

**Understanding Notions of Career Success Among Undergraduate
Music Majors**

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Abstract

Each year thousands of students graduate with music degrees. Many of these students will go on to engage in project-based work and maintain a portfolio career as opposed to having one full-time job within the field of music. The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding into the career goals and career expectations of undergraduate music majors and to understand how these career goals and expectations align with the hierarchy of success reported in the existing literature. For this mixed-method study, online surveys were distributed to undergraduate music majors at seven higher education institutions. The findings revealed that there is a distinction between the jobs undergraduate music majors associate with success, the jobs they would ideally like to hold and the jobs they actually expect to hold. Many of the students surveyed are aware that they will likely hold multiple jobs and be self-employed as opposed to having one full-time job. The findings also revealed that students have deeply personal definitions of what it means to be successful.

Keywords: portfolio careers; music careers; career development; career preparation; arts alumni

Introduction

Music students have many options for creative careers today, but literature suggests that many students still position soloist and orchestral musician at the top of the pyramid of success (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2020 & Solbu, 2007). This is not surprising given that many K-12 music programs revolve around the large ensemble model (Tollefson, 2000). This continues at the college level where music majors are typically required to participate in an ensemble each semester (College Music Society, 2016). By the time music students graduate from college, many have spent at least 11 years playing in a large ensemble. Large ensembles become a significant part of the performer identity. As a student, the ensembles are readily available, but after leaving the bubble of the music school, students must find their own opportunities.

Orchestral positions are limited and extremely difficult to attain. The number of students graduating each year with music degrees continues to increase while the number of orchestral job openings decrease. A 2014 study (VanWaeyenberghe) that looked at musician job openings in 61 professional orchestras revealed that between 1981–2010 “the number of jobs available annually have declined by 50 percent” (p. 8). The surplus of musicians compared to the small amount of available performing positions is not a new phenomenon. There have always been more aspiring musicians in the U.S. than there are jobs (Baskerville, 1982; Harrison, 2011). This leads to the question, what will all of these music graduates do and how will their careers compare to the expectations they had when they entered their music degrees? The portfolio career literature (Bartleet et al., 2012; Beeching, 2010; Bennett, 2016; Bennett, 2008, Solbu, 2007) indicates that most music students want and expect to have fulltime performance careers, but recent research reveals that the majority of music graduates will not have fulltime performance careers and that many hold numerous jobs and engage in portfolio careers as opposed to having one sole employer (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2020; Bartleet, et al., 2019; Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, 2017). Bennett and Bridgstock (2015) define a portfolio career as “a continually unfolding, self-managed patchwork of concurrent and overlapping employment arrangements” (p. 264). A portfolio career in music might include activities such as performing, teaching, composing and arts administration. Because someone with a portfolio career does not have one single employer and is often self-employed, the term portfolio career is sometimes used interchangeably with freelance. The need for portfolio careers “is largely driven by supply and demand: there are far fewer full-time positions than applicants” (Bartleet, et al., 2019, p. 284). If students desire and expect to engage in full-time performance careers will they be disappointed with a portfolio career that will likely involve both performance and non-performance work?

While there is a significant amount of data coming from music alumni regarding career outcomes, there appears to be little research on what current music students’ career expectations are when they arrive at college, how those expectations change throughout college, what their perception of a successful career is, or what skills they deem necessary for their careers. This study aimed to bring the voices of current music students into the conversation regarding career preparation in the field of music. While the literature mentions that students desire and expect to have full-time performance careers, there appears to be a lack of data from undergraduate music majors in the United States on career goals and expectations. It also appears that an assumption is being made that if a student sees a job as successful then that must be the job he/she wants to eventually secure. This study investigates the differences between the jobs students position as successful, the jobs they position as ideal and the jobs they expect to hold after graduation. The

overarching purpose of this research was to understand how the career ideals and expectations of music majors align with the hierarchy of success reported in the literature.

The data presented in this article is part of a larger dissertation that focuses on career and degree expectations of undergraduate music majors (Munnely, 2017).

Literature Review & Analysis: Notions of Success within Music

A musician is often associated with someone who performs or creates music (Bennett, 2008). This idea of musician as performer pervades the narrative of what it means to be a musician even though many musicians engage in non-performance roles. Merriam-Webster's dictionary (n.d.) defines a musician as "a person who writes, sings, or plays music." While this is a common definition of musician, it also leaves out many other important facets of being a musician. Australian research suggests the need for a new definition of the term musician that "encompasses the whole profession rather than the very few who work in performance" (Bennett, 2008, p. 3). Many musicians engage in work outside of performing. Recent studies have shown that teaching is one of the most common income streams for musicians (Bennett, 2007, Strategic national arts alumni project, 2017). This is not a new trend as a 1974 study by the Wisconsin College-Conservatory also found that teaching was one of the most common sources of income for its participants (Jay & Smith, 1974). Australian researcher, Dawn Bennett (2007) found that most musicians in her study spent more time teaching than performing. Bennett also found that business management was among the top three tasks that musicians devoted time to, along with teaching and performing. The common definition of musician does not consider either teaching or business management, but instead is performance centric. One danger of having a narrow definition of the term musician that solely focuses on performing is that it can lead to narrow definitions of success within the field of music, which can impact student career goals.

While professional musicians often do more than perform, one of the most common definitions of success for a musician is having a full-time performance career (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2020; Beeching, 2010; Bennett, 2007; Bennett, 2008). In a 2007 study, Australian researcher, Dawn Bennett uses the term "musotopia" to describe "a place where performance ambitions are realized with an international performance career" (p. 179). Bennett proposes that this "musotopia" is what many music students seek in a career. In school, students are encouraged and perhaps forced to take on an identity of a performer (Roberts, 2000) regardless of what their future career aspirations might be. For example, large ensembles in schools of music are often made up of music majors in various areas including education, composition and musicology in addition to performance majors. This can sometimes cause identities to be blurred and in some respect, everyone is seen as a performer, which can have an effect on self-identity.

