

Music Major, Artist and Scholar

I would like to begin with a word of thanks to the MMEA Executive Board for a terrific conference. A very special thank you to Rob Nichols, President, for a successful conference. Rob puts in many hours of planning, organizing, answering e-mails and phone calls in order for us to be able to come together and recharge our music education battery. Kevin Lines, President Elect, and his crew of equipment managers worked tirelessly prior to and during the conference to insure many successful concerts and clinics. Executive Secretaries Wynne Harrell and Paul Swafford log countless hours managing the myriad of tasks that make a conference work such as registration, rooms, clinician accommodations, awards and certificates etc. the list could go on for pages. Past President Paul Copenhaver was always present to assist and advise as were many other Past Presidents who remain committed to the Association. I would encourage all of you to send a thank you to our MMEA Executive Board for their efforts on our behalf.

To all of the members of the All-Collegiate Choir a word of congratulations and thanks for a great performance at the Third General Session on Friday. I was very proud of all of you as well for your commitment to the All-Collegiate Choir. Dr. Sparks was so very impressed with all of you and how well prepared you were upon arrival to the conference. You were on time for rehearsal and everyone was always very attentive and respectful during rehearsal. I hope that you enjoyed the experience. For me it was one of the musical highlights of the conference. I would also like to say thank you to Ken Jeffs, All-Collegiate Choir Coordinator, for his tireless efforts in making the All-Collegiate experience a terrific success.

As I watched the members of the All-Collegiate Choir rehearse and perform I was excited for the future of Music Education in Missouri. This group of musicians arrived to every rehearsal with enthusiasm and energy that at my age I can only wish for. They have fresh new ideas and will bring to the educational process some very positive musical experiences upon which to build and share with their students. I know that this same enthusiasm and energy exists within our instrumental students as well. I was also reminded of how conscientious and committed this generation of new teachers is about their profession as I hosted or attended clinic sessions that were standing room only throughout the conference. Dr. Molly Weaver's session on Self Assessment had a great crowd that was mostly new teachers and Music Education Majors. Dan Peterson and Thomas Trimborn's session on music for young bands was again standing room only. All of the concerts I attended had very few empty seats and the average age of the crowd in attendance was so very encouraging. I find this generation of teachers entering our profession to be bright and much more articulate and informed about the many aspects of our profession than I ever was as a new teacher. I am excited for the future of Music Education but at the same time I am troubled as well because I see too many young teachers and many preservice teachers encountering difficulties that keep them from realizing their dreams.

There is nothing more disturbing or disappointing than to see a student majoring in music encounter difficulties and not realize their dream to teach or become a working musician/educator. Those of us that are so very fortunate to have the opportunity to work with these truly gifted young people feel a true sense of loss when we realize a student has left our programs. I feel so lucky to spend my days surrounded by music and music making and I hope others will be able to experience the same joy that has been a part of my life.

In a previous article I made reference to some alarming statistics concerning the number of students that do not complete their degree. To me this is a tragic turn of events. The causes are many and different for each individual. I wish there were textbook examples or a document relating to the different causes along with a cure all formula for everyone. But that certainly is not the case. If we do not have people in place to teach and carry the music education torch we will not have music in our schools. So as veteran teachers are there things we can do to help the next generation of teachers and musicians be successful so we do not lose the very thing that makes all of us more human, music and art? College can be a scary place with way to many distractions and outside influences. Those of us with the charge of keeping music alive and developing the next generation of teacher/musician should not stand idly by, we must be mindful of our student's direction. We can help and we must.

If I had the opportunity to communicate with each student that decides to major in music I would first offer my congratulations for an extremely rewarding life choice but I would also offer a word of caution and guidance so that they do not lose sight of their dream. I would tell them that the joy is in the journey. This career choice is a long and difficult road but worth the journey. Enter for the long term goal, be dedicated to finish what you start, and if you feel discouraged please come and visit with a mentor or advisor immediately.

Once the students begin the process there are many factors that play into the successful completion of the music degree. The MENC web site has an interesting article concerning their view on "*What it Takes To Be a Music Major*," (www.menc.org/careers/view/what-it-takes-to-be-a-music-major). This is a reprint from Teaching Music, February 1998, by Louis A. Menchaca. The suggestions found here are valuable insight into preparation prior to entering College in addition to ideas to help students make the most of the college experience. There are four major speaking points and many more tips to ease the journey. There is a statement in this article that I have found to be very pertinent to many students. "*It is important for students to realize that becoming a music major entails more than simply playing or singing in an ensemble.*" In my experience rarely has it been the ensemble participation that gets in the way of academic success. A music degree is a rigorous academic pursuit and requires a great deal more than playing or singing for pleasure. The time demands outside of the classroom and rehearsal hall are huge. It is important for students to understand the comprehensiveness of the music degree. As we train to be the leader in the classroom we must learn to wear many hats. It is important to help students see the bigger picture of what our jobs entail.

Let's take a look at some specific things that we could do to help our students stay on track and realize their goals. We understand the benefits of mentoring new teachers as they begin their careers. College students could benefit from mentoring and guidance as well. This is not the time to cut them lose and let them sink or swim. One of the very basic things that all students need to remember is that a very basic element of academic success can be as simple as being punctual and making regular attendance a priority. Once you are there make the most of all opportunities available. Come prepared to all classes and rehearsals, and participate with enthusiasm. All of these habits can be developed and encouraged early on during high school. If your goals are to play professionally being on time and prepared means you have a job.

