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Abstract

In the increasingly complex world of college choice, high school counselors are an important resource for college-bound students, yet the environment these counselors find themselves in is one that focuses on questions of value and return on investment, resulting in the elevation of some academic disciplines over others. Using a multiple-case study design and Eisner's criticism and connoisseurship method, this qualitative study seek to describe how college counselors at Arizona School for the Arts guide prospective music major through college and major choice by exploring how counselors' backgrounds predisposed them to guiding students through college and major choice, their perception of the value of a music degree, the significance of their predisposition and perceptions for their guidance of prospective music majors, and the surrounding influences that impact their work. Immersive participant narratives and rich description are used to present complexity and nuance while interpretation and evaluation are woven throughout. Themes derived from a synthesis of the narratives are presented with recommendations and opportunities for future study.

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What a Way to Spend the Day: A Curated Multiple-Case Study of College Counselors
and Their Guidance of Prospective Music Majors

A Dissertation in Practice

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the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Stephen Campbell

August 2023

Advisor: Dr. Mike Hoa Nguyen

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Research Problem

In the increasingly complex world of college choice, high school counselors are an important resource for college-bound students (Belasco, 2013; Perna et al., 2008; McDonough, 1997). However, the neoliberal environment in which these counselors operate is increasingly one that focuses on questions of the value of a college degree and expected financial return on investment from education, resulting in the elevation of some academic disciplines over others (Carrigan & Bardini, 2021; Carlson, 2013; Sheehy, 2012). Counselors whose value system prioritizes financial definitions of success may dissuade prospective music students from pursuing college-level music study.

Overview of the Problem

There has always been an economic motivation to pursue post-secondary education (Becker, 1993; Solow, 1965; Weiss, 2015), and indeed, a college degree directly relates to increased life-time earnings and wealth (Carnevale et al., 2011). However, the current neoliberal discourse surrounding the purpose of college, especially in a time of surging tuition costs, results in prospective students and families being more concerned than ever about the return on their investment in college (Ducoff, 2021; Kulkarni & Rothwell, 2015). These financial concerns apply not only to the types of institutions students consider to be of good value, but also to specific academic majors,

with students gravitating toward those they perceived to be good bets financially or feeling irresponsible for choosing a major that does not project high economic returns (Carrigan & Bardini, 2021; Carlson, 2013; Sheehy, 2012). Students are often guided away from majors like music on the assumption of poor economic outcomes (Carrigan & Bardini, 2021; Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2013; Soria & Stebelton, 2013).

This guidance ignores several arguments. The first questions the assumption that a student who selects a major like engineering or business, for example, is guaranteed to have a successful career while a student who selects music is not. In reality, only 27% of all college graduates are working in a field directly related to their undergraduate college major (Abel & Deitz, 2014). During college, one third of students change majors at least once within three years (Selingo, 2017). These findings suggest that guiding a high school student to choose a major based on projected economic outcomes may not be as simple as it appears.

The second argument goes beyond questioning the premise that certain majors equal guaranteed outcomes. Research on skills suggests that students who major in areas perceived to lead to poor future income still end up in economically viable careers based on the skills they developed in their major area (Coffey et al., 2019). This ‘transferable skills’ argument is a favorite for the defense of music education. Authors point to correlations between music study and increases in reading scores, math scores, GPA, SAT/ACT scores, as well as improved self-concept, critical thinking, self-discipline, collaboration, creativity, problem solving, and self-expression (Brown, 2012; Cutietta, 1996; Hallam & MacDonald, 2013; Kalivretenos, 2015; Pitts, 2012; Prey, 2014; Rapp,

2005). If music students develop the skills needed for an economically successful career, then discouraging music study does not make sense, even from a purely financial perspective.

A third and more foundational argument is that education does not serve solely economic purposes. Indeed, while the need for income is an economic reality, it represents only a fraction of a full human life. A reliance on economic definitions of success is an oversimplification that can lead to an absence of passion, joy, and flourishing (Noddings, 2003). Noddings (2003) suggests schools should encourage students to ask the question ‘what makes me happy?’ rather than ‘what will make money?’ as they consider life goals, including post-secondary choices. It should be noted that most people need to make money in order to live and some need to make money sooner or for more complicated reasons (e.g., caring for loved ones). These questions are philosophical in nature, considering what the goal of education is. They are not meant to be mutually exclusive or binary but rather ones of degree. While there is some overlap in the transferrable skills cited above and the elements needed for human flourishing, the operative question is why someone should develop those skills. Is it simply because it makes a student more marketable or are there other motivations? Elliot Eisner (2001) calls for a defense of music education that does not rest on “what sells” (p. 5). Instead, he points to benefits such as felt thought or body-situated knowledge and the ability to listen and make sense of something simultaneously. He asserts that music teaches the skill of really listening rather than simply hearing, being able to work with others toward a common goal, and that it provides a means of expression beyond words. These benefits

serve what Eisner considers to be the goal: enriching human life. If students are guided with a focus on selecting a college major based on perceived financial returns, they risk missing opportunities to develop skills for a fuller life.

Important players in this value-laden college choice environment are the high school counselors that guide students. In many cases they are the main source of information for students preparing for college (Belasco, 2013; Perna et al., 2008). These institutional actors shape the norms and expectations of college-going and post-secondary planning (McDonough, 1997). However, research shows school counselors do not rank highly on the list of resources used most often by music students during college choice, a stark departure from similar research on students who are not specifically interested in a music major (Carlson, 1999; Carson, 2020; Curtis, 2012; Locke, 1982; Ludeman, 1964). While there are potential reasons for a music student to rely less on a school counselor (e.g., the specialization of a music program being outside the counselor's normal expertise), it is instructive to consider how a counselor's guidance may affect these students within the context of the current neoliberal, economically minded era. Responding to the literature on music majors, this study expands the definition of counselor to include other staff members that influence students (e.g., teachers and administrators). It is important to interrogate assumptions made by counselors regarding which areas of study have value, to determine if the support offered by school counselors is appropriate for prospective music majors and whether school counselors are falling victim to neoliberal arguments that devalue music education.

Research Design

A multiple-case study design is appropriate for this study because it seeks to “investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009, p. 18) and it explores one issue or concern through different perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Typically, these cases must be bounded by time and space (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, this multiple case study defines the unit of analysis as the individual counselor, resulting in five cases bounded by time and space (Yin, 2009). These cases are bounded by time in that they focus on the experiences and perceptions of individuals over the course of their lifetimes up to the point of the study. They are bounded by space in that each case is an individual person, they are all drawn from a specific geographic region (Phoenix, AZ) and specific school context (Arizona School for the Arts), a specific segment of American education (secondary arts education), and a specific academic discipline (music). The study method used to execute this case study design is Eisner’s criticism and connoisseurship. This method is concerned with making public a researcher’s expertise (connoisseurship) through criticism meant to improve the subject of the study (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). The goal is to uncover a deep understanding of what is happening in a given space and consider how it can be improved (Saxe & Uhrmacher, 2018). Researchers in this method are concerned with nuance and complexity, both of which are abundantly present in the college choice process. With its origins in art and literacy criticism, this approach is particularly appropriate for an evaluation that is concerned with the arts. Eisner believed that assumptions, when left unexamined, can lead to a culture that is inhospitable to the enriched life the arts can

foster (1976). While Eisner's main focus was the teacher in a classroom, the same philosophy can be applied to the norms and expectations of other educational spaces like a high school counselor's office (Barone, 2014; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to seek to describe how college counselors at Arizona School for the Arts, an arts-focused, public charter school in Phoenix, Arizona guide prospective music major through college and major choice. This is achieved by exploring how counselors' backgrounds predisposed them to guiding music students through college and major choice, their perception of the value of a music degree, and the significance of their predisposition and perceptions for their guidance of prospective music majors.

Research Questions

The research questions are guided by Yin's (2009) assertion that case study designs are best used to answer 'how' and 'why' questions. In addition to that guidance, there are two primary frames for these questions. The first is Perna and Kurban's (2013) updated conceptual model of college enrollment, which demonstrates external, environmental effects on student college decision making and includes McDonough's concept of organizational habitus (1997). The second is Eisner's criticism and connoisseurship approach to research conceptualized through a constructivism paradigm. Constructivism asserts that reality is socially constructed and is interested in exploring through qualitative methods the multiplicity of values and perceptions that guide people (Mertens & Wilson, 2019).

The questions guiding this evaluation are:

RQ 1: How do counselors' backgrounds predispose them to guiding students in college and major choice?

RQ 2: How do counselors perceive of the value of a music degree?

RQ 3: How do counselors mediate college and major choice to prospective music majors?

RQ 4: What are the surrounding influences on norms and expectations of their work?

These questions investigate the backgrounds of the counselors at ASA, the influences that guide counselors' work, and the values that contribute to the counselors' interaction with the specific student population of interest to this study. It is important to study all of these elements in order to paint a vivid, nuanced, and valid picture of the counselors at ASA and their work related to prospective music majors.

Definition of Terms

College choice – Typically, this term refers to the process of a student choosing a college to attend. In this study, this term refers to the process by which a student chooses not only the college they hope to attend, but the major they plan to focus on. It starts with considering how a student is predisposed towards college and college major, proceeds to the process of searching for colleges and majors that fit a student's desires and ends with a student choosing which college to attend and which discipline to major in. The stages used here are based on Hossler and Gallagher's three phase model of college choice (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Perna and Kurban's model of student enrollment (2013) builds on Hossler and Gallagher's definition of college choice and as such is used

to guide the conceptual framework of this study. However, I use Hossler and Gallager here because the predisposition component was revealed to be especially important in this study.

College Counselor – the staff member located in a high school who serves as the primary resource for students going through the college choice process.

Counselors – in this study counselors refer to any staff member at Arizona School for the Arts that influences a student’s college decision. This can include school college counselors, teachers, and administrators. This broader definition of counselor is drawn from research on how prospective music majors are influenced in college choice and college major choice (Carlson, 1999; Carson, 2020; Overmier, 2003).

Prospective music student – a high school student who is considering applying to college as a music major.

Post-secondary music major – a college student studying music.

Return on investment (ROI) – a metric that “compares how much you paid for an investment to how much you earned to evaluate its efficiency” (Guy Birken & Curry, 2021, para. 1)

Summary of Findings

This study found that counselors at ASA draw heavily from their backgrounds and experiences to guide prospective music majors through college choice. They emulate and replicate the relationships that were meaningful in their lives for their students and consider private music instructors to be the most important source of college guidance for music students. Participants are influenced by their experience as professional musicians when they advise students on pursuing music, desiring that their students enter the field with their eyes wide open to the difficulties. Participants want to provide the guidance they did not receive as high school students, but they don't perceive their guidance as being pushy, just providing information. When comparing their experience with those of their students, they are concerned about how much more expensive college is now. Participants consider music to have a magnetic pull on the musician; they can't NOT do it. Participants rely heavily on insider knowledge about the music admission process and the life of a musician to guide their students, and they use a vague and subjective assessment system to connect musicians with music schools. Neoliberal influences are present throughout, particularly evident in participant comments about market competition, students needing to stand out from the crowd, the need to hustle in order to make it, the idea that money is good and music does not equal money, and the use of monetary metrics like merit scholarship as proxies for ability and success. Participants perceive that musicians need to have meaningful musical experiences before choosing to major in music whereas non-music majors can explore and figure out their interests once they get to college. All participants love music and see value in a music degree, but their

views are complicated by cost concerns. They do, however, perceive music to teach transferrable skills, sometimes uniquely compared to other disciplines. Finally, counselors are influenced in their work by expectations set by the surrounding school culture, the music industry, higher education, and parents and students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The body of research surrounding influences on a student's post-secondary path is immense. For the purposes of this study, I employ a conceptual model of college decision-making created by Perna (2006) and updated by Perna and Kurban (2013). This model conceptualizes decision making as influenced by four contextual layers: broad social and economic influences, higher education influences, school and community influences, and student/family level influences. After describing Perna and Kurban's model, this literature review will adapt that model to show layers of influence that surround and affect school counselors in their guidance of prospective music majors. First, it will contextualize neoliberalism as the era in which we live, framing it as the broad social and economic layer, and considering its impact on higher education. Second, it will review the literature on school counselors and their influence on prospective college students, with a particular focus on McDonough's (1997) concept of organizational habitus. Finally, it will review the limited literature on prospective music student college choice, considering the influence of school counselors on this population.

Perna and Kurban Model of Student Enrollment

Perna (2006) reviewed and synthesized relevant research on student college choice, including influencing factors and theories. The result was a proposed conceptual model of student college enrollment that is based on the economic theory of human capital as well as theories of social and cultural capital. Crucially, it is a model that considers the different layers of environmental or contextual influences present when a student makes college-related decisions. In 2013, Perna and Kurban published an updated model (see Figure 1). While this model is primarily focused on addressing inequities in college attainment as they relate to income levels and race, the model provides a valuable framework for this study. The layers of Perna and Kurban's model include (from broadest to narrowest): the broad social, economic, and policy context (layer four), the higher education context (layer three), the school and community context (layer two), and the individual habitus (student and family) context (layer one). In Perna and Kurban's work, the broad social, economic, and policy context includes influences such as demographic changes, unemployment rates, state and federal student aid programs, and curricular reform policies at the federal, state, and local levels. The higher education context focuses mostly on the information communicated to families by institutions of higher education and acknowledges that an institution's goals, location, programmatic options, and institutional characteristics impact a student's college choice. The school and community layer represents the concept of organizational habitus put forth by McDonough (1997). McDonough's concept illustrates how myriad college options are

delimited for a student by an intermediate organization, which includes high school counseling staff. Finally, the student and family layer is the individual habitus or “the internalized system of thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions that is acquired from the immediate environment” (Perna & Kurban, 2013, p. 14). This is an adaptation of McDonough’s organizational habitus and focuses on the significant others who surround the student (e.g., family, friends, etc.).

The authors indicate these layers are both distinct and integrated, influencing each other and, ultimately, the student. Importantly, the model attempts to consider contextual influences and reflect the complexity of college-related decision making. For this study, I apply and adapt this model to counselors’ guidance of music majors in a neoliberal context. Layers three and four (the broad social, economic, and policy context and the higher education context) focus on neoliberalism, the dominant form of capitalism prevalent in America today (Saunders & Blanco-Ramírez, 2016), and its effect on higher education. Layer two is the focus of this study and considers the school context as represented by the staff that counsel students through college choice (e.g., school counselors, teachers, and administrators). Layer 1 represents the student population this study seeks to impact: prospective music majors. The assumption in this study, in keeping with the assertions made by Perna and Kurban (2013), is that each layer has direct and indirect influence on the layers beneath it.

constructions (Harvey, 2005; Read, 2009; Shamir, 2008). The basic idea is that an economy rooted in an individual's pursuit of their own economic self-interest will result in unceasing increases in productivity, which in turn will elevate the standard of living for all people (i.e., a rising tide lifts all boats) (Harvey, 2005). Musicologist Andrea Moore points to words such as "freedom" and "innovation," popular in today's discourse, as indicators of neoliberal values that promote "radical self-sufficiency" (Moore, 2016, p. 33). Not only is an individual's rights and freedom of paramount importance, but the individual's concept of success should be defined in economic terms. Neoliberalism turns the individual into *homo economicus*, the economic man, transforming the person into human capital and promoting a view by which every action can be seen economically, or an investment in that capital (Read, 2009).

The effect of the neoliberal value system is evident in the literature surrounding college choice. A series of reports issued by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce highlight this influence with titles like *The College Payoff* (Carnevale et al., 2011), *Buyer Beware* (Carnevale et al., 2020), *The Economic Value of College Majors* (Carnevale et al., 2015), and *The Economic Value of Bachelor's Degrees* (Carnevale et al., 2017). These reports seek to frame the student as a consumer of educational goods and attempt to make a direct connection between the post-secondary choices a student makes and a specific income. While the methodology can be questioned, and indeed other studies present conflicting findings related to career outcomes associated with specific majors (Coffey et al., 2019), the premise itself illustrates the influence of neoliberal ideas. It places the student and the student's

responsibility to act in their own economic self-interest at the center of the equation, framing them as entering a marketplace and implying a responsibility to gather information on the return on investment in order to make a “wise” decision. These studies do not investigate the possibility that a student may define success in ways other than monetary return or that there may be value not represented in their methodology. This same concern is evident in Eagan et al. (2015) in which they present data about the increasing importance of economic and practical factors in student post-secondary decision making. Kelly and Walters (2016) reflect this focus in their study suggesting that universities should focus on gathering return on investment information in their institutional research in order to respond to prospective student interest in these answers.

The study that comes closest to making a connection between neoliberal value structures and the guidance of students is Carrigan and Bardini’s (2021) study on “Majorism,” or the elevation of one major over another. The study sought to explore student perceptions of their own chosen major versus others using data from two qualitative, ethnographic projects on undergraduate students. They found that students were very aware that majors in the “hard” sciences (especially engineering) were seen to have greater value than those of the liberal arts. Students communicated feeling pressured to make money and contribute to the economy upon graduation, pursuing a value system influenced by neoliberalism’s focus on market forces. Liberal arts students reported feeling a tension between a desire to serve the public good, even if it meant making less money, and a desire to do something perceived as useful. The authors even report liberal arts students were advised that, if they insisted on pursuing a liberal arts major, they should at least

choose a practical minor. Unfortunately, the study does not go into detail about where that guidance originated (e.g., parents, college advisors, high school counselors, etc.). This study supports my framing of the neoliberalism environment, both generally and specific to the higher education context, as the broadest layer of contextual influence in Perna and Kurban's model (2013). However, outside of a brief mention of students feeling parental pressure, the inquiry does not expand to pre-college influences such as school counselors. Furthermore, despite including students from over 42 majors, it does not mention music or music majors specifically.

Despite neoliberalism being the dominant form of capitalism (Saunders & Blanco-Ramírez, 2016), I did not find research on the effects of neoliberalism on school counselors or prospective music majors. However, research shows how neoliberalism has defined the current era, influencing virtually every aspect of our lives (Shamir, 2008). Scholars have written on neoliberalism's influence on the world order (Harvey, 2005; Read, 2009; Standing, 2014) and considered how that world order has affected higher education (Bok, 2003; Cunningham, 2016; Talburt, 2005; Woodford, 2005). One particularly applicable example is Orphan et al. (2020), which showed how governors use speeches and press releases to frame the purpose of higher education along economic lines, casting administrative actors like counselors in the role of human capital developers who turn students into economic productivity centers. Research has also been done showing the student as consumer, some with a neoliberal lens (Cunningham, 2016; Saunders, 2014), and some without explicitly naming neoliberal influences (Paulsen, 1990). Scholarship has traced those effects to curricular reform, both generally and within

music (Moore, 2016; Paulsen, 1990). Previous research on music students does not actively investigate the presence or impact of neoliberal ideas. However, it does deal with themes closely related to neoliberal value systems, including perceived occupational status (Bergee, 1992), the perceptions of merit-based scholarship in getting students to commit to a school (Carson, 2020), and recruiting more generally (Curtis, 2012; Hawkins, 2008; Rees, 1983, 1986), which is often based on institutional status maintenance and the need to fill a class and assure requisite tuition revenue. Considering the surrounding influence of neoliberal ideals (Shamir, 2008), it stands to reason these ideals impact school counselors' guidance of music majors, making it an important topic to investigate further.

School Counselors: Background and Influence on College Choice

When reviewing the literature on the history of college counselors, it is clear that it has always been a profession that is underfunded and poorly defined. From the first versions of counseling in the early 1900s, which focused on vocational guidance (McDonough, 2005a/b), there was tension surrounding the nature of the role (Gysbers & Henderson, 2011). Should it be purely economic, helping the economy function effectively, or should it serve a larger purpose, pursuing the democratic philosophy of enabling students to make educational and career choices? In one of the first published guidance documents for counseling positions, one can see tasks that range from clerical (keeping records), training teachers, remediating failing students, sorting students into tracks based on intelligence tests, working with parents, retaining students, and guiding students on to post-graduation paths (Ginn, 1924, as cited in Gysbers & Henderson,

2011). Indeed, as the profession evolved it continued to wear many hats and be influenced by the culture of the time, adding responsibilities for the vocational, personal, and educational (Gysbers & Henderson, 2011; McDonough, 2005b). Even as the passage of the Vocational Education Act of 1946 and the National Defense Education Act of 1958 granted increased funding and professionalization to the industry, questions of determining the line between counselor and teacher persisted. Now that this role was no longer fulfilled part-time by full-time teachers, where does it fit? Even today, the American School Counseling Association includes an infographic on their website based on a 2018 study (Zyromski et al.) making the case that these positions should be referred to as school counselors not guidance counselors because of a difference in perceived competence.

Recent research uniformly supports the importance of school counselors in guiding students toward their post-secondary paths (Belasco, 2013; Bryan et al., 2011; Clayton, 2016, 2019; Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997, 2005a, 2005b; Perna et al., 2008; Perna and Kurban, 2013; Tierney, 2009). McDonough (2005b) acknowledges the complexity of student college choice, but points to four important contributions a high school can make. They include appropriate curriculum, a college-going culture with high standards and adequate support, a staff that is engaged with fostering and supporting students' college goals, and a robust, well-resourced counseling and advising program. She goes on to show that counselors influence all these areas except for academic preparation. In her January 2005 report to NACAC, she goes so far as to say there is no more important professional when it comes to improving

college enrollments (McDonough, 2005a). Many studies illustrate the continued need for counselors in schools, particularly for low income or underrepresented populations. Two studies, Bryan et al. (2011) and Belasco (2013) took quantitative approaches using the data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002. Both found that counselors had a significant positive influence on a student's likelihood of enrolling in college. Similarly, both highlighted the disproportionate effect this resource has on students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, pointing to the fact that these students often did not have other people in their lives to transmit college-going information.

Despite these benefits, the literature shows consistent and troubling themes of insufficient funding, inequitable access across socio-economic classes and racial identities, the multiplicity of responsibilities held by counselors in today's schools, and heavy caseloads. The result is that school counselors typically serve more students than the American School Counselor Association's recommended 250 per counselor, spend an increasing amount of their time on social and emotional student issues, and cite counseling for post-secondary paths as an area where additional training is needed (ASCA, n.d.). Perna et al. (2008) used descriptive case studies of 15 high schools to show the wide range of counseling supports available across states. This study supports the presence of the constraints listed above and illustrates disparities from context to context with particular emphasis placed on the influence of state and district factors.

Most of the literature showing the importance of school counselors focuses on their role in encouraging students towards college, assisting students in applying to schools, and selecting which school to attend. This study, however, is interested in the

process, nested within college choice, by which a counselor encourages or discourages a student in selecting a college major. In both the American School Counselor Association standards and the standards set forth by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (the most common accrediting body for school counseling training programs) include expectations for counselors to prepare students for careers (ASCA, n.d.; CACREP, 2015). The literature investigating this process is murky, mostly due to the differing uses of the phrase ‘career readiness.’ In some cases, career readiness refers to career aspirations as they apply to college readiness (Novakovic et al., 2021). More commonly, career readiness refers to preparing students for a vocational post-secondary path (Edwin & Dooley Hussman, 2019). In any event, the presence of these standards makes it reasonable to assume conversations about career readiness and college major choice are occurring between counselor and student. Because this study is interested in the guidance to given to students considering a specific major (music), it contributes to our understanding of how counselors engage students in considering career paths related to college major during counseling.

School Counselors: Role in Organizational Habitus

A seminal work on school counselors and their impact on college choice is McDonough’s 1997 book *Choosing College: How Social Class and Schools Structure Opportunity*. In it, McDonough interviews students, parents, and school counselors at four high schools in California. Aside from supporting previous research on the value and importance of school counselors in the college choice process, McDonough found that “each of the guidance counselors constructed norms for behavior and expectations for

students” (p. 153). This led to the development of the term “organizational habitus,” which McDonough defines as “the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual’s behavior through an intermediate organization” (p. 153). This concept is derived from Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of *habitus*, which is the environment cultivated by families to transmit their class status and privilege to their children. In McDonough’s framing, organizational habitus is a term that incorporates organizational culture and organizational climate alongside external influences. Organizational culture is the values held by the organization, while organizational climate refers to the resultant behaviors of individuals within the organization. In applying these concepts to college choice, McDonough sets the context by asserting that the general American culture values attainment of a college degree for its worth in accruing capital, including economic capital. The high school’s organizational culture is the value ascribed to college attendance and of attending certain institutions over others. The high school’s organizational climate is the patterns of its individual students’ college decisions. The organizational habitus, in McDonough’s framing, is the patterns of student college choice that appear across schools with similar socioeconomic status environments. Crucially to this study, McDonough indicates that external factors influence the organizational habitus of a high school. In her study, she points to the competitive college admission environment as the influence. In this study, the external influence being considered, or layers three and four in Perna and Kurban’s model (2013), is the prevalence of neoliberal value regimes on my partner school’s organizational habitus.

McDonough's research does not explicitly investigate the influence of organizational habitus on the school counselor's guidance of a student selecting a college major or the specific needs of prospective music majors. However, throughout the interviews, there is evidence that projected financial success did influence students' interest in certain majors. While McDonough does not describe discussions between school counselors and students regarding which college major a student should pursue, it is reasonable to assume that these discussions did take place and that they were influenced by the school's organizational habitus.

Another study of school counselors by Engberg and Gilbert (2014) characterizes organizational habitus as "the normative culture or collective consciousness of a school environment and how this interacts with individual-decision making" (p. 224). The authors go on to create a conceptual framework of the role of school counseling in a high school's organizational habitus. Factors included the norms of the program (e.g., average caseload, hours spent on college counseling, and the importance placed on college-going) and the resources of the counseling program (e.g., number and variety of college readiness events put on by the program). They found that both the norms and resources of a school counseling department affected four-year college-going rates among students. This study highlights the importance of school counselors in college attendance, but also provides a helpful illustration of the factors within a school counseling program that contribute to organizational habitus.

This study draws from the existing research on organizational habitus by McDonough (1997) and Engberg and Gilbert (2014). However, instead of looking at the

presence of organizational habitus through the lens of social class and competitive admission environments, this study seeks to investigate the impact of neoliberal thought on a school's organizational culture as represented by the counseling program valuing some academic majors over others.

School Counselors: Influence on Music Students

It is important to state upfront that I found no research specifically on the relationship between college counselors (layer two) and prospective music majors (layer one). There is research on the influences present in a music student's college choice and on music student recruitment more broadly, but very little time is spent exploring the way college counselors guide music students through college choice. What can be gleaned from a synthesis of this research shows that counselors have limited influence on music majors and that music teachers should be considered as a significant part of the counseling process. Considering the literature reviewed above showing that counselors play a crucial role in college choice for the general student population, it is worth considering why this does not seem to apply to prospective music majors.

Curtis (2012) focused on the influences present in the college choice of music majors attending a four-year institution. The author surveyed students who were currently enrolled as college music majors, asking them to reflect on the college choice process. The study was quantitative, and the main instrument was a lengthy survey consisting of Likert-style questions. During his review of the literature, he determined that higher resourced students get more counseling and that students go to college counselors for information about specific colleges, including academic reputation, teaching quality, and

academic standards. The suggestion is that music students do not rely on college counselors for information specific to music, but they may benefit from a counselor's knowledge of the college landscape more generally. However, based on research showing limited influence of college counselors on music students, Curtis did not include any survey questions related to the influence of college counselors on music student college choice. Curtis did include a question about the influence of music teachers on music student college choice. This question was added based on previous research (Overmier, 2003) showing that music teachers play an influential role in music students' college and major choice. This study supports the broader definition of 'counselor' used by this study by showing that music students are influenced by their music teachers. He includes in his future research section a call for a deeper exploration of the counselor influence, a call this study hopes to answer.

Carson (2020) also explored elements of college choice among music majors by interviewing current college music students. Carson's focus was on determining the effect of merit-based financial aid on these students' decision, and consideration of counselors' influence played a tangential role at best. He found a wide variation of reliance on college counselors among the music majors studied and concluded that there are limits on what these counselors can do for music students because of the specialized nature of the discipline. This relatively limited research on the relationship between prospective music student and college counselor provides helpful context. This study also supports a broader definition of 'counselor' by showing that music teachers provide additional guidance to music students throughout college choice. Ultimately, it does not

delve deeply into the process used by counselors to guide music students, and it does not investigate the counselor's perception of the relationship, both questions this study seeks to address.

Carlson (1999) conducted a study in which she surveyed the executives at music schools within the National Association for Schools of Music. Her study found that music executives considered counselors to be an important contact point but ultimately to have limited influence over music students' college choice. Like Carson (2020), this study is helpful in providing context to the counselor's relationship to the prospective music student, but it does not investigate counselor processes or perceptions as they relate to their guidance of prospective music majors.

The three dissertations above cite Locke (1982) and Ludeman (1964) as seminal works on music student college choice. Neither of these studies looked directly at school counselors, but both include them as one of many potential influential factors on music students. However, both found counselors to have low levels of influence on a prospective music student's choice of post-secondary path. It is important to note that these studies are roughly 40 and 60 years old, respectively, and the limited reference to the role of counselors has questionable applicability to today's neoliberal context. Other research on music student recruitment (Hawkins, 2008; Kelly, 1988; Lindeman, 2004; Rees, 1983) does not mention college counseling staff at all.

A deep investigation into the relationship between college counselors and prospective music students has not been done. However, the research on college choice for music majors shows that counselors do not have high levels of influence. This is notable

considering the research on school counselors more generally shows that they are extremely important. Why the difference for music majors? Perhaps it is simply the complexity of the music application process that is uncharted territory for most school counselors, presenting an area for potential improvement. It is also possible that prospective music majors are not being adequately supported by school counselors. This study seeks to contribute to our understanding of the relationship between music student and college counselor and provide opportunities for improvement.

Summary

Adapting Perna and Kurban's 2013 conceptual model of college enrollment as a framework, this review considered the literature on the four layers of contextual influences present in a school counselor's guidance of prospective music majors (see Figure 2).

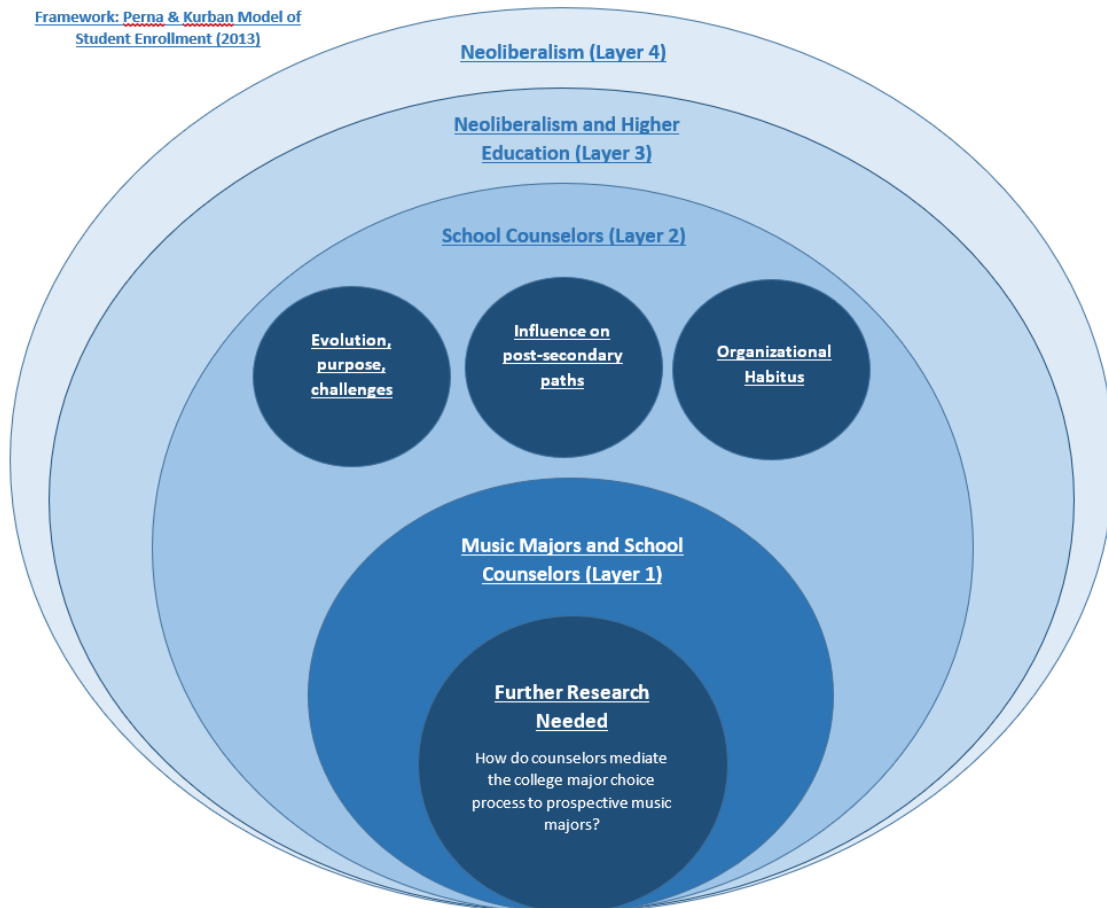


Figure 2 : Modified Model of Student Enrollment

Layers three and four dealt with neoliberalism, its foundations, general influences, and influences specific to higher education and major choice. Layer two, the focus of this study, covered literature on school counselors. It considered the literature showing this position's significant influence on students' post-secondary decision making. This review also explored McDonough's (1997) concept of organizational habitus and a counseling program's role in that habitus, considering how counselors exert direct and indirect

influences on student decision making. Finally, this review covered the literature on music student college choice (layer one) and asked why it appears school counselors have a more limited influence on prospective music students than they do on the general student body. It also provided support for using a broader definition of counselor for this study, one that includes music teachers. Ultimately, the literature found does not intentionally explore the relationship between college counselor and prospective music major, the value systems at play or the surrounding influences that shape those value systems. This study seeks to contribute to those gaps in the literature by engaging counselors directly, learning more about their experience, and seeking to improve their guidance of prospective music majors.

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

The purpose of this study is to seek to describe how college counselors at Arizona School for the Arts guide prospective music major through college and major choice by exploring how counselors' backgrounds predisposed them to guiding students in college and major choice, their perception of the value of a music degree, the significance of their predisposition and perceptions for their guidance of prospective music majors, and surrounding influences that impact their work. Counselors are defined as any staff member at Arizona School for the Arts that influences a student's college decision. This can include school counselors, teachers, and administrators. This broader definition of counselor is drawn from research on how prospective music majors are influenced in college choice and college major choice (Carlson, 1999; Carson, 2020; Overmier, 2003).

The questions guiding this study are:

RQ 1: How do counselors' backgrounds predispose them to guiding students in college and major choice?

RQ 2: How do counselors perceive of the value of a music degree?

RQ 3: How do counselors mediate college and major choice to prospective music majors?

RQ 4: What are the surrounding influences on norms and expectations of their work?

Constructivist Paradigm

This study uses a constructivist paradigm, which considers reality to be socially constructed and uses qualitative methods to explore people's values and perspectives (Mertens and Wilson, 2019). Alkin's (2012) asserts that this approach views all things as value-bound, acknowledging bias rather than rejecting it. Constructivism lends itself well to this study because various value systems come into play during the college choice process. Each stakeholder brings their own perspective and worldview, all operating in a context where the value of a college education is in the news on a regular basis, leading to a broad discourse that is itself value laden.

Methodological Foundation

This study uses a qualitative, instrumental, multiple-case study design executed through criticism and connoisseurship. In an instrument multiple-case study, the researcher chooses one issue or concern and selects multiple cases to illustrate that issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the issue is the guidance given to prospective music majors by counselors in their high school. The cases are five individual counselors at Arizona School for the Arts, each with a different role and different perspective. Yin (2009) considers the multiple-case study approach to be useful precisely because it provides multiple perspectives, resulting in a more robust and compelling study. Creswell and Poth (2018) state, "A case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases" (p. 100). Creswell and Poth go on to say that such a study can be "delimited by the participants" (p. 120). The cases studied here are

bounded by time and space because each case is an individual person sharing their experiences and perceptions gained over the course of their lifetimes and focused on the subject of music study and college guidance. They are further bounded by their place of employment, Arizona School for the Arts, and their geographic location in Phoenix, Arizona. Providing a deep description of each case and interpreting and analyzing each case on its own as well as in comparison to the others provides a rich illustration of the issue being studied.