The curriculum also tends to privilege performing over other aspects of being a musician (Bennett, 2008; Lebler, Burt-Perkins & Carey, 2009). Perhaps this is because the conservatory's initial goal was to produce musicians for the symphony and the opera (Solbu, 2007). Solbu (2007) describes a hierarchy within music programs that places soloists at the top with most students falling into the number two category of orchestra players. While Solbu's pyramid places the orchestral performer near the top of the pyramid, it states that most students end up here. This may be true in the music school setting since most instrumentalists are required to play in orchestra or wind ensemble as part of their degree, but in the real world obtaining an orchestra

position is an extremely difficult feat and by no means guaranteed like it is in the higher education setting. During the 2009-2010 academic year, one study found that there were only 126 openings across 61 of the largest orchestras in the U.S. (VanWaeyenberghe, 2014). Students might often associate large ensemble player with being a musician because playing in an ensemble has been a large part of their educational experience. While students might associate the orchestral position with success, a 1996 study found that orchestral musicians rank below federal prison guards in career satisfaction (Allmendinger, Hackman & Lehman). “The pursuit of a professional music career is risky in terms of a low likelihood of objective success and may not even be rewarding to those who do obtain the position” (Dobrow, 2012, p. 265)

“One of the difficulties for higher education music education is that portfolio career – those featuring multiple concurrent roles – are too complex to be measured by traditional metrics such as national graduate destinations surveys and census collections” (Bennett, 2016, p. 387). Evaluating educational outcomes for music graduates tends to privilege those who obtain fulltime work as performers. Previously, the Music Educator’s National Conference (now the National Association for Music Education) collected data on musicians gainfully employed in performance roles, but did not include data on musicians who were gainfully employed in non-performance music positions (Bennett, 2008). The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) similarly ranks performance over non-performance when measuring outcomes of music graduates (Bennett, 2008; Bridgstock, 2009; Mills, 2007). The HEFCE expects English conservatories to place 75% of graduates in music performance positions within five years of graduation (Bennett, 2008). It only measures full-time permanent salaried posts with a single employer (Mills, 2007). This measurement system does not factor in the many musicians engaged in portfolio careers who do not have one primary employer (Bennett, 2008; Mills, 2007). Like the MENC evaluation of graduate outcomes, the HEFCE evaluation also leaves out musicians working in non-performance roles such as teaching, composing or arts administration. By leaving these individuals out of the system that supposedly measures success of graduates, both organizations continue to position performance roles over non-performance roles in the hierarchy of success. Similarly, in Australia “graduate destinations data are collected six months after course completion, focus on full-time work, and conflate design, media, the arts and the humanities into a single category” (Bartleet, et al., 2019, p. 284).

Bennett’s (2008) research also supports Solbu’s hierarchy of success with soloists at the top, followed by orchestral players and teachers. It appears that this notion of what constitutes both a musician and a successful musician is deeply ingrained into the music education culture. Solbu (2007) questions whether the hierarchy emphasis pervades music education so greatly that it influences the goals of young musicians to the extent that anything other than reaching the top of the pyramid is failure. This may affect a student’s willingness to consider other career paths. Research suggests that individuals “might be unreceptive to career advice that threatens their self-concept” (Dobrow, 2012, p. 267). Even when students become successful in other areas of the pyramid, they may still see themselves as failures because the original dream is still there (Solbu, 2007). While there may not be room for every music student to become a soloist or orchestral player, there is also not room for those who did not achieve these positions to define themselves as failures (Maris, 2000). A broader definition of what it means to be a musician might lead to music students being more accepting of and satisfied by a greater option of career choices outside of a full-time performance career.

A narrow view of what it means to be a musician has an effect on students' perception of careers and success. Research has shown that people's individual definitions of success can influence goals and the actions taken to achieve these goals (Fan & Karnilowicz, 1997). What one may describe as a career calling can actually be the influence of other individuals' or institutions' definitions of success (Debrow as cited in Stark, 2007, p.51). The perception of what is a successful career in music can impact the choices music students make and the value they assign to specific careers. When students have a narrow view of success, they are in danger of shutting out many other potential career options.

There are two ways success is measured, objective and subjective success. Objective success is success that can be evaluated by measurable characteristics such as salary, position, or prestige of employer (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). Subjective success concerns a person's own satisfaction level with their career (Ng, et al., 2005). It appears that many music students put a lot of emphasis on objective success rather than subjective success (Timmons, 2013). Musicians might evaluate success by the prestige of the orchestra they are in or by salary level (Shetler, 1978). The problem is that these factors rely on external qualities and ignore that individuals have different needs for contentment. One study (Ondracek-Peterson, 2013) found that conservatory string alumni had different benchmarks for what constitutes a successful income depending on whether the job was within or outside the field of music. When asked to select the income that indicates financial success for a job in any field, half of the respondents selected \$100,000. When asked the same question for musicians, 53% selected \$50,000. Respondents were willing to consider a musician financially successful at a lower salary than someone not working as a musician. While income is important, "other aspects of one's career can provide just as much, if not more, rewarding experience as can the traditional measures of income and prestige, especially in fields like the arts that are not generally associated with higher career earnings" (Miller, Dumford & Johnson, 2017, p. 4.) Ondracek-Peterson discovered that in her study the definition of success "appears to revolve around four key elements: financial stability and/or wealth, happiness, artistic satisfaction, and pride in one's work as a leader in any particular field" (p. 78). This may indicate that as alumni advance in their careers, they are more likely to look for subjective measures of success over objective measures of success.

Adopting a wider definition of the term musician may lead to broader definitions of success. "The definition of a musician appears to be very individual and will, therefore, require individual tailoring when it comes to the development of a career in music, so that each individual instrumentalist can, potentially, become the musician they want to become" (Ondracek-Peterson, 2013, p. 75).

Methods

In addition to bringing in the voices of current music majors, another purpose of this study was to understand how the career ideals and expectations of music majors align with the hierarchy of success reported in the literature. The data presented in this article is part of a larger dissertation that surveyed over 200 undergraduate music majors at seven music schools (Munnely, 2017). Twelve undergraduate music schools were identified as survey sites. The schools that were selected were a mix of music programs within state universities, music programs within private universities and independent conservatories. Seven of the twelve

identified schools agreed to distribute the survey to their undergraduate music major population (see Table 1).

Data was collected via an online survey built in Qualtrics that utilized both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The survey was conducted in order to gain an understanding into how the career ideals and expectations of music majors align with the hierarchy of success reported in the literature on musician careers and what music majors expect from their undergraduate music degree. The number of respondents varied by question ranging from 25-210. As one might expect, the open-ended questions had a lower response rate than the closed-ended questions. All closed-ended questions had a minimum of 118 respondents with the majority having more than 150 respondents.

Cleveland Institute of Music
Eastman School of Music
Manhattan School of Music
New England Conservatory
Rice University
University of Cincinnati
University of Michigan

Table 1: Schools attended

The majority of the respondents (68%) were music performance majors (see Figure 1). Other was the second highest response at 11%. Because only a small sample of students responded from each institution, this breakdown should not be viewed as being representative of the entire music major population of any of the participating institutions. Due to the schools that were selected, a high number of performance majors was expected. The results of this study would likely look very different if the same survey had been distributed to schools that had a lower concentration of performance majors and a higher concentration of music education majors. Focusing on schools with a high concentration of performance majors was an intentional choice for this particular study. Schools of music within a private school had the highest percentage of performance majors. Seventy-seven percent of respondents from private schools were performance majors. Conservatories had the next highest percentage of performance majors with 70% of conservatory respondents indicating they were performance majors. Schools of music within state universities had the lowest number of performance majors with 54% of state university students selecting performance as their major.

