

Prospective Music Majors: How the Audition Process Influences Their Choices

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Abstract

This study examined the college audition process for prospective music students as experienced by individuals who matriculated at a large public university or a small private university. The positive and negative aspects of the audition process were revealed as well as other important factors in making a college choice, including communication with the music department, scholarships, and the influence of the student's high school music teacher on his or her decision.

Students who choose to enter fine arts professions (i.e., dance, music, theater) by completing a college degree program have unique steps to take in the admissions process. In order to be accepted as a music major student, virtually all postsecondary institutions require an audition, which includes a performance on the major instrument, an aural or written music theory placement test, and often an interview with faculty. The audition serves both the prospective student and the university faculty by exchanging information necessary for both parties to make a decision about the appropriate fit of the program with the auditioning student. While there are a number of aspects involved in the college selection process, the audition process—a visit to the school, time with the music faculty, and feedback concerning the student's performance and music theory background—the audition presents prospective music students with an experience that has great potential to influence institutional choice. The purpose of this study was to examine the process of the music audition through a mixed-method approach incorporating information provided by incoming freshmen music majors from two universities in a Midwestern state.

The competitive aspect of college recruitment demands that every component of the admissions process be carefully planned and executed. The audition is an important stage of admissions for both the institution and the student. Yet there is a paucity of literature concerning the insights of auditioning music students. Developing an audition process that enables prospective students to be in the most conducive performing/interviewing environment will provide music faculty with the best opportunity to evaluate the student's abilities, another justification for study in this area. In addition, both music and admissions personnel can benefit from hearing the voices of students as they share their perceptions of the audition process and its ultimate influence on the decision to attend a specific school.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined the process of college selection (Allen, 2007) but little research has been performed on the subject of college selection within the field of music. Locke's (1982) study of 631 vocal and instrumental students from 22 public and private colleges and universities in Illinois revealed that the most influential recruiting techniques were the receipt of a music scholarship; attendance at a music department admission audition; attendance at an invitational honors ensemble on the college campus; receipts of a tuition fee waiver; and personal contact by a music faculty member. In a related study, Brimmer (1989) surveyed a random stratified sample of 150 higher education administrators offering some form of bachelor's degree in music concerning the recruitment techniques employed by their respective institutions. The findings indicated that most of the institutions recruit music students using strategies similar to those identified in Locke's study, with the chief music administrator as the most active individual in recruiting activities.

Carlson (1999) reviewed the recruiting practices of public higher education music departments. Her study included 194 public institutions that held membership in the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). Responses revealed that 98% of the band, choir, and orchestra conductors at NASM institutions were involved in recruiting students. The recruitment materials of 90% of the respondents emphasized the reputations of the music faculty and the overall reputation of the music department. More than 75%