While case studies can be executed in a quantitative or mixed-methods design, Eisner (1976) justifies a qualitative approach, pointing out that quantitative studies are still founded on assumptions that are not acknowledged. He suggests quantitative methods can dampen emotional expression, removing the chance to empathize and communicate the human experience (Eisner, 1976). This study seeks to describe, interpret, and evaluate the nuances of human expression as they appear in a counselor's guidance of music students. It is not meant to be sterile or ignore the emotion of the space. Such a goal of understanding human experience, with all its subjective meaningfulness, makes a qualitative, constructivist approach appropriate for this study.

Further support for a qualitative approach is found in Perna (2006), whose conceptual framework guides this research. She views qualitative methods as helpful in understanding and describing specific contexts or influences present in a student's college choice process. In this case, I sought to understand how context and influences shape the perceptions of the counselors at Arizona School for the Arts and how the resultant value systems shape and influence their guidance of prospective music students.

There are many elements of a case study design that directly overlap with the data collection and analysis procedures of criticism and connoisseurship, making them a natural pairing. Studies in a case study design require multiple sources of data. Yin (2009) suggests the following: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observations, and physical artifacts. Yin considers a successful researcher in this method to be one that asks good questions, listens well and accurately interprets the answers. They should have a firm grasp of the issue being studied but remain adaptive and flexible. Yin tells us, “Case studies require an inquiring mind *during* data collection, not just before or after the activity” (2009, p. 69). Creswell and Poth encourage the researcher to detail “such aspects as the history of the case, the chronology of events, or a day-by-day rendering of the activities of the case” (2018, p. 100). These requirements fit with a criticism and connoisseurship approach like a hand in a glove. As we discuss below, criticism and connoisseurship requires multiple forms of data during collection and encourages the researcher to acknowledge that data collected from one method must inform and impact data collected from others. Criticism and connoisseurship requires a sensitive, observant, and flexible researcher who is well versed in the subject matter, a connoisseur that can appreciate the nuance and complexity of the cases. Both methods place a high value on thick, rich description that places the reader in the room with the researcher and participant.

Criticism and Connoisseurship

This study executes a multiple-case study design through a criticism and connoisseurship research method. Criticism and connoisseurship was developed by Elliot

Eisner and has its origins in art and literary criticism. Connoisseurship refers to the private act of appreciation. As a connoisseur, I relied on my experience in helping music students through college choice and my understanding of admissions to guide and enhance my appreciation, seeking to understand the nuance and complexity of a given space or event (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). While connoisseurship is a private act seeking to understand and appreciate, criticism is the act of public disclosure (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). As Eisner writes, “the task of the critic is to help us to see” (1985, p. 93). As such, I sought to discern, appreciate, and ascribe value to the counselors’ guidance of music majors, ultimately using a perceptive eye and literary writing style to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar with a goal of improving the program (Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

There are many ways I am an insider with the population under study, impacting my ability to be a connoisseur and critic. I have two degrees in music, having gone through the admission process as both a high school musician looking for an undergraduate program and a college musician looking for a graduate program. As the director of admission for a music school, I am responsible for recruiting and enrolling the best, most balanced, diverse class possible while ensuring that all our programs, studios, and ensembles are fully filled. That task is complex and has become increasingly difficult as college costs rise, music programs are cut or underfunded in K-12 systems, and traditional western classical music’s popularity wanes among younger generations. Solving these issues requires addressing virtually all elements of music education at the college level (e.g., affordability, accessibility, curriculum, representation, arts advocacy,

etc.). However, a major component of successfully recruiting a class is understanding the process students go through to arrive at your institution and the actors that influence that process. Developing a fuller understanding of the work college counselors do, both in general and with music students specifically, and the value systems that shape that work will have a direct and immediate impact on my ability to do my job.

A criticism and connoisseurship approach is appropriate for someone whose goal is to uncover a deep understanding of how something actually works and to consider how it can be improved (Saxe & Uhrmacher, 2018). In the case of this study, the environment is framed by the layers of Perna and Kurban's (2013) conceptual model. Acknowledging the broader social and economic influences, how does the process by which counselors mediate college choice to prospective music students actually function? While I have experience in recruiting music students and guiding them through the choice process, it is important to note that connoisseurship occurs on a spectrum along which we are endlessly traveling. During data collection and analysis, I remained open to opportunities that expanded my perception and grew my understanding of the process by which counselors guide music majors through college choice (Eisner, 2017).

Community Partner

The community partner for this study is Arizona School for the Arts (ASA). ASA is a non-profit, public charter school in downtown Phoenix, Arizona. ASA's urban setting means the surrounding area is a mixture of old, new, and vacant. On one border is a brand new, high-end apartment complex. On another, an old United Church of Christ chapel. Other surrounding lots remain unused, dusty fields. Across the street is a Taco Bell and a

personal injury law practice that looks like it has been there forever. ASA's campus shares some of the qualities of its neighbors. The main building is old, stucco and stone, probably built around 50 years ago. It is surrounded by open parking lots and hemmed in by wrought-iron fences. The middle of campus is a basketball court, which doubles as a pass through for cars during drop off and pick up. On the other side of the court are a cluster of newer buildings in which most of the classes are held. The playground, also fenced in, sports a modern pergola adorned by solar panels and picnic tables shaded from the heat of the Phoenix sun by colorful umbrellas. The entire campus is lined by mature Paloverde trees, the state tree of Arizona, and tall palms. At one point during my visits, a man in a yellow parking vest, who I take to be a maintenance man, opened the wrought iron fence from the main parking lot to let me on to campus. This same man eyed me earlier when I was waiting in the parking lot near the end of the school day. He didn't question my presence, but he was certainly aware of me. ASA's downtown location probably means this man stays vigilant to ensure no one trespasses on the school grounds. I found myself wondering how much his acceptance has to do with me being a professionally dressed White man. Perhaps he thought I was a parent. According to their 2023 Profile, ASA serves 830 students from 5th through 12th grade with a 2023 graduating class that is 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% Black, 35% Hispanic, 3% Native American, 9% two or more, and 45% White. 96% of the graduating class is college bound with 89% going to four-year schools and 90% getting into their top three colleges. This high college-going rate is referenced with pride by almost every participant in this study. Over 27% of ASA graduates plan to pursue the arts after graduation, with another

22% indicating plans to pursue arts in conjunction with humanities or STEM. The mission statement for ASA reads, “Arizona School for the Arts inspires creative thinkers and leaders through providing an innovative concentration in college preparation informed by the performing arts” (ASA What We Believe In, n.d., para. 2). An example of this mission in action is evident through an exhibit about resistance appearing throughout the school’s halls. Art and other decorations cover the walls inside the school, adorning lockers and stairwells. A focus on college preparation through the lens of performing arts makes ASA an appropriate location for this study. Music is one of ASA’s four majors, along with art, theatre, and dance. This means there is a dedicated population within ASA whose focus and potential college aspirations are musically informed, increasing the likelihood that this study is able to answer the music-specific study questions. Nestled within this broader school context is the college counseling office which seeks to “guide students to discover and develop their interests and skills in order to create a college or career plan that supports their personal strengths and goals” (ASA College Counseling, n.d., para. 1). This study explores the application of this mission, particularly related to musically inclined students, and provides areas for potential improvement.

Because of the size of the college counseling office at ASA (one staff member) and the fact that music students are guided through the college choice process by multiple influencers (Carlson, 1999; Carson, 2020; Overmier, 2003), ‘college counseling program’ is defined broadly and includes the staff college counselor, teachers, and administrators involved in counseling students through the college choice process.

Participants

Uhrmacher et al. (2017) reviewed 38 educational criticisms and found the average number of participants to be 12. However, they also found a good portion of the studies had a range of two to eight participants. They concluded that there are numerous factors that can affect the number of participants appropriate for any given study (e.g., access, availability, the nature of the context, etc.). Ultimately, they recommend a group of four. In this study, the number of participants was limited to those staff members who influence a student's college choice process and who were willing to participate.

I gained access to ASA through a staff member named Nicole, a long-time friend of my mother. I don't know her well, but I understand she used to babysit my sisters and me when we were little. I didn't interact with Nicole during this process, but once I was on campus, I ran into her in the main office. I was surprised to find she looked very familiar, despite it being decades since I saw her last. I am grateful to Nicole for her willingness to play initial gatekeeper. Without her, I would likely not have gained access to ASA for this study.

I initially contacted Sharon, the college counselor at ASA, directly, hoping my role as admission director would be enough to gain access. It wasn't. My mother mentioned her friend that worked at ASA and offered to contact her on my behalf. Nicole contacted Sharon to make the introduction. I planned to follow up with Sharon, but Nicole's prodding did the trick and Sharon emailed me almost immediately, responding to my initial email about a month after I sent it. We had an initial Zoom meeting a few days later, and I found Sharon to be more than willing to partner with me on this project.

She shared my care for prospective music majors and was interested in learning more about the guidance structure at ASA outside of her office. As the winter holidays were quickly approaching, we agreed to reconnect in the new year. In the interim, she proactively contacted Laura who is in charge of the arts program to get her buy in for the project. Further evidence of ASA's support was required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and Sharon was happy to procure a letter from her principal officially inviting me to conduct research. While I worked on getting IRB approval, Sharon and I refined our research timeline. Once IRB approval was granted, Sharon sent an initial email to ASA's music teachers inviting them to participate in this study. I then followed up with teachers thanking them for their consideration and offering to provide more information. Sharon emailed 16 teachers, five of whom agreed to meet with me. There were a few additional teachers who expressed interest but ultimately were unable to participate. However, five responses allowed me to meet the recommendation from Uhrmacher et al. (2017) of 4-8 participants.

What follows are brief introductions to the participants along with their answer to why they chose to work at ASA, which I pulled from the school's website (ASA Faculty, n.d.). These introductions position the participants within the context of ASA and set up the unique roles they play in guiding students toward college.

Sharon – The Guide

Sharon is the College Counselor for all of Arizona School of the Arts. She is the gatekeeper for this project, introducing me to other teachers and serving as my main point of contact. Because of Sharon's role, she is tasked with preparing and delivering the bulk

of the official college choice curriculum. As such, her contribution represents much of the nitty gritty of how students, both musicians and non-musicians, are guided through college choice.

Why ASA?

“ASA is my family, my community. I love to empower students to discover their strengths and vision for their lives.”

Laura – The Architect

Laura is the Arts Director and Vice Principal of Student Services. Before that, she was a teacher in the band department for 13 years with a special responsibility for woodwinds students. As a participant in this project, Laura provides a window into the ecosystem and culture of the arts department at ASA. She sits in the metaphorical command center, applying a critical eye to the curriculum and constantly learning to better serve ASA’s students. One of her administrative accomplishments includes creating the Performing Arts College Prep program, which is meant to help performing arts students with their unique college application processes. Because of her many years of classroom teaching and her current role, Laura possesses both an insight into the 30,000-ft culture-building part of an ASA musician’s college choice and student-specific guidance.

Why ASA?

“I am at ASA because of the students. They are the most incredible group of people to be around. I am continuously amazed and inspired by their willingness to take risks, be involved with their community, and explore new ideas. I had the honor of

working with students from every grade level, and I am amazed by them all. The students challenged me to continuously grow in my teaching craft and as an artist. It is a privilege to be a part of their learning journey.”

Henry – The Taskmaster

Henry plays two important roles at ASA as it relates to this project. He is the primary band director for the school, meaning he interacts with a large portion of the musical student body. He also runs the Performing Arts College Prep program, serving as faculty mentor and guide for performing artists navigating the college choice process.

Why ASA?

“I chose to work at ASA because of its unparalleled commitment to educating the young people of our community equally in the arts and academic fields.”

Kris – The Sage

Kris is the percussion instructor at ASA and represents a critical archetype in the student musician’s path to college. In her capacity as private instructor, she works directly with students in small groups and individually on percussion technique. She possesses instrument-specific knowledge that is crucial for percussion students considering continuing their musical education beyond high school. Kris has been at ASA for 17 years and has a wealth of student stories relevant to this project.

Why ASA?

“People are always amazed that I have taught at ASA for so long. My answer is always, ‘Where else would I be able to teach percussion where the whole community (students, teachers, parents) is so supportive and dedicated to the arts and education?’

ASA is an amazing place that turns students into artist scholars. I wish I had gone to ASA when I was in high school!”

Lindsey – The Ally

Lindsey teaches band, chamber music, and woodwinds technique at ASA.

Lindsey represents the sort of miscellaneous faculty role that surrounds students at ASA. She does not have any curricular responsibility for college choice, and she is not primarily a private instructor. She provides tangential insight into the culture of college-going at ASA, the guidance given to students, and is a window into the ‘other’ influences on music students at ASA.

Why ASA?

Lindsey does not have an answer to this question on ASA’s website.

Researcher Positionality

It is interesting to note that Elliot Eisner, the originator of this research method, appears to have had mixed feelings about the need for a statement of researcher positionality or “critical prologue” (Eisner, 1994, p. 232). His view was that everything a person does is value-laden and in criticism those values should be apparent without stating them explicitly. However, consistent with this study’s constructivist paradigm, the evaluator’s interpretation in criticism and connoisseurship does not represent the ‘right’ or only meaning, and an upfront explanation my beliefs and background will allow the reader to consider whether my criticism has value (Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

It is perhaps most important to mention three facts. One is that both my undergraduate degree and master’s degree are in music, meaning that I proceeded

through the college choice process and emerged having decided a music degree was worthwhile not once but twice. In the years since, I have spent much time reflecting on these choices and have concluded that I have no regrets. This absence of regret reveals my current belief in the positive value of a music degree. This, alongside my professional experience detailed later, contributes to my ability to be a connoisseur in this study.

Second, I started my college search process in the early 2000s when college costs were considerably lower than they are now. Partly due to those lower costs and partly due to my family's healthy financial situation, college costs did not play a prohibitive role in my selection of a college or college major. Perhaps more importantly, however, my parents' philosophy of schooling was one that centered on the fulfillment of doing something you love rather than making money. Their views on this have not changed despite all four of their children choosing occupations not known for high pay.

The third is related to my professional career as an admission professional at post-secondary music schools. I have spent my entire professional life working with high school students who are considering pursuing music at the college level and their families, and I am deeply familiar with the specific needs of prospective music students as it relates to navigating the college choice and admission process. This experience is why I feel suited to engage in the connoisseurship part of this methodological approach. Beyond supporting the student through the nuts and bolts of the process, the conversation about the value of a music degree is one I must have had 1000 times and one about which I feel strongly. Despite these strong feelings, I believe I entered the research space from a position of inquiry, open to different opinions about the value of a music degree.

The first and third statements give me insider status among these participants. We have a shared educational history and a shared interest in the next generation of music majors. I came to view this status as a positive factor during data collection. It provided a baseline rapport with participants by virtue of a common musical language

It was possible my professional position would be considered by my participants as a position of power. While the reality is more complex, on paper I appear to be the one who decides whether or not the students these counselors guide will be admitted to the University of Denver Lamont School of Music. For my non-music admission colleagues, it is common to have difficult conversations with counselors regarding why their student was not admitted to the school. The admission person is viewed in that relationship as a gatekeeper. However, music admission functions differently, relying on individual faculty assessment based on audition, rather than a general admission process.

Furthermore, my philosophy is that college counselors in high schools are partners in the recruiting process, helping to match their students with the right school, whether or not that is the school that I represent. I endeavored to make this philosophy apparent and foster a relationship as collaborative peers consistent with a relational ethic (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). In the end, I believe my professional position did not negatively impact this study.

Beyond these facts, it is also important to acknowledge my identity as a White male with an upper-middle class suburban upbringing. According to 2020 demographic data from the American School Counselors Association (2021), 76% of ASCA membership is white, while 85% are female, suggesting that my gender identity will be more of a

consideration than my racial identity in this space. Indeed, my participants consisted of four White-presenting females and one White-presenting male. I strove to be conscious of these identities and engaged in consistent reflection, considering how these identities affect my relationships with my participants and, ultimately, the effectiveness of the study.

Data Collection

According to Saxe and Uhrmacher (2018), data collection in this method falls into broad categories of observations, interviews, and artifact collection. As this method requires the evaluator to appreciate nuance, subtlety, and complexity, the process of engaging in these broad categories of data collection is multi-faceted and iterative. Collecting and ultimately analyzing this data requires consideration not only of the data within each category, but also the interaction between categories (Saxe & Uhrmacher, 2018). As such, my research questions are answered by synthesizing the data from all collection methods into a description and interpretation of events (see Figure 4).

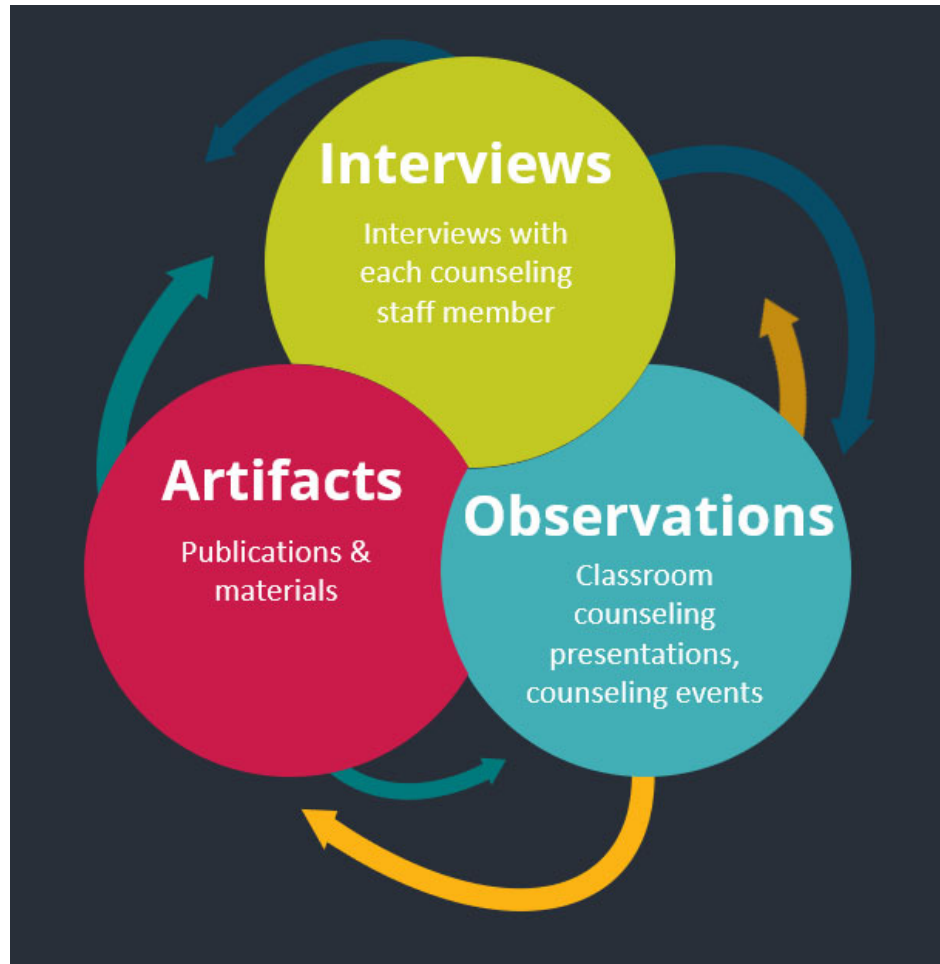


Figure 3: Data Collection and Analysis Visual Representation

Data collection was loosely guided by a series of dimensions from the “ecology of schooling” (Eisner, 2017, p. 72). The dimensions considered in this study are the intentional, the structural, the curricular, and the pedagogical (Denison, 1994). The intentional asks what the counselors want to have happen in their guidance of music students. The structural seeks to understand how the counselors use the time and space of each interaction with music students to accomplish their goals. The curricular explores the type of college choice content counselors use in guiding music students. The

pedagogical considers how the counselors communicate the content to music students. Observations provided the means of gathering data along the structural, curricular, and pedagogical dimensions. Interviews were critical to understanding counselor perceptions (intentional dimension) as well as their curricular offerings and pedagogical approaches. Lastly, artifacts were used to provide context for and understanding of the curricular dimension.

In this approach, it is possible to have a *prefigured* focus, looking for specific themes, or an *emergent* focus that is more open to themes as they appear. There are undoubtedly elements of a prefigured focus in my approach to this study simply because it is influenced by my positionality and the needs and interests of my community partner, Arizona School for the Arts (Eisner, 1985). There are further shades of a prefigured approach present in my use of a constructivist paradigm, a conceptual framework of student enrollment (Perna & Kurban, 2013), and a theory of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism, in particular, required proactivity in order to investigate because it is so pervasive in our society. Without actively seeking it out, it would be easy to miss simply because it is everywhere. With this in mind, I added financially focused questions to the interview protocols. I actively sought to explore how participants perceived the financial outcomes available at the end of a music major, both in their own lives and in their guidance of students. With these aspects of a prefigured approach in mind, I strove to engage in the research process without a theoretical framework set in stone. Instead, I cultivated an openness to an emergent focus, deciding what was important as the research progressed, rather than determining it beforehand. I allowed for an emergent focus by

using open-ended, exploratory research questions as exemplified by RQ1 (Saxe & Uhrmacher, 2018) and reflective memo writing (Saldaña, 2021). Indeed, while some of the lessons learned from this research fit into the prefigured framework, others did not. A combination of prefigured and emergent foci resulted in a richer project.

Observations

Observations are a critical component of qualitative research, providing the opportunity for the researcher to note a phenomenon in the field using the five senses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This form of data collection is appropriate for this study as criticism and connoisseurship seeks to place the reader in the space, providing a rich, thick, and visceral description of events. Observations for this study took place in both planned and unplanned ways. The planned events included two counseling presentations given by Sharon to high school English classes. During COVID, Sharon put all her presentations online, posting them to her counseling website. I was able to review all seven of these presentations, which created a data collection experience that straddled the lines between observation and artifact collection. During my time on campus, Sharon invited me to participate in a career fair, allowing me to observe firsthand an event planned and executed by the counseling office meant to help students imagine their life after high school. Finally, much observation was made during my time on campus conducting interviews.

Time spent in each observation varied, but as Saxe and Uhrmacher (2018) note, the quality of perception is more important than length of time. While the focus of the observation was the interaction between counselors and students/families, noting the way

content is delivered and the extent to which the values of the counseling program are expressed (Kauper, 2012), engaging in criticism and connoisseurship also prompted me to consider the surroundings (structural dimension). With the exception of the career fair, I assumed a *nonparticipant* role in these observations, observing from a distance (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In observing these events, I engaged in the practices suggested by Saxe and Uhrmacher (2018), relying on my experience as a music admission professional to deepen my appreciation. At points, I used a wide-angle lens, trying to take in everything at once to establish a general sense of what is going on. I made use of every sense, observing how the space looked, smelled, sounded, and felt. While I did not actually lick a desk, for example, I considered how that desk might be made vivid with gustatory language. If a specific sense was particularly generative, I spent time focusing on that one source of input. Observing in episodic vignettes, where I focused on describing what is happening in real time and capturing as much of the action as possible, were used to poignantly illustrate a specific event. At points throughout observations, I applied specific lenses as they relate to my research questions. For example, what is being communicated about the value of a music degree? Finally, I used visual representations, in which I sketched something specific about the environment.

The events observed were meant to serve a wide range of students, not just music majors. As such, observations were crucial in setting the stage and providing an understanding of the broader setting in which music majors are served.

During observations, I relied heavily on field notes and an observation protocol like the one suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Elliot Eisner (2017). The

protocol consists of two columns. One is for descriptive notes; the other is for interpretive notes. There is no specific protocol required for this study method, and I selected the two-column approach because it is straightforward and allows for creatively organizing data. Sketches of the space were helpful as I analyzed my observations notes, but I decided not to include them in the narrative write up (Saxe & Uhrmacher, 2018).

Interviews

Interviews were the main data collection method used to understand the process of counseling music majors from the counselors' point of view, exploring the meaning they construct from their experience and how that affects their values (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews are a foundational element of a criticism and connoisseurship research method and necessary in a constructivism paradigm that asserts that individuals construct their own reality. Interviews in this study included the participant counselors. I set out to follow a three-interview method used by Miller (2018). The first interview included questions focused on the background experience of the participant, seeking to build a relationship and understand their individual context. This interview included questions about how and why the counselor was drawn to the profession, their favorite and least favorite parts of the job, highlights from their career, their general sense of the value of a music degree, and interactions with music majors. The second interview went deeper into the subject matter, seeking to understand the perceptions of the participant. In keeping with the iterative nature of data collection in this method, questions for the second interview were influenced by notes from observations, artifact collection, and other interviews (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). In fact, my first interview with Sharon resulted in

my changing the first interview question to allow for participants to share more about their background. Questions in this second interview related to how college choice is mediated, their perception of the counseling program's aims and goals, and their perception of music education. Finally, the third interview is meant to occur towards the end of the project and seeks collaboration on the interpretation. The last interview engages in what Miller (2018) calls co-connoisseurship. This approach values the participant's expertise in their area and reflects the constructivist paradigm's interest in the individual's perception of reality. The aim of co-connoisseurship is collaboration and validity, providing an opportunity to share my analysis and ensure accuracy in the eyes of the participant. Timing and participant availability meant that a third interview wasn't a possibility as originally planned. Instead, co-connoisseurship happened more organically through the first two interviews in which I engaged in member-checking, reflecting back to the participant what I was hearing and ensuring we understood one another. Indeed, Miller (2018) refers to this process "as a way of co-constructing knowledge with the participant and leveraging their own connoisseurship of their data" (p. 82). I also followed up via email. While I engaged in email exchanges with many participants, the main source of co-connoisseurship was Sharon. She was very communicative and consistently willing to answer clarifying questions. This was particularly important during my observation of her recorded presentations and the analysis of artifacts, most of which she curated.

The approach allowed space for rapport building, deep investigation of the study topic, and collaboration. As counselors are the focus of this study, the time I spent with

these participants and the data it generated formed the core of the description component of my data analysis. The goal in interviews was to listen well, seek concrete examples to aid in rich description, consider the environment in which the interview took place, and cross-check my data collection with the participant (Saxe & Uhrmacher, 2018). At the end of each interview session, I immediately sat down and engaged in analytic memo writing or researcher journaling. I found this process to be the single most important element of this project. It straddled the line between data collection and data analysis, helping me remember the feeling of being in the room with a participant while those thoughts were still fresh. I returned to these reflections time and again during the data analysis stage. Ultimately, much of this journaling ended up in the narrative write up for each participant.

I used two audio recording devices to record the interviews. One of the recording devices was a Zoom meeting with the video turned off. This allowed me to collect an automated transcript of the interview. However, after using that transcript as a basis for more thorough and accurate transcription, I determined the auto-transcript feature was not sufficient. There were too many errors, and many sections were deemed inaudible by the program. I decided at that point to use a paid service, Temi, which generated a transcript from the audio recording. This service was far from 100% accurate, requiring me to spend around two hours listening and refining each transcript. This, of course, was not wasted time as it provided an opportunity to listen and reflect on the interviews before entering dedicated data analysis. During transcription, I left in as many filler words (e.g., ‘um,’ ‘yeah,’ ‘uh,’ etc.) as possible. The goal was to leave as much of the participants

actual speech pattern intact. When quotes were pulled for the narratives below, I edited some of these filler words out for clarity, while keeping some in to provide color and illustrate the speaker's personality.

Artifacts

The definition of artifact in this method is broad, but in this study, it included college choice materials and resources, most of which were available on Sharon's Counseling Padlet online. It also included counseling presentation videos, application materials from the Performing Arts College Prep program provided by the director of that program, ASA's website, and ASA's school profile provided by Sharon. With these artifacts, I followed the process suggested by Uhrmacher et. al (2017) by asking the following questions:

- 1) What do the categories reveal and conceal?
- 2) How do the categories, and the artifacts arranged in such a way, inform your thinking?
- 3) How do they relate to your observations and interviews?
- 4) What emergent themes are appearing in all three data collection activities?

Data Analysis

In analyzing the transcripts of interviews, observation materials, and artifacts, I followed the procedure suggested by Saxe and Uhrmacher (2018), which relies heavily on coding or, more appropriately for this more literary style of study, annotating.

Annotation bridged data collection, analysis, and interpretation with a goal of revealing themes (Saxe & Uhrmacher, 2018). I followed the phases of annotation suggested by

Uhrmacher et al. (2017), including *global annotations*, in which I examined the data as a broad picture, looking for larger contours, *pattern-finding annotations*, in which I begin to set more refined themes, and *crosschecking annotations*, in which I considered data that does not fit my themes. I recorded these annotations using the comments function in Microsoft Word.

Before starting annotation, I printed out a ‘one-sheet’ to help focus my thoughts. This sheet included my study purpose statement, the research questions, the phases of annotation listed above, the four parts of a criticism and connoisseurship study which I explain in more detail below, the ecology of schooling, and my modified version of Perna and Kurban’s layers of influence model. I returned to the sheet before every analysis session. Among other benefits, this helped remind me to actively look for neoliberal tendencies like the use of monetary definitions of success and not allow them the slip by because they are so common in our society.

All told, there were roughly 10 hours of recorded interviews. I listened to each interview recording multiple times, following along on the transcript. Further listening was done without the transcript allowing the narratives to sink in aurally and providing opportunities for new ideas to surface without the influence of the notes I had already written on the transcript. During those sessions, I recorded my thoughts on a blank word document, later adding the notes to the transcripts when appropriate. I also spent time reading the transcript with no audio accompaniment. I listened to the recordings in chronological order (i.e., one participant’s first interview followed by another participant’s first interview) and organized by participant (i.e., one participant’s first

interview followed by that same participant's second interview). This process continued during the writing portion of this project. While I already had themes generated from the annotations, I returned to the audio recordings and the transcripts time and time again during writing to ensure I was accurately representing the participants in the narratives. After each new listening, I spent time in analytic memoing, recording my thoughts and making connections within a participant's statements and between the statements of multiple participants. I returned to these memos often, asking myself what themes were emerging and whether there were bigger ideas that I was missing. After I reached a point where no new themes were emerging, I began to consolidate my annotations for each participant. I wrote all annotations for each participant in a single word document and began considering how they were related. Some were distinct and stood on their own, while others were combined, creating a more nuanced larger theme. Once I had consolidated annotations for each participant, I brought them together and began looking for similarities and differences across participant experiences. At the top of my data analysis plan, I included this quote from Uhrmacher et al. (2017, p. 24) "The researcher sees how otherwise disconnected parts coalesce to form the coherent story" as a way to encourage me to constantly ask 'what's the story here?'

While annotating the interviews, I also reviewed my observation notes, considering how those counseling presentations informed the interview data. Similarly, I spent many hours analyzing the resources provided by the counseling office, considering how the college choice curriculum interacted with the perceptions shared by participants.

The process of analyzing and presenting the data was guided and organized by the four main components of criticism (Denison, 1994; Uhrmacher et al., 2017): *Description*, *interpretation*, *evaluation*, and *thematics*. Description provides a narrative account of the entire process. Interpretation explores the meaning behind this synthesis and can be woven throughout the description. Evaluation is the assessment of the value of the process. It is here where the critic can suggest improvements. Thematics provides an understanding of the major themes and represents this method's version of generalization. While these components are helpful in conceptualizing this part of the study, they are not necessarily meant to be followed as steps. There may be overlap between the dimensions, with some demanding more attention than others (Denison, 1994).

The *description* serves two broad purposes: to provide evidence on which the interpretation is built and to contextualize the study (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). My goal was not to simply relay the details of the events in question. Instead, I sought to provide a description of the entire process that is "rich" and "thick" enough to "evoke images and to give the reader a visceral sense of places, people, and situations" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 39). This description is a synthesis of data collected from all methods. I took a literary approach to writing, not shying away from the use of metaphor, analogy, or simile. My goal was to place the reader in the room with the participant, weaving a narrative that is evocative and representative.

The *interpretation* explores the meaning of the description, bringing in my knowledge as evaluator (connoisseurship), and making a case for the validity of the interpretation. Eisner describes it like this, "If description can be thought of as giving an

account *of*, interpretation can be regarded as accounting *for*” (Eisner, 1991, p. 95). The goal is to press meaning from the description, explaining why it is important. Uhrmacher et al. (2017) refer to the combination of the evaluator’s point of view and the theories applied as *interpretive frames*. While I endeavored to stay open to new themes as they emerge, my interpretive frame was guided by neoliberal theory (Harvey, 2005) and McDonough’s (1997) concept of organizational habitus nested within Perna and Kurban’s (2013) conceptual framework.

In the *evaluation* dimension, I considered the value of the description and interpretation of events and explore the findings in relation to a set of criteria. As discussed above, the evaluation criteria were developed as a combination of prefigured focus and an emergent focus in collaboration with stakeholders. This section serves to fulfill the main purpose of this study, answer my research questions, and illuminate areas for improvement. It was here that I was confronted most by Dennison’s (1994) comments regarding overlap. I found that I was evaluating the process while interpreting the description which resulted in blurred lines between these sections.

Finally, the *thematics* section represents this method’s version of generalization. An important aspect of this stage is the development of anticipatory frameworks, which are broad themes that can be used to guide future research (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). It is possible that Arizona School for the Arts will not be interested in making the study report public (Weiss, 1998). However, if they agree to the publication of this report, I expect these anticipatory frameworks to be useful for other schools as they consider how their

counseling programs serve prospective music students and for music admission professionals as they interact with high school counselors.

Trustworthiness

The constructivist paradigm holds that people construct reality and that there is no one correct interpretation of events. Often those who ask questions of validity are concerned with objectivity. However, Eisner takes issue with such a narrow view of objective validity, arguing for a broader, consensual validity, which asserts that we believe what we believe in part because others share our beliefs (1994). The goal is whether a belief is useful, not whether it is objective.

To attain consensual validation, Eisner requires two elements: structural corroboration and referential adequacy. Structural corroboration asks if the evaluator's interpretation is consistently and cogently supported by the data presented. Referential adequacy refers to whether, after reading the criticism, the reader can see the interpretation for themselves when observing the events in question. As consensus, by definition, requires external input, consensual validity was achieved through co-connoisseurship, detailed above. It will also be determined during external review, both by my doctoral committee and, ultimately, by external readers.

In order to increase trustworthiness, I engaged in the following strategies as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2015). *Triangulation* requires the use of multiple sources of data during collection, which I accomplished by collecting interviews from multiple participants, observing multiple events in different modalities, and collecting various artifacts. I engaged in *member checking* as part of co-connoisseurship, ensuring

that I was understanding and interpreting what participants were saying during interviews and asking clarifying questions about the artifacts collected. *Adequate engagement in data collection* was achieved to the extent time and participant availability allowed. However, the recurrence of themes throughout participant narratives suggests sufficient saturation was achieved. *Researcher's position or reflexivity* was a critical component of this study. I engaged in researcher journaling and critical self-reflection at every stage of this process. *Peer review/examination* was discussed in the consensual validity section above and was achieved through co-connoisseurship and review by my doctoral committee. Journaling during data collection and analysis also satisfied the need for an *audit trail* in which the researcher keeps a detailed account of methods and decisions made during the study. Finally, this method relies heavily on *rich, thick descriptions* to place the reader in the space and provide enough information for the reader to “determine the extent to which their situations match the research context, and, hence, whether findings can be transferred” (p. 259).

Ethical Considerations

One ethical consideration is apparent in the name: criticism and connoisseurship. How does one say something critical about a community partner who has graciously invited one into their lives and spaces? I addressed this by informing Arizona School for the Arts upfront that criticism is the art of disclosure and that the final report may indeed be critical (Saxe & Uhrmacher, 2018). I sought to navigate the ethical challenges of this study using what Uhrmacher et al. (2017) call relational ethics, which values

collaboration and centers a care for others. Negotiation and a nonjudgmental stance are crucial but did not keep me from submitting some critical feedback in my study.