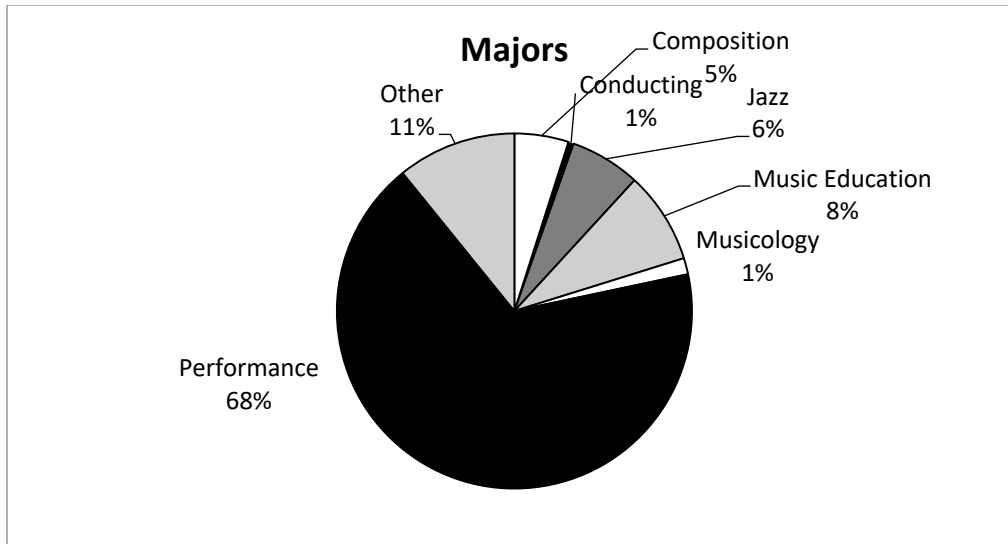


Figure 1: Majors of respondents

Findings & Discussion

Notions of Career Successes, Ideals & Expectations

The first part of the study inquired into what jobs students most associate with success, what their ideal jobs are and what jobs they expect to hold after completing their degree. It also captured data regarding satisfaction with expected career and knowledge about portfolio careers.

Position Most Associated with Success

First, respondents were asked to select the position that they most associated with a successful career in music (Figure 2). Only one choice was permitted from the twelve options.

What position do you most associate with a successful career in music

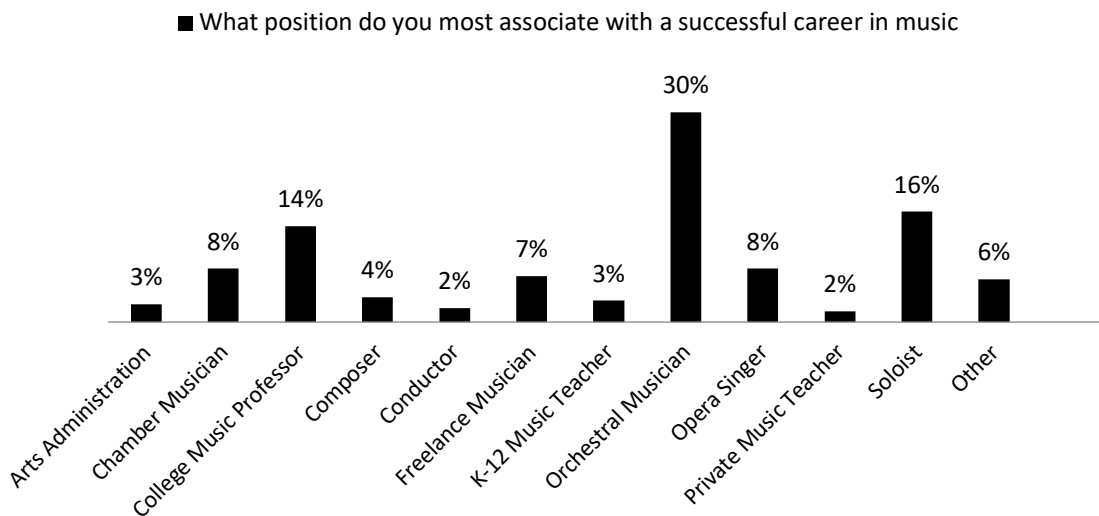


Figure 2: Positions most associated with success

The most common response was orchestral musician with 30% of respondents selecting this option. Soloist was second with 16% of individuals selecting it. The responses to this question contradict Solbu’s (2007) hierarchy of success, which places soloist at the top and orchestral musicians below. One reason for this contradiction could be that the majority of students majoring in music play in a large ensemble, often an orchestra or a wind band as part of their K-12 and college education. Because the large ensemble is a requirement for most music degrees, the role of an ensemble musician may be deeply ingrained in a student’s identity. While solo opportunities exist in K-12 and in higher education, they are not guaranteed and are much harder to come by. College Music Professor came in just behind soloist with 14% of respondents choosing it. Taking into consideration the four students who responded other and listed multiple jobs and the respondents who selected freelance, 9% of respondents associated a portfolio career or freelance career with success.

Analyzing the data by instrument family produced interesting results regarding jobs associated with success (Figures 3 & 4). The instrument families considered were orchestral instruments, piano and voice. When considering only orchestral instruments, the percentage of respondents who selected orchestral musician as the position most associated with success increased to 47%. Forty-seven percent of vocalists selected opera singer making it the most common choice for vocalists. Orchestral instrumentalists were the least likely group to choose soloist with only 9% selecting this option. Pianists were the most likely group to associate soloist with success with 30% selecting this option. Soloist was also a popular choice for vocalists with 22% selecting it. Pianists were also more likely than the other groups to select college music professor. Vocalists were the most likely group to associate freelance musician with a successful career in music, while no pianists selected this as an option.

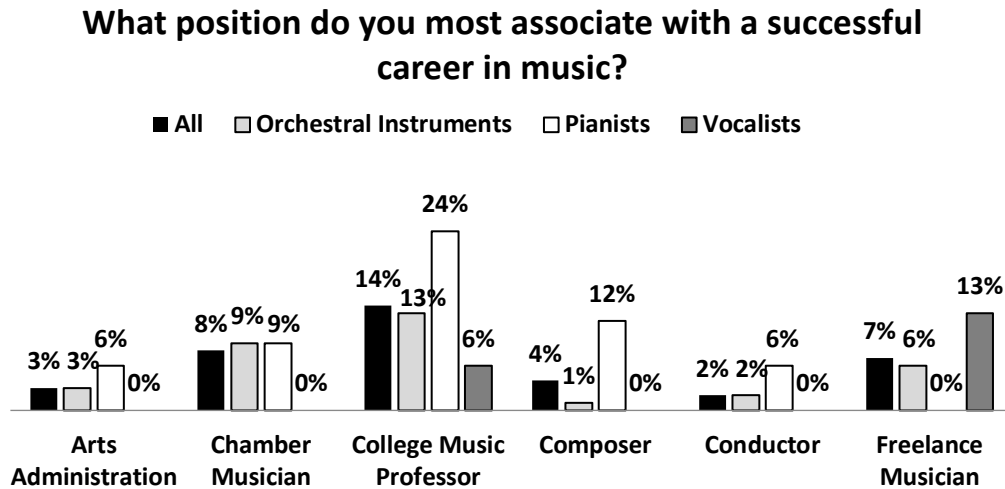


Figure 3: Positions most associated with success by instrument part 1

What position do you most associate with a successful career in music?

