals with the music faculty needing to be flexible. As seen in the faculty interview themes, there needs to be more of a concerted effort to realize the impact that too many ensemble and personal performance requirements may have on the students in the

music department. It is recommended that the music faculty make yearly determinations of the performance calendar and its impact on the students. For example, the faculty may wish to spread the performances out more throughout the semester instead of loading all the performances at the end of the semester. The end of the semester for students is already intense because of final exams and juries for which they are preparing. Likewise, the beginning of each semester is always relatively light in comparison. Perhaps the faculty might program their semester performances toward the beginning of the semester and use it as extra motivation for the students to prepare a performance without a semester's worth of rehearsals. Likewise, the faculty might want to carefully oversee the number of different ensembles in which students are participating. This is one thing that can quickly become a stressor for students at a small school because, as shown from the interviews, each student must carry a considerably larger load and responsibility for the performance ensembles to be successful.

The next recommendation the author has for small music programs and the faculty is to not be so overly concerned with numbers that it impacts the quality of the performance ensembles. Always recruit quality musicians over someone who will simply fill a chair for your ensemble. Continue to work with the admissions representatives to assist in the recruitment of prospective students. It is also advisable that all the members of the music faculty take an active role in recruiting prospective students. It is also advisable that the applied faculty participate in the recruitment of prospective students. This will ensure that prospective students are hearing from multiple individuals of the faculty before they commit to the school. This will help them to already have an established relationship with many of their professors prior to the start of their first semester and should make the transition to college smoother for them.

The faculty members teaching music theory and music history courses need to try to identify hindrances to student success early on before they become a bigger issue. One faculty participant said, “Fairly early on rather than waiting till they're sinking...or they've missed those rudimental skills. I think just encouraging and not counseling in an official way but counseling...in terms of asking them personal questions. How much time are you spending? And encouraging them to get focused if that happens to be part of the problem.”²¹⁴ By identifying the struggling students early, then the music faculty can truly try to help. This is another advantage to being at a smaller school where the music faculty interacts with each student on a personal level. Another faculty member may be able to connect with the student in a better way or explain a certain concept in a different way to the student. This is shown through one of the student participants when he speaks about difficulties in his music composition class, “With composition if I couldn’t go to my professor, I had [my other professors] to listen and they each gave their tip.”²¹⁵

One of the themes from the interviews was the general lack of preparation to study music at the collegiate level. This is especially true of students taking music history and music theory courses for the first time. This is primarily a dysfunction of some public schools and outside the realm of this research. However, it is advisable that the music faculty at SLACUs become more active within the public high schools from which they are mostly recruiting and students and offer to help better prepare the students. The primary reason for this lack of preparation is band, orchestra, and choir at the secondary school level are so hyper focused on being able to meet their performance requirements of school concerts, state assessments, and in some cases regional

²¹⁴ Faculty Participant 1, interview.

²¹⁵ Student Participant 7, interview.

competitions that they are left with little to no time to adequately prepare the students to be more successful in a music theory classroom. Since such a high premium is placed on the performance aspect of these ensembles and the fact that some schools seemingly care more about a ranking or a trophy, very little actual musical knowledge is being taught in some secondary music classrooms.²¹⁶ In order to help with this, the researcher suggests that the music faculty at the college reach out to as many different music teachers in the surrounding area and offer summer camps for their students. The summer camps could be geared toward teaching performance topics, but within the schedule for the camper's day, provide some time where the students are introduced to music theory concepts. This will help further prepare the students to attend college as a music major and will also help the music programs in the surrounding school systems because the students will grow musically and be able to perform better on their instruments. This also serves as an active recruiting tool for the college or university because it gets students on campus and learning about music which is the goal in recruiting prospective students to the university.

Finally, it is suggested that SLACUs spend significant amounts of time and resources providing opportunities to draw students to campus. Going out and visiting schools helps to recruit students, but there is nothing like students having a positive musical experience on campus. This can be in the form of honor bands/choir events, summer camps, high school marching band days, pre-concert festival performances, or having high school musicians participate in being a music major for a day. These events typically affect recruitment the most because the students have a positive experience making music on campus, going to music

²¹⁶ Faculty Participant 5, interview.

classes, and seeing ensemble rehearsals and performances in action. This helps them to connect with the current students and imagine themselves as a student at the school in the future.

While the university is recruiting students, they also need to keep in mind that, in some ways, they are also recruiting music educators in the surrounding area. Having a positive relationship with these music educators will go a long way toward being able to attract music students to their school. Therefore, it is also advisable that the SLACU has something to attract the music educators who are bringing their students to these on-campus events. The university can achieve this by having a presentation for professional development credit that most of the band directors will need to renew their teaching licenses. The university also may wish to provide summer opportunities for music educators on campus such as conducting symposiums or other pedagogical resources that music faculty members may be able to provide.