This project was reviewed by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board. This review ensures this proposal shows an "awareness of relevant ethical issues...and plans for addressing ethical issues related to three principles: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice" (Creswell & Poth, p. 54).

All recordings of interviews and transcriptions are stored on a password-protected computer and will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study. Paper field notes and journal entries were transcribed into digital format and kept on a password-protected computer. Until their transcription, they were kept in a locked filing cabinet. After transcription, the paper copies were shredded. Digital versions will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study. The names of all participants were changed to protect the participants' confidentiality. The key connecting participants' actual names to pseudonyms was kept on a password protected computer and will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.

Chapter 4: Description and Interpretation

In a traditional five-chapter dissertation, chapter four is the section where the researcher presents their findings. In a criticism and connoisseurship dissertation, the researcher/critic describes and interprets the events of the data collection. Ideally, the critic can provide a rich or thick enough description for the reader to reasonably disagree with their interpretation (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). This is not meant to be just the critic's thoughts, feelings, or insights about what is happening. It should provide enough pure description for the reader to question the interpretation: to say, "Really? Are you sure about that?" At the same time, the degree to which description goes beyond a simple recounting of events to support or foreshadow themes, relationships, and concepts is the degree to which description overlaps with interpretation (Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

What follows is a robust description of my time with each participant, offered from my interpretive point of view as the critic, with observations and document analysis intertwined where appropriate. While certain themes do emerge among the participants' story, they are also different.

A messiness is present that reflects the complex, non-linear path that music students take on their journey to music school. In Chapter 5, evaluation and thematics, I will bring elements of these participants' stories together, evaluating the counseling

ecosystem as ASA and sharing themes that may be useful for other researchers studying how musicians are guided toward college.

Sonata Form

As I worked through the analysis of my time with each participant, I noticed that each one, to varying degrees, combined their own experiences as students with those in their current roles and then replicated them in guiding their students. Because of this, analyzing each participant's background is critical to understanding their values and the impact those values have on how they mediate college choice to prospective music majors. A common musical form used from the Classical period all the way through 20th Century music uses a similar structure. Sonata Form, as it is traditionally known, has three distinct parts. The first part is exposition in which the primary ideas are stated and begin to move toward somewhere new. In the second section, the development section, those ideas are taken, modified, and pushed to a new place. The final section, called recapitulation, returns to the original ideas, in the original musical key, with some modification from the development section included. Lest we think this standard form leaves no room for variation and personality, the Harvard Dictionary of Music tells us that exposition sections "vary widely in structure revealing a highly flexible interaction of tonality, thematic material, and large-scale rhythmic motion," while "construction of the development section follows no stereotyped plan." Finally, "recapitulations run the gamut from nearly exact restatement of the material of the exposition...to thoroughgoing recomposition involving extensive compression or expansion" (Randel, 2014, p. 622). The result is a structure that helps in organizing five unique participants, each following

their own version of this path. Some participants recapitulate an almost identical story to their own, while others end further afield but with clear tones of their own stories still resonating in their mediation of college choice to their students. The result is five participants who share much but remain as distinct as five musical pieces composed by different composers.

The Guide - Sharon

All my participants are unique, but Sharon occupies a singular position, one that is particularly important to this project. She is the College Counselor for all of ASA and bears the primary responsibility to mediate college choice to all ASA students. She is the one who gathers and/or creates the materials used in guiding students towards college. She is the one who goes into classrooms to give presentations, preparing students for what to expect as they go through this process. She meets with most students one-on-one, getting to know them, sending transcripts, and writing recommendations. She is the participant I spent the most time with and the main co-connoisseur as I worked my way through analysis. After my initial gatekeeper introduced me to Sharon, she took over gatekeeping duties, introducing me to anyone she could think of and sending my request for participants on to her teachers. Unlike my other participants, Sharon is the subject of my classroom observations, and it is her documents that I analyzed as part of my data analysis. I will use those observations and document analysis here, woven throughout this part of the description and interpretation.

When I arrived at ASA in the mid-afternoon to meet with Sharon, the heat was oppressive – hotter than I remember Phoenix in the spring. The students were out in the

yard at recess. It was alive with bouncing basketballs and shouts of playing children. Some students ran right past me, playing with each other and oblivious to my presence. It felt overwhelmingly child-like. They had no interest in the sweating man with thinning hair and a briefcase, holding his blazer because of the heat. It is a short walk from where I was staying, but even that short walk provided ample opportunity to break a sweat.

Sharon met me in the main office and escorted me back across the campus to her office, unnecessarily apologizing for the craziness of the students in the yard. Masks appear to be optional again, and Sharon is much happier because of that change. The year of COVID and COVID protocols have worn her down somewhat. After we dropped off my bag in her office, she took me on a tour of the building. She is clearly comfortable with popping into people's classrooms while they are in session and with stopping (stalking?) people in the halls in order to introduce me. We'd stop outside classrooms and listen to the music-making happening inside (or ballet, or history class), and she'd tell me about the various teachers, pointing out the brass teacher who is wearing a Santa hat despite the heat and that Christmas is long past. She mentions that the teachers are a bit frazzled right now because of preparations for their year-end "showcase," and to be fair, some did seem frazzled. As we meet people along the way, Sharon seems to know everyone and be immanently comfortable with them. They, in turn, appear to like Sharon and don't mind being waylaid in the halls.

When we get back to her office, she shows me all the people who are signed up to present at the career fair tomorrow (myself included). This event represents one of the many offerings designed to help current students consider where their path might lead

after high school. She is clearly pleased that people seem to be taking an interest, both students and the presenters, which include alumni, parents and college reps like me. She seems particularly proud of the alumni who are attending. She tells me later that she really likes getting a chance to see where students end up and to feel their willingness to return to ASA to help out.

Sharon is an enthusiastic person, a joy to be around. She is short and middle-aged with close-cropped hair. She seems confident and comfortable in her own skin. She is very talkative, which I really appreciate, both because I'm talkative and because it is easier to interview a talkative person. She tells me that she listens to people all day and is just so pleased to have someone ask *her* questions!

Her office is small. She says it is a converted closet. It has dance studios on both sides, which I do not need to see to believe. She tells me that she made the administration put a window in, even if it just looks out on the lockers across the hall. As she describes this setting, not an enviable one in my estimation, she doesn't seem bitter. She's just telling a story in her consistently positive, kind demeanor. The office itself is a space that is both clean and cluttered. She has college pennants neatly hung on the walls, but also strewn about on the counter. Her immediate workspace is very tidy, an orderly, white glass-topped, kidney shaped desk, with very little on it. But the shelves behind her don't share the same orderly appearance: she has boxes sitting on top, neatly labeled but unreadable from where I sit. There are many books, including a full tall bookshelf, to which she turns at one point to show me a book by her favorite college prep writer. She knew just where it was. I imagine the students who meet with her in this room feel

welcome and put at ease. The clean tabletop in front of them removes distractions and clutter both mentally and physically. Yet they are surrounded by resources to be accessed and presented to them according to their needs by the energetic educator who sits before them.

She had told me before that she has performance anxiety. Indeed, it is one reason she didn't pursue a performance career after graduating, and maybe why she focused on choral composition in college. I sensed this anxiety when we started looking at the consent form, which she signed before we covered much of it, but especially when I turned on the recorders and read her the preamble. The transition from our friendly and informative conversation to the interview itself was awkward. I tried to point out how inherently awkward that part is, but I'm not sure it helped. At the beginning, she would lean over my phone to speak more directly into the mic. Her body language was tense, sitting straight-backed in her chair, leaning forward at the waist to speak into the mic with her arms clasped across her chest. She was never cagey or hesitant in answering, she just seemed uncomfortable at being recorded. But this didn't last too long: she is clearly more comfortable talking about the students and their accomplishments. Once the conversation turned to them, I noticed that she had started to relax into the chair and unclasp her arms.

Sharon's positive approach to life comes through over and over again during our time together. She is blessed with a thankful heart. She is quick to praise her colleagues and appreciate the help they give in guiding students. "I feel like I played a very small part." False modesty is a common trait in performing artists, and having spent most of my life around performers, I am sensitive to it. That is not what is happening here. I believe

Sharon views the world this way. This is remarkably consistent, with these traits surfacing throughout her presentations which I observe, both in person and on Zoom. This strikes me as a personality particularly suited to patiently guiding high school students on a journey of self-discovery, culminating in college choice. At one point during observation, I wrote “Sharon is just so delightful. So friendly and unassuming. Generally cheerful and she seems approachable. She is not intense, which is helpful for what could be a stressful topic.”

Sharon’s loves to be creative, to take ideas to execution and help people know themselves. She does not like the mundane, uncreative things, citing the need to upload transcripts or fill out forms as examples. She views these elements as standing in the way of the fun stuff. “I’d like to have a magic wand and say, “all the things are done <pshew>” (Her magic wand sound is accompanied by a flick of the wrist). Characteristically, she doesn’t say this bitterly. She doesn’t blame anyone. She is simply lamenting the need for such things. At risk of stereotyping her, I can see how her attraction to the creative and aversion of the logistical might extend beyond just the examples she mentions. She is drawn to people and places and events and projects at the expense of the less fun, less relational parts of life. She’s always happy to chat, happy to stop what she’s doing to answer a colleague’s request for help. Indeed, this happens right after we sit down with a knock on the door from another teacher. Sharon doesn’t bat an eye. She just stops what she’s doing and helps this colleague. At the same time, she has forgotten about my request for survey data and other things. This all fits. She’s happy to help but probably needs some reminding to get something more procedural done. I

wonder whether her students ever get annoyed at having to remind her to upload their transcripts.

At the end of one of our sessions, she walked me out because she forgot or ignored the need to check me in, and she didn't want people to wonder what I was doing there. She had some of those mundane things to take care of when I left, but she seemed happy to ignore them as long as possible.

Exposition

At one point, she tells me to say less about her in my write up and instead to focus on the students. She knows that this project is focused on the counselors more than on the students themselves, but she still would prefer not to be in the spotlight. This inclination of Sharon's results in an exposition section that consistently pivots back to student stories. Because *who* Sharon is inseparable from *how* Sharon performs her responsibilities as college counselor, her background provides context needed to understand how Sharon mediates college choice for ASA students and for music majors, her perceptions of the norms and expectations of college counseling at ASA, and her perception of the value of a music degree.

Her Surprising Path to Music, Away, and Back Again

We begin our more structured conversation with her upbringing and background, revealing a circuitous, surprising path to where she is now. Sharon grew up overseas in India, and she credits that childhood experience for much of who she is now. In fact, she insists I change my first interview question to allow participants to speak about their upbringing before the college choice process. She believes deeply in the value of

experiences and in many ways has a collectivist approach to life that is atypical in Westerners. It also provides a different lens through which to view her own college choice. She ended up at Meredith College in North Carolina, a small women-only college. As a white woman, she went from being an ethnic minority to being surrounded almost entirely by other white women. It was a jarring shift for Sharon, and as she reflects on that cultural shift, it still surprises her that she chose to go to Meredith. However, the school was fairly close to home and the lower cost of college at the time combined with her family's high financial need made for an inexpensive option. Sharon received little guidance in her college choice. "I didn't have anyone guide me. I went to North Carolina. It was a women's college, but I didn't know what my choices were. I didn't have any self-awareness, no literacy on like why I felt the way I did about anything."

This lack of guidance lays the groundwork for her future career as a college counselor, showing her what she wants to provide for her students by virtue of what she was not given as a student herself. Her path toward a music major was no more directive. "Um, I did what I had always done. <laugh>. I got a scholarship, and just kind of found my way with a Bachelor of Music." She had gotten positive feedback about her musicianship in high school, performing for people, participating and doing well in competitions, and she just rolled that into a college program. "I don't remember getting guidance except someone believed I could teach." That belief, combined with her aversion to being the center of attention, led her to music education with a focus in choral composition. She admits she didn't really have a broad view at the time of what someone

could do after getting a music degree, a perception that will change over time. “I loved music and I enjoyed what I did, and I only thought, well, you perform, or you teach, and those are the things. I know [now] there's quite a bit more you can do, but, you know, I didn't know what they were.”

She recalls that, after getting her degree, she had no obvious path forward in choral composition. She taught for a while on Kent Island with a younger age group than she really wanted and burned out quickly. Her path, still lacking strong direction, took a turn away from music at that point. “After two years, I thought, yeah, I don't know if I can continue at this rate. I knew that that wasn't my age group. I went for a couple years back into church ministry where I was a youth director with middle school and high school students. And I'm like, ‘ah, these are my people.’ I have always enjoyed teaching people about who they are and their strengths, and junior high is the best time to really work on that.”

After getting married and moving to Pennsylvania and then Arizona, she started doing interior design work. She describes even this job in contrast to music, running from the performance anxiety and avoiding the drive required to be a musician. “I liked the ability to not perform. Teaching is performing, you know? You're on; you gotta have your A game. And I needed a break. I was meeting one on one with people and designing things that went into their home. It was complete...other.”

I noticed that both her non-music jobs seemed to share something with her current college counseling position. At all stops, she is drawn to helping people discover who they are and realize their dreams. For students in the youth group, she helped them

understand themselves and who they are in the world. For her design clients, she took an idea and helped them manifest it in a physical space. Her values, developed over time in different contexts, make her the counselor she is today.

Despite her years outside of the music world, music could not be ignored forever, apparently. After a while in Arizona, she started teaching part-time at Arizona School for the Arts, teaching piano, choir, and creating a Life Skills class. Teaching made up most of her portfolio at ASA for 8 years before she transitioned into her current, full-time college counseling role.

ASA is a unique place in Sharon's estimation. It provided a home for her to return to music and education, and she has stayed there for a long time. She also hints at the pull that the love of music has on a musician, the siren's song. "I can't say I would've stayed in education had it not been for ASA. I loved ASA. And that's why I'm here 20 years. And that's kind of my journey, but even when I was in my first teaching experience, I remember saying out loud to myself, I don't know why I was talking to myself, but I remember saying it out loud. I said, 'I love music, but I love teaching about life.' Like, I knew that I wanted to move beyond music, but then I'm surrounded by it. Like I can't get away from it. It's a great setting for me to do what I'm doing, you know?"

Her experience with music's magnetic pull is something she will later identify in her students. Sharon's feelings about ASA's students begin to reveal her thinking on the value of music, how the arts affect students, and on the transferrable skills that they might expect to gain from music study.

“The students were very different than like just teenagers. They had a real passion. I think arts changes even the emotional abilities. I don't know the word, um, it meets a need that's deeper than just the academic and it, it makes a person very well rounded. How can majoring in music be something that propels you into something, either music, but other things, you know?”

We will return later to Sharon's views on the value of a musical education for her students. For now, it is important to note that she makes similar connections to her own background. “Remember I was a composition major - so the transferable skill I see now - I created. I created the college department. I created the life skills program. I love to create from nothing. I think that is probably a foundation of who I am. Like, take me into a space that's either not doing well or doesn't have something. and I like that kind of space. I tend to not be attracted to well-oiled machines.”

Her observation is based on her own self-discovery and experiences. Sharon is able to reflect and make connections between where she's been and where she is now. Much of what she sees connects directly how she views her on mediating college choice. “I'm drawn to other people who have ideas, and I help them start it and execute it. And then I jump off the train and I'm like, ‘okay, you're good to go.’ And then let me find the next... It's like a project I love, I love people's projects.”

It is comments like this, combined with her evident reflection, which reveal the connection between youth pastor, interior designer, and college counselor. She loves taking an idea all the way through to execution. In our conversation, it is clear she sees

how her music education prepared her for her current position but not necessarily how the skills she learned were present in all of her occupational stops.

The Value of Experience

The value Sharon places on experiential learning and self-discovery is a foundation of her counseling philosophy and, thus, how she mediates college choice to her students. She always returns to it in telling her own story, routinely references her international upbringing, the competitions she participated in, and the summer programs she attended. She uses her life both as an example of good experience and as an example of someone who did what she did because she *didn't* have certain experiences. "I encourage my students to have experiences more than anything, like jump into a summer program. I do this because I did what I knew. I didn't know the other possibilities... I think when a person has an experience, it either validates something or just confirms that they shouldn't do that."

Her insistence on students gaining experience is evident in her response to what keeps her in her job, what she enjoys most. "The best part of my job is when I see a student take something that I might have said, and say, 'I'm gonna take you up on that. I'm gonna do that. Or I'm gonna try that.'"

She goes on to tell me a story about two students who sought out experiences that informed their college major choice. The first student wanted to pursue economics but wasn't sure how to find experiences that would help them make their decision. "So, I said, contact the economics professor at ASU. They did, and they ended up having great

conversation. The guy sent him one of his favorite books. They had a, you know, a whole little conversation there.”

She used this story to encourage another student, saying, "Hey, if you don't find an experience, create one." She goes on to tell me this young woman's story. "She came by a couple months later, 'I did what you said. I contacted the ASU chemistry department.' I'm like, 'you're, you're 14 or 15, like good for you.' She ended up coming into the Zoom call with all the graduate students, doing a chemistry project. And the professor said, 'Hey, would you like to be a part of it? Would you like to just see where this goes and see what we do?' And so, her eyes just lit up. And I thought, that's my favorite part. When I see someone have these aha moments about their passions, and then they do something about it. And, and most I wasn't that in high school, no one said, 'Hey, why don't you check this out or do this, or...'"

Pushing students toward a foundation of experience is key in her approach both because she has lived a life full of varied experiences and because she didn't have someone encouraging her to engage in college choice in this way. As she tells me these student stories, I am struck by how similar this sounds to what I view as the music student approach. In my experience, music students learn more about a school by connecting with faculty and students in an experiential way: taking a lesson or participating in ensembles. It seems she is unconsciously applying that lesson to non-musicians.

Development

Sharon role as college counselor is made up of the philosophical and the practical. She researches and reflects and develops a counseling approach that is heavily imbued with values she's formed over the course of her life. She has a yearly cycle, thoughtfully curated, that she followed to serve her students as well as a wealth of resources, collected over the years. Sharon stays up to date on trends in higher education by nurturing a life-long learner mentality, which gives her keen insight into how the world of college choice has changed since she was a student.

Counseling Approach

Sharon is a self-described “good advocate” for ASA, and after our time together, I have to agree. She is particularly proud of what she sees as the high expectations placed on ASA students. “The person who graduates from ASA is always a high-quality individual...we have a high standard for academics and arts.” She is a cheerleader for student success to the outside world, particularly college admission reps, but also to the students themselves. In one of her presentations to the students, she is quick to point out that the graduation requirements for ASA are exceptional. “We’re really unique in this.”

Her pride in the school influences her work as college counselor and her responsibility for the curricular and pedagogical components of college guidance. In introducing herself in a presentation to new students, she says, “I enjoy working with students and seeing you accomplish your goals and have vision for your lives.” To accomplish this, she bases her structure on four words, one for each year in high school. For freshmen, the word is “Discover.” The goal is to develop self-knowledge, and she cites the personality tests she administers as an example of how she accomplishes that

goal. Sharon's whole philosophy of college guidance is based on the students knowing who they are. She tells me "Know yourself" is the first step along the road to college, a viewpoint that fits her reflective personality. While high expectations and good outcomes are important to her and she acknowledges that people care about those things, she routinely redirects attention away from prestigious outcomes back toward student growth. For sophomores, the word is "Explore," returning again to Sharon's emphasis on experience. This year is meant to widen the students' horizons and expose them to things they hadn't considered. Junior year is "Prepare;" she is expecting the students to research schools, attend college nights and college visits, make their lists, and begin gathering what they will need. Finally, Senior year is "Apply." It is time to actually do the thing they have been working toward!

The Yearly Work

Because Sharon's work represents the main curricular component of college choice, the foundation for *how* college choice is mediated to students, I needed to get a sense of her yearly rhythm (see Appendix D). She gives me the cycle immediately from memory, reminding me now and then that she is just one person and doesn't have a team of counselors. It is clear that she feels her creative vision is hindered by the limited resources. I also sense that she thinks I might think poorly of her as if she isn't doing enough. This feels characteristic of someone who has performance anxiety. She has high expectations for herself and expects that others do, too. "Because it's only me and so I have big visions and then I have to manage that, you know, I have to take my ideas and then see what can be feasible in a year."

Throughout the year, Sharon gives monthly presentations. During COVID these presentations went online. She points out the benefit of having them recorded and available to students. I can see how that would be a positive change, and I certainly found it helpful to go back and watch them to get a sense for her approach. The topics of these presentations vary depending on the time of year and the student audience she is targeting. Similarly, she releases a periodic newsletter, helping students and families stay engaged.

Her first quarter is focused on seniors who are in the application process. She requires them to meet with her for 20 minutes each to make sure things are progressing as planned, reminding them to gather deadlines and meet those deadlines. She administers a senior survey, gathering information about their hopes while also mining for quotes that she can then use in writing recommendations (a major part of her life in September and October). Recommendations are clearly not Sharon's favorite part of the job. It is one of her mundane administrative tasks, and she holds it in contrast to other projects that generate "creative energy." This time of year, she prioritizes early decision and early action applicants, with additional attention given to students applying out of state, with the idea that she and her students are more familiar with the in-state procedures already.

While she is focusing on seniors, she also holds events for younger students. At the beginning of the year, she puts on a breakfast simply to introduce herself and begin building rapport.

Early in the year, she identifies students who are first generation or for whom English is a second language. She knows from the research and from personal experience

that these families will require more support to navigate a totally new process. This focus struck me because a few times during our time together I got the sense that Sharon was frustrated by some of the discourse surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. However, when confronted by the needs of her students, she immediately engages in research to develop appropriate support systems. She offers these supports with the same student-focused care as her other efforts, without judgement or condescension. This appears again in reviewing the resources she curates for students, many of which are in Spanish.

October is visit season. She invites college representatives to meet with students in small groups, an event I have been part of in the past. She also organizes college fairs where many schools set up booths and students and their families can go from booth to booth, learning about all sorts of schools at once.

In October and November, she focuses on financial aid, helping students navigate the FAFSA and other aid applications. That season morphs into helping them to prioritize their time researching non-Federal aid, including institutional scholarships. This season continues all the way through to February.

In January, once most of the seniors have applied for their schools and are in the midst of figuring out how to pay for them, Sharon directs her attentions to juniors, with one-on-one meetings to solidify their college lists in preparation for the application season. This is also when she holds a community college-specific college fair. Finally, near the middle and end of spring semester, she spends some time on sophomores. The main event of this season is a Sophomore Night when in-state schools hold a panel

discussion, helping students explore what options may be open to them. Sharon's lack of guidance as a student pushes her to provide robust structured guidance to her students.

The Resources

The central tool for mediating college choice is the College Counseling Padlet Sharon created in 2020. The Padlet is referenced frequently in our discussions and in my observations of her classroom counseling sessions. It seems to be the main resource for students. However, it represents a repository of resources, so saying it is the only resource is misleading. Instead, it is better considered as the hub for all the resources she has gathered over the years.

When accessing the Padlet, I used a little business card that Sharon gave me in our meeting. It has a QR code that is meant to be accessed on a phone. Because I preferred to review the Padlet on my computer, I scanned the code with my phone and sent it to myself via email. This was awkward, and in retrospect, this was clearly not the way this method was meant to be used. Sharon links the Padlet on the ASA college counseling website, though not so prominently that I could find it quickly. She tells me she also links it in her email signature.

I have used Padlet in the past, and I can see why Sharon uses it for this purpose. It is easy to set up, and it works well on both a laptop - as the students did during classroom presentations - and a phone. I found it overwhelming, but I was trying to do too much at one time. Students are taking it in smaller bits with Sharon's guidance. Indeed, any chance she has she brings the students back to the Padlet to access one part in the context

of their discussion. She doesn't simply send the link as an answer to every question. It is artfully done.

Since the Padlet is the main tool Sharon uses to resource students, I will briefly describe what a student finds when they use it. Padlet is an online tool for information organization and display. It uses a "wall layout" (padlet.com, n.d.) set up in a grid of sorts (see Figure 5). The background, behind the grid, appears to be a close-up picture of white wood. The background picture does not move or change as you scroll around. The title of the page is **ASA College Counseling – Arizona School for the Arts – College Counseling** (bold and large), and a subheader of **Stay in the College Loop**. Across the top, horizontal axis, Sharon has category labels. Each label has entries stacked beneath. They have rounded corners, and while they are not circular, they remind me of bubbles. These categories include:

- College Calendar – SignUps – Zoom link (4 bubbles)
- Dual Enrollment (6 bubbles), Current Scholarships & Opportunities (3 bubbles)
- Take a Deeper Dive (which includes a cute little fish emoji that is colored like Nemo but shaped like Dori) (1 bubble)
- College Acceptances (1 bubble), Events Coming Up... (3 bubbles)
- College Presentation May 2022 Links Needed (3 bubbles)
- Resources (8 bubbles)
- ASA – College Presentations (9 bubbles)
- \$\$\$ Financial Aid (the dollar signs are green emojis) (10 bubbles)
- SAT & ACT (10 bubbles)

- College Applications (8 Bubbles)
- Recommendation Letters (1 bubble)
- Communication (3 bubbles)

Each of these categories has a descending, vertical axis made of the stacked bubbles. They are different depths (top to bottom) based on the amount of information displayed. The longest columns are Financial Aid and SAT & ACT at 10 bubbles, though some of these appear to be date-specific (e.g., upcoming events, College presentation, etc.) suggesting that they may be longer at certain times of the year. Some of these are clearly more transactional like the college calendar and signups for Zoom meetings with Sharon.

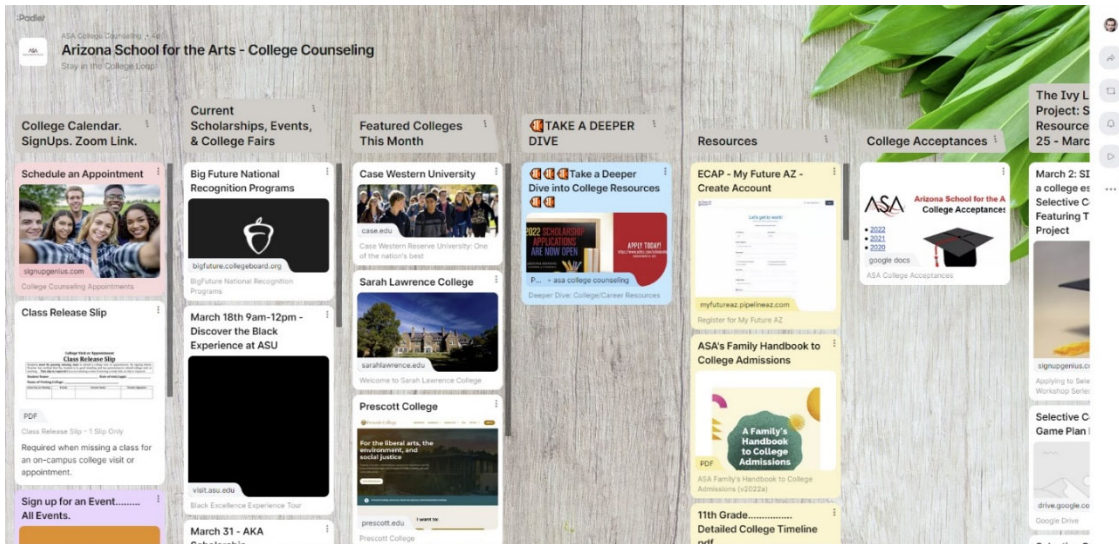


Figure 4: ASA Counseling Padlet Screenshot

After spending some time exploring the Padlet, I followed up with Sharon to ask some clarifying questions. She tells me they represent a combination of resources she’s personally discovered and those that were recommended to her. “I do not have a team of counselors to refer to. When I go to a training, I gather new resources.” Once again this suggests that her ambitious and her ability to meet perceived expectations are dampened by bandwidth constraints. She wants to find resources that are “easy to navigate...have practical steps.” Sharon shows sensitivity to how her students interact with technology and tries to accommodate it. “I have found that students today don't visit websites that are hard to navigate, or they won't dig for info. Whenever I ask the students if they know how to get to the Padlet or if they have researched the Padlet, most of the time they have, and even checked out a specific resource. They have shared that it is helpful. I place it at the bottom of my signature, so it is convenient... I also picked the Padlet because of the ease of adding new resources. I can be sitting with a student in a meeting and quickly add

a resource we've been talking about while they are sitting there. It makes for efficient use of time, as my meetings with students can be only 20 plus minutes. Padlet has a phone app so students can add the college Padlet to their phone and go to the resources quickly.”

This suggests that Sharon does not treat the Padlet as a passive resource, just a place to dump things that students might find useful. She tinkers, as she does with her presentations. She gives consistent thought to what is needed and when. “I place the most relevant info or current items in the first 3-4 columns. Right now, it is dual enrollment. In September/October, I will bring FAFSA info to the forefront. I move things around so they can find most relevant info front and center. At the end of the year, I brought our college acceptances to the forefront. The ‘Take a Deeper Dive’ section starts to go into detailed sections that might pertain to a specific need, but not necessarily time sensitive.”

She engages with this resource in the most interactive way possible and appears to always be looking for new and better resources or ways to incorporate it into the work she is doing in classrooms or with individual students. It the self-described “life-long learner” that is on display here. “Once I create a presentation, then you know, the next year I'm tweaking it. I tend to like take it and redo it. You know, something new, new information, or ‘why did I talk about that last year? <laugh> they don't need to know that.’”

A Life-long Learner

Sharon constantly calls on third-party resources to supplement her own knowledge and influence her mediation of college choice. Throughout her year of

planned events, she brings in outside experts (e.g., college essay writing guide, college reps, representatives from community college to talk about concurrent enrollment). She jumps at any opportunity to provide resources for her students. I experienced this firsthand when she asked me to participate in the career fair while I was in town. She saw me using an arts degree in a non-traditional way and wanted to make sure her students had a chance to explore that possibility. Her curiosity serves her well. Once, she referenced a big gift from Michael Bloomberg to Johns Hopkins University, showing that she is engaged in higher education current events and that she allowed it to change her view of the affordability of that school. She apparently listens to college choice podcasts in the car! Her openness to new information translates into sensitivity in the classroom. When she presents to a class, she asks what the students want to cover from her outline to be sure she spends enough time there. When she ran out of time in one presentation, she adjusted in the next to avoid the same mistake. When she received complaints about not talking about community colleges, she was teachable and worked in community college information in meaningful ways. It even expanded her thinking about how community colleges might address some of the cost concerns presented by four-year schools.

There is some very human tension present here. A few of her comments revealed that she has received negative feedback. Comments like. “We didn’t get enough attention from Sharon!” “I never saw her!” “She didn’t help!” “She didn’t talk about community colleges.” Some of her responses to this criticism were constructive, but others were more along the lines of “I can’t be everywhere at once, people!” This is the sort of internal monologue that may be motivating her comments about being able to do more if

she had more people or more time, comments that I've interpreted as self-protective. Her sense of the norms and expectations for the college counseling program are shaped by the feedback she receives.

It's a Different World

Sharon is my oldest participant, and the years since she was in college combined with her long experience helping students find their college fit gives her a unique view of the changes and impacts how she mediates college choice to her students. "So, when I talked to students, you know, it's a whole industry [now]. It's a different world and time than when I went to college." This idea appears throughout the many conversations we shared. She sees today's college choice process as being much more competitive than it was for her. "It's become more competitive; I think selective schools can't really give merit aid. They're very need based, you know, once they get more selective, the pool of students all become highly qualified. So, then they'd be giving everyone money. All the candidates look really similar, which makes for more pressure...I don't recall ever saying, 'Hey, what'd you get on your SAT?'...You didn't do this comparison thing. We just, we graduated from high school, and we went our separate ways."

She is aware that moving college applications online, particularly the use of the Common Application, has made it incredibly easy to apply to many more schools than before. It opened up the world and made it more accessible. When she looked for schools as a high schooler, she barely looked beyond her back door. Even with her international childhood, the world of college choice was smaller. "Well, I think applications are easy. We had to put it in [the mail]. We had to get the piece of paper and that's a lot of work,

you know, once the common app came into play, 'Oh, let's just do another one. Let's add this one. Let's add that.' So, I think the pool becomes bigger because the application process is easier. I think that's one factor. Because the application process, like there's more competition that things become more selective. Someone gave me the example of Reed College. It didn't used to be that selective. It was pretty, you know, easy to get into. Now it's considered selective because the admissions rate is higher. But I also think, because it is competitive now, students are like, 'how else do I stand out?'"

This worry that the students feel pressure to stand out from their peers weighs on Sharon. "'I've got a 4.0, but everyone else does too.' And so, there's a pressure. I know students who have said like, 'Well, I started a nonprofit.' They're like little adults...I recall just kind of being a teenager <laughs>. Like there wasn't so much of 'What more do I need to do to get in?' You know? Our students, they're in clubs, they're volunteering, they're doing summer programs, leadership programs, like they're involved in a lot... they put pressure on themselves to look good to a college. 'Am I good enough? Is this good enough?' I don't recall having that kind of pressure."

Sharon's apprehension about how things have changed does not stop her from trying to provide resources her students. She perpetuates the "how do I stand out?" pressure by encouraging her students to keep track of their accomplishments in her college choice timeline documents. She knows the expectation is that they stand out, so she helps them do it. She is caught in the machine even though she worries about how it affects her students.

In addition to seeing changes in the application process over the years, Sharon has observed the increase in the cost of college. “I remember having about \$2,500 [in debt] at the end of it that I paid off by the time I was 22. I think [tuition] was \$8,000 a year to go. Now it's 32 for that same college!”

These insights impact how Sharon guides her students. They are uppermost in her mind, and while she doesn't have all the answers, her desire to help them find the right fit pushes her to engage in the ever-changing world of college choice.

Recapitulation

Sharon's own life experience and the insights gained over years of working with students influences how she mediates college choice. She possesses insider knowledge which she passes on to her students. She is sensitive to the differences between non-arts students and music students and can point out how her mediation of college choice changes depending on which student she is working with. She delimits students' college options, despite wanting to remain informative and not pushy, and that process is influenced by the neoliberal culture in which she operates. Finally, all these life experiences come together in her thoughts on the value of a music degree.

Insider Knowledge

Sharon is the ultimate insider, especially for her music students. On one hand, she brings her knowledge of the college choice industry, enriched over many years by her curiosity and desire to help her students. On the other, she knows what it means to be a musician with the special considerations that go along with that.

In addition to her recognition of how higher education has changed, covered earlier, her scholarship advice is an example of her insider knowledge. She spends much time and space on the Padlet discussing scholarships. Given that she cites scholarship dollars as a metric for success, I think Sharon may be partly motivated by a desire to demonstrate positive student outcomes. However, she references the incredible increase in cost of higher education many times, and she remains consistently focused on helping students find a way to pay for it. “There's such a secret sauce to every individual college. Because the cost of college has really risen in the last five, 10 years...I think that students are responding to something. They went through a pandemic where someone may have lost their job. I don't know all the things that are influencing [them], but there is a need for information for families on how will I pay for this. And what are my options, you know, and that's why I spend an equal amount of time talking about scholarships. Like I throw them out there but being strategic. I'm not a big fan of all the big scholarship places. I say put them last on your list if you have a little time. But like, I talk about the low hanging fruit, like go to DU's scholarship page and see what do they have to offer? It's like educating them on where are all the places to look but being strategic with their energies. So, what is your ROI on your time that you just spent doing that essay? Yeah, so when I do my kind of scholarship workshop, we talk about like, especially seniors, you know, in their senior year and they're getting serious, to take their top, you know, two or three colleges and really dig into the scholarship section of their website.”

She highlights an upside-down pyramid image to help students know where to invest the most time. Figure 6 below appears on the Padlet, and she refers to it in the in-class and Zoom presentations.