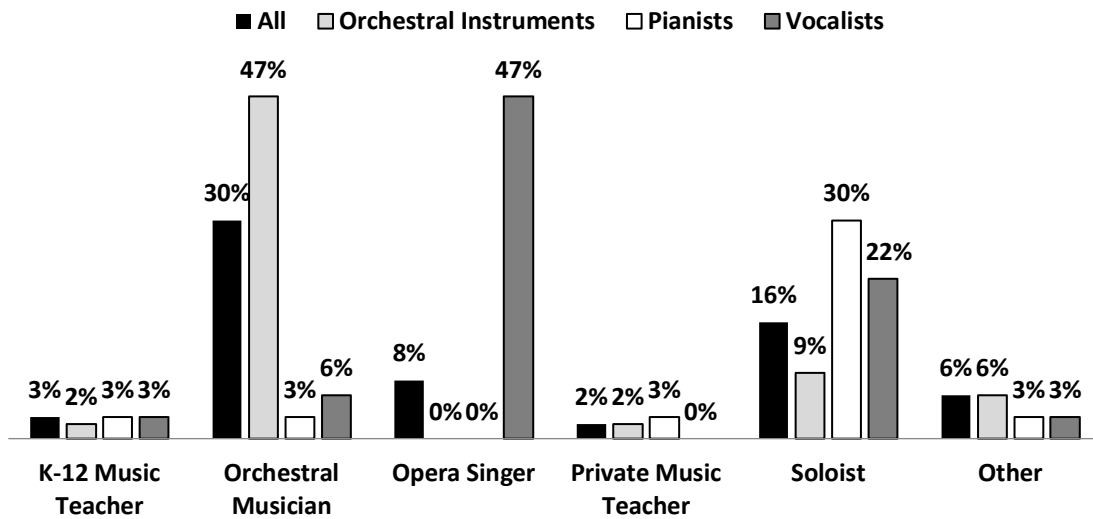


Figure 4: Positions most associated with success by instrument part 2

Ideal Job

Participants were then asked to select one job out of the same twelve choices, that they identified as their ideal job if ability wasn't a factor (Figure 5).

If ability wasn't a factor, what would your ideal job be?

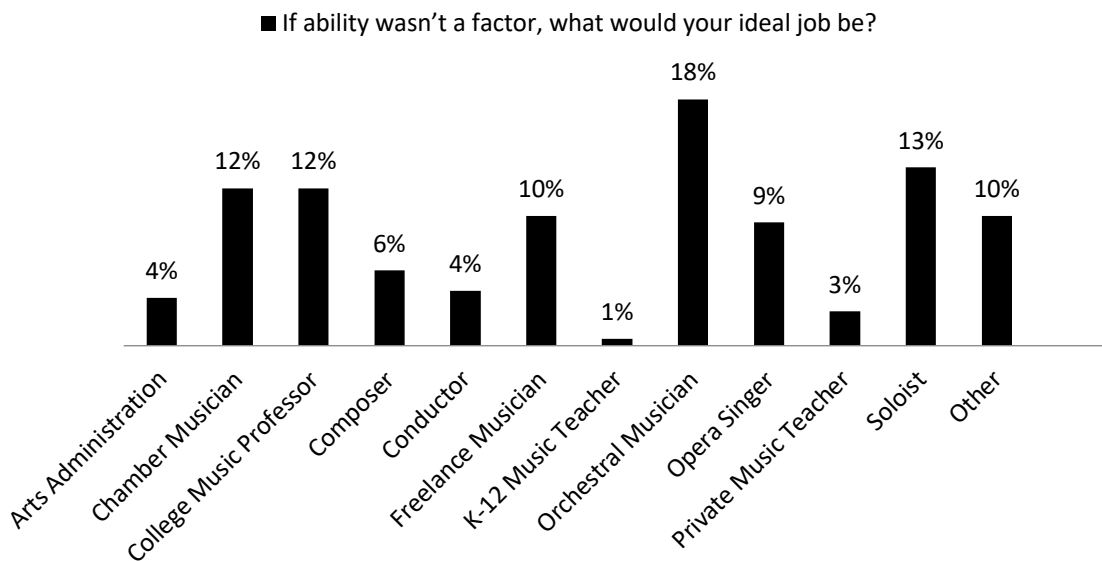


Figure 5: Ideal job

Orchestral musician was again the most popular response with 18% of respondents selecting it as their ideal job. The second most popular response was soloist with 13% of the respondents selecting it. Orchestral Musician and soloist were also the two most popular responses associated with a successful career in music. While the ranking of these positions was the same, the percentage of respondents changed. This comparison is illustrated in Figure 6. Thirty percent of respondents indicated that orchestral musician was the position they most associated with success compared to 18% who selected it as their ideal job. This drop of 12% was the biggest fluctuation when comparing data from the two questions. This indicates that associating a particular job with success does not necessarily mean the student desires to obtain that job. This could be due to the student not desiring to do the job they most associate with success or it may indicate that students are aware of how highly competitive the job market is. A student may associate the position of orchestral musician with success when considering how society views success, but he/she may desire a different career based on his/her own interests and goals. This might indicate students are thinking subjectively about success when selecting their ideal job. The fluctuation for soloist was not as significant, dropping by only three percentage points from those who selected it as the position most associated with success compared to those who selected it as their ideal job.