Thesis Conclusion

It is important that music majors feel supported regardless of what type of college or university they attend. Small liberal arts schools that can provide the best resources for the music majors in their department are going to experience the most success and growth in their programs. While the challenges of being a small school are numerous, the opportunities that it creates for the students and faculty are also equally numerous. By using opportunities such as small class sizes, cohesion of instruction, and access to music faculty members, the music faculty will be able to provide a quality music education for the students at these small liberal arts institutions. Using some of the information learned throughout the course of this research, music students at these institutions will continue to grow and achieve success. It is the author's hope that this research will help many SLACU music departments to continue to grow and prosper.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter Preliminary Review

Dear Recipient:

As a graduate student in the School of Music at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Music Education degree. The purpose of my research is to better understand factors for the success of music majors at small liberal arts colleges and universities and I am writing to invite eligible students to participate in my study. Teachers, if you have students that would be eligible for this study, please feel free to forward this document to them.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and be a music major with at least one year of study completed. Participants, if willing, will be asked to submit a brief survey and some could be asked to participate in a follow-up interview. It would take approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate please contact me at [REDACTED]. I will then send you a link to the survey.

A consent document is provided on the first page of the survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. I will provide a link to the consent form for you to complete prior to taking the survey. After you have read and signed the consent form, please click the link to proceed to the survey.

Participants will receive a visa gift card if they participate in the interview portion of the research.

Sincerely,

Spencer Nance
Researcher DME Candidate

[REDACTED]

Appendix B: Permission Request

Dear Dr. Seth Taft

As a graduate student in the music department at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Music Education degree. The title of my research project is Determining Factors for College Music Major Success in a Small Liberal Arts University: Perspectives from Students and Faculty for Retention and Successful Completion of the Degree Program and the purpose of my research is to find ways to increase the level of successful music students in a small liberal arts environment.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at Limestone University. Participants will be asked to complete the attached survey and then they could be asked to schedule a follow-up interview.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to

[REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Spencer Nance

Appendix C: Student Survey Questions

Student Preliminary Survey:

What is your specific degree (i.e. music education, music performance, music therapy, etc)

What is your specific instrument or vocal part?

How many hours have you completed toward a degree in music?

1. Under 15
2. 15-30 hours
3. 30-45 hours
4. 45-60 hours
5. 60-75 hours
6. 75-90 hours
7. <90 hours

When considering schools, did you have options to attend both state schools and small liberal arts colleges/universities?

If so, what made you ultimately choose the school you are currently attending?

How would you describe the overall environment of the music department at your school?

Is the music faculty supportive of students receiving extra help if they are struggling in music classes?

Are additional support systems set up for students struggling to maintain the required GPA to be successful music students?

On a scale of 1-10, 1 being poor and 10 being very good, how would you rate your ability to manage the stress of being a college music major?

What kind of things do you do to ensure that you understand the material presented in your music courses?

Which courses are/have been your most challenging music courses? And why?

Which courses are/have been your least challenging music courses? And why?

How many other students are in your instrumental/voice studio?

Could you describe your interaction with your instrument/voice teacher and other students in your studio?

Appendix D: Faculty Survey Questions

What is your job title:

What is your primary instrument or vocal part?

How many years have you been teaching in higher education?

1. 2-5 years
2. 5-10 years
3. 10-15 years
4. 15-20 years
5. Over 20 years

What courses do you typically teach?

What types of music degrees does your school offer students?

What do you feel is the biggest challenge for students attending a small liberal arts college pursuing a music degree?

How much time on average would you say that you spend per week on recruitment of new students to your college/university?

What kinds of things do you do in order to help with the recruitment of new music students?

Does your college/university have ample resources to assist struggling music students?

On a scale of 1-10, 1 being poor and 10 being very good, how would you rate your students' ability to manage the stress of being a college music major?

Which courses tend to be the most difficult for your students?

How many students are in each instrumental/voice studio?

Does your college/university have full-time instrumental/voice faculty?

Could you name three things that would further help your students to succeed as music majors at your school?

Appendix E: Student Interview Questions

Student Interview Questions:

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself and why you chose to be a music major.
2. What would you say was the most important factor in your college decision to choose a small liberal arts college?
3. What year are you in the program?
4. What is your specific area in the music program?
5. What has been the most challenging aspect of your life as a music major?
6. What do you feel are the advantages of attending a small liberal arts college for music?
7. What do you feel are the disadvantages of attending a small liberal arts college for music?
8. At your institution, do you feel there is ample assistance to support students who may be struggling to succeed?
9. If you answered no, what things do you feel could be put in place that would help struggling students to be more successful in the music program?
10. Do you feel that the student population at your school is well supported by the music program and the administration at the school?
11. What do you feel is the number one thing holding students back from being successful in the music program at your school?

Appendix F: Faculty Interview Questions

Interview Questions:

1. Please tell me a little about yourself and why you chose to teach music at the collegiate level.
2. What are the challenges of being a music faculty member at a small liberal arts college/university?
3. How many years of experience in higher education do you have?
4. Has all of your experience at the college level been at small liberal arts schools or have you also taught at larger state universities?
5. What would you consider the most challenging aspect of student success in college specifically at small liberal arts colleges?
6. What kind of programs on a university level does your institution provide to maximize student success?
7. Do you find that many students are not able to take these programs into effect and can be successful?
8. On average, how many music majors do you typically have in the music program?
9. Are there professional development opportunities for faculty members to learn new things or teaching methods to better reach students who may be falling behind?
10. What courses do you typically teach?
11. Of those courses, which ones are typically the most difficult for students to achieve success in?
12. How many different music degrees does your institution offer?