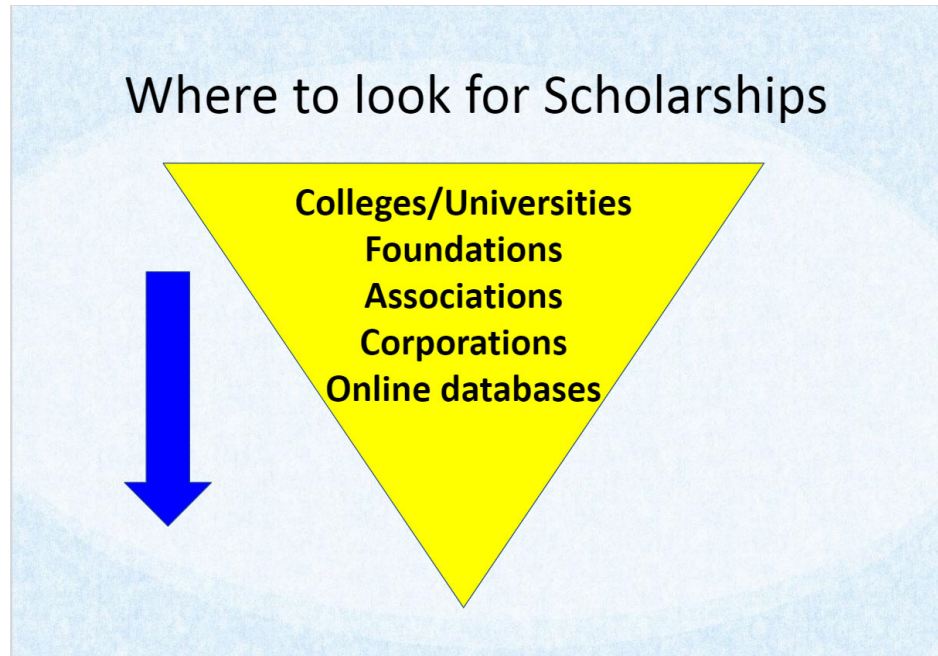


Figure 5: ASA Counseling Upside-down Pyramid Scholarship Guidance

I find this image helpful and rooted in reality. It is targeted to the sources of aid that provide the most funding for the least amount of work. The schools a student is applying to will be more likely to help them afford their school than online databases will. One is more individual and motivated to help; the other is just an aggregator, impersonal and sometimes impenetrable, passive and without a stake in the decision. I have not seen this approach to advising students elsewhere, and I plan to borrow it in my future guiding of students and their families.

Sharon offers her insider knowledge with characteristic humanity. As I reviewed her various college choice checklists, all available on the Padlet, I was struck by just how important these resources are for students. They seem fairly standard, but they should not be taken for granted. The checklists have straightforward transactional items (i.e., take this test at this time), but they also have relational, interpersonal elements. One item suggests writing thank you notes to people who helped along the way. This is presented as both a smart networking choice, but also useful as an opportunity to reflect on the high school stage of life and to cultivate thankfulness. This strikes me as a very Sharon thing to do, since her own gratitude to the people around her is so apparent. It fits into her self-discovery and development viewpoint, as well. To her, this process isn't just about getting into college. It is about becoming the person you want to be, and for Sharon, that person is a thankful and reflective one.

Scholarship advice and student checklists help her students benefit from Sharon's insider knowledge. They help both non-music majors and musicians alike. However, she also shows that she has insider knowledge specific to musicians.

She knows that relationships are key in the arts, particularly those a student has with their private teacher and with the teacher they would study with at the university. "It depends so much on that relationship," she tells me. The private teacher is not just a primary resource for the student, in her view, it is also a resource for her. In a presentation about summer programs, one intended for all students but that happened to focus primarily on music programs, she spends a long time talking about the Lamont Summer Academy at the University of Denver. She calls out the good experiences her

students have had there and specifically mentions the strength of the guitar program. To my knowledge, only one guitarist has come from ASA to Lamont in the last decade or so. It surprised me that she had such a strong view of the program. When I asked her about it, she pointed to the teachers. “I rely on my arts teachers to guide their students to the college that aligns with the student and their abilities. One of our guitar teachers recommended Lamont and spoke highly of the program. Since this student’s guitar skills were so advanced, he also had a high chance for a great arts scholarship, which he did receive. I have not spoken to the student regarding his experience. However, I recently found out last week that he was just hired as a Program Manager for Phoenix Conservatory of Music. We are so proud of him.”

She knows enough about the music world to know what she doesn’t know. She is not a guitarist and can’t recommend a good guitar school based on her own opinion of the faculty member at that school. The private guitar instructor at ASA can, so she relies on that person to guide her as she mediates college choice to her music students. Note that she gets her feedback from the teacher, not the student. Sharon has remarked that she doesn’t always hear how her alumni are doing, which I take to mean that the teacher is a more readily available source of information. The teacher is close by, easy to track down. The student, less so. The teacher also has a broader view. The student can speak to the one program they experienced. The teacher can speak to how that program compares to others, gathering years of secondhand student experience.

The primacy of the private teacher is a level of music-specific sophistication that Sharon knows in part because of her own music background. Further displaying her

music insider knowledge, she knows the extra steps required for students who apply to music schools. “I do double check [with students], because there are some that will struggle, like they're overwhelmed by the ‘so I gotta apply to Vanderbilt [the university] and I've gotta apply to Blair [the music school]?’ Just the extra pieces that they have. So, I'm more like clarifying, ‘Hey, find out how you have to audition. Do you have to go [audition in person] with the pandemic? Are you just sending something?’ I fill in pieces that are more procedural.”

Sharon seems to downplay this bit of advice, but I cannot overstate how critical this is. Someone like Sharon who is steeped in college guidance and understands the added steps music majors have to take might lose sight of how unique their application process is. It happens to me frequently when I am working with parents who are not musicians themselves. They wouldn't know the intricacies of the music application process because they haven't experienced it and aren't surrounded by it. It is important in those moments for me to recognize my insider knowledge and share it with the family. Sharon is doing that here. This knowledge and Sharon's awareness of the need to check in with music applicants on this front is something a non-arts counselor may not know to do.

Digging deeper into Sharon's music-specific insider knowledge, I find she knows the subjective nature of music school reputations. When students ask which schools are best, she thinks, “I know some of the answers to that, but it, it's shifting and changing. It's like Juilliard or let's say Peabody, like that used to be good at this, but now it's completely this or it's not even that.”

Sharon is saying is that certain schools are good at certain things and that it shifts over time. This is counter-intuitive and not always well understood. It can only be seen by people who are on the inside and have observed schools over time. Again, the private instructor is central to this understanding. For example, if a skilled teacher is at a college, let's say a piano faculty member, they build up the quality of the piano program. Once that teacher leaves, the quality of that piano program may fluctuate. The larger public may just say, "Oh, I've heard of that music school. It's good!" Someone plugged in to the world of piano higher education may know that, while the overall school still has a good reputation, it may no longer be the best place to go for piano. This detail is more like top-level academic graduate programs. Perhaps there is a particularly productive or famous faculty member in the psychology department at a major school who may draw graduate students. If that faculty member leaves, a sophisticated graduate student may change their mind about applying to that school. I have found that type of college choice influence to be uncommon in the undergraduate world outside of music. I was impressed that Sharon was aware of this and allowed it to influence how she mediates college choice to her music students by constantly centering their private music teachers.

Finally, Sharon has nuanced views of government sites that help students understand projected salaries for specific majors. She points out that a musician's life if made up of many varied jobs and that portfolio of income doesn't lend itself well to income tracking sites, a fact she knows in part because her own experience as a professional musician. She points out that the projected income range for a musician can be from "zero to a million dollars," which while hyperbolic, demonstrates her point. A

counselor who isn't familiar with a musician's life might use such government sites to discourage that career path. Or a student might be discouraged by them without someone like Sharon to say, 'Oh don't use those.' This happens often when I work with parents in the application process, so I am encouraged that Sharon understands it at the high school level.

The Difference between Music Students and Non-Arts Students

Because Sharon has insider knowledge from multiple identities, particularly college counselor and musician, she can point out the differences between non-music students and music students choosing a college, and she changes how she mediates the process accordingly. She considers non-music students more open to external influence. "I mean most kids can be like undecided. It's not about being able to say what you wanna major in because that'll shift anyway. Cuz like sometimes they'll say, 'Oh, I'll major in biomedical.' I'm like you have no experiences or it just, they saw it somewhere. I think TV shows, I get this influx of forensics from CSI, and you know, or, um, political science. Um, just because we've been in a, a tum..tum..., What's the word? [SC: tumultuous time?] Yes. Or they might think, I wanna make a difference. I wanna get involved. You know? So you never know, like I think there's so many layers to influence, but I do see like some, I sometimes see patterns or trends of a major and I'm like, huh, alright, 'why do you all wanna be vets?' You know, like what happened?"

She is speaking in fairly broad terms, and when considered alongside all the good comments she has made about ASA's high standards and well-rounded students, it can be assumed that this characterization does not apply to every non-music major. However,

she paints a picture of a student who is less sure what they want to do and holds it in contrast to the students she sees headed toward music. The importance of experiences once again plays a major role in her worldview. “In terms of music and arts, that really is experiential from usually much younger years. I think one thing I notice about our students - I think we have about eight or nine of them in the conservatory track - you become very singular focused. You're good at what you do by then. You know where you wanna go. You've been studying it, at least here, you know what I mean? It's a different context [from non-musicians]. Those who are gonna do it. They've gotta find the passion in the music and, and, and loving that. Like that music has to be their passion. They tend not to be the type of person that's like peer pressured. They've already accomplished that goal on a teenage level, and they can see themselves enjoying it.”

The pre-college experience for musicians is so different from that of academic majors. In one of her presentations to ASA students, not just musicians, she highlights that students can go to college to “find my purpose in life.” In that context, she is trying to relieve some of the pressure on students to choose their major right away. She provides self-discovery tools to help students determine which disciplines they might enjoy and tells them “It’s normal not to know what you want to do at all.” This is how she guides non-musicians through the process of college choice, but it is clearly not how she views students who plan to major in music. “I would never say that there’s a person majoring in music who has *not* done gigs, been performing... like they are already experiencing it. So, I think experiences cause people to imagine themselves doing it. Like the reason I went into teaching, well, my experience was that I was a teacher at 14 and you can

visualize yourself, 'Could I see myself doing this? Forever? Yes.' You know? Anyone who's going into performing arts has had, I would say it's an experiential field. Someone who says, 'I wanna be a scientist.' Maybe they've had science classes, but how much science experience have they had? They just know that it is a possibility. People who go into performing arts. Uh, do you see them change that major? They aren't a string player and then there's something else. They master, master, master the one thing. Where people who haven't had experiences shift and change and wonder. They're going through the experience in college."

Experience is a consistent theme throughout. Sharon values providing information that can lead to student experience, which will lead to self-discovery, which will lead to better college choice. She observes that the timeline of experience between music students and non-music students is different. Music students' experience comes earlier and more consistently than that for academic students. Science students may not get the same type and frequency of hands-on experience that musicians do, which means the depth and focus of their passion may not develop until later, at the college level. This supports her comments on how many students go to college undecided and figure it out while they're there. It holds two ideas about the purpose of college in contrast. One, for non-musicians: go to learn what you want to do. The other, for musicians: go to dig deeper into the thing you have already started mastering. Different views on the purpose of college mean different approaches to mediating the college choice process.

It follows, then, that Sharon views music majors as not needing as much support or guidance as their non-music peers. She refers once again to the importance of a music

student's private teacher who she expects is guiding the student in all things music. Sharon also points to the comparatively smaller ecosystem that musicians inhabit. She sees them as more connected to each other, cultivating ideas of what it means to be a college-bound musician within their high school music community. She tells me that the student has usually decided to major in music before they start working with her seriously.

Delimiting College Choice and Neoliberal Undercurrents

Sharon considers the college choice guidance she gives to be value-free and not pushy. She says she doesn't actively steer a student one way or the other. She says, "I never say *not* to put something on the list" and "I don't control other people. I only can control information." I believe that Sharon believes this; it agrees with her focus on experience and self-discovery and her desire to not be the center of attention. She truly wants to help students to know themselves so they can make the best possible college choice. However, she is impacting students' decisions whether she claims to or not. That impact can be more passive, through her choices about third-party resources to use and how she guides them to make their college lists. She also says, when guiding a student on where to apply, "Let's do a reality check on that one," suggesting that she is considering other factors they should take into account, effectively directing a student away from one school towards another.

How Sharon mediates college choice is affected by the focus on money in the surrounding culture in the United States, a focus that is made more important by rising costs. Certainly, Sharon views the consideration of costs as an element of setting the

students up for success. Sharon sees a job well done when a student did the work to learn about themselves and about what school would be good for them and then, when college decisions are released to have the options that they wanted, including from a financial standpoint. Beyond the necessary and wise consideration of cost, however, the use of financial metrics for success appears as well, creating tension. She points to financial metrics for success when explaining the success her students are having. “I’d say on average, now they get 55k to 60k per person, but we have also out peaked at certain times 70k and 80,000, like average. I feel like that, while that’s financial aid, that is the bottom line <laugh> to be able to go and not be in debt. And so, I could see the data, you know, going up and up, it was like every year kind of. And we had more students, we were growing, but I did it per student. You know?”

Sharon’s is not comfortable with the money-focused view, but the pressure to give in to financial definitions of success persists. There is a real ‘they did the work and now they’re being rewarded for it!’ subtext to this idea. They got a scholarship so they must be valuable. She casts this process in very market-based language. “I think you can get into USC, but how much financial aid will they give you for that 4.0? You’ve worked a lot for that. Let’s look at scholarships. I do all of that, but I want them to also know what are some colleges that are also great for what you want, but they’re gonna really appreciate that 4.0.”

She wants students to get the most out of the work they’ve done. They need to recognize what they’ve accomplished and leverage that for the best possible financial situation. “I do talk about negotiating you know. If a college really just sees the value in

it, they might be willing to, to do something.” In her mind this is defined by merit aid. In one of her presentations, she even goes so far as to direct them away from Ivies and elite schools toward schools a few rungs down the ladder because they will appreciate (with scholarship) that student’s profile. “Do you wanna be a big fish in a little pond? Because if you, if you do there’s money in that too. You know, that smaller college that has a fantastic small department would be a great fit and they're gonna, you might not even pay full tuition. It doesn't mean that steers everything, but it has to be a component.”

I always sense that Sharon views the money elements as a necessary evil. Something to deal with pragmatically, even as it detracts from what she really wants to do with students. She sees the limits of scholarship as a metric for success and knows it doesn’t fit her student-focused, self-discovery approach. “I also had a goal. We went from 70 to about 87% of our students were getting into their top three schools. And so, um, I always say that's their accomplishment, you know?”

The tension between being pragmatic about finances and her own philosophical framework is apparent when she considers majoring in music specifically. “They have to get a job and they have to think about it, but there can be so many ways to do it.” Sharon knows that adults need to pay bills, and she knows that has to be considered when working with students. But she is open to a broader view. As with her own journey, she thinks students have to narrow an understanding of how the application of a music degree can be used; she self-identifies the need to teach them to expand their ideas.

Transferrable Skills and the Value of a Music Degree

Sharon's emphasis on experience and her appreciation of ASA's high standards come together in how she values the arts. Earlier, when discussing why she came to work at ASA and why she remains there, she pointed to the well-rounded student body. "Arts plays such an important part...it grounds people to something other than themselves." Sharon also sees some specific skills gained in music. "I think musicians are skilled people. They learn to adapt and be flexible. Um, and they're used to performance, which you're flying by the seat of your pants sometimes. You know, things happen! [For example] the venue's not ready. 'Okay guys, we're changing it up. We're doing this now.' You know, there's this kind of adventure that comes with it, which I think is transferable...to any job."

A previous boss of mine used to call this "Let's fake an opera." He meant we would be called on to pretend we had it all together even when we didn't. I hear this same concept here with Sharon. This view leads Sharon to believe that an arts education sets you up for unique success in non-arts disciplines.

She tells me about how the representatives of the University of Arizona engineering department will seek out ASA students for their program. "UofA engineering department, they're always wanting to know if we have more, 'do you have any engineers?' And this kind of goes into the arts piece because I said, well, what do you love about art students? Well, the engineering candidates coming in with arts in their background become students who are able to articulate in writing and verbally what they are discovering. So, they're doing an experiment and because they've had the experience of presenting research and writing, they tend to be students who are very well-rounded

engineers. They know how to work as a team because we actually have a very, very team-oriented approach here. So, they're taking that with them.”

Sharon returns to the idea of the performing arts, specifically, preparing students for success because of the poise they bring to presentation. This calls back to her view that teaching is performance. Her life-long learner personality also surfaces here. “But I think just being in the performing arts, I don't know, you develop a confidence, uh, ability to, I think I shared before, like take feedback and redo, that's what music is. There's never a perfection. You're never there. You never arrive. And to take that philosophy into a good work ethic, like 'this isn't done, like I wrote this thing, but it, you know, there's more I could do. I could improve.' It is kind of a different philosophy than maybe just academics.”

Sharon's pride in ASA's curriculum and the graduates it produces is evident throughout, and I sense this topic is a happy place for her. She works with college representatives frequently as the college counselor, and this “well-rounded student” pitch is one she probably uses often. It is not just marketing, however. Her sincerity is apparent.

Sharon isn't just showing students that their music study can translate outside of the music or arts world. It is also important to her that they know they can do more *within* the music world than just perform or teach. I hear echoes of her personal story in which she went into school with a very narrow view of potential outcomes, and she clearly is doing her best to prepare her students with more hopeful expectations from the beginning. She quickly rattles off a few examples of students who majored in

performance but ended up in production or administration like managing Arizona Opera or doing marketing for the Phoenix Symphony. “They have to get a job and they have to think about it, but there can be so many ways to do it.” Her reference to the student who attended the Lamont Summer Academy also bears this out. She lauds his exceptional guitar skills and the success he had in both undergraduate and graduate degrees. In the same breath she points out his current administrative role as program manager for the Phoenix Conservatory of Music, saying “We are so proud of him.” Sharon values many definitions of success for her students and doesn’t have a strict, narrow view of the outcomes.

This is a fitting worldview for a counselor whose real passion is helping students discover who they are. When I ask Sharon what she wants for her students, she quickly returns to that self-discovery theme. “Well, it's the college department mission and that is guiding students to discover who they are so they can find education that matches with their strengths and their skills. So that would be the bottom line. It's not about, ‘Hey, can we get them in all these great schools?’ Because I wanna see them thrive in a, in a community, wherever they go, it's a community they are gonna grow in as a person, learn about themselves, learn about the world and others. I always encourage them to discover more about what kind of place are you gonna fit into? And, you know, you're gonna grow there, you're gonna get there. And you're like, oh my gosh, these are my people. I think that's equally as important as like the program and the, all the things that are ranked, you know? I want them to know their ‘why.’”

Sharon has made a career of helping people learn about themselves and realize their dreams, something that appears in many iterations along her own surprising path. To mediate college choice to her students, she combines that life purpose with her own experiences and her insider knowledge of higher education and of music schools. Sharon remains effective in a world that is ever-changing and certainly very different from when she went to school. The result is a yearly cycle packed with events and personal contact with students, supported by thoughtfully curated and accessible resources. While monetary metrics and business language appear in her work, her consistent focus is on helping students discover their why and how to get where they want to be. While she does delimit school options for students, she is not pushy. Ultimately, she values the arts and music specifically. She relies heavily on private music instructors to provide targeted guidance to students and to relay music-specific information about schools. She is proud of the program and the students at ASA, and she shows it by singing their praises.

Near the end of one of my trips, I ran into Sharon at the Giant Coffee shop near campus. She said she only had two seconds and then stayed to talk for 20 minutes. She is just so friendly, and she quickly becomes comfortable with people. She said she can call me a friend now and shows the truth in this by immediately sitting down and sharing about her husband, showing me pictures on her phone. She also shares more about the feedback she receives sometimes being negative. She takes off eventually and encourages me to drop in to say goodbye before I leave this week. Even if she gets criticized for some things, she seems willing to make improvements. She is constantly learning and trying to provide more and more opportunities for her students. Despite having done this

job for a long time, receiving criticism, and being stretched thin, she is not jaded. I think these students are lucky to have her.

The Architect - Laura

Laura is the Arts Director and Vice Principal of Student Services at Arizona School for the Arts. Before that, she was a teacher in the band department for 13 years with a special responsibility for woodwinds students. Along with her insight from years of working with students directly as a classroom teacher, Laura contributes to answering this project's research questions by providing a window into the ecosystem and culture of the arts department at ASA. She has experience mediating college choice to individual music students and, in her current role as an administrator, she develops and implements the systems used to mediate college choice to these students. She sits in the metaphorical command center, applying a critical eye to the curriculum and constantly learning to better serve ASA's students. Laura possesses both an insight into the 30,000-ft culture-building part of an ASA musician's college choice and student-specific guidance. We will spend a fair amount of time discussing her values because they influence the choices she makes at ASA and those choices impact how college choice is mediated.

When I meet Laura more our first interview and she welcomes me back to her office, she immediately strikes me as a consummate professional. She wears a mask for the entirety of our time together, and I do the same. She is average height, standing about 5'6" with a slender build. I learn she is in her 40s, but she looks younger. She dresses in almost all black, with sandal-like shoes. She wears glasses above the mask, framed by dark hair that is about chin-length. Her office is relatively small with a large window. I

assume it looks outside, but the white nylon blinds are closed the whole time. She has a standing desk in the back right corner, and after spending some time with her, that seems appropriate. She is high energy, but not exuberant like Kris or Lindsey. She is focused, bordering on intense. She is performing the whole time we interact, but I sense that I'm getting the real her; it's just that the real her has given much thought to presentation. As I get to know her, I learn that this matters very much to her. It is one of the main transferrable skills she associates with a musician's training and one that she tries to pass on to anyone she mentors.

Between the door and the standing desk is a cozy sitting area consisting of a green chair, a small coffee table, and a small gray couch. This is where we sit, she in the chair and I on the couch. A beautiful flower arrangement rests on the table next to her: whites and greens in a white textured vase. The rest of the office is sparsely furnished, consisting of a filing cabinet and another small table. However, the room is eclectically decorated. The walls have posters, one of Dizzy Gillespie and one of Louis Armstrong. Both were gifts, she tells me. There are also posters from the school's recent productions (*The Little Prince* and *Into the Woods*). She has an Easter Island tissue dispenser where the tissue comes out of the head's mouth. It is a strangely silly item for a woman I would never describe as silly. What appear to be science projects also hang on the walls, foam balls connected by rods. I think they are molecules and am convicted by how long it's been since I've taken a science class. There is a board with colored papers attached to it like large post-it notes in rows with writing on them. They appear to be naming the color of the post-it in various languages. I ask about it, and she says it's from someone else's class

that they were just storing here. This feels particularly fitting for a vice principal's office. Her office, like her job, is a place where people store odds and ends.

Laura appears confident and composed throughout. She didn't show any of the same awkwardness or discomfort about being recorded that Sharon had. She held the same poised but relaxed pose for almost the entire time, leaning back against the chair, legs crossed, arms engaged because she talks using her hands in small, controlled motions. It is a grounded posture. She cares about performance as engagement, connecting with the person in front of her. When she starts talking about her journey to where she is now, I am struck by her assurance. Not hubristic assurance. It emanates from someone who is engaged and reflective. She has thought about things, so she has things to say and viewpoints to hold.

I enjoyed my time with her. She is personable and polished, not necessarily outgoing, but not cold or distant. She has lots of thoughts about systems and pedagogy, and I sense immediately that she will have a different perspective from some of the other participants. Whereas many talked in a student-focused way, sharing stories of individual students, Laura speaks in a more structural, teacher-focused way. It is still student-serving, but students are viewed more as the beneficiaries of a model that she is setting up.

Exposition

Laura's values are heavily influenced by her upbringing and the path she followed as a college student and professional. Her perception of her own experience is

foundational to how she mediates college choice to individual students and in the systems she puts in place, and it colors her view of the value of a music education.

A Surprising Path Despite Proactivity

Laura starts her story with her family of origin. I learn that her family and the values they held are still foundational. “I will talk about my early childhood experiences because so much of that has shaped where I am now. I grew up in a family of artists. Performing artists, dancers, my mom's a dancer. And her family, all artists. And my father's a businessman. One of the foundations of my own upbringing was we had to, each of us had to take a year of ballet, a year of music, a year of visual arts. And most of us, I'm one of seven children, we all stuck with something in some fashion. And so, the majority of us went into arts as a profession. Those that did not go into an art as a profession maintained their hobbyist elements. And so, my family was very much into education and arts, always.”

Right from the start Laura hints at the importance of education and art as a pair, not to be separated, but made stronger together. It is greater than the sum of its parts. This is an important viewpoint that guides Laura's path to where she is now and how she mediates the college choice process to ASA students.

She grew up in the Valley (what folks from Phoenix call the greater metropolitan area) but was a little too old to start at ASA when it was founded. She followed the musical upbringing to an undergraduate degree at ASU in flute performance. When she talks about how she decided to apply to the schools she did, I am surprised by the lack of direction. Laura's drive and desire to chart her own path is apparent early on and

continues throughout her story, but her recollection of her own undergraduate choice sounds uncharacteristically without agency. “Like no guidance. It was just like, ‘What are you doing? Great. I’ll do that. What are you doing? Great. Oh, my teacher went there. I should try that.’” As with Sharon, this lack of guidance early on results in a desire to provide ASA students with support she did not receive at their age.

Her path to ASU was less direct than one might imagine. Initially, she did not get into the music school at ASU. Indeed, she didn’t get in anywhere she auditioned, starting instead at a community college nearby. With the help of the flute professor at ASU, Laura was able to combine classes at community college with classes at ASU, as a non-major, ultimately transferring enough credits to be on track when she did eventually start at ASU. I would not characterize Laura as someone who has a chip on her shoulder. She is too mature to be motivated by bitterness. There is, however, a similarity between that kind of motivation and the drive that she has. Already, the importance of a private music teacher is on display.

The Self-Starter

Cost was certainly a delimiting factor as Laura decided where to apply. “I didn’t look beyond what I could pay for, or even conceive of because it just wasn’t an option. And so, like thinking about bigger schools that might have a bigger price ticket, I didn’t even consider it.” The conversation surrounding cost brings out a character trait I will come to associate very closely with Laura. She was raised to be a self-starter. “See, in my family, it was like, ‘You want it, you gotta ask for it. We’re not doing anything for you.’” All six of her siblings paid for their own education, and she perceived this expectation

clearly from the beginning. “‘You gotta get a scholarship or you're paying for yourself. We'll cover the cost of your car insurance, but you gotta cover the rest.’ And so, but it was like, I didn't know any different because that's just how it was and being fourth in line in the family, it's like, you know, I didn't think anything different because that was the common place.”

As she talks about how her family made their own way, it is clearly a source of pride for Laura. “I got a half scholarship as an undergrad. It turned into a full scholarship by my senior year. I didn't grow up in a wealthy family, so everything was granted. So, I did end up having everything more or less covered. Um, the hard part was the instrument cost. And so, I ended up taking a loan out to buy my instrument, which, I don't know if you know the cost of flutes, but they're very expensive <she laughs somewhat ruefully>. I paid for my own [tuition], both my degrees. I paid for my own housing. I did everything, um, myself.”

We will see later that Laura's pride in making her own way creates an expectation that students, particularly musicians, must work hard if they want to make it. The experience and the resulting viewpoint impact how she mediates the college choice process. She expects self-sufficiency and creates systems to help them develop it.

Related to her self-starting personality, Laura is someone who forges her own path, unencumbered by the accepted norms of other musicians. She tells me about her practice routine even as an undergraduate. She knew exactly how much time she needed to be in the practice room and how much it would increase year over year. She was sensitive, even then, to the need to be a well-rounded musician, learning piccolo not just

flute, being proficient in Baroque music and modern music, not just the more classical or romantic styles. “Nobody created that formula for me. I just decided it myself.”

This trait appears again in her decision to move to New Mexico after graduating from ASU to pursue a freelance musician career. “When I graduated from my undergrad, I wanted to take time off. The local, like prominent flute players in town, they expressed to me their concern about me taking time off. You know, ‘but you're gonna, you're gonna stop practicing. You're gonna quit. You're gonna do these things.’ And I thought, well, why can't I decide my own path?”

In my experience, this move is very uncommon for a new undergraduate music degree earner. Typically, students either leave for graduate school or stay in the area of their undergraduate institution, leveraging networks and building a performance resume. Laura did not have family in New Mexico. She perceived it as a good market for young freelancers and then just up and moved. Her courage to chart her own course will surface in her development of curricular programs at ASA and, by extension, with students navigating college choice.

Four years later, the flute teacher at ASU changed, and she decided it was time to return to ASU for a master’s program. The image of Laura as a woman set apart, one who forges her own path, comes into starker relief as a non-traditional graduate student. Because it is most common for music students to move directly to graduate work after getting their undergraduate degree, Laura’s four-year gap, full of professional experience puts her in a different category. As she describes her experience, she sounds like an adult among children. “It was both a blessing and a curse to have those four years off. In the

freelance world, you know, you show up to a rehearsal as a professional, you'd better know your music, and you have one week between the first rehearsal and the performance. You get, you know, three rehearsals, if you're lucky and then you play your show. And then I show up for my graduate studies and it's like, we have a month of three rehearsals a week to do this. What?"

Her different approach was noticed by her classmates who thought she was spending too much time freelancing, investing her energies outside of the school. "I had the reputation that I was too career oriented." These criticisms do not seem to faze Laura. She spent her time in graduate school creating chamber music groups, performing not just the hits, but uncommon arrangements of non-classical music. She resists the traditional path, the formulaic approach to being a musician, and as we will see later, encourages her students to do the same.

Development

Because Laura is so connected to her past, the lines between her exposition section and development section are blurry. She brings those childhood lessons with her to ASA and continues to rely on them as her role evolves. Her time at ASA took the childhood lessons about the value of music and provided opportunities to apply them, particularly related to integrating music with academics. As this section delves more into her current role at ASA, it is important to remember that Laura curates the ecosystem in which music teachers mediate college choice and the student musicians themselves progress through the process. In some cases that takes a concrete shape, as with the Performing Arts College Prep program introduced below. More often, however, her

views and the values that influence them are important to answering this project's research questions because she trains the arts teachers and sets the culture of the arts program.

Coming to ASA

During her graduate school years, she began her career at ASA part-time as the flute teacher and teaching woodwinds classes. "One thing that really drew me here was it really spoke to how I was brought up in that it's all about how performing arts really helps grow your academic understanding and then how your academic understanding helps grow your performing arts experience. The marriage of the two was always just ingrained in my whole childhood."

This same draw still plays a major part in her identity at ASA. Her current ASA profile online reads, "As Arts Director and Vice Principal of Student Services, Laura focuses on ASA's culture, community, the unified standards rooted in the school's mission and core values, and the interdependence of academic and arts instruction" (ASA Faculty, n.d.).

She spent 13 years as a classroom teacher before transitioning to her current full-time administrative position. It was a natural transition, given her skill at organizing. "Um, I really like organizing. Probably to a detriment <laughs> but because I like it so much, when people struggle, I say, let me do it and I can take it on for you." As the Arts Director and Vice Principal of Student Services, Laura guides and manages the arts curriculum and evaluates all 30 arts teachers. She also has a fair amount of 'other duties as assigned' as befits a vice principal in a high school setting. "I'm really just kind of

filling in the blanks. ‘Do I need to help in this area? Do I need to help with testing?’” The odds and ends stored in her office lend visual support for this catch-all job description.

“I’m just collecting all this stuff because they don’t have a place to put it.”

She is a classically trained flutist, and I was struck at one point by how much she felt like a stereotypical flute player. Organized, maybe a little type A. This clearly serves her well in her current position, but it wouldn’t surprise me if people, those less open to change, had accused her of being controlling at some point in her past. I wonder if this is what is actually going on when she laughs about liking to organize things “maybe too much.”

As an administrator, she is able to bring her curiosity and 30,000-foot systems view to bear. Indeed, as we discuss how she interacts with students, she keeps pulling the conversation back to the mountain top, wanting to synthesize and discuss how it all fits together. ASA does not require teaching certificates for their arts teachers, and Laura views her role as helping arts teachers bring their creativity to the classroom while she provides the structural skill they might lack. “What I’ve had to do is really look at it, really talk with them from a practical standpoint. Emphasize what they already do and then teach them how to understand what that’s called. And so, I’m creating labels to the skills they already have instead of trying to teach them new skills.”

Laura shows herself to be curious and driven. If she sees a gap in her knowledge, or the knowledge of her teachers, she will just go out and learn about that so she can do what she wants to do, usually passing it along in a systemized way to her teachers. This is consistent with her college path in which everything relied on her proactivity, from

application processes, the choice of which college to attend, to figuring out how to pay for it.

Her natural curiosity and drive lend themselves to this task. She is constantly researching and pulling together ideas to pass on to her teachers. Throughout, she is grappling with the tension between creating a formula like the one she pushed back against in her education and providing space to cultivate student creativity. “What was important to me was how are we training young students to be the artist they want to be instead of creating a pre-prescribed concept. And yes, we have prescribed concepts because we're a school and an institution. We have to have ensembles and whatnot, but how do I train teachers to help guide the individual through these collective environments?”

A sensitivity to tension is apparent in her belief that the value of arts education can be translated to non-musicians and integrated into every discipline (“Everyone can learn what the magic is all about.”) and her wrestling with the reality that measuring these things is difficult (“How do you quantify assessment on skills that are really subjective?”). Consistent with Laura’s impulse to think on a systems level, she doesn’t see how this hidden value system, measuring the unmeasurable, applies to music students as they make their way through college choice. This topic surfaces more with the music teacher participants who are working with individual students more directly and helping them determine which schools they are good enough to get into. However, I feel it is the same thread, and it makes sense that it would manifest in both the teacher’s world and the student’s.

Performance Arts College Prep Program

After getting to know Laura, I am not surprised when she reveals that she was the creator of the Performing Arts College Prep program that Henry now runs. This is a concrete manifestation of how Laura's skill in creating support systems impacts how ASA mediates college choice to musicians. It emerges from a desire to integrate academics and arts. "We've always had programs that heavily supported our students going into high level academics. And they had expressed concern that we didn't have something like that for musicians." She leverages her insider knowledge, understanding that musicians who are preparing for college applications are dealing with unique requirements, like the sheer volume of time required to practice and prepare audition repertoire. Her description of the PACP program rests on providing time for students to prepare for the arts-specific elements of the college choice process while creating "anchor points" along the way to keep them on track and provide guidance. This is how she sees Henry's role. She still participates with Henry in selecting which students are accepted to the program, but even her participation has a pedagogical motivation. "He and I make the decisions as to who gets in together. Usually I defer to him, but this way they feel that there's an elevated element. And then I'll sit in on the juries, you know, I write notes ask them questions. You know, create that feeling of what is it like in, in a high stakes situation where you have to, you know, feel the pressure."

Despite her focus on integration, she does not work closely with Sharon in the counseling office. "I wouldn't say that up to this point, we've worked extensively together." She suggests that they've talked about it, but nothing has taken shape. Laura

expresses a view that academic students, or students who are going to major in non-arts disciplines, go to Sharon while music students go to their private teacher. While the connection with the private teacher is clearly paramount and will come up again in our conversation, the lack of connection between Laura and Sharon strikes me as odd. It reveals a perception of the norms and expectation of the counseling program at ASA: there is one track for academic students and another for music students.

A Structuralist with an Anchor

Laura is a thoughtful person. She doesn't just synthesize research to come up with a system that works at ASA, though she does do that. She also reflects on why she is where she is. What is the purpose? This shows in her ability to connect her decisions, her viewpoints, with her upbringing. It also appears in how she deals with the stress of the job. "Honestly, I have never loved watching children create more than I do now. I get such a rush observing classrooms, going to the concerts. If I need to, to decompress about something, I just go sit in a classroom and it's like, awesome. And when I was in, in grad school and I was contemplating, 'Do I wanna get a doctorate? What would I use a doctorate for?' I'd go teach college and, you know, sitting in studio class and being like, I don't know if I can handle this, watching children not be able to play the same old things week after week. But it's funny now my perspective is like, I go into these rooms, and it doesn't matter if it's, you know, the percussionist learning quarter notes and different sticking patterns. Watching their process is just so gratifying. Or watching a young string player go from only pizzicato to, to actually picking up the bow and pulling on the string and like, you know, watching their faces when those big milestones happen. It's so cool."