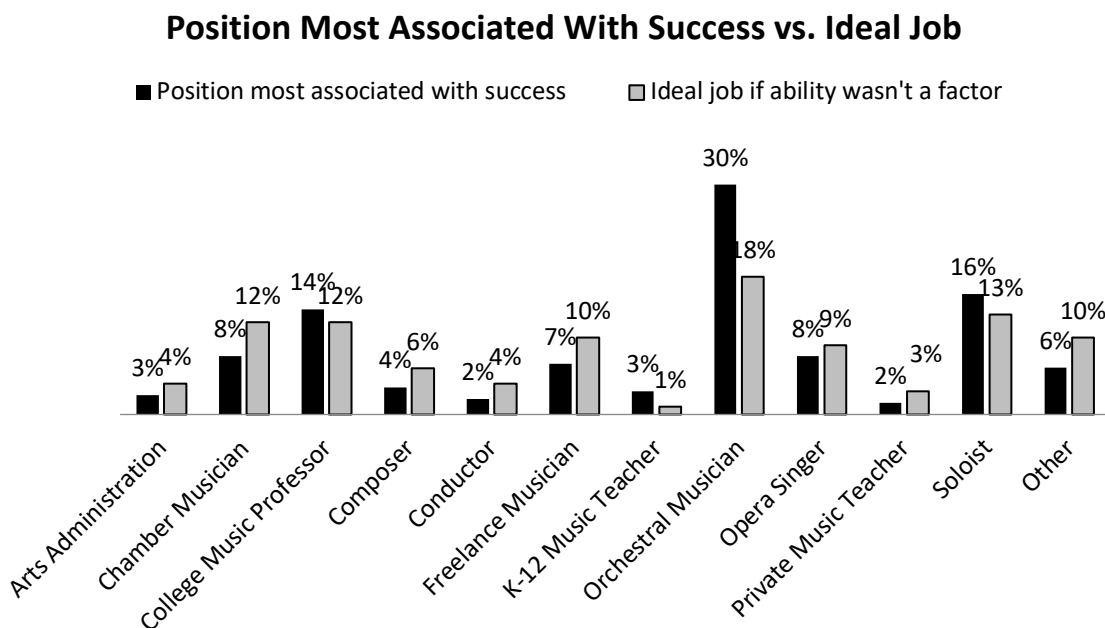


Figure 6: Success vs. ideal job

There were again, interesting results when reviewing the data by instrument family (Figures 7 & 8). Orchestral musician was still the most popular choice for respondents in the orchestral instrument group with 30% selecting it. This is 17% less than the percentage of orchestral instrumentalists who selected it as the position most associated with a successful career. Opera singer remained the most common choice for vocalists with 53% of vocalists

selecting it as their ideal job. Interestingly, the same percentage of pianists (30%) who selected soloist as the position most associated with success also selected soloist as their ideal job. Pianists were still the most likely group to select college music professor when it came to ideal job with 18% selecting it.

If ability wasn't a factor, what would your ideal job be?

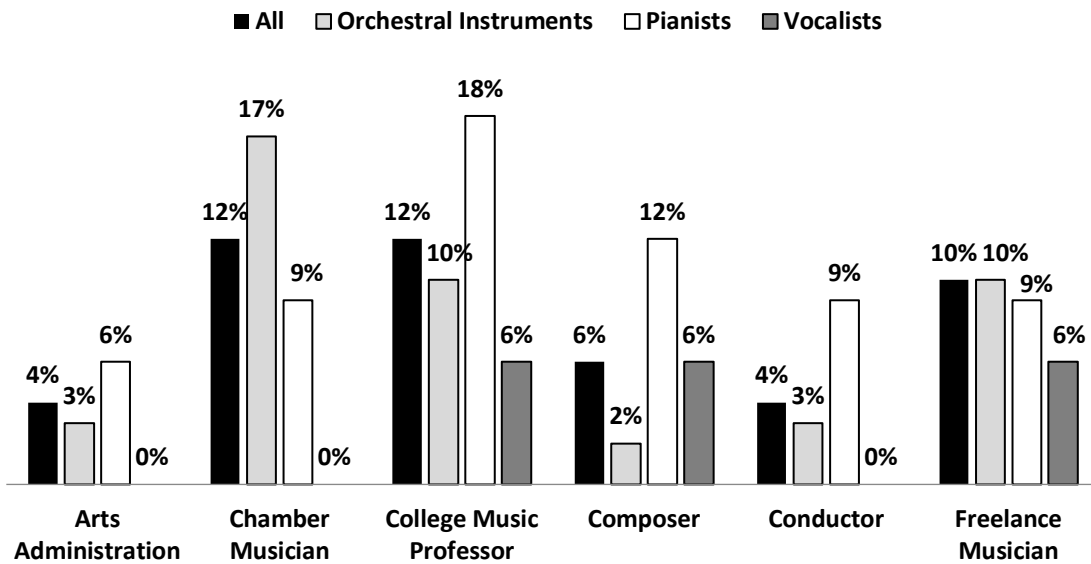


Figure 7: Ideal job by instrument part 1

If ability wasn't a factor, what would your ideal job be?

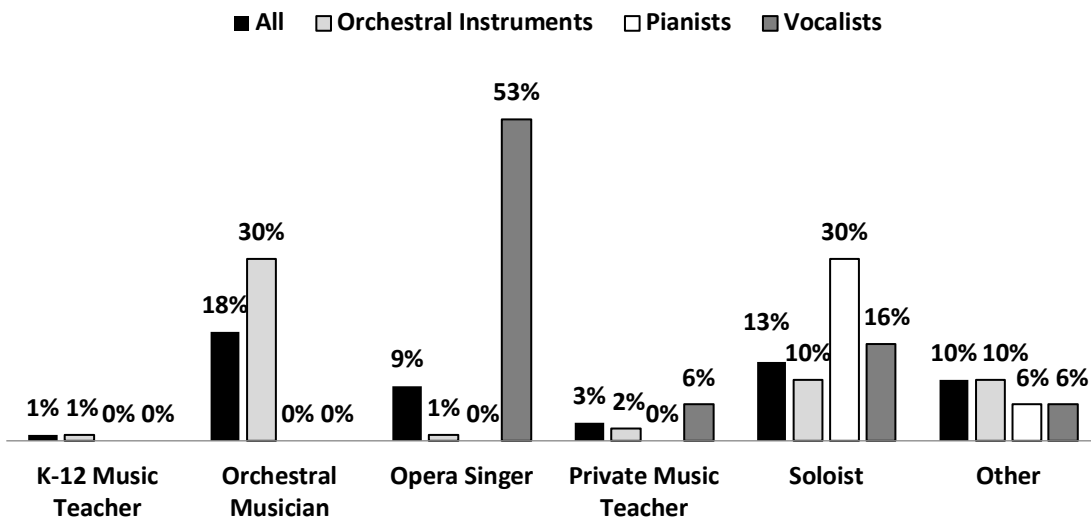


Figure 8: Ideal job by instrument part 2

Interestingly, a very large percentage of 1st year students selected freelance musician compared to other years in school. Twenty-two percent of 1st year students indicated that freelance musician was their ideal job. In all other years of the study, this position was selected by 6% or fewer. The further into their degree students were, the more likely they were to select “other” as their ideal job. Only 2% of 1st year students selected other as their ideal job, while 15% of 4th year and higher students selected it. This may indicate that as students progress through their degrees, they are exposed to variety of careers they hadn’t considered and are thinking more creatively about their future.