13. Do you feel that each music degree is given its fair share of resources for students to succeed?
14. What would be the thing you would want to see improve the most for music major students at your institution to experience more success?

Appendix G: Site Approval to conduct research at Furman University

Below is conditional approval to conduct research via surveys and interviews from students and faculty members at Furman University in Greenville, SC. Dr. Randall Umstead is the chair of the music department and obtained approval for the researcher to recruit participants from Furman University.

Dear Spencer,

Thank you for sharing this provisional approval with me. I approve under the following conditions:

- You send an email to me for distribution that confirms this IRB approval, requests participation from faculty and students, and provides a link to the survey instrument or other method for participation.
- I would distribute that message and your survey instrument to our faculty and students.
- Potential participants would then have the opportunity to participate or pass at their own pleasure.

Best wishes,

Randall Umstead, DMA
Chair, Department of Music
The Gordon and Sarah Herring Chair
Professor of Music

Appendix H: Site approval to conduct research at Limestone University

Below is conditional approval to conduct research via surveys and interviews from students and faculty members at Limestone University in Gaffney, SC. Dr. Seth Taft is the program coordinator of the music program at Limestone and offered his approval for the researcher to recruit participants at Limestone University.

Spencer,

I grant my permission for you to solicit participation from Limestone music students for your research project.

Seth A. Taft, PhD

Assistant Professor of Music Education

Director of Instrumental Music

Program Coordinator, Music and Music Education

Carroll 202

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Music Program Handbook

Appendix I: site approval to conduct research at North Greenville University

David Cudd [REDACTED]

To:

?

Spencer Nance

Thu 1/25/2024 4:24 PM

Start reply with:

Sounds great, thank you! Great, thank you so much! Wonderful, thank you!

Hi Spencer,

I have conferred with our Provost late yesterday afternoon and you are welcome to conduct your graduate research at NGU. You are welcome to begin at any time, just let Gary or I know what you need from us to get started. Good luck with your research!

Best,

J. David Cudd, Ed.D.

Associate Dean, Department Chair

Cline School of Music

College of Communication and Fine Arts

North Greenville University

PO Box 1892

Tigerville, SC 29688

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

www.ngu.edu

From: Spencer Nance [REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, January 19, 2024 11:34 AM

To: David Cudd [REDACTED]

Subject: [EXTERNAL SENDER] Permission to conduct research at North Greenville University

Good Morning, Dr. Cudd:

As a graduate student in the music department at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Music Education degree. The title of my research project is Determining Factors for College Music Major Success in a Small Liberal Arts University: Perspectives from Students and Faculty for Retention and Successful Completion of the Degree Program and the purpose of my research is to find ways to increase the level of successful music students in a small liberal arts environment.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at North Greenville University. Participants will be asked to complete a survey and then they could be asked to schedule a follow-up interview. I am looking for student participation as well as faculty participation.

Appendix J: Blank Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: Determining Factors for College Music Major Success in a Small Liberal Arts University: Perspectives from Students and Faculty for Retention and Successful Completion of the Degree Program

Principal Investigator: Spencer Nance, Doctoral Student, Music Department Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and either a current undergraduate music major at a small liberal arts college/university with under 5,000 students with at least one year of study completed in the music degree program or teach music courses at a small liberal arts college or university with at least two years of higher education experience. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to identify possible solutions for music majors attending small liberal arts colleges to achieve more degrees of success.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in a short online survey for initial data collection lasting between 15-20 minutes.
2. Participants could also be selected to participate in an individual Zoom interview lasting approximately 1 hour. This interview will be audio and video recorded for later use in the findings of the study. The researcher will not distribute a recording of video or audio of your interview.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include having a framework for measuring music major success in small liberal arts institutions. This will help guide students and faculty members through the music degree programs at small colleges and universities and will help students have a higher degree of success in the music department.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. I am a mandatory reporter.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and faculty sponsor will have access to the records. Participant responses will be kept confidential and stored on the external hard drive only. Names of the individuals selected for interviews will be replaced with pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and an external hard drive. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for five years. The researcher and members of his doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. After the interview, participants will receive a \$25 Visa gift card.

Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?

The researcher serves as a professor at Limestone University. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, participation is voluntary. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, Limestone University, Newberry College, Converse University, or the University of South Carolina. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Spencer Nance. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Keith Pace, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio and video record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix K:

Music Student Support Plan

This document is intended to outline a plan for academic, professional, or other support for students with needs exceeding the provisions of the normal curriculum. The plan may be permanent or temporary depending on the nature of the support required. A Support Plan is required for probationary continuation of a Fine Arts Scholarship.

Student _____

Supporter _____

Advisor _____

Date _____

Current Course Success

List all current courses based on level of success to this point.

Excellent	Acceptable	Concerning

Goal

Strategies