Laura lives in the control center, the command tower. She is overseeing and structuring and building and implementing. To come down from the clouds and sit in the presences of burgeoning creativity pulls her back to the reason for it all. She is actively reminding herself what it's all about. It reveals her perception of the inherent value of a music education that generates creativity.

Laura sits at the apex of the arts student structure. She concerns herself with the culture of the programs under her watch, asking herself how she can help students and teachers be successful, how she can help them cultivate creativity. She is the architect of the musician's ecosystem at ASA. Of all the participants, she is also the most aware of how her own path impacts how she mediates college choice to ASA students.

Recapitulation

Laura applies her childhood, her professional experiences, and her responsibilities at ASA to mediate college choice to music students. She operates as a switchboard operator, connecting students to other resources, and she shares her insider knowledge with students, helping them to ask the right questions. However, those same experiences sometimes lead her to give guidance that has a very neoliberal tone. These same inputs result in a nuance view of the value of music and a music degree. She returns time and again to the core of what attracted her to music in the first place: creativity, and she cultivates that in her students. She is also able to articulate many skills a musician learns during their education that transfer to other contexts.

Switchboard Operator

Laura's experience with direct mediation of college choice to music students happened mostly in her classroom years, reinforcing once again the crucial role private instructors play in guiding students. She recalls an example in which she used a recruitment poster from the University of Southern California to create a lesson plan. The poster shows many occupational options for students with a music degree (e.g., performance, teacher, sound engineering, arts administration, etc.). She would have the class pick a section of the poster, and they would dive deeply into it for a large part of the year. She wanted them to see the various options available to them, to explore what those options really meant, and to learn who to connect with, what questions to ask. Even in the classroom, Laura, the future administrator, is thinking about how to structure and integrate these conversations into her lessons. Her motivation is also a reaction to her own background. "When I was heavily counseling students in choosing their major, I think I really focused in, on what do you want to do? And then how can we help shape that path, really homing in on the idea that they don't have to do the formula."

In her current administrative role, Laura shows that connections are key. In mediating college choice to individual music students, those connections are relational in nature. "What I do is I put them in contact with somebody who can effectively guide them." She plays switchboard operator, leveraging her knowledge of ASA and the surrounding musical communities. "I was talking with a student a few weeks ago, who's interested in going into recording engineering. And so, we don't have any recording engineering people on campus here, but I do have some close friends in that industry in town. And so, then I create this almost mentorship, but then, you know, using whoever

their primary instructors are here, use them as much as possible, but then I set up that mentorship with, with this other person.”

Insider Knowledge

While Laura acknowledges the importance of the private instructor, her broader knowledge of the field allows her to branch out and provide more resources for students. Her musical background combined with her understanding of curricular structure shows a kind of insider knowledge that is reminiscent of Sharon’s comments about pre-college musical experience. “I find that in the academic areas, they have time in college to specialize. Whereas in the arts fields, they have to go in already specialized. And so, they build those relationships in college on the academic side, and then they find their path. Whereas in any of the arts fields, I want them to have that relationship before they go, and then their mentor here can help teach them how to have those conversations to really, you know, hit the ground running. Cause that happens on day one in college, as opposed to their junior year.”

This is a common theme when I speak with parents of music students in my professional role, and I am thrilled to hear that Laura is sensitive to it and can articulate it. Music students can’t just show up at university having had a good experience in a music class and wanting to learn more, as perhaps an English major or even a STEM major might. They must come to class on day one with a high level of musical understanding and facility. In this way, it has more in common with athletics than undergraduate academic disciplines. An athlete is unlikely to be successful at the college level if they’ve only played their sport for fun now and again. Successful college athletes

have been deeply investing in their craft for years before college. Laura includes this observation alongside a comment about how intense the music school application process is, noting the preparation it requires. Laura knows this because she has done it herself. She passes this knowledge on to students directly while also looking for ways to build it into the curriculum at ASA (e.g., the PACP). Her insider knowledge impacts how she mediates the college choice process to individual students and how she structures the college preparation ecosystem at ASA for these students.

If You Want It, You Have to Get It

Laura's view of how finances impact a student's choice of a college major differs from that of the other participants because of how she paid for school. She projects her own experience onto her students strongly on this topic. There are overt neoliberal influence present in her views. She agrees that college is expensive, too expensive, but she quickly reminds me that she paid for her own college, recalling her self-starter personality trait. She believes that anyone can figure out how to pay for college if they work hard enough. Her family's "if you want it, you have to get it" mentality shines through in her encouraging students to negotiate for better scholarship. "Now I'm advising people if they don't give you what you're asking for, tell them, 'I'd like to come.' If your private instructor or your main advisor can't do it, go to the ensemble director." She also suggests adding other majors to increase the student's scholarship opportunities, evoking a leave-no-stone-unturned mindset, and casting the student in competitive consumer role. While Laura's view on this sounds like a 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' story, she also wants her story to inspire her students. "There is always

somebody who can latch onto that because there is somebody who experiences the same story that I experienced.” In true Laura-the-structuralist form, she quickly transitions from individual student advice to pose the question “How do we create that discussion together so that we know that everybody could have the opportunity?” She mediates the college choice process to music majors by encouraging hard work and the negotiation of the costs. She presents this as the natural path, pointing to her own experience as proof that it works.

The Core

Laura clearly loves music and is glad to be in the profession. However, she characterizes her guidance of students as providing information not pushing. “I don't like to, you know, make people feel like they have to go into an art field. Cause it's, it's not an easy field as you know. And so, I don't candy-coat it at all and, you know, I talk about how it's like you're getting a law degree or you're getting a medical license, but you make a quarter of the money. But, you know, the gratification is there. And so, I would always say the first thing is like, you know, you need to go into arts if you can't live without it. There's gonna be more bad than good. And so, [you do it] because you can't live without it. That's what gets you through the bad, and I, you know, talk about what the bad is. Bad isn't like the worst thing ever, but it's like, it's you have the gigs that you hate. You have the gigs, you love, you have the, the gigs you love but you have a really bad day. And then you were like, you know, in tears because you don't know what just happened. But then you have those moments where it's complete euphoria, and there's nothing like it.

And that's, it's like you, if you have one of those a year, that's like, amazing. And then you're just, you know, that's what carries you through.”

I love this moment from Laura because it is one of the few times where the emotional passion, not the intellectual passion, presents itself. The struggle of the musician is real to her. She knows the lows and the highs and that the highs make it worth it. This is the emotional, or even spiritual, core. It glows and emanates love for music, but it is surrounded and insulated by a pragmatic shell. When the core is activated, as with a truly good performance, it is transcendent. But one cannot live on the mountain top, so pragmatism is needed to make it through the day to day. When I consider this view in the context of how Laura mediates college choice, it’s almost as if she is presenting the pragmatic, while guarding the emotional core. But there is a deep-seated hope that a similar core is present in the student, and they might just decide to pursue it. It’s as if she’s saying, ‘You probably don’t want to do this,’ but then when it’s clear they do and the cores connect, it changes to ‘Oh you do!? All right, let’s do it!’ The comment about money plays a role here too. It’s as if she’s saying, ‘Surely if you’re going to do this much work, you want to get paid!’ This acknowledges implicitly that music degrees don’t project wealth, so students might not want to pursue one, while at the same time believing a music degree is worth it for the right type of person.

Her Ultimate Goal

Laura returns time and again to the primacy of creativity for her students. She is reacting directly to her own education, in which the formula she was meant to follow felt opposed to creativity. Recalling once again own experience as a self-starter she says, “I’m

doing some of these things just because it's required in my degree program. How do I still nurture myself as a performer so that I'm growing beyond as opposed to just following what's prescribed?"

She dedicates much of her time and energy to cultivating a culture of creativity at ASA. It sounds like an up and down road with some faculty pushing back. "I think just even getting our teachers here, who also grew up in that same formula, getting them to push beyond, they were terrified at first." To Laura's credit, she has persevered and found new ways to change hearts and minds. Her changes are meant to help all students, not just those who pursue music in college or professionally. "In my mind, it's teaching students who don't go into arts how to incorporate arts into their daily life, keep their performing, because they have ownership over what it is. And there's a sense of pride. So therefore, they're gonna, they're gonna wanna play longer for longer years, whether it's professionally or not professionally, but then at the same time, those that do go into college or into any arts profession, they know how to do something creative. And that opens up their ability to be a much more versatile and eclectic performer. I've really been thinking about what does it mean to be a 21st century artist? Because it's not the same as the 20th century artist at all. A hundred to 200 years ago, everybody learned creativity. Everybody learned improvisation. Everybody learned composition, but we're...I use the term museum pieces. We teach kids to be museum curators as opposed to creators themselves."

She suggests the culture has changed enough that the search for creative community is a delimiting factor in college choice. "And how do we, in a K-12 system,

set students up for success in that [creativity] if the universities they go to aren't ready for that yet? At least they've had something in, in their high school life that gets them there or what we put in our day-to-day curriculum helps them search for the, the universities that already have that in the system. I think there will be a lot more offered in the coming years. But, um, you know, nationwide it's just not there yet. There's still a lot in the old frame.”

She suggests that ASA students will be so driven to be creative that they will notice that college music schools don't do well at teaching and nourishing creativity. While I hear some loud echoes of her own experience here, her subtextual criticism of music schools resonates with me. Many of the issues that caused Laura to be dissatisfied with college are still issues today. The formulaic approach, the insistence that students replicate the same musical careers as their teachers, the seemingly mindless dedication to a specific musical canon. These tendencies still thrive in many schools. The idea that she would train students who are ahead of the university faculty and curriculum in this regard is an exciting one.

Transferrable Skills

Laura pursues creativity and integration because she believes that music teaches transferable skills. The practical knowledge that not all of her students will go into music drives her to think about how more people can benefit from the lessons music teaches (“everybody can learn what the magic is all about”). In her role as the teachers' teacher, she is a few steps further down the path in the transferrable skills conversation. “I learned a lot of self-management skills as a musician. Probably the biggest thing that I've learned

as a musician is how to actually present. I do a lot of presentations, and I look at it as a performance. And so, I even go through my same mental preparation for, how am I going to perform? I give coachings to non-music faculty or non-performing arts faculty. I teach them how, as instructors, you have to learn how to engage your audience. It doesn't just happen magically. A performer is trained how to say, 'I want you to feel this way and hear these words and understand it in this fashion,' and here's how you do that. And so, um, so I use a lot of music, music techniques, and I will translate it over to non-music, so that musicians and non-musicians can gain the same benefits. I mean, there's nothing, there's no presentation preparation like being a performing artist."

Laura sees the value of music education but wants to spread the wealth and apply it more broadly. In line with her resistance to the formula she was taught, she extends this broad definition of success to student outcomes. She is inspired by the approach her theatre department takes to this. "I really love that they use the language: 'I'm not just teaching you to be a theatre artist. I'm teaching you to be a theatre patron,' and that holds equal value."

Her line of thought progresses naturally. Music teaches transferrable skills (e.g., presentation ability), and it lends itself to a broader definition of success (patrons, not just performers). Creativity is the lowest common denominator, one that can be applied in every walk of life. It makes the best professional musicians, and it benefits those who do not end up in the arts. That is the end goal for her students. "What I want from my students is to see that they are creators and that they find joy in art making, no matter what they do. And you can study and hone in on all of these skills and you're gonna go

and you're gonna do, and you're gonna experience, but you're gonna know, and you're gonna be able to have those conversations, gonna make your life richer because of it. You're gonna be able to understand empathy and expression in ways that you wouldn't know if you didn't have this. And also, I want people to know that it doesn't take an arts degree to be an artist. It might mean you can't get, you know, a million-dollar job but, um, that's <laugh> a gross exaggeration. You might not have a full-time job, but you can still love it and enjoy it and experience it.”

Laura provides a unique view of life at ASA. Instead of relying on student stories and anecdotes, she returns time and again to the structural and the programmatic. I am reminded that she is used to being a representative of ASA as an institution. Even when she talks about her classroom work, she talks about it structurally. She wanted to accomplish a goal, so she implemented a lesson plan. I am grateful for this viewpoint. She has a meaningful responsibility for the culture and ecosystem at ASA, particularly for the arts students. She has created the world in which the other participants and their students live. Despite her unique role, Laura’s surprising path to where she is now shaped the philosophy she brings to bear on ASA, both as a rejection of her experience and an embrace. In many ways, Laura encapsulates the Sonata Form structure. She even practically says so herself and connects it to why she is where she is now. “What I’m really interested in seeing is what you heard from my upbringing. How much of that is resonating in my words about how I use my role now. Because to me, you know, as we all go through our twenties, we wanna reject our parents, like to the Nth degree. And I went through that as much as anybody else did. But when I grew through my thirties and

forties, I started thinking, no, there's a lot of that that's really important in making sure that those seeds of connection, um, those roots, how that carries through, because that really matters a lot to me. That some of those initial concepts have remained. And to have a school that, actually I didn't create the mission. The mission was there, and it aligned with exactly with how I was brought up.”

For Laura, her family laid the foundation for the value of music. She pursued music, even though the path to her goal wasn't linear and didn't progress the way she thought it would. Along the way, she realized that the formula others were subscribing to, indeed, that she may have once subscribed to, was not the only way to do things. It wasn't what she wanted. She forged her own path, ever depending on the self-reliance her family expected of her. Her experiences refined her views on musical success and on the symbiotic relationship between the arts and music. She turned her thoughtfulness, courage, and discipline into a keen mind for systems. In her current position, she continues to learn and develop, all the while bringing her skills at creating systems to bear and reflecting her deeply held values. Her mediation of college choice to students and her communication of the value of music directly reflects her upbringing, her experience, and her learning. She pushes students toward creativity as the be all and end all because she has come to see that as the most important part of life. That family influence persists, however, and she consistently includes a healthy dose of bootstraps mentality. Now more than ever, students who want this life have to make it for themselves. If she could do it, so can they! It's expensive, and it doesn't pay that well, but it might just be worth it if they don't take no for an answer. Even if it doesn't end up

being the life they want, the creativity they learned, among other things, will apply to anything they want to do. It will make them better, one way or another.

Laura's main contribution to this study's research questions is one of ecosystem architecture. She represents the systems thinker that shapes the goals of ASA's arts program, creating the paths through which music majors pass. While some of Laura's views, particularly the ones that suggest a bootstraps mentality, do not resonate with me and need some nuance, I think ASA is lucky to have her. A culture that is formed with the love of the arts and a broad definition of success is a positive one. I leave our time together thinking that we in higher education could learn much from Laura's approach.

The Taskmaster – Henry

Henry's role at ASA is as the primary band director, but he also holds curricular responsibility for mediating college choice to performing arts students by virtue of his role running the Performing Arts College Prep program. Because of this dual role, Henry has a both a macro and micro view of the college-going culture of musicians at ASA.

It was another beautiful day on the morning I met Henry. Not too hot yet at this early hour, but extremely sunny. The Palo Verde trees with their iconic green trunks and branches are blooming bright yellow. The parking lot is empty except for a very nice dark green Audi sports car and a BMW SUV, offset somewhat by a large moving truck unloading supplies. The campus is quiet because it is 'Power Wednesday,' a monthly occurrence, I'm told, where teachers have professional development sessions and students have the day off. The scene is totally different what I saw the last few times I was on campus. No kids yelling and running through the yard. It is almost sleepy.

I email Henry to make sure I am in the right place, a little afraid we had miscommunicated, and he wasn't on campus. Thankfully, I see a man walking toward me from across the yard who calls out "Stephen?" and I know we are all set. Henry appears young. I feel we are contemporaries, but he looks younger than I am, or at least younger than I feel. He is over six feet, with an athletic build and a full head of hair and thick beard. He wears a button up shirt and stylish jeans and shoes. He greets me in fashionable sunglasses, an accessory worth donning for even a short walk in the bright Phoenix sun. He is friendly right off the bat, though I sense some discomfort. I consider this an appropriate feeling for someone meeting a new person and not being sure what to expect from the interaction. This discomfort continues when we reach the band room, a bit circuitously because construction blocks the doors that would lead there more directly. After we deal with the consent form, and I get through the preamble and into the questions, he starts to become more comfortable. I'm reminded how amazing it is that people eventually relax after talking about themselves for a while to a willing and interested listener. It's a topic on which almost everyone is an expert. The band room looks like a hundred other band rooms I've seen. It has colored sound dampening pads on the walls, probably three feet by six feet each, some orange and some a blue/green. There are stacks of chairs along the walls, and while I didn't notice in the moment, I am sure it also has stacks of music stands hiding somewhere. His desk is along the internal wall, almost an afterthought. This is clearly meant to be a rehearsal space, not an office. Parallel to where we sit is an external wall with windows along the top that admit daylight and a door through which I exit at the end of the interview. Outside in the hall I

can hear the construction workers who work on the door. It isn't overwhelming, just present. The drills and muffled talking are noticeable in the otherwise silent school.

Henry and I sit in worn but comfortable chairs with wheels. A gracious host, he gives me the "comfy" chair. As we begin the interview, his posture mirrors mine: legs crossed, leaning back in the chair. His relaxed posture masks the discomfort I initially felt from him. As the interview progresses, he continues to loosen up. He has a lot of body energy, which flows out of him in a frequent use of hands while he talks and an ever-more-frequent spinning back and forth in the chair. It is not distracting. It feels youthful, but not unprofessional. He seems like someone who would be a great band director: engaged and engaging, energetic and physically exuberant. His gaze constantly shifts from me up to his left, over my right shoulder. Sometimes this comes when he is formulating an answer to my questions. Other times it's where he directs his answers. I do this when I'm in a situation where I'm responding to new questions, and I project this reasoning on to him. It doesn't really read as a nervous tick, just a habit of speech.

Exposition

As with Sharon and Laura, Henry's background and college choice experience directly relate to how he mediates college choice and colors his perception of the value of a music degree. Henry followed a path that did not meet his expectations, taking surprising turns along the way. Music took hold of him in high school and never let go. Despite the lack of intentional guidance, he navigated the college choice process multiple times and was influenced by financial considerations and the private music teachers at each of his destination schools.

A Surprising Path and the Music Bug

Henry's experience in music is very familiar to me. Reviewing his interview transcriptions, I found I needed to be careful not to project my own experience on to him since his story sounds like my own. It is a non-linear, surprising journey when considered in retrospect. He grew up in a home with parents who were themselves musicians. His father was a life-long band director, which Henry credits as a reason he himself went that route. That example, plus a strong college expectation within his family, led him to consider a degree in music. While his parents appreciated his musical ability and believed he would be successful, he recalls that they encouraged him to do something other than music. "They told me my entire life that I should do something other than music, because 'you're gonna be poor for your entire life.' That's what they, that's what they told me. And I kind of considered that, you know, I thought about like architecture, like I thought about a couple different things, but I just ultimately kept coming back to that. And then I was like, 'and *you* did it, so like, you know, how bad could it be? You know? Like I've lived a comfortable life,' ... they were gonna support me no matter what I did, but they kept telling me like, 'you're too smart. Like do something else,' you know?"

There seems to be a contradiction at play here. One that was passed down to Henry from his parents, and that surfaces now and again in our conversations. On one hand music is worth creating a life around. And yet, there is a sense that, if one can do anything else ("You're too smart! Do something else!"), they should go that route instead. This view of pursuing music will appear again in his guidance of students. In our conversation, he reflects that this parental protection wasn't really meant to dissuade him

from studying music. It sounds to me as if his parents did well not burdening him with their own financial worries. He feels he had a comfortable upbringing and sees no reason why the choice to pursue music as they did would be a problem. He was sure that they believed he could be successful after school. “They knew I’d put in the work and find something.” I come away feeling that his parents are actually proud that he chose to be a musician, despite their advice to the contrary.

While Henry’s parents’ example directed him toward a music career more generally, he formed a more specific decision to major in music in high school. “I was doing sports all the time. Like you know, I played baseball, basketball, football, every year I did golf. I did like racquetball. That’s mostly what I did when I was a kid. But it, music had always been a, like secondary to that. Um, and then I’d say school was like third to that. <laughs>”

The music bug eventually got him when he started to notice how a musical environment made him feel. “I don’t even really like the sports environment that much. Partially, because when I, I think I went to high school, I wanted to do football and I wanted to do band and like, you can’t really do both. And I tried. They were like, ‘we can make it work,’ I guess. But the football coaches were like, ‘You’re missing one practice a week for band, so why would we play you?’ And then I was like, ‘because I work my butt off.’ You know, like, and, but then the band guys were like, ‘eh, it’s okay. You know, you miss one rehearsal a week. Like just, you know, we’ll take you when you’re here, you know?’ And, and it was also just a nicer environment, you know, it was a lot more accepting of everyone all the time, you know? I think it’s one of the big things that kind

of started pushing me in that direction a little bit more. They, they were also just like, I don't know, yeah, they definitely were my people. Um, a lot more genuine fun people to be around.”

The music bug led him to pursue music in college, but he almost immediately diverted from the initial plan. He decided to attend Morehead State University, as his parents had done before him, and major in music education. However, he quickly switched to a degree in music performance after being unimpressed with the music education coursework. “The general education classes were terrible. I hated them. They were just like, the teacher was really bad. That was, you know, it was like very non-engaging.” That, plus teaching experience with middle schoolers, turned him off to education for a long time. He decided to move on to a master’s in performance at the University of Akron, and then, being unsure what to do next, he stayed on for a second master’s in theory and composition. Finally, he got a Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) degree in performance from ASU.

Henry received very little guidance in his college choice decisions, saying about one over-worked college counselor “I think I got 10 minutes with him.” This lack of guidance will be one of the influencing factors in Henry’s mediation of college choice to his students. He wants them to have what he didn’t have. While many nuanced influences affected his journey through multiple college choice decisions, two factors rose to the surface as we spoke. Despite his lack of guidance and calling himself naïve about finances, cost was a top-level consideration. He went to Morehead because he got in-state tuition and his parents were alumni, making it the cheapest option on the table. When he

moved on to graduate work, he immediately dismissed more expensive options and focused on two schools that gave him teaching assistantship positions to cover his tuition. For his doctorate, he declined what he considered the more prestigious school in favor of the one that was less expensive.

Combined with finances, however, was the second factor: the bassoon teacher at that school. As a high school student, Henry had participated in an honor band that was hosted at Morehead, and he had a very positive reaction to the bassoon professor. When he was deciding between the two master's programs that offered him full-tuition assistantships, it came down to who the teachers were at those institutions. Henry was not impressed by the professor at Kent. "He wasn't that great in his prime, and now I don't even know if he can play the bassoon anymore, you know? They kind of kissed my ass the entire time I was there..." meanwhile, the University of Akron professor blew him away. "I played a solo for her and she had the entire thing memorized in her head. So, I was playing it for her, and she was like, 'whoa, wait that note there, that D,' so she didn't have music in front of her. She was just like, just throwing it down. And I was like, 'Wow. That's really impressive.'"

Akron was actually the more expensive of the two schools, but the teacher influence won the day. It was not the last time teacher considerations would impact his college decisions. When he decided to go to Arizona State University for his doctorate, he did so in part because he "really vibed with Dr. Albie."

As we will see, Henry's own experience with college financial considerations and the important of private music instructors reappears and influences how he mediates college choice to his students at ASA.

Development

The Musician's Life

While a doctoral student at ASU, Henry assumed that his next move would be to a job somewhere as a college professor. But his path led in a different direction. By the time he had graduated, he had roots in the Phoenix area, gigs that were consistent and paid the rent. He had found various teaching jobs to supplement his performing. "So, I had like three part-time jobs and then I was gigging, and I was doing all that stuff." This full and fulfilling life did take its toll, however. Two of his main teaching engagements were all the way across metro Phoenix. "It's a huge drive, and I was doing it every day, like six in the morning to GCC, like up until noon. It was like, yeah...terrible. And then all the gigs and then all the other things" One of his teaching gigs included being part time at ASA, a job that fairly quickly became full time, which allowed him to drop his in-person responsibilities at GCC. "I'm always working to focus and concentrate my life," he says. This describes what I've come to see as the life of a musician, starting with many income streams within music and slowly paring them down. This experience of working multiple jobs and scrambling across metro Phoenix forms Henry's view of the outcomes related to studying music. It is the reality he advises his students to expect upon graduation from college music study, which in turn affects how he mediates the college choice process to prospective music majors.

When I asked Henry why he does what he does, considering it wasn't exactly where he planned to be when he started and factoring in his parents' directing him away from music, the multiple jobs, and the grind, I hear high school Henry speak. The musical bug awakened in the early years still thrives. "I think it's just because it's, you know, these are my people, this is what I love to do. You know? I could not see myself working a job for money that I, or spending, you know, eight hours in my day doing something I don't care about. That... that boggles my mind. I have friends that do that. And I'm like, how could you possibly spend that much time of your life doing that? You know, I do music because I think it like, it adds to the world and I teach children and high schoolers and college students, because that adds to the world. I want to push us forward in some way. That's, I think it's like the real motivating factor."

Henry is able to hold multiple truths at once, in tension with one another. The life of a musician is difficult, and the outcomes are not clear from the outset, but ultimately, it is worth it, and he can't imagine doing something else. This tension is present, both in articulated and subtextual ways, in how he mediates college choice to ASA students who are considering continuing in music at the college level.

Performing Arts College Prep Program

Besides being the band director, Henry bears a unique curricular responsibility to mediate college choice to performing arts students at ASA. He is in charge of the Performing Arts College Prep (PACP) program that is designed to help performing arts students apply to college and to provide guidance along the way. The program was created by Laura to provide these students extra time and support to prepare for their

unique college application processes. Henry's demeanor suggests that it's common knowledge that performing arts students have special college application requirements, but the PACP program acknowledges those special needs by making it a curricular offering. "You're doing this because you need a little bit of extra time in the day to prepare for auditions and all of the extra stuff that performers have to do to get into college. That's what the program is for."

This assertion rings true to me. It is often a surprise to non-musical parents that their child is required to take so many extra steps to apply for a music major. To acknowledge that difference and intentionally create a support system in high school is a fairly unique and laudable initiative.

Henry explains that participation in the PACP requires an application form, teacher recommendations, and a detailed plan for how the student will use the time the program provides, showing how it will further their goals. It is fairly extensive and meant to reflect the college applications they will be preparing soon. Finally, the students sit for an interview with Henry and Laura. To participate, the student must also have reached a high enough level of math and foreign language to make room in their schedules for the PACP program. Once the students are in the program, it functions like a semi-structured independent study. They are expected to be very self-driven, Henry tells me, but there are some structured supports like planned mock auditions and interviews, organizational tools like spreadsheet templates to help keep track of the various requirements of the schools each student is interested in, and opportunities to sit down with Henry to get one-on-one guidance. "The whole point is that they [understand] 'this is your time, and you

have to use it wisely and you're gonna just check in with me on occasion...I'm just like a resource for you when you need it.”

Henry took over the PACP program in the middle of 2021, and the combination of a mid-year start and the disruption caused by the pandemic made it hard. From his background, I sense that Henry wants to be challenged and make things better. Back when he chose to attend Akron instead of Kent, he did so in part because he expected to be challenged more and to have a role in shaping the budding bassoon studio. He has that same impulse here to build on the work being done in the PACP, but external factors have kept him from being able to bring his full energy to it.

Ensemble Director

Henry is a distinct archetype among my participants. Along with being the PACP coordinator, he is the band director, which represents a totally different relationship with the students. “So, I'm like, you know, I'm the task master, you know, we've got 40 people in this room and I'm gonna make it happen and it's gonna happen exactly on these minutes. And then we're gonna do that, you know? It's a little bit less personable...I think it's just like the nature of that position.”

He has the sense that students have other settings that make personal conversations, like discussing college plans, more natural. “They have their techniques classes. And those are much smaller classes that are more informal, a little bit more personal. So, I think they, they always go to that teacher first anyway.”

This is certainly supported by my conversations with Kris, who teaches lessons and coaches smaller ensembles and mediate college choice more directly on an individual

student level. It is also supported by Henry's own experience as a private instructor outside of ASA, "Every private student that I have and like chamber musicians that I work with, when I'm in those informal settings, I do get a lot of feedback and there's a lot of, you know, talking about it [college choice]."

I found this to be a helpful window into the musician ecosystem and it does make sense. As a private instructor outside of ASA and PACP coordinator inside ASA, he can compare the types of college choice conversations he has in those roles with the few he has as band director. He is surprised by the difference, but he sees that private lessons or technique classes are smaller, more informal, better for forging the deeper relationships conducive to mediating college choice to students. This insight served as helpful context in our second interview where we delved more deeply into how Henry mediates college choice and his perception of the value of a music degree.

My second interview with Henry took place in the main office right around 8am. We headed back into a small conference room in that building. This is the same building in which I met Laura, but a different room. This room has a small, oval table with six comfortable wheely chairs. It is lit with florescent lights, but they are a warm yellow, not white or cold. We sit on opposite sides of the table; he is facing the door while I have my back to it. We don't sit directly across from each other, which felt like the socially sensitive thing to do; the equivalent of not sitting directly beside someone at a movie theater. We're here together but giving each other some personal space. There is a giant air conditioning vent in the middle of the ceiling that comes on a few times during the interview. It is absurdly large for the size of the room, but neither of us notice it until it

comes on. It is so loud that it pulls our attention from the conversation, and Henry instinctively leans closer to the recording device. I comment about how very Arizona this is, to pump a small room full of cold air. Even by Arizona standards, however, this is a comically large vent, and it occurs to me that this room is probably an addition, or a part of a larger room that has been walled off for a conference room.

It is nice to have already established rapport with Henry. The first interview was so important on this front. It allowed us to greet each other in a very friendly manner, to engage in some small talk as we walked back to the room, but then to jump right into the interview questions. He seems comfortable and becomes more so as the interview progresses, his hand motions becoming bigger as we go, especially as we touch on topics he is passionate about. He slides his hands over the top of the table when he talks, gestures that go along with his talking, not fidgeting. The motion makes a sliding, friction sound, and I wonder in the moment if it is going to come through on the recording. I am reminded that this a band director, accustomed to communicating emotion through hand movements. Asking him to communicate without his hands would be like asking a painter to paint without her brush.

Recapitulation

As we begin to talk more directly about how Henry mediates college choice, we start with Henry's perception of the college-going culture at ASA, setting the stage for the work he does with students. Running the PACP program means he fits into the college-going apparatus and being the band director means he sees a large chunk of the population. His experience in these roles leads him to believe that the college-going

culture is strong. He echoes Sharon and Laura in his assertion that ASA provides a “pretty balanced education,” one that allows for a good understanding of the various fields of study and setting students up for success in college choice. While he doesn’t work directly with Sharon, something he would like to improve, he tells me that ASA has a “fairly high college admittance rate” and that, while they are not all majoring in music, when he talks with band kids “almost all of them are heading towards college.” While he points out that he is more aware of the music students, he observes that most students, especially the seniors, are talking about college a lot, suggesting the culture is somewhat pervasive. This general acceptance of college as the goal shows also in Henry’s colleagues’ willingness to regularly give him some of their class time to promote the PACP program. I notice as we speak that Henry’s view of ASA’s college-going culture is fairly anecdotal, despite his curricular involvement with the performing arts students. They don’t seem to have structured faculty conversations about it: It’s just present.

Henry is aware that he is only seeing a part of the picture with his music students. He senses the influences present in a student’s decision to major in music and go to a particular school, but he picks it up in snippets. “When I start talking about like, ‘Okay, which decision are you making?’ they usually say like, you know, ‘I talked about this with my parents.’ They’re pretty open about that. ‘I talked about this with this person. I talked about this with this,’ but usually I’m probing a little bit, like what kind of things have you been thinking about what kind of conversations, you know, but they, yeah, they usually just tell me like, yeah, definitely parents. They talk to the parents about that a lot. Um, and then usually private instructors. It’s kind a little bit different with all of them. It’s

really up to their communication level, you know, with all of them. I can email 'em as many times as I want, like whether they email me back or like, whether we start having that conversation at some point... They're as open as they want to be."

Even with a more structural role, Henry's awareness is subject to the student's disclosure. The pieces of the puzzle he does see reveal influence from private instructors and parents. The college-going culture at ASA also means the students are influencing each other. "Even like early on, they're kind of like, you know, you have the like posturing of younger students to try to like fit in with the older students and stuff like that, and they clearly don't know what they're talking about, but they're trying to like get that in. But a lot of the time that conversation is something about college or like, you know, 'I really wanna go here. I really wanna do that.'"

The college choice influences Henry observes are familiar from Henry's own story. Private teachers are key, parents play a large role, and the cultural bent of the community surrounds and shapes the students. Henry observes that most of these students have been taking private lessons for a long time, that they play in music ensembles outside of the ones provided at ASA. These experiences shape their view of what music is or can be. "I think it's really, it's a cultural thing, they're in their cultural bubble." Most of these students have known that they love music for a long time. It is not a junior or senior year discovery but rather the result of years of individual and communal exposure. This observation harkens back to Sharon's and Laura's views on the types of experience musicians have had, and need to have had, before getting to college.

Mediating with Insider Knowledge and a Vague Value System

Henry reflects on his own lack of guidance as a high school student and wants his students to have a better experience. “So, I always try to make sure that’s like, you know, ‘you need to know this.’” But even as he guides, he perceives his role as one of revealing, not pushing. His job is revelation; he is an agent of transparency, an information conduit. “I basically just act as a sounding board. So, it’s when they’re making those kinds of decisions, I make sure that they’re asking the right questions and that they think about the right things, but, you know, I always try to be like, ‘that’s a difficult decision, you know?’ And like, ‘let’s talk through all these different things’ Uh, but I, I try not to influence which direction they’re moving in at all.”

Henry’s implicit insider knowledge is on display here. He focuses on not pushing the students, but he thinks there are right and wrong questions to ask during the process. This is something he knows that they don’t and that is specific to music applications. As we chat, I see that much of his determination of which questions are the right ones is based on his own life. “I’ve always just kind of assumed that it’s kind of like I did.”

This insider knowledge also manifests in an undefined set of values that surfaces in his guidance of students. “This year with the interview process, um, all of them had very realistic expectations and really wanted to work through it. I was expecting to see a few more of those just kind of like ‘I’m gonna apply to Juilliard and I’m gonna get in,’ you know? <laughs> One of the first things we’re gonna do is like, you need to have real, very real conversations with your private instructors and talk about like, you know, what is reasonable for you to do? You can have a stretch school, but make sure that most of colleges you applied to are things that are like, you think you can get into.”

Henry acknowledges that some schools are beyond the ability of some students, and points students to their private teacher to help determine what schools are within reach. At first blush, this seems like a fairly standard college choice guidance procedure. However, musical ability is not algorithmic, which makes this type of guidance murkier. While conversations about the objectivity of GPAs and standardized test scores are needed, those metrics provide some guidance for a prospective student. College counselors can point to average scores for each college to help their students target their applications realistically. There is no such thing for music. These “stretch” schools that Henry references are determined by the personal perception of the music teacher based on their sense of what musical quality a certain school represents and how their student’s ability fits with it. Henry speaks as though this is common knowledge, and it is, but only to those who share his insider status.

Projecting His Experience through a Neoliberal Lens

Henry’s views on the value of a music degree and the way he mediates college choice to prospective music majors are intertwined and both are impacted by his own background. He sees students’ view on the purpose of college shifting to being more financially minded, encouraged by parents who have accrued their own college debt. He adjusts his college guidance to be job-focused as a result. However, his job advice also encourages neoliberal tendencies like overwork and self-sufficiency. He criticizes institutions of higher education for being too focused on revenue generation at the expense of cultivating creativity and supporting students. Discussion of cost and value manifests differently throughout our conversation. Henry’s views of the job market, the

cost of school, and the value of music have developed over decades, and I sense they are not fully realized even now.