Expected Jobs

Respondents were then asked to select the positions they expect to do for work after completing their degree (Figure 9). They were given the same twelve choices as in the previous questions, but this time they were permitted to select more than one option in order to determine how many expected to hold multiple jobs. Seventy-three percent of respondents selected more than one job indicating that they expected to engage in a portfolio career. Of the 27% of respondents who selected only one job, 4% selected freelance musician. A freelance musician does engage in multiple project-based jobs, so this choice would also be considered a portfolio career. Considering all of the respondents who selected more than one job and those who only selected freelance musician, 77% of the respondents anticipated having a portfolio career. Research indicates that many professional musicians hold more than one job and that this been common practice for many years. A 1974 study, *Music Career Curriculum Development Study: A Study of the Relationship of Curricula to Employment* (Jay & Smith) found that none of its respondent held just one job. Data from the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) shows that 37% of respondents hold two or more jobs (Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, 2013). Participants in this study seem to be aware that it is unlikely that they will make their income from one job.

Participants who only anticipated holding one job responded with orchestral musician, soloist, chamber musician, composer, college music professor, K-12 teacher, private teacher, opera singer and arts administrator. Orchestral musician was the most common choice with 6% anticipating this to be their sole job. Only 1% of respondents expected to be a soloist with no other jobs. Solbu’s hierarchy of success puts orchestral musician and soloist at the top of the pyramid, but this data indicates that the majority students don’t appear to expect to reach the top of the pyramid.

The most common response was freelance musician with 63% selecting it. Again, indicating that the majority of respondents expected to engage in project-based work or a portfolio career. Private music teacher was the second most common response with 62% selecting it. These were the only two options that received responses from over 50% of the survey respondents.

Thirty-eight percent of respondents expected to hold jobs as orchestral musicians, but only 6% expected this to be their only job. There could be several reasons for this. According to the Berklee College of Music (2016), the salary range for an orchestral musician is \$28,000-\$143,000. This is a very large salary range and jobs near the top of the range are the exception. While many musicians choose to engage in supplemental work for a variety of reasons including

artistic fulfillment, musicians at the lower end of this range will likely need to engage in additional jobs to supplement their salary. According to Handy (1989), various jobs within a portfolio career can fill different needs, which is one reason an orchestral musician might choose to engage in a portfolio career.

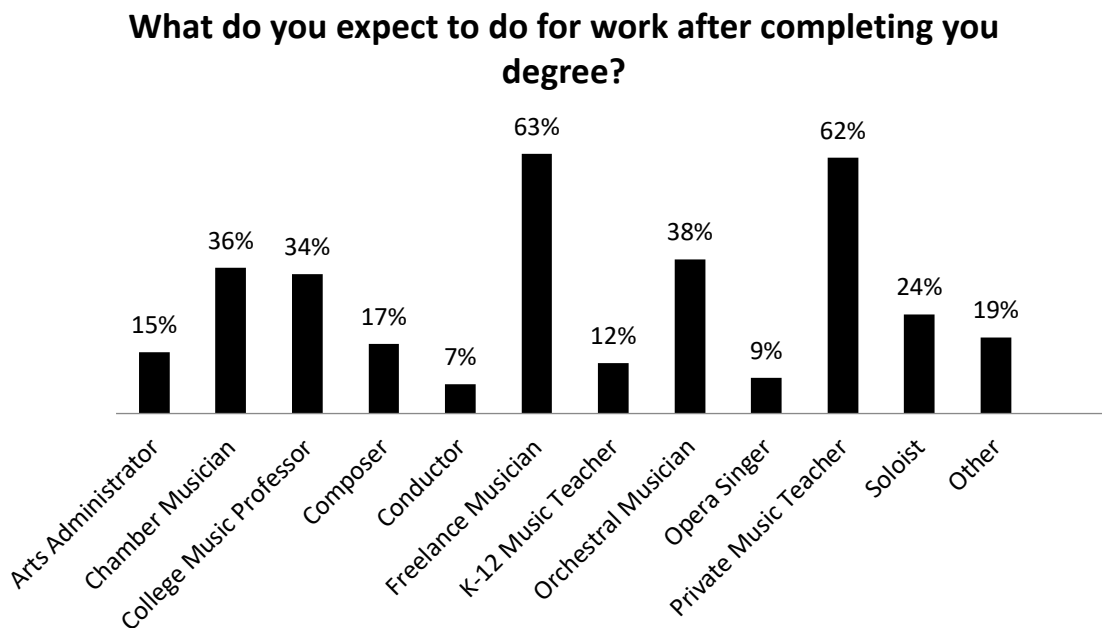


Figure 9: Expected job(s)

Interestingly, while only 16% of respondents selected some form of teaching as their ideal job, 72% expected to teach in some capacity (college music professor, K-12 music teacher or private music teacher). The majority of respondents expected to teach in conjunction with other jobs with only 0.5% indicating that they expected teaching to be their only job. A high number of students, 34%, expected to work as college music professors. The survey did not distinguish between full-time professors and part-time adjuncts, but only 3% selected college music professor as their only job, which may indicate that many of respondents anticipated being adjuncts. Both an Australian study (Bennett, 2007) and the Wisconsin College-Conservatory's study, *Music Career Curriculum Development Study: A Study of the Relationship of Curricula to Employment* (Jay & Smith, 1974) found that teaching is one of the most common income streams for musicians. SNAAP results found that half of all respondents have taught at some point in their careers (Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, 2017). It appears that current students are also aware of this and expect to teach as part of their careers.

Once again, analyzing the data considering instrument family yielded some insightful results (Figures 10 & 11). The percentage of respondents in the orchestral instrument group who selected orchestral musician as one of their expected jobs increased significantly from the percentage who selected it as the position most associated with success or as their ideal job. Sixty-two percent of orchestral instrumentalists expected to have work as an orchestral musician. Vocalists were the most likely to expect to have work as a soloist with 41% selecting it.

Orchestral musicians were the least likely to expect to work as a soloist with 17% selecting it. Fifty-three percent of vocalists expected to work as an opera singer, which is the same amount that choose it as their ideal job. Interestingly, pianists and vocalists were significantly more likely to expect to work as an arts administrator than orchestral instrumentalists.

What do you expect to do for work after completing you degree?