Being aware of some the very basic differences in high school and college can help prepare the future music major for the transition. I encourage students and teachers to visit the Southern Methodist University web site and review the table “*How is College different from High School?*” (www.smu.edu/alec/transition.asp). Provided here is a very comprehensive listing of the various aspects of managing college that will be different from the expectations of high school. A college class schedule can be deceiving. In high school we are used to six hours a day but in college the schedule will look lighter when in reality it is more intensive. Distractions are easy and procrastination begins to develop because of what appears to be a less intensive approach. In reality the work load is much greater and where assigned reading material and homework is reviewed in the high school classes students in college are expected to stay up with the assigned reading but will not be quizzed over the material. It is understood that in college students are expected to read and understand the assigned material. Lectures and assignments proceed from the assumption that you’ve already done the assigned reading/work. Testing also takes on a unique and different approach. In high school tests are mainly the reproduction of what you were taught in the form that it is presented. Exams at the college level are guided by the principle that mastery of a content area is seen as the ability to apply what you have learned to a new situation. Grading differs as well, effort counts in high school, grades in college are obtained through results.

The new found freedom that is a part of the college experience can be difficult to manage. College is voluntary not mandatory like high school. Confusion arises when no one is pushing you out the door to go to class. Diligence and discipline are essential elements to a successful college experience. Student must learn to manage their time wisely. In music you are asked to be an artist and a scholar. Time must be spent in all areas of your degree program. Attend class and complete assignments to the best of your ability with the time you have. Learn to balance practice and study. Learn to balance social time with the needed time to complete your work. A music major is one of the most demanding degree programs. Learning to say no to social distractions is needed discipline.

Most time management advice employees the use of a personal calendar of some type. You must find what works for you, computer, phone, paper, etc., it really does not matter what the form just that you get in the habit of using this organizational tool so that it works for you. Write down everything preferably in one place! This new responsibility can be a major stumbling block. Plan each day and stick to it. Have a plan when you will practice, study, call home, do laundry, gym time, etc. Plan ahead for large assignments; don’t wait till Wednesday to start that paper that is due on Friday. Break big assignments up into small segments, like you do when practicing, and be persistent about working a little each day. Rest is important, the body needs regular sleep. All nighters really are not a very good choice. Your concentration and focus are not enhanced by being exhausted. Turn off the phone when studying or practicing, it really can wait.

Work closely with your advisor let them help with the sequence of classes and keep you on track for graduation. Schedule regular appointments and keep them apprised of your progress. They will push in the direction of degree completion and encourage a full class load. Having you completely immersed in your subject area will make you a better student. A full class load will depend on your degree program but avoid taking the minimum number of credits to qualify as a

full time student and keep financial aid in place. The minimum load will increase the amount of time you are spending in college and therefore increasing your frustration and the feeling of never realizing your goals. This will lead to boredom and frustration and you will become discouraged and quit. Staying focused and diligently working toward degree completion keeps you on track and is self motivating to realizing your goals. Too much time on your hands will allow you to seek distractions and activities that are not degree related and can eventually get you off track and lose sight of your goals. Ask your advisor about the needed preparation for juries, exams, etc. they have been through the same trials and will gladly offer some insight and ideas for successful completion. We all want you to succeed!

Educators if you currently have a high school or middle school student that is considering majoring in music I would like to offer some ideas that you can share to help for smooth transition and a successful college experience. A solid music and academic foundation prior to entering college is essential. Keeping in mind the earlier statement of the comprehensiveness of the music degree program students must be encouraged to be able to read both treble and bass clef and be confident with the fundamentals of music such as major and minor key signatures and related scales, standard meter signatures and the most frequently used Italian terms for dynamics, tempo and style. Next I would encourage students to be open to and listen to a wide variety of music prior to entering college. Find and listen to recordings of professional vocalist or professionals playing your instrument. Experience the best recorded examples of your major ensemble. Have some experience and be able to discuss music by the masters Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Holst, Arnold, Vaughn Williams, etc. Seek out and experience music from other cultures and listen to Jazz and its infinite variety. Private lessons can certainly be a huge help but the availability to a good private teacher is not always a reality. Ensemble directors can assist students with a consistent approach to fundamentals and encouraging solo and ensemble participation. For instrumentalist it is important that you be able to sing with confidence. Matching pitch with your voice and singing melodic lines in tune is fundamental. Time restraints and high school graduation requirements sometime get in the way of extra class offerings but instrumentalist should be encouraged to sing in the choir both at school and church if possible or in a community choir. This will help down the road more than they know. Keyboard skills are a major part of all music major course of study. All college music majors regardless of their principal performance medium must be able to play and read intermediate keyboard literature. Prior exposure and knowledge in this area can be a huge benefit to success in college. We all need and use the keyboard plus the understanding of the keyboard will help with music theory. Some piano lessons prior to college would be great but a piano class is just as good. If lessons are not available and there is not a piano class there are some wonderful books such as the *Alfred Basic Piano Library*, (Alfred Publications) that has many progressive levels of piano instruction that could be used independently and give students some basic keyboard knowledge that will surely help.

Music Majors please stay the course. You are not alone; there is a support system in place if you take advantage of it. A Music degree is difficult but it is a very rewarding career choice. We need you to keep Music Education alive and flourishing in our schools. Best wishes for the completion of your degree.