He perceives the students' view of the purpose of college and of the process of applying as being more developed than his was as a high schooler. "It definitely seems healthier and more thought out than my generation of college goers. Which we all know just because that was like the national trend at the time. Right? They definitely think of it more as a financial decision. They think of it more as a steppingstone overall. I think they also just, like, I don't know, they just consider a lot more things than I remember doing when I was younger, you know, but I think it's because like, you know, their parents are my age or 10 years older, and we all went through that, so it's like, we've been prepping them <laugh>, you know?"

He sees his students as being less naïve than he was when it comes to costs, but he sees variation. For some, it has much to do with the parents. "There are some parents that I know of that instill 'this is a financial decision,' and make that their kind of top priority." Others "definitely don't have that full understanding, maybe it hasn't been imparted to them." This brings Henry back to being a source of information. "So I always try to make sure that like, you know, 'you need to know this.'" Henry is sensitive to the generational impact on college guidance. In his generation and socioeconomic class—and that of his students' parents-- college-going was not questioned. It was uncritically assumed you would go to college. But that generation is now parents with student debt who wonder if they made the right choice. That experience affects how they prepare their children. This insight also affects how Henry mediates college choice. He is aware of the

shift in the purpose of college and, when combined with his own experience, he encourages students to think more about the jobs that will be available after graduation and the life those jobs represent.

Henry guides students with pragmatism. It is very important to him to make sure students engage in the process with their eyes open to the reality of the musician life, as he sees it. “I want to give them realistic expectations for like, what's actually out there ... Typically you're gonna come out and you're gonna have a few different jobs that you're working at the same time. And you're gonna start with a lot of things on your plate and you're gonna figure out which things you really like to do, which things you don't like to do. And you're gonna hopefully continue to build the things that you really like and start to narrow out the things that you don't like. I think that sounds a little overwhelming sometimes, you know, and it *is* overwhelming sometimes, but trying to also emphasize, like there are benefits to that and there are definitely things that are not great about that too, you know?”

This is essentially his life from the beginning of the development section that he is describing as the reality. He started with many smaller jobs and narrowed them down until he had a more manageable life, with more of the positive elements. I can't help feeling the subtext of his personal experience beneath the industry wisdom he describes. “If you're in theater, you're not gonna get into all the plays that you wanted to, you're not gonna be doing it on Broadway. Like you're gonna be looking for every opportunity you can find... you're gonna have a patchwork of stuff until you find that thing that works out for you and it might last for 10 years, and that's okay. You're gonna be doing a lot of cool

things. But you're gonna be, you're gonna be doing *a lot* of cool things. I try not to make it sound grim because it, it's not, it's not grim, you know, it's like, there are some great things about that. You have a lot of flexibility. One job goes away, you're not screwed. You've got all this other stuff going on too. Um, but you know, be prepared for that for a while. Something of a patchwork of jobs.”

There is an undercurrent of a pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps mentality in how Henry sees the music industry which surfaces in his advising. “Like this is gonna be difficult. This is not a shoo-in, in the way that maybe it's felt like in high school, like getting out of college, you're gonna have to hustle.” He preaches a diversification of abilities to find a place in the job market, although with a healthy framing of curiosity. “Be interested in as many things as you can, be open to really learning music theory, be open to like really working on history. Um, cuz some people do not do that.”

It is abundantly clear that Henry’s own experience in college colors his mediation of college choice. Tension, even contradiction, is apparent as we talk. He values music and the benefit it brings to society. He also acknowledges that the life can be difficult. Consistent with Henry’s own experience and the tension that exists between the financial value of a life in music and other, less quantitative, benefits. He shares a student anecdote that illustrates this tension. “Well, recently I, I had a student where clarinet performance is like what his main thing is, but he also wants to do engineering in some way. He got into Yale, the San Francisco Conservatory and Oberlin, and then I think also ASU and somewhere else. Uh, but he, those were his big three. Um, and, and so he was, you know, he’s at the same time that he's juggling, like these three really big schools, he's also

juggling, like, 'Okay, what, um, what specifically do I want to do? Like, I can always play clarinet, but I can make a lot more money as an engineer, but I really like clarinet and I want to do that, and I like this musical world, you know? And so, if I'm not gonna be great at either if I am doing both at the same time... Should I do this music performance degree, or should I go into engineering and get a job that's gonna pay a lot of money?'"

He sees this tension in the student, and later, reveals it in himself. "When it comes to that, like student with engineering or that it's like, you know, it's great to have a lot of money, but it's like, you know, once again that doesn't buy you happiness, if you're totally unfulfilled in your job, that's gonna be a very different story as well."

Henry is mediating college choice to these students with a fair amount of nuance. On one hand, he wants them to make pragmatic, outcomes-based choices, usually based on whether they can get a job and make a living. On the other, he doesn't want them to go too far in the money-focused direction.

Henry's job market advice quickly turns to criticism of the higher education industrial complex. College was a positive experience for him, but he has plenty of criticism that affects the way he engages with students. Henry's exuberance ratchets up to a new level when he speaks on this. Generally, university costs just way too much money for a student to make it viable as like a route. Um, you know, for a long time, I actually had a lot of reservations about even sending students that direction [to college]. Since then, I've taken a more utilitarian view of it. Like it has to be something that will actually work for you and something that you can build a life out of. And it's, you know, there are

instances in which that is the case, in which case, you know... I loved going to university. I wish I didn't spend as much money... I find it prohibitively expensive in a lot of cases. And often I'd say more often than not the jobs that they're actually like, trying to train you to do are just not there on the other end.”

I ask him if he is referring to college broadly or if he thinks it’s specifically a music thing. He responds. “That is a music thing. Uh, cuz you know, like if you're going into nursing or you're going into engineering, they're gonna find a job for you... Like I saw ASU just trying to pump as many [musicians] out as possible, making their degrees easier to achieve and then just like getting as many people in there as possible and then boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. Here's a bunch of band directors for schools that don't have a band program, you know? And you're like, well, what's the point of this?”

Henry’s frustration with the way music schools are run does not end with the curriculum or the jobs for which they are preparing students. He sees the same market-based cynicism in what universities expect of music faculty. “The process for getting hired and like, say like being bassoon professor or something like that, is not about creativity. It's not about a lot of things, but what it definitely *is* about is being able to recruit students to school and that's like the, that's the goal. I don't wanna recruit people to this school in a way that is irresponsible. Like, I want to know that this school is, you know, making sure that they're helping students get a job after and that there are jobs available for the things that we're teaching.”

Henry is a thoughtful person. His feelings on this have developed from a combination of personal experience, his students’ experience, and astute observation of

the field. During this stretch, I feel him climbing on to a soapbox of sorts, as if this is the sort of conversation he likes to get into with friends at a bar after work. The hand motions increase in frequency and energy. This clearly rankles him. Within this passionate frustration is an acknowledgment of a popular narrative: some majors have obvious outcomes, and schools help you reach those outcomes. Music is not one of those majors. Henry presents this fairly value-free here. It is not a criticism of music. It is a criticism of the universities' priorities and how they affect the support given to music students.

Considering the costs and his criticism of music schools, I ask Henry why a student would decide to major in music. He describes a student with a familiar sounding musical bug. "A lot of them just, you know, 'this is what I want to do with my life.' You know? That's what I mean, that's what the answer always is, 'I love arts. I love what they do in our community. That's what I've always wanted to do.' Some of them are a little bit more like, 'I've always wanted to be the principal trombone in the Chicago symphony,' you know, and you're like, that's wonderful. Some of them are just very creative and thoughtful. Like, 'I want to give back to the community in the same way it gave to me and, you know, I think arts is great for the world and I want to continue that.' And, you know, most of them have significant arts training and they've been doing it their entire life."

Transferrable Skills

Despite Henry's frustration with colleges' neoliberal focus on recruiting and on generating tuition revenue and his insistence on making sure students understand how difficult a musician's life can be, he is also someone who says. "Every revolution, every,

you know, cultural uprising, every grassroots movement has art at the center of it, has music at the center of it. If you look at, you know, the velvet revolution, you know, or something like that, you know, the center of that is a song that everybody remembers, even though it was banned by the government or something, you know, it like that's, um, that's something that's worth having. That's something that's worth pursuing because, whatever's happening at large in the world, whatever things are going on, there will be art and culture and music and all of that ingrained in it. It's gonna be there. So, it's worth doing. Whatever you do, art can be a part of that. Music can be a part of that. It can be a creative, wonderful part of that.”

What I get from Henry is not as simple as a contradiction. It is complexity, nuance, humanity. He holds the good – music making, flexibility – with the bad – it’s hard and it doesn’t pay well.

This complexity is consistent throughout our conversations. Henry sees the value of a music degree and of music in general and he likes his job and where life has taken him, but he also spends a lot of time talking about the cost of school and the grim options for a student when he graduates. Even when reflecting on his own college experiences, he says they were good, but he regrets the cost. However, he typically lays this cost at the feet of the colleges, not the students. He sees them generating tuition dollars and churning out students regardless of the job market’s need for them. He has this frustration with the cost of college and the difficult life of a musician, which he holds in tandem with a clear belief in the value of music and the unique drive and passion that music students have.

At one point in our conversation, I tell him I get the sense he is happy where he ended up, that he wouldn't necessarily go back and take a different path. When I ask him if that is accurate, he responds, "That's fairly accurate." He tells me he isn't someone who likes to talk about how happy he is, that he is satisfied but that every job has things that suck. This mundane complexity encapsulates so much of Henry. Is he a pragmatist who wants to be an idealist or the other way around?

His Ultimate Goal

We end our time together talking about what Henry wants for his students after they leave ASA. In what I've come to see as very "Henry," he combines pragmatism and idealism. He starts with the immediate, short-term outcomes. "I think that I, what I want for them is to have confidence that their next few steps are clear for them. And they know where they're going, and they know what they need to do when they get there. Um, but then I want them to be open enough at that point to figure out what's going on in the next 10 years, you know, and to be like flexible and understand, listen to themselves, listen to what's going on around them and be ready for what comes, you know?"

Then he moves quickly into his view of the purpose of life. "The ultimate goal of this is not music and it's not college or anything like that. It's, it's ultimately to be like a happy person, you know, like a fulfilled, exciting, good person, right? That's your, that's the ultimate goal of all of this. So don't lose that in the, in the like rush to try to make something else happen. You know?"

Henry's life and the way he mediates college choice to students was not and is not linear; things don't go exactly as planned. Ultimately, though, Henry has decided this life

works for him and is worth pursuing. “It’s interesting. It’s not what I thought. I always had this kind of probably a very pretentious edge of, I need to be a university professor because that’s like, you know...and it took a long time for me to shed that. And then once I did, I was like, this is awesome. This is a great job!”

Henry represents a type of teacher that is ubiquitous at most high schools, certainly arts high schools. Every one of these schools has a band director and given the large number of musicians with whom this role interacts, Henry’s contributions are critical to understanding the ecosystem surrounding musicians as they are guided in college choice at ASA. His responsibility for the PACP program is an interesting curricular wrinkle, further solidifying Henry as a needed participant in this study. Henry’s own experience as a college-educated musician, particularly the role of finances and the importance of the private instructor, reappear in his views on guiding students toward music study. He encourages students to go through the process with their eyes wide open, uses his insider knowledge to help students to ask the right questions, and uses subjective ability measures to help them delimit their school lists. He was bitten by the music bug, found his people, followed a non-linear path, and lived the decrescendo of the musician’s life. He sees and can clearly articulate the highs and lows of a life in music, but his views on the changing world of higher education color his view on the value of a music degree. The result is a complicated worldview that impacts how he mediates college choice to students.

The Sage – Kris

I expected my time with Kris to present unique potential. She is the only true instrument-specific teacher I interviewed; a role I expected to be foundational in the college choice ecosystem at ASA. As percussion instructor, she works directly with students in small groups and individually on percussion technique. She has instrument-specific knowledge that is critical for percussion students heading toward music school. My expectation that our time together would be generative was not disappointed, and Kris's exuberance and love of life added an unexpected dose of fun to the proceedings.

I got to ASA a few minutes before our scheduled time and sat in an empty main office, its AC proving to be a major benefit after my walk in the hot Phoenix sun. The teachers were still in their day-long professional development sessions that had started earlier that morning when I met with Henry. After ten minutes or so, teachers started spilling into the yard, heading toward their cars. Kris came into the office to get me. I was the only person there, which made it easier for us to identify each other despite our having never met. She was wearing a mask, but as I looked for mine, she assured me it wasn't necessary. She tells me she wears hers mostly to protect her immunocompromised parents. She adds, hinting at the humor that would be part of our time together, that she wears it so people can't tell what she's thinking.

As we make our way to Kris's classroom, we walk upstream of the throng of teachers heading for their cars with a combination of glassy-eyed fatigue and relief to finally be out in the sunlight and warmth. Kris's room is right across the hall from the band room where I had met Henry earlier that day. She shares her office with the Spanish teacher, who I later realized is the dad of a Lamont alum. The music world is small

indeed! The way she talks about him represents what I come to see as her general outlook on life. She describes him as one of the most stoic people she's ever met, but she seems to respect him and even to enjoy sharing a space with him. She shares a story in which she apparently had been setting up the room's tables wrong and he simply put tape on the floor to show her where they needed to be. I thought that sounded pretty passive aggressive, but she has a good attitude about it. This personality trait persists through our interview. She is quick to give the people around her the benefit of the doubt, seeing strengths in them even while acknowledging their idiosyncrasies.

The room is large and square with two rectangular tables pushed together to form a large square table in the middle. Her desk is in the back corner. A shelf with a hodgepodge of items on it that includes pinatas hints at the room-sharing situation. There are also stacks of chairs on a rack along the wall. The room has a big garage door that opens out onto the lunch area and playground. Like a new student on a college campus or a new employee in an office, I am slowly piecing together the layout of ASA, and I realize that I sat in front of the garage door yesterday when participating in a career fair for the students. The same workers who were fixing the door this morning when I met with Henry are still hard at work. This time, I am closer to them and the sounds.

Kris is an energetic and friendly woman. We quickly realize that we grew up in the same westside town, and we bond over that area of Phoenix: the unique restaurants, the chip on our shoulder about being from the 'poor' side of town, and even that we know some of the same people. It is a meaningful connection, and we make plans to visit some of the haunts together the next time I'm in town. She is a naturally open and engaging

person, but this shared history boosts our rapport and makes it easier to move right into a more focused conversation.

Because she wears a mask, my attention is drawn to her expressive eyes. She is fairly short, probably 5'4", with dark hair. I estimate she is in her 40s, sturdily built, with the strong hands and forearms of a life-long percussionist. She is remarkably cheery and exuberant despite spending all day in professional development. She speaks and interacts confidently. Somehow this feels appropriate for a woman in the male-dominated world of percussion. She seems very comfortable in her own skin and that confidence extends to the opinions she holds. I am struck by how gracious and generous she is with her time. A long drive back across town awaits her, and we didn't finish until after 5pm *after* she had done professional development all day. She was still kind and talkative throughout, showing no inclination to usher me out and get home.

With the table between us, I could not observe her body language quite as well. We sat on perpendicular sides of the table, with one chair between us. Much as the mask had drawn my attention to her eyes, the table draws my attention to her hands. She is an expressive speaker who uses her hands liberally to illustrate her points. She seems comfortable the whole time. Her rapid speech pattern is energetic, even extroverted – drawing on the energy of our connection – rather than nervous.

Exposition

Kris's story starts with a strong family culture of music and weaves its way through twists and turns. The structured guidance she received was minimal, but a good private percussion instructor and her strong connections with others influenced her

decisions. She takes a break from music before returning to the industry, piecing together multiple jobs to make her living. These experiences form her understanding of the expectations that will dictate her mediation of college choice to her students.

A Surprising Path

Kris's background is full of music, but as with the other participants, her path to where she is now was far from linear or expected. "I grew up in a family where music was a priority. We all took piano, and my dad played violin. He also played bass drum in the marching band in college, and he was very proud of that. And then my mom sang. So, it was always a priority in our family. When you hit fifth grade, you were gonna be in band. There was no question about it. 'Pick your instrument,' so I picked the flute and you're like, wait a minute. <she laughs because, of course, she is now a percussionist> So, I played flute from fifth grade all the way into my first year of college. And I was your typical high school band nerd. And when I graduated from high school, I had a scholarship to study flute at Northern Arizona University... I had said, 'I'm gonna be a band director.' I wanted to perpetuate the high school band thing, right?"

To my ears, this is a classic music major story. There is a family culture of music; it's just the thing the kids do. Kris enjoys it and is caught up in the flow of music life, leading towards college. She even mentions she was a scholarship recipient, which I see as a way of telling me she was talented. But her path took an unexpected turn. Her brother was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and the family focus shifted. He was studying at Glendale Community College, much closer to home, and Kris joined him there. "That felt like a safe place." This turn in her path eventually led her away from flute to

percussion. “The faculty there was really amazing and continues to be amazing... While I was there, I just went to the, the advisor and he's like, ‘Well, what do you wanna do?’ And I was like, ‘I don't know. I guess I'll major in music.’ <she laughs> He's like, ‘okay,’ and he just signed me up for all the classes... And in that process, I had to take all of the methods classes. So, I took woodwinds, I took brass and then I took percussion. And when I was in the percussion methods, I really loved it. And so, the percussion professor there who is still there and is still a very good friend and mentor said, ‘Well, maybe you should switch to percussion.’ And I went, ‘okay.’ <laughs> like, I had no direction. And so, people were suggesting things. I was willing to try whatever. So, I dropped flute, which the flute teacher was not happy about. Then I started taking percussion [lessons]. I really enjoyed it. I really bonded with a lot of the other students that were in percussion.”

Kris description of this time in her life sounds like someone adrift in a current. Her dialogue evokes ‘dumb kid’ vibes, heightening the sense of a student who didn’t know what she was doing. She follows her brother to GCC. With no other particular interest, she thinks she might as well study music, and the advisor arranges that. With no direction, she more or less stumbles into a totally new area of musical expression, moving from flute to percussion, where she finds her people and settles in.

Once safely ensconced in the percussion studio, she begins to get the guidance from her percussion teacher that will shape her understanding of how music students move through college choice. “And then he said, ‘Well, where are you gonna go after this?’ And I thought, ‘I don't know.’ He's like, ‘How about go to ASU?’ ‘Sounds good.’

<laughs> So, I prepped an audition for ASU. I did get into ASU, and I started doing music education.”

Her experience at ASU was not the positive, supportive one she had had at GCC. After starting in music education, she realized how long it would take her to complete her degree, adding years to the time she had already spent at GCC, so she switched to a Bachelor of Arts in music, its fewer requirements allowing her to finish earlier. When she finally graduated, the music bug that had once bitten her in high school band and college percussion methods class went dormant, falling victim to too many years of undergraduate study and burnout. After graduation, her path takes an unexpected turn. “And I decided I was gonna quit music, and that coincided with Ikea opening up here in Tempe. And I was like, this is it. I love Ikea. I'm quitting music. I'm gonna get a job at Ikea, and I'm gonna go back to school after like a couple years. I'm gonna do interior design. I had this like plan. I was at Ikea, you know, I paid \$5 a month for health insurance. It was amazing. Free Swedish meatballs and those mediocre cinnamon rolls.”

But the music bug wasn't done with her yet. Like the sailors on Odysseus's ship, her ears were plugged against the siren's song. But they were about to be opened at the urging of a friend. As before, it is a relationship that impacts her choice. I had a friend from ASU who was subbing here at ASA at the time. And she called me, and she goes, 'There's this job opening. This is your job.' And I was like, 'No, no, no, I've quit. I'm done. I'm burnt out. Music was something I did as like, that was the activity I did when I was younger. But this [IKEA] is the career path I wanna take.' She's like, 'No, no, this is your job. This is the school.' We would have, you know, conversations about like,

wouldn't it be great to teach? Cuz I went from being like, I wanna be the band director to like, I never wanna see marching band again. You know? That kind of thing. We'd have conversations and I'd say like, 'Why don't we have a performing art school in Arizona like this? I wanna do this. I wanna have percussion ensemble. I wanna teach all these things.' She goes, 'This is the school. This is your job. This is where you're gonna be able to build that.' And I was like, 'No, no, no, no.' She goes, 'Well at least call.'”

In this example of relational redirection, a friend reminds her of what she really wanted to do all along, and, according to Kris, she was persistent. She does eventually convince Kris to call, which leads to a fifteen-year (and counting) career at ASA. Of course, it wasn't an overnight switch. She started at ASA as a part-time instructor, slowly cutting back her hours at IKEA. Eventually, she quit IKEA entirely and transitioned to “75% here [at ASA], plus a private studio, plus 15 other jobs.” The decrescendo from many jobs to fewer continued for ten years before her position at ASA became full time. “I like quit all I've had, I have one job. I've never had one job.”

Development

Kris brings her background with her to her role at ASA. The love of music, her lack of guidance, her reliance on relationships, and her slow, steady movement toward consolidating many jobs into one manifest in her view of her role as percussion instructor and the need to provide specialized guidance to music students considering in music in college.

Centrality of Private Teacher

Kris's main role at ASA is as percussion instructor. This includes percussion lessons and technique classes along with percussion ensembles. Kris clearly cares for her students and values a tight community within her percussion studio. Her studio and her role as private instructor form the main mechanism for mediating college choice to her students. "They're typically my classroom students here, but also my private students. So, there's always that kind of conversation that they'll initially say, like 'I wanna major in music.' And so that gets the ball rolling." Kris believes strongly in the centrality of the private teacher in guiding music students. "And it has always been a tradition of you go to your private instructor to do all this. At ASA, they would always talk about like, getting like, do we need to hire a, like an outside counselor? And I was like 'To major in music? No, like that's my job.' ... your private instructor helps you do that because your private instructor is the one that has the connections and knows the people and knows the teachers. It's really my knowledge of professors who I have interacted with throughout the years. Either I met them when I was at ASU [or] I met through PASIC, which is a percussive art society. It's people that I'm connected to within my network."

The centrality of the private instructor is not reserved just for high school instructors guiding students to college. Kris urges students to consider the college music instructor when looking at schools. "It's often like, well, okay. Here's all the people I know. And here's the schools, because my big thing is it's not so much the school as it is the person and that is the connection, the professor. And that is directly because I had a great one and a crappy one and I knew how having a great one was gonna change everything and how having a crappy one was gonna change everything. So, I wanna

make sure that those kids feel really connected and supported by that person, even before they get accepted.”

Kris encourages students to research the professors, which in turn also helps to grow Kris’s network. “‘What have you researched?’ Because I do want them to do research. And often they’ll come back with ones where I don’t know that professor. And I say, ‘Well, let’s read their bio. Let’s see what like their experience is. Do you know what their specialty is? Do you know what, like, what is the philosophy of their studio?’”

Kris’s own experience, with both good and bad private teachers, affects how she views her role in guiding her students. She pulls from a long history of experience and relationships with fellow teachers, as well as a strong alumni network to guide her students. “Having that sort of network of alumni is like, I feel like there’s anyone I can reference. Like ‘tell me what you wanna do. I have somebody that will talk to you,’ and they will, which I think is really awesome, because again, in the percussion department, it is a culture of family. We say it’s a family, it’s a family. It’s family. And the kids see when alumni come back, how excited I get to see those alumni when they come back and they go, ‘Oh, okay. Like, so this person will help me.’ And I didn’t know how to network at all. No one showed me how to network. No one told me I needed to network. And so, if I can provide like a small network of ‘we’re all connected through ASA percussion, that person will help me.’ I can’t tell you how many times that has happened. I’m like, okay, ‘Email this person tell ‘em and you’re in percussion.’ And I told ‘em email you and then talk to him and they’ll do it. It’s great. It’s really cool.”

Kris has cultivated this network because she received meaningful guidance from her private instructor at GCC, but also because she recognized gaps in her own background. Much of the guidance she gives students and the environment she creates comes from a combination of positive experiences and the *absence* of support along her own path. I know this private-teacher-as-guide model from my own experience as a college-bound musician and from talking with so many prospective music majors in my admissions career. While every participant in this study points to importance of this role, Kris is the only one who spends most of her time at ASA as an instrument-specific instructor. Her insight is crucial to understanding the ecosystem of guidance given to music students at ASA.

Specialized Guidance

Kris appreciates the work of the counseling office at ASA. She and Sharon are friends and long-time colleagues who work together well, albeit informally. However, the strong guidance system for her students at ASA and Sharon's musical knowledge highlights the issues she sees in music guidance elsewhere. "I think it's a college counseling problem, not necessarily here, but other schools. I know so many kids in percussion that had no idea for four years, that when they say, 'I wanna be a music major. I'm gonna go audition at ASU because that's where I wanna go to music school,' Right? They had no idea about all these requirements, they spent four years marching, snare and kind of playing in band. And then when they go to be a music major, there's all these giant hurdles, because no one told 'em, you're gonna probably have to take lessons. You gotta play Marimba. You gotta play timpani. You gotta all these things. I think that's a

big problem with college counseling and nobody in a public school will ever, the college counselor of a school will never say that to them, let alone know it. I think that that deters many kids that could be great musicians, great educators. They are passionate about music. They do wanna invest, but then there's this giant, like, what word am I looking for? Barrier!”

Kris even differentiates between percussion students and other music students. The barrier to entry is greater because of the specialized instruments they need to play. It isn't as simple as learning a few etudes on the clarinet and going to audition. Access to the instruments they'll need can be an issue. Percussion illustrates the need for targeted, knowledgeable guidance that only a private teacher and *maybe* a musically trained college counselor can provide. I am amazed at how articulate Kris can be on these issues. This understanding of the needs of music students is present in all the participant interviews, but often it is just assumed to be known. It is insider knowledge shared among musicians that doesn't need to be said out loud. Kris's ability to see it, acknowledge it, and speak to it supports the need for unique guidance for this unique population.

Recapitulation

In Kris we see someone whose path was not straight. She was influenced and redirected by unforeseen events, by the guidance of others. Her education was fairly inexpensive and led to a fulfilling, but busy life of many jobs, mostly within music. Over time she has whittled that mass of jobs down into one full-time job that she loves, working with people who love music, both as students and colleagues. Still, she knows

the sacrifices made to pursue a life in music. All this experience, the positive role-models, the gaps she sees in her education, combine with a keen view of the changing world around her creates a complex, sometimes contradictory philosophy of mediating college choice for music students, one that is rich with insider knowledge.

Cost Concerns and the Reality of a Musician's Life

Concerns about college costs and the musical job market feature heavily in Kris's story. When Kris reflects on her path, she acknowledges that she received comparatively little structured guidance. It was more that she bumped into life events and people along the way that redirected her. She is quick to point out that the consideration of money when she was deciding where to go to college was very different than it is today. "I feel like my parents paid \$800 a semester at Glendale Community College. I think overall at ASU, I think my parents shelled out maybe \$7,000. But 10 years later, fast forward, ASU is \$20,000 a year, right? I highly recognize how lucky I was that I went to college at a specific time where you could still go to college, even if you had to get loans, you weren't gonna, like, you, weren't gonna be a hundred thousand dollars in debt."

At one point, she shares that she and her husband, another musician, live in a condo on the west side of town. They would love to buy her parents' house, a large old ranch home in a desirable neighborhood, but they aren't clear how that would work financially. These anecdotes aren't shared to make a point. They are offered as asides as we talk about her life and our shared hometown. However, when considered along with her many part-time jobs and her long path to where she is now, we can see how a major increase in college costs might impact how she guides her students. If she has worked this

hard to cultivate the life she has, which still leaves something to be desired (her parents' house), and she paid less than \$10,000 for her extended undergraduate program without student loan debt, how much harder will it be for her students whose college education will cost so much more?

Indeed, her concerns about the cost of college and the difficult musical job prospects are evident in her mediation of college choice to her students "I am really adamant. If they say, 'I wanna major in music,' like we have a big, giant conversation about what that means. 'What do you wanna do? What are possibilities for like career paths?' Because I think because I had such a lack of guidance and such a, like, 'I guess I'll just do that.' Like I just went into it, not really thinking about it. I want them to really think about it and really know what their options are. And then also know what their financial options are. So there does need to be an honest conversation with the parents. I look how much it's cost, and I'm just like, 'Wait, what?' <laughs>. Like I can't understand that. Year after year we have more conversations about student loans. And what scares me, I think students now are willing to go into debt. Like \$80,000 in debt. And I can't tell them to do that. I said, 'I will not advise you to do that. That's a conversation between you and your parents.' But that scares me about students today, because I know even if you are the best music student there, you're not gonna get a job playing in whatever orchestra, being whatever soloist, being with whatever company when you're 23. If you are, you're the unicorn, and there are only a couple of unicorns <laughs>, and you're not it. That's a hard conversation to have, but it's an important

conversation to have. And I think by having that conversation, a lot of students will make better, will make the right choice for them.”

Kris insists that students make the decision to major in music and embark on this musician’s life with their eyes wide open, a sentiment echoed by many of her colleagues and other participants. To her that means really understanding the costs and what she perceives as the difficulties that go with the life that follows the degree. She appears to accept the narrative that a life in music is a life with few job prospects and little money. Indeed, when responding to a student who wants to be a jazz drummer, she says, ‘Okay, so you want to be poor.’ This response is offered with a humorous tone, but it only serves to soften what she clearly believes to be true: music equals no money. Hyperbole aside, Kris has plenty of very practical advice to give these students. It is advice that highlights the tension between Kris’s concerns and the value she places in music. “I have so many kids that wanna be performance majors, but then I will say to them, ‘Are you willing to also A, B, C, D E F G?’ ‘No, I don't wanna do any of those things.’ ‘But do you realize being a performer also includes like, maybe you're gonna teach some lessons or you're gonna like run a box office over here. You're gonna do, because you're not gonna get paid when you're 22, right out of your bachelors, to be a soloist, it's a multidimensional profession, music. And so, you really need to be open to all of it.’ And I say to them, ‘If you are not, then you should not major in music.’”

This advice seems to discourage considering music as a career path, and indeed, I imagine it is eye-opening to a student who thinks they will just have one, high-paying music performance job right away. However, Kris tells me that this advice sometimes has

the opposite effect. For example, parents who are concerned that there are no jobs for musicians are encouraged to hear that there are actually *many* jobs. It's just that those jobs form a portfolio of income streams, rather than the traditional one-job-one-salary concept they may have in mind. "When they hear that, when I say it is a multifaceted profession and that there is plenty of work out there and you can work, and you will work. But if there's anything else that you'd rather do, you should probably do it. I think sometimes they're relieved."

Here Kris reveals the music bug or the siren's song by highlighting its absence. If the pull isn't strong enough, and a student has interests in anything else, they should pursue the non-music path. This assumes that it will be easier, and that unless the student can't live without music, they won't make it in the profession. As Kris was drawn to ASA after starting a career at IKEA, the musician *must* do music. They can't *not* do it. This insight resonates with me and mirrors the experience I have had with parents of prospective music majors. Parents know their child loves music. They see the drive and the passion and know it makes their child come alive. This is especially true if the parents aren't musical themselves. They have reservations, of course, but when they receive an honest answer about life on the other side of the degree, often they are more open to their child making this decision. Kris hits on this idea when she says, "They're also relieved when you say here's all the things you could do, and it's not just starving artist or teacher."

Linear Expectations

Kris often references parents as she talks about mediating college choice to students, positioning them as part of the decision-making unit. She clearly considers them to be a major influence on a student's college and major choice, and she uses their viewpoints to form her perceptions of expectations. She points out that they do not always have an accurate view of career opportunities after graduation. She sees how the parents expect a linear path with a clear career trajectory and a clear return on investment. "You go like this <makes a twisting line with her hand>. And I think parents think 'career ladder' <makes a more direct upward motion with her hands>. And it's not that." Here, Kris's journey from music to IKEA and then back music appears in her perception of life after college, and she is aware that what she perceives as reality does not match the parents' perception.

This observation rings true to me, but there is also a somewhat well-meaning hypocrisy present. When I walk families through this choice to study music, I often ask the parents what they majored in. I find that very few of those parents are doing exactly what they expected to do when they selected a major. Few are even working in the same industry as their college major. Certainly, this disconnect between their own path and their expectations for their student could be related to the changes in higher education since they attended college. Our college culture, due partly to rapidly rising costs, now leans more toward consumerism and believing that college leads to a return on investment by way of career. I see in Kris's description that the path is surprising only because of family expectations and their perception of the surrounding culture. It may also be that the parent may simply want the best for their kids and therefore be risk

averse. They may not have end up in the career they majored in, but they want their kids to be safe, and music isn't perceived as safe. It is rife with failure, and they don't want their child to fail. Music is viewed as a risky, failure-rich option.

Insider Knowledge and a Vague Value System

I sense that Kris's main goal with her cost advice is that her students understand of the life of a musician, that they enter the field with their eyes wide open. However, the delimiting role Kris plays with these students and the insider knowledge she offers them also stands out. She has established that she uses her network of teachers and colleagues to help guide students to specific schools. However, the direction she gives them relies on a hidden value system. "There are only a couple of unicorns <laugh>, and you're not it." Over time, she has developed a sense for what level students need to have reached to get into 'good' schools and live the performer's life. Hints at this value system show up elsewhere in our conversation. She mentions a student (and even herself) getting a scholarship to study music, suggesting that this student is the cream of the crop because the school gave them money. She refers to a student who is going to school "somewhere big," referring not to the size of the school but to its place near the top of an opaque ranking of music schools. "I think the hardest part of the advising everything is prepping them for their audition and having the conversation about the reality of where they're at. Because we're a little tiny pond here. We're a great pond. We're a high performing pond but a little pond. And you wanna go to Eastman? I kind of have to get down to the heart of what they really want to do and balance that with what they're capable of doing. And

when you're at the top of All-State, yeah. And you're sitting high and feeling great. You're like, 'Of course I'm gonna get into Eastman.'”

This is insider knowledge on display. The vagaries of musical ability and potential are present in the student who is the big fish in a small pond and doesn't know what it takes to get into a top school. However, Kris's guidance is also affected by those same vagaries. The assumption is that Kris knows what it takes to get into Eastman and the student doesn't, but because there are no 'objective' metrics for musical ability at the high school and college level, even Kris's insight, while more informed, is still largely conjecture.

Transferrable Skills

Kris shares a few anecdotes about students who went into performance and ended up in other successful careers. One student started at the University of Indiana as a percussionist and ended up running Debbie Allen's dance school. Another of her past students went on to become the costumer for the CBS show *Picard*. Another student studied percussion, then decided to switch to game design and minor in music. That student's senior recital consisted of all video game music arrangements. Kris mentions that some students at the recital were game fans but had never really thought of the music side, had never experienced music that way. As Kris describes this, I feel the excitement rising in her, and it is contagious. This student started as a music major and then rolled it into another passion, combining the two. In doing so, she opened her friends' eyes to a new type of creation, a new manifestation of beauty. If she had been convinced music wasn't worth it, if she had majored in something 'safer' from the start, this surprising

journey of self-discovery, this surprising path, might never have happened. Kris is clearly proud of these students and quick to hold them up as successful examples despite their unexpected destinations. “There's still the misconception that whatever I study in college, that's my job... That's not the case anymore. And I even say to kids who study music, ‘Like you think you wanna study music? do you know exactly what you wanna do? No? That's okay. Yeah, because there are a million things you can do in music.’”

Kris holds two seemingly contradictory truths at once. She just finished telling me she wants students to be sure they understand how hard music is before they decide to pursue it. It's a cautionary bit of advice. Here she paints a more flexible approach. I understand this to mean that someone who is going to make a living in music must understand the reality of that choice, but since a college major doesn't necessarily equate to a specific career, students should pursue what they love. She sees the non-linear path people take after college and considers it a feature more than a bug. “My siblings all left music, so I could probably ask them like, ‘How does it help you to be an accountant?’ <laughs> because it clearly does because my younger brother is very adamant that his kids are in music. And my sister is very adamant that her son is gonna be in music even though none of them stayed in it. So, it's not, I don't know. I'm starting to realize that like college is about learning how to be an adult and not so much about like picking a career. And so, if I was gonna learn how to be an adult, maybe I'd pick something... I would advise people to pick something in the arts where you like really studied what you wanted to study and be around the people that you really want to be rather than like, I don't know... that felt... I got very philosophical <laughs>.”