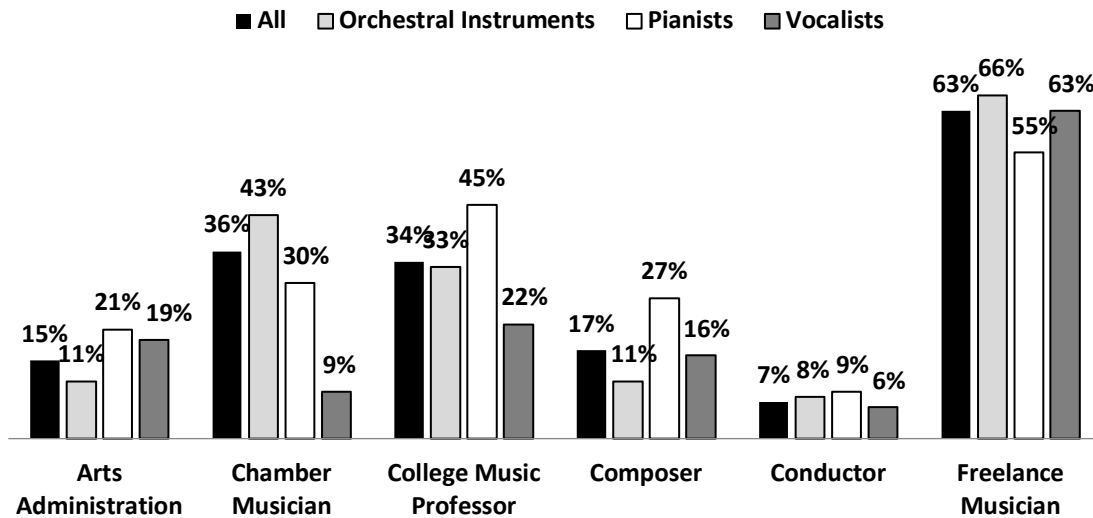


Figure 10: Expected jobs by instrument part 1

What do you expect to do for work after completing you degree?

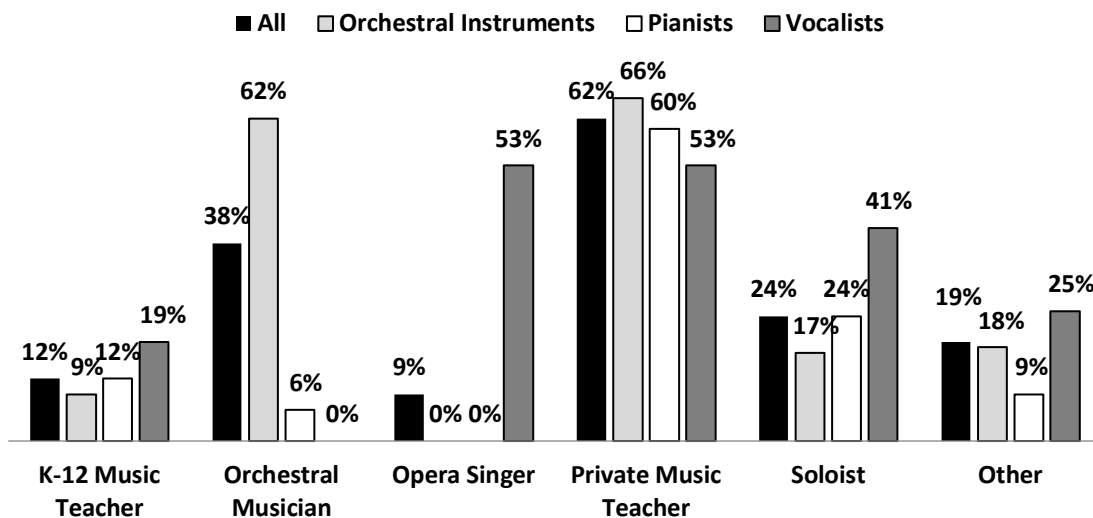


Figure 11: Expected jobs by instrument part 2

The findings indicate that there are significant differences between the jobs students position as successful, the jobs they would ideally like to hold and the jobs they actually expect to acquire. This might lead to the assumption that students are dissatisfied with their expected careers, but the findings reveal that is not the case. When asked about their satisfaction level with their expected jobs, the majority of students selected some level of satisfaction with what they expected to do for work. Ninety-one percent selected either very satisfied or satisfied with only 6% selecting dissatisfied. It appears that the vast majority of students are satisfied with their expected careers and seem to understand that they will likely engage in project-based portfolio careers.

Next, students were asked whether they anticipated holding multiple jobs in music at the same time. Eighty-five percent of respondents expected to hold multiple jobs in music at the same time, indicating that they plan to engage in a portfolio career. This is not shocking considering that 77% of respondents selected multiple jobs or freelance careers when asked about what they expect to do for work. Only five students responded that they did not expect to hold multiple jobs in music. Participants appear to have a realistic understanding that full-time jobs in music with a single employer are limited and hard to come by. While many participants are interested in performing with an orchestra or opera company and performing as a soloist, they seem to understand that these endeavors likely won't be on a full-time basis.

Students were then asked whether they anticipated being self-employed at some point in their careers. The majority of students reported that they anticipated being self-employed at some point, with 79% responding yes. Only 6% responded no, while 15% were unsure. Self-employment is a common characteristic of a portfolio career since work is often available on a contract basis. Once again, the findings from this question indicate that the participants have a realistic sense of how musicians make a living.

Career Goals & Hopes After Graduation

Respondents were given the opportunity to describe, in their own words, their career goals and what they hoped to do for work after graduation. Respondents had a broad range of goals and hopes for their careers. Portfolio careers, teaching, orchestral positions and attending graduate school were common similarities among the responses. Numerous respondents mentioned concerns about financial stability and the need to find a career that would provide this with one student stating, *"I am planning on working as a nurse at least part-time in addition to any music career I have. I hope to work as a freelance artist and I would love to perform on Broadway, but I also want a degree of financial stability as well. I do not want to be forced to pick up any gigs just because I desperately need to make rent."* Attending graduate school or obtaining additional preparation before embarking on their targeted career was also a common response. One student stated, *"go on to grad school, or an artist diploma of some kind. After those degrees, I intend on independently practicing until I win an orchestral position. I will support myself with freelance gigs and private teaching."* Many respondents wrote about finding their place in the field of music while being open to a variety of areas and opportunities with one respondent commenting, *"I have a variety of interests, and although I'm already a senior, I am doing my best to pursue all of those interests and keep my options open. My ultimate career goals are to find my place within the music world--whether that's through performing, teaching, or administration."* Several respondents described out of the box careers or ideas about how to

fund their careers indicating that they were thinking creatively about how to provide value. One respondent wrote about continuing music as a hobby, while supporting himself/herself outside of music. Another described her personal goal of becoming a mother and homemaker while also continuing to sing. Respondents had varied and personalized career goals.

Definition of a Successful Career in Music

Understanding notions of success among undergraduate music majors was a key goal of this study, so allowing the respondents to offer a definition of success without the restrictions of closed-ended questions was important. Respondents had a wide range of what constitutes a successful career in music. The vast majority of respondents listed attributes as opposed to a specific job. Only three respondents listed a specific job as their definition of a successful career in music. Many indicated that success is personal and will vary from person to person and that there is no single definition of success. Themes emerging from the responses were having an active career, affecting people with music, artistic fulfillment, continuous growth, doing what you love, financial stability, having a high level of musical skill and personal satisfaction and fulfillment. Many of the responses fell under multiple themes. Responses to this question indicate that students in this study are thinking broadly about success and are not necessarily subscribing to narrow definitions of success associated with specific jobs. A sample of responses regarding definitions of a successful career in music is offered below:

“I would define a successful career in music as a diverse career that goes between periods of travel, varying workloads, and performances with many groups and/or in many roles.”

“A successful career in music should impact others in some way, whether those others are students or audience members. How it might do this is subjective; they could be a large factor in someone's decision to begin playing an instrument, or they could be the reason why somebody stopped and felt something profound while listening to music for the first time. Regardless, I think that the amount of positive impact a musician can have on others defines their success in the field.”

“If I can wake up every day not knowing exactly what to expect to be doing next week and having to go look for work and new opportunities to use my skill as a musician to make a living I know I will have succeeded. As long as I'm playing music, I have found success.”

“A career where you are doing what you love and yet still working hard and learning. It's not a comfortable career, but one that pushes you.”

“If I feel a continued passion, feel like I'm bringing joy to others, and can earn enough to eat and live.”

“Making a comfortable living involving music in some capacity.”

“Since we live in a capitalist society, I do believe that it is necessary to make a decent, comfortable wage. Past that, I would define a successful career as one that satisfies the

wishes you've always harbored for yourself, not those of others. I personally have had people tell me that I should try for something else, or not be an orchestral musician. But I think success is figuring out how to use what you have and create a life that you are happy with and is worthwhile for you."

"Success is different for everyone, so the definition must be broad. I would say that it is one that fulfills one's passion for music and sense of being."

Respondents had deeply varied and personal views of success. Many of the responses indicate that they are thinking about what is going to make them happy and not solely focusing on society's perception of success. While many respondents do hope to have a performance career, they also appear to be open to many different avenues as long as they are able to continue their passion of making music.

Definition of Musician

Literature on portfolio careers suggests the need to develop a broader definition of musician. Bennett (2008) suggests the need for a new definition of the term musician that "encompasses the whole profession rather than the very few who work in performance" (p. 3). Respondents were asked to provide their own definition of the term "musician" in order to understand whether or not current students already have a broad definition of the term musician. Respondents offered a wide variety of responses. The responses were coded into ten themes, which are illustrated in Table 2. Several definitions fell under more than one theme.

Someone who is artistically and technically skilled on their instrument
Someone who creates/performs music
Someone who has a career in music or is paid to perform
Someone who communicates or expresses themselves through music
Someone with a holistic knowledge and understanding of music
Someone who studies music
Someone who engages and enhances the community through music
Someone who evokes emotion through music
Someone who has dedicated themselves to music
Someone who finds joy in music

Table 2: Definition of musician themes

Several respondents also expressed that a musician isn't solely someone who performs with one student stating, *"There could be many definitions for this term. There are many ways of being a musician, from being a performer, to being a composer, to being an electronic musician, a producer. Being all of it at once...I think a musician today has to take advantage of all of the tools of the 21st century"* and another commenting, *"I define the term musician as one who shares the power of music with others and is able to make them feel something as a result,*

whether that be through performance or education.” While this theme wasn’t communicated as often as the ten major themes, it is still important to note that several respondents did indicate that a musician is not limited to one who performs.

The definitions offered by respondents indicate that students have their own personal definitions of what it means to be a musician. While students do offer broad definitions for musician, many still revolve around playing an instrument. It appears that there is still a need to broaden the definition of musician, so that those who do other musical jobs aside from performing are included.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how the career ideals and expectations of music majors align with the hierarchy of success reported in the literature. The findings revealed that undergraduate music majors have a wide variety of career goals and deeply personal definitions of success. This study found that students had deeply personal definitions of what it means to be successful. When asked to define a successful career in music, many of the respondents listed characteristics and values that they hoped to have in a job as opposed to listing specific jobs. Instead of associating specific jobs with success, respondents instead considered goals such as having an active and varied career, being able to affect people with music, having artistic fulfillment, continuing to grow as a musician, being able to do what they love, having financial stability, being happy, having a high level of musical skill and being personally satisfied and fulfilled. It appears that students in this study are thinking broadly about success and are not necessarily subscribing to narrow definitions of success.

When asked about specific jobs associated with success, the top three responses were orchestral musician, soloist and college music professor. The majority of respondents associated performance jobs with success over teaching and other non-performance jobs. The findings also revealed that specific jobs associated with success differed by instrument role. Orchestral instrumentalists considered orchestral musician to be the most successful job, while pianists considered soloist and vocalists considered opera singer to be the most successful job. Orchestral instrumentalists were the least likely to select soloist as the most successful job.

When asked to select what their ideal job was, respondents often selected a different job than they selected for the position most associated with success. This indicates that viewing a position as successful does not necessarily mean a student desires to hold that position. While orchestral musician, soloist and college music professor still remained in the top three, the percentage of respondents who selected these positions as their ideal job compared to the job most associated with success dropped. The majority of respondents selected a performance job as their ideal job over teaching and other non-performance jobs. Participants also believed that with enough hard work they could accomplish their ideal job.

The majority of respondents expect to engage in freelance or portfolio careers and hold multiple positions within music. Only 3% of respondents indicated that they did not expect to hold multiple jobs. It appears that music students understand that they will need to engage in portfolio careers and hold a variety of different jobs. Respondents also appear to understand that many of them will likely be self-employed at some point in their careers. The majority of

respondents also expect to teach in some capacity. Most plan to teach in conjunction with other jobs as part of a portfolio career. Participants in this study seem to be aware that it is unlikely that they will make their income from one job.

There were significant differences between the jobs respondents selected as the position most associated with success, their ideal and their expected job(s). Freelance and teaching were the two most prominent examples of this. Only 7% of respondents selected freelance as the position most associated with success and only 10% selected it as their ideal job, but 63% of respondents expect to engage in freelance work. While 72% of respondents expect to teach, only 16% selected teaching as their ideal job and only 18% selected teaching as the position most associated with success.

A major finding of this study is that there are significant differences between the jobs students associate with success, would ideally like to hold and actually expect to hold. These are important distinctions. The results demonstrate that we cannot assume that because a student views being a soloist as a successful job that this means the student expects to become a soloist or even desires to become a soloist. The results also indicate that in many cases respondents are not expecting to hold the jobs they ideally desire to hold. While this might be viewed as a negative, it is important to note that respondents had a high level of satisfaction with their expected jobs, so they do not appear to feel as though they are settling.

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