When I ask Kris what she thinks her students stand to gain by studying music, she is reflective. “I think the answer to that question for me personally, is becoming more and more apparent for myself in the last five years. I think that working here and working with people who didn't grow up in the arts, I see a huge difference in people in terms of like flexibility. I just think music and arts teaches you all of these like life skills. These things that apply to everything about life. And I see people who didn't study the arts and you kind of get their background and you're like, wow, you weren't in marching band where it was, you were in it for everybody and there was this common goal and there was sacrifice. Or you didn't do theater where it was long hours together and you know, bonding and teamwork. And you didn't do dance where you have to be so incredibly focused and driven. And I, I kind of look at them like I feel bad for them because they didn't experience that because I think I learned so much about life. I don't think I learned anything about counterpoint, but <laughs> I think I learned so much about how to be professional, how to deal with conflict, how to deal with people, how to deal with different personalities, how to, honestly, how to shut up sometimes. There's constant problem solving. And I don't see that from other people all the time. So, if somebody said to me, why should I major in music? Well, well one, it's fun. But two, I think you're going to get a skillset out of it that is applicable to not just playing music.”

The transferrable skills Kris rattles off – or “life skills” as she calls them – are similar to the ones mentioned by her colleagues. Collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, dedication, discipline, professionalism, and confidence. She calls back to her

costume designer alum who once told her ASA taught her how to be creative. “When you study the arts and you study all those things, it’s totally transferrable to everything else.”

However, as Kris talks about transferrable skills and going to college to become an adult, not to get a specific job, I hear some dissonance with the rest of her story. Kris talks about parents who value music when their kids are young, but not as a career path. Even Kris’s dad, the one who was so proud to play bass drum in his college marching band and who insisted his kids do music, was not enthused that his daughter wanted to make music a career. They are drawn to the things that can be gained from music study up to a point. Once that desire to study music reaches the college level, with its promise of a career after graduation, we see parents who want their kids to reconsider. This influence is apparent in Kris herself when tells her friend, the one trying to convince her to apply to ASA, “Music was something I did when I was younger,” suggesting it had served its purpose. I think this underlying perception is part of the reason she focuses so much on costs and outcomes in her mediation of college choice to her students

As an instrument-specific instructor at ASA, Kris fills the college guidance role that all the participants point to as the most important for music majors. Indeed, Kris not only acknowledges that responsibility but grasps it and runs with it. She is also a great example of seemingly contradictory or divergent thoughts on pursuing a life in music. On the surface, there is this desire to make sure her students understand the practical difficulties of being a musician. They must discuss the financial and occupational realities before pursuing the degree. Her guidance is laced with assumptions that music does not equal money and money is good. Then, when we get to the more philosophical

parts dealing with ‘why would someone study music’, she reveals that she doesn’t think college is about getting a job. It’s about becoming an adult and a better person, and that music sets you up to do both of those things uniquely well! Kris cares for her students and is proud of their accomplishments. Ultimately, she wants students to do something they love and be surrounded by people who also love doing that thing. She wants them to be happy and seems to think music is a place where that can happen, perhaps in a special way. Yet concerns about future income and job prospects persist and take center stage in her conversations with students and families. After packing up saying goodbye to Kris, I walk back home, the sun streaming through the Palo Verde branches heavy with yellow blooms. As I walk, I wonder if the money concern is a rooted in a fear that her students won’t be happy. That if she encourages them towards music, they’ll be surprised by the reality of the life and regret their choices. Of course, most adults have regrets or unmet desires. Kris even hints at some of her own as we talk, and I imagine those are felt more keenly during harder times. Do we want something for our kids that is impossible? That we don’t have but like to think still exists? Certainly, someone with plenty of money can be unhappy. Certainly, adults who pursued STEM or other careers assumed to be lucrative can be unhappy. It isn’t algorithmic. I imagine it’s more personal and ever-changing than that. In the end, my time with Kris has been every bit as challenging and illuminating as I expected, and I leave thankful for our time together.

The Ally – Lindsey

Lindsey teaches band, chamber music, and woodwinds technique at ASA. While she does not have any curricular responsibility for college choice and she is not primarily

a private instructor, Lindsey represents the sort of miscellaneous faculty role that surrounds students at ASA. She provides insight into the culture of college-going, the guidance given to students, and is a window into the ‘other’ influences on music students at ASA. Lindsey’s focus is on cultivating a supportive environment in her classrooms. That environment and the relationships they foster, in turn, create opportunities for Lindsey to mediate college choice to students. In that mediation she relies heavily on own experience and background. She maintains an almost childlike wonder and love of music which she tries to encourage in her students.

There are many musician archetypes. There are super type-a, driven types. There are intellectual, thoughtful, stoic types. There are the fighter pilot, competitive types. There are also those who can lose themselves in whatever they are doing right in that moment. They are drawn toward fun and good vibes and are somewhat oblivious to a society ruled by the tick tock of the clock and ding of calendar alerts. I have a special affection for that last archetype, and Lindsey is a wonderful example of the group. I had a hard time reaching Lindsey during this process. Even on the morning of our first meeting, after not responding to my email confirmations for a week or so, she contacted me three minutes before our interview was meant to start to ask to reschedule. I assumed she wasn’t really interested in participating but didn’t want to officially drop out. To her great credit, she emailed to reschedule for later than day and was very sorry for standing me up. I’m really glad we connected. Our first meeting took place in the same band room where I met Henry. For Henry’s interview, I sat in Lindsey’s chair, now I sit in Henry’s. Despite her small stature, she is a larger-than-life person. Her hair is cut in an almost

mohawk-like do (very short, shaved on the sides and longer on top). She sports trendy glasses and has a multi-color tattoo on her right forearm, which I later learn depicts bassoon keys. Her ID lanyard has several interesting pins on it that appear to be images of Disney princesses. This somehow doesn't fit her overall presentation, which I would characterize as "alternative." Along with her trendy glasses and pin-adorned lanyard, she wears blue shorts and a grey shirt with long sleeves which she has rolled up. Her larger-than-life persona emanates from exuberant hand motions and over-the-top voice work. Her normal speaking voice is very engaged, energetic--and loud. She brings even more animation to her speech when she slips into sillier voices, which she does fairly often throughout our conversations. I can't tell if this comes from general discomfort or if this is just a demonstration of her playful spirit. In any event, she is an absolute delight, an easy talker, and willing to be candid about her experience and views.

We are interrupted multiple times throughout the interview by people walking into the band room. She doesn't seem too bothered by it; neither do the interrupters. Clearly, she is a naturally informal, warm, and kind person. If given the option between a chill, low-stress environment and a focused, intense one, she would choose the former every time. This is not simply avoidance of conflict, however. Her decisions are student-focused and based on her belief that students remember how they felt in a classroom more than they remember the content. When she shares examples of classroom management, they are always based on treating others with the respect they deserve, not on the principle of teacher as authority. Relationship is key in almost every aspect of her story whether it be those she cultivates with students or those that guided her through big

decisions about college and career -- or even the one she has with the bassoon, which sounds more like a complicated romantic relationship than one a person has with an inanimate object. The bottom line is that she loves the students, and they appear to feel the same way. They are why she is here.

Exposition

Like the rest of the participants, Lindsey is a college-educated musician, with both bachelor's and master's degrees in bassoon performance. Unlike the other participants, however, Lindsey does not come from a musical family. Despite the lack of music at home, Lindsey caught the musical bug early when, in seventh grade, her school hired a new band teacher. She tells me, "Once I had him, I sort of fell in love with, with music and whatnot," foreshadowing the type of influence she will want to have on her students. This drove her to pursue music despite not having any idea what that meant. "I never really thought about anything else, so it was like, well, I'm going into music. I'm sure I'll be able to live." Her *laissez-faire* approach persists throughout her sometimes-surprising musical journey.

While the music bug clearly does not discriminate between those who have musical parents and those who don't, Lindsey's educational experiences remind me of first-generation students. She reflects, "My band director, you know, he had mentioned like, you should really get into some lessons, but I didn't even know what they were. My family didn't know what they were." I asked her if her parents were worried about her laser focus on being a musician. Instead of worrying about the unknown, her parents supported her musical pursuits. "if you have the abilities and these people want you, we

really want you to do it!” Her response rings true to me as a parental archetype I am familiar with in interacting with prospective music majors. Parents like hers see the gift their child has and are amazed! They often will do whatever they can to support their child’s passion. Lindsey’s experience with her band director and her parents’ supportive approach lay the groundwork for the environment Lindsey will eventually create for students in her band room.

CSU Stanislaus was where Lindsey’s real education began. She started studying with a dedicated bassoon teacher, getting those private lessons for the first time in her life, and her abilities exploded. As with Henry, she entered school as a music education major, perhaps a carryover from her good experience with her high school band director. Also like Henry, she had terrible experiences in the education coursework, eventually dropping it in favor of performance. Her surprising path and tumultuous relationship with the bassoon continued when, by the end of her degree, she hated the instrument, only to have a transcendent musical experience make her “fall back in love with it.” The combination of a large scholarship and good weather brought her to Arizona State University for graduate school, where she lived away from home for the first time. Almost immediately, her relationship with the bassoon soured again, and she found alternative musical outlets in the flute, clarinet, and saxophone. Lindsey’s path is somewhat less surprising than the other participants, largely because she had fewer specific expectations for what lay ahead. Indeed, her comment about being sure she’ll find a job shows her lack of clear expectations. Still, her path from seventh grade

musician through master's degree contains twists and turns: from music education to performance; from bassoon to other instruments; from close to home to a different state.

When she describes her experience after graduate school, I hear consternation for the first time, "I just didn't think I would end up with a career in music. I thought like, well, grad school ended. It seems like no one wants me." She had taught a few private students during her time in graduate school, and the experience, which she took to represent teaching in its entirety, further turned her off to being an educator. The reality of her situation began to settle in. "It's like, man, this is, this is rough. But then once I was tossed into it, I needed to figure out a way to make money, and I had an education and Alta and Sephora hadn't called me back for an interview. Like you're scrambling, you know, I sort of floated for like six months just, yeah. 'I'll get a job soon family!' Just like, what the heck?"

She delivered this quote in her usual cheery and hyperbolic demeanor, but I can tell this bothered her more than her affect would suggest. She entered her music degrees with an expectation for what came after. Even if it wasn't as clearly stated as it is for some young musicians, it at least included making a living in music after graduation. Finally, Lindsey gave classroom teaching a try as a substitute for special education classes at a school across town. Once again, her path was not as straightforward as she imagined. In her time substituting, she discovered a love for teaching that, when combined with her love for music, would lead to the job she currently holds at ASA.

Development

Lindsey's role at ASA is teaching band and woodwinds class to 5th through 12th graders. Getting her job at ASA was a function of relationship. I have included a large excerpt from this section of the interview because it not only shows how she came to where she is but also because it exemplifies elements of her personality and reflects her values. Parentheticals are my added narrative comments.

L: “Oh, so Adam Roberts was the band director [at ASA], and I was recommended for this like pro jazz group that he does. And I didn't even have a bari (this is a type of saxophone). I play bari sax now. And I had then, but I didn't own one. So, I was using some like Maricopa County, horrible horn and all this stuff. And it was really sketchy, and I hadn't played jazz in years, and I was terrified, but when I started working with him and all these other great people, I just like (she makes a sound and motion indicating her mind was blown) to where at one point I wasn't playing bassoon at all. I was playing bari five to seven nights a week. So, I was playing a ton of jazz, which again, I like never expected, I have a degree in classical bassoon, you know? But then, Adam saw my like growth (she makes a sound and hand motion like a plane climbing into the sky). I was still like, you leave grad school, and you don't totally know what you are. But like, I did not feel like I belonged in that group. But with his encouragement and some of the people around me like, oh man, like, this is my role. And in jazz you get to play loud! And like there's all this really cool stuff. That was just so different. So, we had interacted, I had known him maybe two or three years at that point. And then he was leaving this job. So, I knew that, you know, he worked at this awesome school, and it's an art school, and you know, the model is that there's a band director, but then they get this like

specialized stuff and like, wow, man, like that sounds amazing. And then I went and played in a gig one night and he just walked over to the table, and he was like, yeah. ‘You know, I won the job at Chandler Gilbert community college. I’m gonna be leaving ASA’. But I’d already accepted the special ed job. So, I felt like my heart’s like gonna fall out of my stomach. So, I’m like, oh my, like you’re leaving that place. Like what’s happening? He’s like, ‘Yeah. the other person’s gonna move into the band director role. And then the woodwind job will be open.’ Like, oh my God. Oh my God.”

SC: “And then, so you were part-time here. And what were you doing with the other part-time?”

L: “So, yeah, so I was part-time here only in the afternoons. Again, I was gigging a ton. Then I ended up in a cover band playing saxophone and like singing backups and stuff. So sometimes my nights, you know, I would get home at like three. So literally the part-timeness was I would sleep until like 11:30 and then I didn’t have to be on campus until like 12:30. So it was really, it just offset what my ridiculous schedule was.”

This excerpt is quintessential Lindsey. The exuberance. The self-doubt (“I did not feel like I belonged in that group”) that hides the courage it would take to play a borrowed instrument for a professional gig in front of professional musicians in a musical genre she wasn’t trained to play. The willingness to observe, without arrogance, the progress she’s made as a performer. The almost child-like joy at discovering success in unexpected places (“in jazz you get to play loud!”). Her description also shows a life with many distinct parts: special ed teaching, gigging, a part-time ASA job, etc. As she explains how her ASA job evolved from part-time to full-time, I see how her life slowly

simplifies, consolidating into fewer jobs. She gets to focus on the things she likes to do and less on the things that make her run around town putting jobs together. Her story reveals her values, along with her personality. These values, plus her experience making a living as a musician form the worldview through which she mediates college choice to students.

As with our first interview, I was unable to find a time with Lindsey for a second in-person interview when I was in Arizona. Unfortunately, she was sick and left school right before our scheduled time. I didn't know this until later, and she was, again, very apologetic, both of which felt very "Lindsey". Her email includes the phrase "I swear I'm a functioning adult who can make it to meetings," which I found to be characteristically endearing. While we couldn't find a time that worked while I was in town, I left Arizona with a vague assurance of a Zoom meeting later. Again, as with our previous interview interaction, she is willing and enthusiastic about the interview, a fact that seemingly contradicted her elusiveness in scheduling. I took this as confirmation of her personality. She lives in the moment, describing herself as someone who is not a planner or someone who thinks overmuch about the future. Even on the day of our interview, she realized that she had made the appointment on the day of their Showcase, the culminating event of the school year that is clearly both exciting and stressful. Once again, I found her simply delightful, and I am grateful to her for making it work.

Through the Zoom box, I see Lindsey in what appears to be her office at ASA. Like our first interview, this one is also interrupted. Once on my end as loud fighter jets fly over my house. Two more times when the motion sensing lights in Lindsey's office

turn off, prompting her to wave her arms wildly to get them to turn back on. Lindsey is also distracted with the impending Showcase. Her focus is often pulled to her hands, which are apparently filthy from loading the trucks for the show later. At one point, she stops mid-answer to text Henry about something logistical for that evening. But she jumps back into our conversation as quickly as she jumped out. As with the interruptions in the first interview, these distractions don't seem to bother her, and so they do not bother me.

Recapitulation

Cultivating a Supportive Environment

Lindsey's own story is one of relationships and a love for music that is more vibes than it is one of charging toward a specific goal. These experiences and the traits they reveal about Lindsey show up in how she runs her classroom. When I asked Lindsey what she liked best about her job at ASA, her answer was simple. "Any time I'm interacting with any of the students." She views her band room as more than just a place where music is performed. While she has an undeniable love of music, it is the love of the students and the unique community that music creates that energizes Lindsey. "This is the space for you. Like, this is the place, like here is where all the nerds, we can hang out or like, you know, if you need to go cry. You totally go cry. Like I've had to; I've cried in band. Things happen in high school; I've cried in band. I cried in honor band auditions. Because it was super stressful, and I hated it. Like it totally happens. And like, yeah. I want them to know that. But like, this is a place that we're playing music and it ends up being like pretty cool and difficult music and whatnot. But I also just wanted to be like a

place where you can kind of like, you can rest a little. Or try to use your brain in a really different way. Or, you know, you actually get to sit by your friends that you might not see, you know, the whole rest of the day.”

Along with this description of life in the band room, she shares stories of students who have been with her, and with each other, for years, and who bring her prom photos and let her into their lives outside the band room. “I know most of these students aren't gonna become musicians. Sure. But if there's one, you know, every once in a while, or if there's some that like, you know, take some comfort in my classroom.”

As an arts teacher and not a college counselor, Lindsey does not have a curricular responsibility to guide students through college choice. Her sense is that ASA has a strong college-going culture. She is aware of the Performing Arts Conservatory Preparatory program that Henry runs, but college-going isn't something she discusses often with other teachers, and she has no structural relationship with Sharon.

Despite the absence of any structural responsibility to guide students, she cultivates relationships with them and creates an environment that allows them to engage her on these topics if they want to. Indeed, a number of the anecdotes Lindsey shares indicate that students, particularly ones interested in majoring in music, do bring this up with her in informal and relational ways. “It's usually like, you know, it's all super casual. Like it's after class or before class, or, you know, something like that, anytime they have some sort of downtime or, you know, I'll just be like walking across the campus, and, you know, someone will like flag me down.”

Insider Knowledge

When she gives advice, she relies on insider knowledge gained from her experience. True to her relational focus, she perceives her role as providing information, not pushing students one way or the other. “I certainly don't say, I've never said like, you know, ‘oh, don't go to this one [referring to a college].’ Like, because I just, I, I don't know enough. And you know, the climate as far as like, what's the top music school, you know, it's, it's changed since I was in school. So, you know, I encourage a lot of, you know, figure out who your studio teacher is gonna be. If you're gonna go into, you know, a music, any kind of, if you're gonna go the path of music, um, you know, make sure you like what they're offering.”

Lindsey has decided what things from her experience remain true, like the importance of the studio teacher the student will study with or the influence a good band director can have on a student's journey. She is also aware that things may have changed. The vague, often subjective, hierarchy of music schools may have shifted since she graduated.

Lindsey perceives that students who want to major in music need to have supportive parents, have taken private lessons and loved them, and whose private instructor will be the main source of information and guidance. Essentially, she expects students to have similar backgrounds to her own. Interestingly, she says that parents who are not supportive feel that way because of money issues. “If they don't have the support of parents, it's usually for money reasons. Uh, you know, ‘don't be an arts major because you won't be able to make any money afterwards,’ that kind of thing.” It's unclear where she gets this perception, however, because when I ask if she's actually aware of that sort

of conversation occurring, she says she isn't. She shares a story of a student who is trying to decide whether to double major in music and engineering, and she hopes it isn't because he is concerned about being marketable, almost as though she's considering that potential influence for the first time. I prodded Lindsey on this but couldn't tell whether this is a general belief within Lindsey's music community, or if this is Lindsey trying to give me an answer she thinks I want to hear based on my previous questions related to finances. Given Lindsey's own disappointment with her immediate job outcomes post-college, I lean towards this being something she actually believes.

Guiding by Cultivating the Music Bug

As Lindsey describes her interactions with students about whether to major in music, it is evident the conversation is less straightforward. In the story of the potential engineering/music double major, she seems to be aware of the situation, but not directly involved in helping him decide on a major. Guidance about being a music major is not structured. Instead, it exists on the margins, encompassing and weaving in and out of her interactions with students. For example, instead of telling musically talented students they should or should not major in music, Lindsey looks to cultivate the musical bug, planting a seed that could eventually blossom into a dedicated music major. "I have a few really young ones that I, like fifth and sixth grade, that I can see being like super great music majors. So, I'm already trying to build it in them, like kind of young. It's, it's that they're, they're already, they're totally competent at their instruments, but it's more that. They legitimately seem like they're enjoying everything that goes on in a band class. So that's what it is. It's that they're like, like band is clearly their *thing*, and they've sort of

taken ownership of it already. And you know, those are the ones that seem, you know, that you can sort of target younger.”

Lindsey can see the musical bug biting students early on, and she wants to be supportive. She is now in the role of encouraging band director, replicating a foundational relationship from her childhood. She describes some students “who have been on like the super conservatory path” who she considers to be driven and less open to suggestions that might broaden the scope of schools they are considering. She also sees students whose “paths seem a little more nebulous.” She fully understands and embraces that “not everyone’s gonna be a professional musician,” a belief that supports her broader view of the worth of music. For this group, Lindsey does not subscribe to a stigmatized hierarchy of ‘good’ schools versus ‘less good.’ She actively promotes the junior colleges in the Phoenix area, though she is clearly aware that they are sometimes stigmatized. “They’re fantastic artists, you know, at those schools. They just sometimes get a bad rap.” Considering the negative opinion some have of community colleges, her perspective is refreshing. It asserts that community colleges are a valuable resource and that students should not write them off or consider them less valuable than four-year schools. Having been influenced by her own experience in changing instruments and genres, she is open to a broader definition of musical success than just playing in an orchestra or sticking to one genre. After a brief interruption caused by the lights turning out and Lindsey moving frantically to restore them, she continues. “Uh, so people who are like really into just any kind of music, uh, so like I have a few students who are really into just film scores and whatnot. So, like those kind of people, you know, I also try to

tell people that, like, you don't just have to be like a classical player or a jazz player, you know, like you can learn everything about recording. You can learn. I mean, there's so many other sort of routes to be a music major and still be involved in all this awesome music stuff that it doesn't need to be something as specific.”

Transferrable Skills

Up till now, this interview was progressing fairly quickly, with Lindsey giving pretty short answers. However, when we talk about why a student would major in music, what they would gain from such a decision, Lindsey really comes to life. Clearly, she has thought about this, and it is important to her. At first, she rattles off a series of transferrable skills she thinks are being taught by music. “Well, you can learn everything that you need to learn for a job, but you're playing music instead and it's just way better. <she laughs> So like, I mean, you can learn everything you need to learn about like deadlines and working as a group and working with people you don't like and, and being on time, and you know, some stuff is almost like higher stakes because you have to perform live, say you have to do some sort of presentation at like a, at a ‘normal person job,’ (her voice suggests quotes). You know, not music, you know, like you've done all this stuff in front of people. You, even, if you you've done recitals, you know, like all of that can easily be rolled over into so many different kinds of work, but you got to be a musician while you did all of it.”

This echoes my own experience with transferrable skills and reflects the literature so closely that I ask her if she says this sort of thing because it's just what musicians say or if she's actually seen it. She is adamant this is something she thinks about a lot and

came up with on her own. It came from having to make the case to young students for why they should participate in band and then just grew from there.

Lindsey's defense of music education is not just practical, however. She goes on to observe much more philosophically.

L: "Yeah. And like reading music notation. I do think it's one of the most amazing, like multitasking things you can do. So as far as just like random multitasking training that students almost don't even realize they're getting, like, you know, it just, instead of sitting in front of a computer and like writing essays for college, which you still have to as a music major, you know, like you're doing all this multitasking stuff that I just feel like is like, it's better for your brain."

SC: "I think that we lose sight sometimes as musicians, how weird it is to read a totally different language and then have it translate into something physical that makes something aural."

L: "And then sonic, and then it's temporal, you know, so then it's gone forever."

She says this almost wistfully. There is something special about music making that still holds magic for her. It is exceptional. The value of doing this work is more than monetary. "Like, my career and like my life and the things I get to do with my time are, I mean, I love them. I think it was absolutely worth it. You know? I live in an apartment and like and I'm not a real, I'm not the future thinker. I don't really care about getting a house. You know, I just, this is, but the, yeah... Like I wanted to be a musician and I wanted to be around music. And that was, I mean, like, I'm that obsessive type. So perhaps, maybe some of my guidance, isn't the best. Like, you know, if you have goals of

getting a house and things like that, you know, but I'm very, like, 'be happy' That's what I want from people.”

Her Goal for Her Students

This is borne out when I ask her what she wants for her students when they graduate. “Oh man, yeah, just 100%, just like their like true happiness.” Hearing how Lindsey views music and its impact on her life makes it easy to see why she wants happiness for her students. She has a broad view of the purpose of education in general and the purpose of music education in particular. It isn't about a specific career outcome; it's about doing what you love and being happy. This answer may sound cliché, but Lindsey comes by it honestly. Her view of life is as one big continuum, and it impacts how she sees the purpose of college. “So, you know, I try to tell them to like, you know, stay open minded about things and, you know, college is not really the whole like end all, you know, you finish college at like what, 22. And you got a lot of growing to do after 22. So, like, that's what I try to sort of tell them, like really focus on your happiness. Um, not on making other people happy and like, that's what I want for them.”

Her view highlights the disconnect between where students are in their life at 17 and the pressure that is placed on selecting a college major. In her view, you have barely started figuring out your life when you finish college, let alone knowing how to plan your whole trajectory. Her own surprising path showed her this, and it impacts how she speaks with students. She talks about wanting happiness for her students and makes the point that 17-year-olds shouldn't be expected to know what they want in life. She also hints at a healthier view of college: it isn't the end of things; it's a step along the way. At 22, you

still have so much more learning to do. When she says this, it seems obvious to me. Of course, 17-year-olds don't know exactly what they will do with their lives. Some *adults* don't know what they will do with their lives, and we should have the perspective gained with age to know that 17-year-olds have much growing to do. If this is true, why do we treat college as if we're punching a specific ticket to a specific life path that we'll follow for the rest of our lives? Why do we, as adults who have the wisdom to know that it takes a long time to decide what you want your life to be and that it isn't as linear or as clear as we want, expect students to engage in college choice as though this isn't true. Is it simply that college has become so expensive that we can't engage with it in its rightful and healthy place as a step along a much longer path? That money has ascended too high on our list of pursuits in life, above things that bring beauty, happiness, and good? Of course, it isn't binary. Money is needed to live in our society. It's a question of degree. There is a dissonance, a disconnect between these threads of thought, yet they are wound together in Lindsey's story despite their incongruity.

Lindsey is an important character in the ecosystem of a musician's college choice at ASA. She doesn't have any curricular responsibility to guide students like Sharon, Henry, or Laura, and she doesn't fill the traditional and crucial private instructor role of Kris. However, Lindsey represents the miscellaneous relationships that surround students. Even in this role, we see how Lindsey's own non-linear path influences her values, which in turn influences the environment she cultivates for students and the guidance she gives when she has the opportunity. Her story highlights the informal ways teachers interact with students. She sees them in the halls, she's there when they have hard days, she

notices and encourages the musical bug when it appears in students. Lindsey's story is a useful avatar for the many relational influences that surround students in an amorphous and messy journey toward college.

Conclusion

It wasn't until after I sat with the data for some time that I began to see the distinct roles played by each participant in the guidance of students. The titles of Guide, Architect, Taskmaster, Sage, and Ally evoke the Hero's Journey, an idea made famous by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949). The idea is that a hero journeys through the story and meets people who meaningfully impact the hero in unique ways. Campbell uses different titles for his roles than the ones I present here, and his are meant to be a distillation of the archetypes present in many stories that feature a hero. In my project, these titles are not meant to be generalized archetypes as in Campbell's conceptualization. Instead, they are meant to represent that, while there are themes and similarities present across participants, they are still distinct individuals who wait at various places on the musician's road and interact with them in different ways. It illustrates the diversity of influences on a student, even just within the high school setting. The Guide, Sharon, provides both overarching and individual guidance to students, supplying them with resources, helping them read the road signs, take the necessary steps, and navigate the pitfalls. Laura is the Architect because she oversees the whole ecosystem within which the student musician lives. She builds the infrastructure, creating the parts of the road that exist within ASA and lead to college. Henry is the Taskmaster who sets the expectations for students in the PACP program and in band class

and provides anchor points along the way. Kris is the Sage because she is the master of the craft and can bring her specific expertise to the musician and help set them on the right road. Finally, Lindsey is the Ally because she wants to create a place for the musician to be themselves while supporting them along the way. Some of these archetypes may appear at other institutions, and if they are helpful to future researchers in the field, which is an added benefit. What is true is that music students at ASA are surrounded by multiple helpful characters who, despite their differences, want to help music students navigate this important process.

The Guide, the Architect, the Taskmaster, the Sage, and the Ally. Five different roles played by five different people. All are musicians, albeit with different backgrounds and specialties. All have a relationship with music students at ASA related to their journey towards college. We have spent time with each, exploring their unique viewpoints and contexts. As we enter into the Evaluation and Thematics section of this paper, I will transition to drawing these stories together, looking at the themes that emerge and offering my evaluation of the college counseling program at Arizona School for the Arts.

Chapter 5: Conclusion – Evaluation and Thematics

In criticism and connoisseurship, there is no final absolute takeaway or conclusion. Eisner describes the process like this:

The task of the critic is to perform a mysterious feat well: to transform the qualities of [an experience] into a public form that illuminates, interprets, and appraises the qualities that have been experienced...every act of criticism is a reconstruction. The reconstruction takes the form of an argued narrative, supported by evidence that is never incontestable. There will always be alternative interpretations of the “same” play, as the history of criticism so eloquently attests (Eisner, 1998, p. 86).

The narratives presented above represent five distinct individuals in a specific place and time. What is observed and reconstructed in this paper is done through my own critical paradigm. What is learned from these narratives may or may not directly apply to another context or institution. However, qualitative research in the constructivist paradigm contends that the experiences and perceptions of individuals in their specific contexts have value. We seek to understand human experience with all its subjective meaningfulness. The themes drawn from that human experience may in turn be useful to others.

What follows are answers to this project’s research questions constructed through synthesizing and analyzing the participant narratives and considering their relationship to existing literature. As with the previous chapter in which description and interpretation overlapped, so it is with this chapter in which thematics and evaluation are presented in

tandem. I will also offer recommendations based on my evaluation of the counselors at ASA, discuss the limitations of this project, and suggest opportunities for future research.

The problem this study seeks to explore relates to the intersection of our current neoliberal culture and the guidance given to prospective music majors. Economic factors have long motivated college enrollment, a motivation that has intensified in a time of rapidly increasing tuition costs (Becker, 1993; Ducoff, 2021; Kulkarni & Rothwell, 2015; Solow, 1965; Weiss, 2015). Financial concerns also affect the types of majors students perceive to lead to good careers (Carrigan & Bardini, 2021; Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2013; Soria & Stebelton, 2013). However, literature on how majors map to careers is less definitive, with most college graduates working in careers not directly related to their degree (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Selingo, 2017). Skills learned in some majors transfer to careers beyond those perceived to be connected to that major, complicating the major-to-career path even further (Coffey et al., 2019). Finally, these economic considerations stand in opposition to other potential purposes for higher education such as human flourishing, the public good and the pursuit of art for art's sake. It is important to interrogate the value systems of counselors, particularly regarding whether music study is worth pursuing in our current economic environment. To ask whether the support offered by school counselors appropriate for prospective music majors and whether school counselors falling victim to neoliberal arguments that devalue music education.

The purpose of this study is to seek to describe how college counselors at Arizona School for the Arts guide prospective music major through college and major choice by exploring how counselors' backgrounds predisposed them to guiding music students in

college and major choice, their perception of the value of a music degree, the significance of their predisposition and perceptions for their guidance of prospective music majors, and the surrounding influences that impact their work.

RQ1: How do counselors' backgrounds predispose them to guiding students in college and major choice?

Relationships Are Key

Each participant shares stories of relationships that impacted their choices. For Sharon, an example is the teacher that told her she could teach, who believed she had the ability. Indeed, it is the only career guidance she remembers getting in her high school years. For Laura, the interconnected relationships in her family of origin were ever-present (and still are) in her decision making. She also decided to return to ASU because of a specific teacher there. Henry had a positive interaction with a professor from Morehead when he was a high school student that directed his path. Similar relationships appear again at his master's and doctorate level college choice decisions. Lindsey was impacted by her high school band director, the first person to reveal to her the joy that music could bring and give her the language to navigate that road. Kris left NAU because of a family relationship, became hooked on percussion because of a teacher, and ultimately returned to music when a friend insisted that she apply for the job at ASA. With the exception of Sharon, all participants pointed to parental support as being foundational for their decision to pursue music. Laura, Henry, and Kris all had musical families that valued the arts and cultivated their love of music. Lindsey's parents were not musicians but were so impressed with Lindsey's skill and the passion that drove her

that they encouraged her to pursue it at the college level. While all participants were able to point to other, non-relational influences along their path, none of them made their decisions in a relational vacuum. Relationships are key. However, one relationship was conspicuously absent: the college counselor. Only Henry mentions an interaction with the college counselor, and it is meant to show how little guidance he received. On a slightly broader note, while all participants felt supported in their journey to major in music, they also say that they received little to no guidance through the process. The foundation was there, but the detailed knowledge of how to navigate the college choice process was lacking.

The Siren's Song: Counselors Heard the Call

The magnetic pull of music is a phenomenon that appears in all participant stories. The idea is that music takes hold at an early age and won't let go. There is a sense that a musician can't *not* do music. Sharon, Kris, and Lindsey are pulled back to music after working in other fields, with Sharon even noting that she can't seem to get away from it. Laura was exposed to the value of music early on in her family of origin and never deviated. Lindsey chose music because the love of the art trumped any consideration of whether she could make a living doing it. Henry was pulled in multiple directions in high school yet makes the decision that music is where he wants to be and stays with it his whole career. Henry mentions he found his people in music, a sentiment that also surfaces with Lindsey, Sharon, and Kris. He and Lindsey both see the pull of music and the community it creates as a reason to do it even if it doesn't make as much money. They believe they are happier here than they would be somewhere else.

Counselors Each Followed Their Own Surprising Path

All five participants in this project have their own version of a surprising path. Many entered college with a clear view of what they wanted to do. For example, Sharon thought that the only outcomes available to her were teaching or performing. Indeed, she started on that path immediately after college only to find her path take her through church ministry and interior design before eventually ending up in a third unforeseen destination as college counselor. Laura wanted to major in music but didn't get into any of her schools, starting first at community college before jumping to four-year music study. She followed a non-traditional path from there, ending up in an administrative role she never considered an option as a 17-year-old high school student. Henry, Lindsey, and Kris all thought they wanted to pursue music education but almost immediately switched majors once they started college. Henry pursued performance with a clear focus, checking off degree after degree and thinking that he would ultimately be the model university professor who teaches while having a robust performance career. While Henry stayed in music throughout his career, unlike many of his fellow participants, he ended up in a very different place than he originally planned. Lindsey re-entered the teaching world through special education before making the jump back to music. Kris jumped schools and instruments before graduating with her music degree. She then pursued a completely different career, thinking IKEA would be her home, before being pulled back into music education. All participants except Sharon shared that they worked many jobs right out of school, combining these different income streams to make a living. Over time, they consolidate those income streams. Henry shares that he is still in that process,

about to stop teaching a class at GCC to free up room in his life. Kris rejoices over only having one tax form to file this year, a practical example of actual simplification. Before Laura took the administrative position, she was running a performing chamber group in addition to her teaching job as ASA. Lindsey performed and taught outside of music before consolidating and becoming full-time at ASA. While the reasons for the twists and turns in these participants' journeys are different, their paths share a surprising and circuitous nature. So much of the current college-going culture is predicated on the idea that college and the life and career that follows progresses along a clear, linear path (Carnevale et al., 2011). However, we know that such a path is uncommon (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Selingo, 2017). The paths of these participants support the idea that we erroneously make things too simple when considering life after college. Our expectations do not match the outcomes. It seems like a basic observation since we know few things work out exactly like we expect them too. And yet we continue to treat decisions like selecting a college major as though the outcomes are set. The path is surprising because our expectations and perception of the surrounding culture are unrealistic. We overestimate our control and underestimate the variety of potential outcomes.

RQ2: How do counselors perceive of the value of a music degree?

All participants see value in a music degree. They consider musicians to be called to music in a way that is virtually unavoidable, a siren's song of sorts that calls to a musician and won't let them go. Participants can list skills learned in music that translate to other areas. However, their view on whether students should pursue music is nuanced, almost contradictory, particularly as it relates to the costs of higher education and the

absence of a linear path upon graduation. Once again, participants' views on the value of a music degree are heavily influenced by a worldview formed by their own experience, both as music students and as professional musicians and teachers.

Counselors Have Complicated Views on the Value of a Music Degree

All participants find meaningful value in music and the college degree that led them to where they are. As I observed with Laura, there is a deep-seated core of musical love at the heart of each participant. Sharon talks about how special the music world is and how she can't seem to get away from it. Laura considers music and the creativity it engenders to be a requirement of a well-rounded person. Henry mentions not understanding how friends of his can spend so much of their time doing something they do not love. Kris observes the differences between those who have musical experiences and those who don't, clearly valuing the former. Lindsey thinks that everything you need to know in life can be learned in band. Much of the perceived value in a music degree is communicated in ways that overlap with their thoughts on the siren's song of music and their perception of the transferrable skills music teaches.

While all participants feel strongly that music is important, money concerns color their perception. They hesitate to encourage music study because of the difficult life or the lack of income associated with it in their minds. One moment, participants will speak on the unique benefits of music and music study. The next they will share that they want students to enter the world with their eyes wide open, implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) saying that a student should think twice before pursuing that life. There is a strong sense of nuance bordering on contradiction when participants engage in this topic.

As I listened to each of these participants, I heard them offer a few different purposes for higher education and the pursuit of music as a major. Each participants' views on the value of a music degree and the purpose of college more generally straddle at least two philosophies. It's complex and intersecting, but there does seem to be three different approaches here. One is the figure-out-what-you-love while at school: a self-discovery approach. A second is major-in-something-that-leads-to-a-lucrative career: a return-on-investment approach. The third is the I-can't-imagine-doing-anything-else approach: the major-in-what-you-love approach. Participants jump from one approach or purpose to the other, illustrating their nuanced perspectives.

Participants apparent conflict about the value of a music degree is reminiscent of the research done by Carrigan and Bardini (2021) in which their participants are conflicted about entering a liberal arts degree. In the case of Carrigan and Bardini, the focus is on the students themselves and their perception of certain majors. This project shows that a similar tension is present among the counselors in this study. Selingo's (2017, p. 2) finding that students "succumb to pressure to pick a practical major their parents think will lead to a good job" is also present in the participant descriptions, which show participants feeling pressured to guide students pragmatically.

Music Teaches Transferrable Skills

Transferrable skills was a topic these participants seemed to enjoy talking about. Most of them were very quick to provide a list of lessons learned in music that can be applied elsewhere. The ability to get up in front of people and present in a coherent and compelling way was first among them, cited specifically by Sharon, Laura, and Lindsey.

Participants also perceive that music students can take feedback and criticism, not just in their performance, but in other areas as well. The expectation is that students who study music know what it is to collaborate with others and work as a team. It teaches professionalism by requiring students to show up on time, prepared to do the work.

This project led me to consider the opaque nature of music study and the skills it provides. It's a continuum. The transferrable skills music develops are not suddenly available after someone decides to major in music or gets a music degree. These skills are developing during music study right from the beginning. Just like any skill, it isn't a light switch, it is a muscle being grown, strengthened over time. It made me wonder if there is a point of diminishing returns. Does a life-long professional performer stop developing as a presenter or a collaborator after a certain time? There is, again, a money-related component here, I suspect. If a plateau does exist in skill development, does it intersect with the growing professionalism of the musician? For example, if someone makes their living playing violin, does their focus shift so much to making a living that the transferrable skills stop developing? This factors into the college choice decision because the college decision is just a stop along the way, as Lindsey points out. It is not necessarily even the most important stop, as all participants continued to develop after they graduated with their music degrees. This may also be illustrated by a parent's desire to have their kids participate in music early on but not pursue it as a career, as exemplified by the families of Kris and Henry. It's a question of degree, and the perception is that at some point, the (financial) cons outweigh the pros. A child can do

this early and develop some of these skills, but the point is to prepare them for something else. A parent might think it is fun and valuable, but it is not a career path.

It is important to consider that valuing transferrable skills can be a neoliberal tendency in and of itself. A neoliberal line of thought seeks to justify the study of music because it can lead to a lucrative career as opposed to a justification that relies on the non-monetary benefits of music and the arts. The reality is that it is both. As has been mentioned in this study, we live in a society that requires money to live. Being able to show how music study can lead to that outcome is a necessity. It is also true that the music skills that lead to lucrative careers are not mutually exclusive from those that lead to human flourishing. Being able to work collaboratively with others to solve a problem is both a marketable skill and a way to engage in fulfilling human interaction. Someone who learns discipline can dig deeply into edifying pursuits and also meet deadlines and accomplish career goals. Seeing transferrable skills in both ways is fitting in a study concerned with the nuance and complexity of human experience.

In general, the counselors' perceptions of transferrable skills match the findings from previous research. Brown (2012) refers to the discipline learned in music, a skill mentioned by participants in this study. Similarly, Kalivretenos (2015) points to leadership and presentation skills, both popular examples given by participants. This study suggests that the idea that music develops transferrable skills is common knowledge among participants and factors heavily into their value system.

RQ3: How do counselors mediate college and major choice to prospective music majors?

To answer this question it is important to provide the broader context within which prospective music majors exist and are guided through college choice. As the sole college counselor at ASA, Sharon, provides the main curricular and programmatic support for ASA students. Of the participants, she is the one tasked with supporting all students, not just prospective music majors. As such, her narrative provides the bulk of the answer to this question.

Sharon mediates college choice through creating the content and deciding how to order and display that content on her Padlet. She develops the yearly cycle of support systems for students, calling on third party resources, including guest speakers and college representatives. She also facilitates the actual application processes for ASA students, educating them on the Common Application, writing recommendations, and sending transcripts. Throughout, she compares her experience to her students' and adjusts her mediation accordingly. An example of this adjustment is her prioritizing financial aid resources when she barely gave any thought to finances during her own college choice. She brings a life-long learner mentality to her work, constantly researching and redeveloping the resources she provides for her students. She is humble, thankful, caring, and welcoming. All personality traits that make the difficult and sometimes scary process of college choice easier on her students. The absence of structured guidance in her own background creates a desire to provide stellar guidance to students at ASA. She views

this guidance as being value-free and not pushy, yet she engages in delimiting. For example, asking students to do a “reality check” on the schools they are considering.

I found that external monetary definitions of success do affect Sharon’s work. Sharon indicates an awareness and engagement with higher education and college choice news through her references to Bloomberg’s Johns Hopkins gift and the college choice podcasts she listens to in the car. Much of the discourse surrounding higher education has to do with the return on investment of a college degree, examples of which can be found in Carnevale et al. (2011, 2015, 2017, 2020) and the analysis provided Orphan et. al (2020) showing that neoliberal motivation is present in political speeches and press releases on the purpose of higher education. Sharon engagement in that broader discourse influences her and drives her to spend much of her time helping students find scholarships. While this is not, on its own, a particularly neoliberal decision, what manifests in that guidance is an encouragement for students to engage in full-throated competition. She asks them where they are going to be most highly valued, instructing them to keep track of their accomplishments to make the best case for themselves to the school. While Sharon laments the need to push students in this way, she perpetuates the perception that students are consumers presenting in Cunningham (2016) and Saunders (2014).

While monetary metrics do impact her, Sharon mainly intends to guide students through experiential self-discovery, setting them up to make the best possible college choice. Her own background and perceptions of the higher education industry, cultivated through years of work as a college counselor and her own research forms a value system

that influences her mediation. She communicates college choice content through sensitive pedagogy, as when she adjusts her agenda to accommodate her students' needs in the classroom presentation. She does so in various locations, through multiple modalities and with multiple forms of representation, as evidenced by the range of events she plans and resources she marshals.

In general, the findings of this study support the literature on college counselors. McDonough (1997) finds that college options are delimited by intermediate organizations, which include high school counselors. Similarly, McDonough (2005a) finds that counselors influence students' college options by the way they present information. The structure and flow of that presentation indicates to students what is important, directs the college search process, and delimits options. This study supports both of McDonough's findings. Despite this study not including students, as McDonough's does, Sharon's narrative shows that she is structuring and presenting college choice content along a series of criteria she considers important. The work she does delimits college options for her students. Similarly, this study supports Engberg and Gilbert's (2014) findings regarding how counselors impact organizational habitus through developing their resources, both content and events. As the sole college counselor, Sharon has total control over what college choice resources are available for students. This process sets the norms for college choice at ASA and contributes to the high college-going culture at ASA. McDonough (1997) also asserts that competitive higher education influences the habitus of a high school. Sharon's comments about how

she must help students stand out from the crowd when applying for college supports this finding.

This study also observed that Sharon felt restricted by her bandwidth, unable to execute all the ideas she has for the program. This is consistent with the literature on counselors being asked to do too much (ASCA, n.d.; Clayton, 2019) and having too many roles with not enough time to perform them all (Belasco, 2013; Perna, 2008). However, Sharon's focus on providing information about colleges and financial aid shows she is supplying one of Perna and Kurban's (2013) four most important predictors of college attainment. While not as directly responsible for them, Sharon does seem aware of the importance of the other three predictors: financial resources, academic prep, and support from significant others. She is proud of the academic preparation at ASA and credits it for their college success. Her insistence on directing students to experience, often relational in nature, is reminiscent of the guidance to rely on significant others.

College choice is mediated to prospective music majors in both explicit and implicit ways. The Performing Arts College Prep program, meant to support performing artists, including musicians, through the college preparation and application process, is an example of the former. It was developed to address the special needs of performers in the application process (e.g., auditions). It also serves as a concrete opportunity for Laura and Henry to engage in conversations with prospective music majors related to college choice. Because Sharon's offerings impact all students, her work also contributes to answering this question.

However, *where* these counselors mediate college choice to prospective music majors is less important than *how* this process is mediated. To that end, I offer a series of themes that arose from the participant narratives. Recall the Sonata Form used to organize the narratives in the previous chapter. It is a useful mechanism because each participant relies on their own experience to create a value system. That value system then impacts how they mediate college choice. In some cases, they seek to replicate their exact experience. In others, they seek to provide support to their students they did not receive. That impact is present throughout the themes below.

Participants' Experience as Professional Musician's Impacts Mediation

Each participant shares a life story that did not follow a clear, linear path, often consisting of an early professional career made up of multiple jobs. Those experiences manifest in their guidance of music majors. Sharon's understanding of a musician's life leads her to discourage musicians from using the large government resources that supposedly help students know what income to expect from certain degrees. She suggests those tools are not meant to measure an income based on a portfolio of jobs. Other participants' experience manifests in their mediation of college choice to students via their comments about how difficult the life of a musician can be after graduation. It results in participants wanting their students to enter the music industry with a clear view of what they consider to be the reality of the life of a musician. Henry tells students to expect to do cool things, but *a lot* of them, and highlights the need to hustle to make it work. Laura also warns students of the hard work necessary to be a musician and describes the musician's life as a mixed bag of good and bad jobs. Kris makes sure her

students understand that they should expect to do more than just perform. Lindsey describes the fear of graduating from graduate school without a clear path forward in music. These perceptions and experiences of the musical life impact the type of student participants think will be successful in a music major and the career that follows. Henry and Laura reference considerations like communication, planning, work-ethic, and drive as requirements if a student wants to be a successful in the PACP program, and by extension the college music application. Sharon and Kris suggest similar traits are required to be a successful music major. I suspect there is also a systemic neoliberal influence at play here, which I will discuss in a later section. All participants present this information with a mixture of excitement and fear. The subtext is that students should think hard before entering the music field. I will return to this phenomenon when discussing their views on the value of a music degree in RQ4. The experience participants have had as professional musicians bumps against their perception that parents and students expect college to lead directly to a specific job.

In the review of the literature, I made the assumption, based on ASCA (n.d.) and CACREP (2015) standards and other literature related to career-readiness, that career-readiness conversations were happening between counselors and students. Participant narratives support this assumption, and indeed, there is also a connection between the participants' career guidance and their mediation of college choice to these students. Of course, the standards cited are referring to trained school counselors. This study, however, finds that career-readiness advice for prospective music majors is provided by a broader constellation of musically trained influencers.

Participants Compare their College Choice to Their Students'

Despite these participants being different ages, each of them pointed to the differences between the environment of their own college choice and the environment currently surrounding their students. Sharon, Kris, Henry, and Laura all specifically point to the absence of structured guidance given to them during their high school years. Henry's comment about getting only about 10 minutes with his college counselor is particularly reminiscent of the research showing that counselors are overworked (ASCA, n.d., Belasco, 2013; Clayton, 2019; Perna et al., 2008). Each of the participants indicates they feel it is important to guide their current students *because* they didn't receive guidance and they want to make sure their students are better cared for than they were. The *absence* of experience, in this case, impacts how they mediate college choice to their students. While participants want to provide guidance they didn't receive, Sharon, Laura, Henry, and Lindsey all explicitly point out that they don't push students or close doors, trying instead simply to be informative. It is clear they view this as the platonic ideal. They don't want to be viewed as too pushy or too directive. They see the need for guidance, but they do not want to actively discourage students from certain schools. However, delimiting is occurring, and their intention may not be the same as what is received by the students. This is potential area for future study that I will address in that section.

Another common observation when participants compared their college choice to those of their students is the vastly different costs associated with college today. Sharon and Kris mentioned specifically how much more their alma maters cost today than they

did during their college years. Henry laments the rising costs of higher education more broadly, even suggesting there was a period where he considered not recommending college to his students at all. Eventually, he describes coming to terms with the purpose of college having changed and adjusts his guidance of students accordingly. He perceives higher education being about finding a job, so Henry tries to prepare students for that outcome. Despite the comparatively lower tuition costs when they went to school, many of the participants cite costs as a delimiting factor in their own college decision. The fact that they were still concerned about paying for school even when costs were lower leads to greater concern for their students.

McDonough states “the guidance process impacts students through subtle and unobtrusive controls” (1997, p. 91). The participants’ characterization of their guidance as providing information and not being pushy supports McDonough’s statement. These participants are mediating college choice through a variety of explicit and implicit methods, and it is heavily influenced by their own experience in college choice. However, none claim ownership of that direction. This also intersects with Ilic et al. (2020) in which the authors found that counselors did not want to give opinions on where students should apply. However, in Ilic et al., this reluctance was because the counselors’ bandwidth was too narrow to allow them to dig deeply into the right fit for each student. I do not think bandwidth issues are the motivating factor with the reluctance shown by this study’s participants. I believe their reticence has more to do with not thinking it is their job to direct a student so forcefully. They view themselves as advice givers not decision makers, and they may not want to overstep.

Relationships Are Key, Particularly Private Music Teachers

Guiding music majors is deeply relational, with special importance given to the private music instructor. This includes the private instructor at ASA and the faculty at the music schools students plan to attend. In the answer to RQ 1, I illustrated how relationships were foundational for participants in their journey toward a music degree. Participants, whether consciously or subconsciously, replicate these meaningful relationships for their students. Lindsey became the band director who opened her eyes to music, cultivating the love of music in her students. Henry became the teacher whose command of the art awed him. Kris is now a percussion teacher who inspires young musicians. Laura now preaches the same virtues that her family of origin once preached (e.g., arts and academics make each other better, if you work hard enough you can do it, etc.). Sharon believes in her students the way the teacher who gave her the confidence to teach believed in her.

While there are many types of relationship influences present here, all participants point to private teachers as a particularly important relationship for musicians. One of the most consistent themes from the narratives of how these participants guide music students is the focus placed on the private instructor. This is both the private instructor at the high school level, like Kris, and the private instructor at the college level. The participants uniformly encourage students to talk to their current instructor to get instrument-specific advice on where to go to college. As exemplified by the story of the guitarist who attended the University of Denver Lamont School of Music, Sharon relies on the private teachers at ASA to give her expert advice on which schools are good for

which instruments. This is especially important given the insight shared by participants regarding the changing hierarchy of good music schools. Across the board, the participants instruct prospective music majors to learn about the private instructor at the schools they are considering. Kris has particularly detailed advice to give students in the regard. She wants her students to know whether a teacher's pedagogical style will fit with that student's personality and learning style. Incidentally, this highlights the connection between the private instructor in the high school and the private instructor in the college. The fit between college instructor and music student is key, and the person who can best speak to that fit is the high school music instructor. The continuum of this sort of expert, relational guidance is paramount.

The finding that participants consider private teachers to be the most important influencing factor on prospective music students is consistent with the research on college music majors (Carson, 2020; Curtis, 2012; Overmier, 2003), all of which find that musicians rely heavily on their private music instructors for advice on college. However, this study provides a slightly different view of the importance of college counselors put forth by McDonough (2005a). McDonough contends that counselors are one of the most important professional influencing college enrollments. This study expands that understanding by demonstrating that a more diverse group professionals, namely private teachers, are also expected to be the primary influencer on these students. While not explicitly stated, the participants' path toward replicating meaningful relationships in their lives for their students is reminiscent of Jones and Parkes (2010) study on the motivations of undergraduate music students to pursue careers in music education. In that

study, 55.9% of respondents stated they wanted to pursue music education because they wanted to be like their former teachers who helped them.

The Siren's Song: Counselors See It in Their Students

In the answer to RQ 1, I explored how music had a magnetic pull on the participants. Once they experienced living the musical life, they were never quite able to shake it. While there is tension present as participants describe this phenomenon, especially related to cost concerns, it is a foundation of their value system, and it impacts how they mediate college choice because it defines their perception of the type of person who should study music. This is supported by the fact that the participants also consider the siren's song of music to still be alive in the younger generation. Laura and Kris both note that the music students *must* do music. Kris even goes so far as to tell students that if they can do anything else they should, suggesting that the love of the art must overcome the difficulty of the profession. Sharon tells me students choose music because it is just kind of "in them." Lindsey points out that the band environment is special and allows students to act differently, surrounded by their musical friends. Participant ability to see this in their students determines how they guide individual students. It manifests in comments made by Kris, Laura, and Henry that suggest if a student *can* do something else, they should. The idea is that only those who love music more than anything else can be successful.

I was unable to find research that specifically studies a high school musician's call to music. There are studies that show that students discover career interest based on their identities and passions, for example in student affairs (Linder, C. & Winston

Simmons, C, 2015; Taub & McEwen, 2006), but those studies show students discovering these career paths as undergraduates. The participant observations in this study suggest the pull to music starts earlier. This earlier manifestation seems to track with the participants' observation of the earlier experiential education musicians receive. Parkes and Jones (2011) hint at the musician's need to do music in their study. The authors proceeded with their study on student motivations to pursue careers in music by assuming musicians "really haven't a choice, as if their love of being a musician and the need to be creative was somehow above all other needs, including financial ones" (p. 21). They expected the motivation for music majors was rooted firmly in identity, that they simply *were* musicians. However, their study failed to support that assumption, finding instead that their participants pursued music careers because they enjoyed performing and communicating with the audience through music. In responding to those findings, the authors suggested that such feelings were so obvious to the students in the study that their primary identity was as a musician that they didn't think it was worth mentioning. This study supports the assumption made by Parkes and Jones by showing that musical counselors perceive that their students pursue music majors because their identity as musicians demands it.

Counselors Possess Insider Knowledge and Use a Vague Assessment

Procedure

Largely because of their own experience as working musicians and music school graduates, participants mediate the college choice process to prospective music majors through use of insider knowledge. Each has gone through a degree in music, many have

multiple music degrees. All have pursued careers in music and have years of experience. They know what is important to musicians and therefore mediate college choice to prospective music students by helping students ask the right questions and navigate the process. There are limited resources to help music students navigate the college application process, a particularly comprehensive example is MajoringinMusic.com, created in 2011 (Majoring in Music, n.d.). That resource, while valuable, is geared toward the student themselves not the counselors. Indeed, when I asked Sharon if she was aware of it, she said she was not. The participants describe something that is a purely experiential and relational undertaking. In most cases, the participants do not appear to realize just how proprietary their knowledge is. Sharon knows she doesn't have the instrument-specific information needed in every case, so she guides students back to their private instructor, but even knowing what you don't know is a kind of insider knowledge. Her insider knowledge allows her to differentiate how the needs and experiences of prospective music majors differ from the rest of the student population and she adjusts her guidance accordingly. Sharon and Laura both observe the need for musicians to have deep musical experience early because of how intense the college music curriculum is right from the start. Laura created the PACP program because she is aware of the special needs of performing artists, musicians included, during the application process. Henry is a mentor in that program because of that same knowledge. Kris is constantly helping students navigate potential pitfalls based on her experience in the music field.

This insider knowledge contributes to the use of a vague, subjective value system to assess their students' ability and to delimit schools where their students apply. I found

this to be one of the most generative discoveries in conducting this research. We see it in Sharon's comment about doing a "reality check" on certain schools. Henry and Laura engage in similar exchanges through the PACP application process, helping students pick realistic schools. Lindsey hints at it in relation to knowledge about which schools are good, suggesting this is necessary information to help students know where to look. The most overt acknowledgement of this value system is from Kris, which is appropriate given she is the instrument-specific expert. Her comment about a student not being a "unicorn" illustrates the point that some students have the requisite musical ability to be successful and others don't.

Instructors assess a student's ability and use it to guide them toward or away from certain schools. The sentiment is along the lines of 'you're not good enough to get into Juilliard.' However, it is less clear how those teachers know they won't get into Juilliard. I'm not saying they are wrong, just that it is murky. It is relational. Perhaps they had a student that went there, or they knew someone that went there, or they know the instructor there, or they know someone who knows the instructor. That relational component is combined with a general perception of the quality of that school. This is similar to the perceptions of the counselors in McDonough (1997) and Engberg and Gilbert (2014) in which they are delimiting schools for students based on certain metrics, but music presents cloudier metrics. Academic counselors can look at average SAT/GPA to determine whether a student's profile matches a school or not. The criticism of the overuse of these 'objective' metrics prematurely discouraging or excluding students who might do well at those schools is valid. However, issues with the 'objectivity' of those

academic metrics aside, music doesn't have anything near as standardized. These teachers are using their content expertise ('I know good music when I hear it') and combining it with their perception of certain schools ('Juilliard is the best, so if you aren't the best I've ever heard, you can't go there'). Both insights are fallible, and aside from Laura's observation of a similar phenomenon related to the difficulty in measuring the intangible in teaching, none of the participants seems aware of the challenges inherent in this approach.

In McDonough (1997), she shows that college options are delimited by intermediate organizations including high school counselors. "The counselor creates and implements the school's organizational response to college planning and, as such, creates an organizational worldview that serves to delimit the full universe of possible college choices into a smaller range of manageable considerations" (p. 89). McDonough's work is referring to the professional counselors, but this study shows that such delimiting is occurring through other musically trained adults, which in this case includes the college counselor. These same actors are engaging in major-specific conversations with students, an exchange that McDonough does not describe in her work. In the literature review, I asserted it could be assumed such conversations were happening. This study shows that conversations about major are happening with prospective music majors. These musically trained adults help them navigate the decision to major in music and selecting the best school to pursue that major by leveraging their insider knowledge and using subjective ability measures.

Because of Sharon's insider knowledge, she can offer more to music students than the research on counselors suggests (Carlson, 1999; Carson, 2020; Curtis, 2012; Locke, 1982; Ludeman, 1964). Indeed, Carson (2020) suggested that music students do not utilize counselors as often as non-music students because of the counselor's lack of specialized knowledge. Sharon has that specialized knowledge and, as such, is able to guide music students more effectively. Curtis (2012) and Overmier (2003) show that music teachers influence college choice of music students. This study supports the importance of music teachers in mediating college choice to students and suggests that this importance is made possible by the music teacher's insider knowledge.

Neoliberal Influences Impact Counselor Guidance

Neoliberal influences permeate and surround the participant narratives. All participants at one point or another use market-based language like ROI, marketability, or market competition. The most overt influence is the rapidly rising cost of college, which all participants observe at some point during our conversations and give as a reason for why college outcomes need to be carefully considered. Participants see the student as a consumer and a competitor. When the time comes to select a school, Sharon encourages students to negotiate scholarship, a tactic also supported by Laura. Both Laura and Sharon encourage students to look for the monetary value in their non-music skills as well as their music skills (e.g., are there academic scholarships available if you double major?). The scholarships students receive are held up as indicators of a student's worth and musical ability. This appears in both the participants' perception of students and their

re-telling of their own lives, with many participants offering, unsolicited, that they were awarded music scholarship.

Henry extends his neoliberal criticism to the institutions of higher education, pointing out that they are motivated by tuition revenue and headcount rather than the well-being of their students, a criticism that is supported by research on music schools (Curtis, 2012; Hawkins, 2008, Rees, 1983, 1986). He even calls this out as being directly opposed to creativity. They aren't looking for the best musician or teacher; schools are looking for a revenue generator. This criticism is partially rooted in another neoliberal theme: you must overwork to make a living. This sentiment is most clearly represented in Laura's pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps thinking, but also appears in Henry's insistence on "hustle" and his encouragement to students to diversify their abilities in order to be more marketable. The marketability concept appears with Sharon and Laura in their thought about what majors or minors a student can add to a music degree to increase marketability. The perceived lack of income available to musicians appears to be an underlying force here. Kris puts this most bluntly when she asks a student who wants to be a jazz drummer, "so you want to be poor?" Henry directly points out the difference between music job placement and nursing or engineering. Laura compares the professionalism required for music to that of being a doctor or a lawyer but with less pay.

Sharon considers students who were independent, driven, ambitious, committed, self-starting to be the example of excellence. When Henry talks about the conservatory program, one of the goals is to teach the students to be independent and driven. In some respects, this is influenced by neoliberalism because it has shades of an "every man for

themselves” approach. Of course, it is also typically true that college does require more proactivity from the individual. The result is a bit of a chicken or the egg, but both the chicken and the egg are on the neoliberal farm. The college subscribes to neoliberal ideology by focusing on making students fend for themselves, preparing graduates to participate in *homo economicus* (Read, 2009). The high school values independent students *and* is forced to focus on independence because college expects that from their students.

The type of student ASA counselors consider to be successful music majors reflect the “radical self-sufficiency” Andrea Moore decries as being a result of neoliberal influence (2016, p. 33). Guidance given to prospective music majors in the study also supports the findings in Carrigan and Bardini (2021) in that counselors suggest prospective music majors have a practical minor or double major. While there are indications that participants in this study want their students to be marketable upon graduation, consistent with the findings of Carrigan and Bardini, most of the advice about minors and double majors is geared toward making sure students are considered for every scholarship dollar available by presenting the most diverse set of skills to colleges. It is still a neoliberal inclination, but slightly different from the career-focused motivations presented by Carrigan and Bardini. This focus on scholarship dollars is supported by Curtis (2012) in which he finds scholarship to be a significant factor in which schools music applicants attend. The counselors in this study have a sense for the importance of scholarship, supporting the importance found in Curtis. However, this fact is not mutually exclusive from a neoliberal influence. It simply shows that a perception of the importance

of scholarship is present among, not just students, but counselors as well. This focus supports the views of Cunningham (2016) and Saunders (2014) that students are considered consumers and encouraged to engage in competition.

RQ4: What are the surrounding influences on norms and expectations of their work?

School Culture

This question is embedded throughout and appears in the responses to the other research questions. Participants view the education offered at ASA with pride. Sharon considers herself a good advocate for ASA because she has faith in the type of student the arts and academic curriculum produces. Laura can't say enough about how important the integration of arts and academics is at ASA and how well it prepares students for college, a viewpoint shared by Henry. Participants view college-going as the expectation among ASA students, despite being concerned about the cost.

Music Industry

They consistently describe an expectation that the private music teachers play the most important role in guiding college-bound musicians in college choice, an expectation supported by the findings of Curtis (2012), Carson (2020), and Overmier (2003). This expectation sets music student apart from non-music students, with the latter being expected to simply go to the college counselor to receive the guidance they need, an inclination that supports McDonough's (2005a) finding that college counselors are one of the most important professional for driving college enrollments. Laura, Sharon, Kris, and Henry all cite the expectation that musicians are experiencing music making at an early

age while non-musicians can wait until college to specialize. The observation that musicians need to have musical experiences early on to develop specialization is not represented in the literature on music majors, though it is a common topic of conversations among music admission professionals. The combination of these expectations resembles the organizational habitus Engberg and Gilbert (2014) define as “the normative culture of collective consciousness of a school environment, and how this interacts with individual decision making.” Because this study focuses counselors and not the resultant actions of students, the expectations described above represent the first half of Engberg and Gilbert’s quote, or what McDonough (1997) calls organizational culture.

Higher Education

Participants point to the higher education industry as setting expectations on their students, thus setting expectations on them in guiding those students. Sharon speaks on this the most as she describes how the higher education system has changed over time, making it easier to apply but harder to get in and harder to afford. Colleges require students to stand out, so Sharon creates ways for them to do that. This agrees with McDonough’s (1997) findings that competitive higher education environments influence the habitus of the high school. The music specific guidance given to students often relates specifically to the expectations put on those students by colleges of music. These specialized expectations led to the creation of the PACP program by Laura and its administration by Henry. Because of their application processes, colleges create the expectation that Sharon check in with students to ensure they’ve not only applied to the university but also the music school. Kris looks at the audition requirements for

percussion set by schools of music and considers it an expectation that she prepares students for those requirements. The influence of higher education on counselor expectations directly relates to Perna and Kurban's (2013) findings that the way higher education markets and communicates with students influences their enrollment.

Students and Parents

Participants who have curricular responsibilities for college counseling, like Sharon, Laura, and Henry, have clearer views of what is expected of them but are also concerned about their own bandwidth in being able to meet those expectations. Expectations are less clear for participants who do not have a curricular responsibility. The norms they perceive are shaped by their own experience going through college choice, combined with their experience as professional musicians and teachers at ASA. Norms and expectations are also shaped by feedback from students and parents. This is particularly true for the Sharon who routinely reminds me that she is doing it all herself and can't possibly do everything that needs to be done, a feeling that appears to be a result of parent and student feedback. This is consistent with McDonough (2005a) where the author shows that counselor worldview is influenced by the school's and counselors' perceptions of parents' and communities' expectations combined with a counselor's own knowledge base. It also supports the findings related to counselors' limited bandwidth in Belasco (2013) and Clayton (2019). Participants ultimately consider it their job to provide information to students, help them navigate pitfalls, have confidence in the next few life steps, and set them on the path to a happy, creative, and fulfilling life.

Conclusion

By exploring how counselors engage with music teachers, this study helps expand the application of extant literature and contributes to filling the gaps presented in the literature review. There are indeed similarities between research on college counselors and the participant narratives presented here. However, because that research is focused on professional counselors, this study expands the application of that research to informal counseling. Similarly, the research on the impact of institutions of higher education on the college choice process is expanded to include schools of music within those institutions. Many of the findings from previous studies are supported by this study, but this study drills down further into their music-specific applications.

Recommendations

The interpretation offered in the narratives includes elements evaluation. Broadly speaking, the teachers at ASA care deeply about their students and want the best for them. Sharon is a curious, life-long learner who does not rest on her laurels or uncritically recycle materials for her students. She is constantly trying to improve what she does. I found her positive and humble approach to counseling students inspiring. A similar drive exists with Laura and Henry in relation to their curricular responsibilities. Henry wants to improve PACP and, based on his personal history of leadership and improvement, I do not doubt PACP is in good hands. Laura is tireless in her pursuit of knowledge that will benefit ASA and its students. Kris and Lindsey clearly love their students. Kris continues to create a community of percussionists both past and present, setting them up with social capital to go along with the percussion skills they learn in her class. Lindsey highly values a supportive and welcoming environment and cultivates such a space in her

classrooms. I am encouraged about the state of music education at the high school level after spending time with these participants. While the world is indeed different, the love of music, the siren's song, is still strong. The participants see it in their own lives and in the lives of the students they work with. This unifying factor, along with the sense that these are 'my people' persists and even crosses generations. It is like a strong silk thread that connects musicians over time and space, despite the turmoil of the surrounding culture.

Practical Recommendations

More Collaboration Between Counseling Office and Music Teachers

Except for Kris, none of the participants had any structural interaction with the College Counseling office. Even Kris's interaction with Sharon appeared to be more a function of the two being friends, not connection specifically created to benefit the students. Many participants acknowledged the need for more proactive interaction, particularly Laura and Henry, which is fitting considering their own curricular responsibilities to guide students. An immediate process improvement could include Sharon flagging any musically interested students for the music faculty. It is clear she encourages the students to be in touch with their faculty, but one additional proactive step would solidify that connection. I encourage them to explore more substantive ways of connecting the support they give to students, creating a network rather than distinct stops along the road.

Engaging Alumni

Both Sharon and Kris shared stories of positively using ASA alumni in their guidance of current students. An expansion of alumni engagement would be beneficial, particularly for Henry in the PACP program. That program is meant to give meaningful guidance into the particulars of music applications and auditions. While Henry and the other faculty have some of this experience, none of them have done it as recently as ASA's alumni. This engagement would likely increase relational connections and begin to show current ASA students the variety of outcomes associated with music degrees.

Creating an Application Guide

Sharon and I discussed the possibility of creating a guide for music students as they progress through the college choice process. This would be a shared endeavor between college counselors and music teachers like the participants here and college admission professionals like myself. The idea would be to codify some of the insider knowledge that is present in the narratives. Combining the perspectives of secondary and post-secondary music experts would help create a resource that is not too local - like it might be if it was just created by high school counselors - and is not a marketing tactic - as it might be if it was just created by admission professionals looking to fill their class.

Fostering Connections Between High School and College Music Teachers

A longer-term practical suggestion is the creation of a database that connects high school and private music teachers with their counterparts in the post-secondary arena. While Sharon could potentially put something like this together for ASA, it is probably outside her bandwidth and a national approach would be more beneficial to more people. This research further solidifies the primacy of the private music teacher in guiding

students and the importance of the post-secondary music teacher to the student's eventual musical growth. A resource that connected those two sides of the guidance spectrum would benefit all. Sharon and I can start this work through our respective professional organizations.

Develop Reflection Exercise for Staff at ASA

This study found that counselors draw heavily from their own experience to guide their students. A potential area for development would be a workshop or exercise to help staff at ASA reflect on their own upbringing and paths to music, drawing connections between that background, their views of the value of a music degree, and their guidance of students. It would serve both as a team building exercise, strengthening the community of teachers and staff at ASA, and as a means to encourage these staff members to claim their role as informal college counselor.

Transferrable Skills Training

Participants in this study were very aware of the transferable skills they perceived to be gained through music study. ASA should consider creating a training module geared toward delivering this knowledge more broadly and connecting it to college guidance. The audience could include teachers at ASA, students, and their parents. Such a training would help address concerns about majoring in music. By showing how music education can be applied outside of the traditional musical careers (performing and teaching), it would help broaden the definition of what it means to be a successful music graduate. Laura is clearly doing some of this work with teachers, helping them connect

the skills they have developed through music study to their classroom work. Her work in this area could serve as the foundation for this training.

Philosophical Recommendations

I found the narratives that focused on how hard it is to be a musician to be difficult to hear. This is much of the motivation for the ‘I want you to go in with your eyes fully open’ comments among participants. However, these people are successfully working in the music industry. They decided to do music and seem relatively happy. Is telling students how hard it is really just good advice for high school students, or is it overly discouraging? Of course, I agree with the general idea. I’ve seen how hard it is to make it as a performer. I’ve seen plenty of talented people who just don’t have the drive or will to survive the full-time performer life. Mastering a craft is hard. That all rings true. That said, I find myself wanting them to take a broader view. It really is going to be hard if a student only pursues a career in performing. If that is all a musician consider worthwhile, then yes, that will be extremely difficult. But what about Kris’s story about the student who expanded her love of music into video games? What about the fact that all these participants didn’t end up just pursuing performing, but found seemingly satisfying jobs in the music world? The participants are particularly interested in educating their students in the realities of college music study. They want their students to enter that world with their eyes wide open. While many have expanded their definitions of musical success over the years, more emphasis could be placed on the value of a music degree beyond the traditional outcomes (i.e., performing). These teachers clearly believe there are worthwhile outcomes from studying music that do not

require a performance career. In fact, all of them are doing something other than just performing. If part of these conversations included framing non-performing outcomes as just as valuable, I think ASA's counseling program would be more fully realized.

In general, I hope an awareness of the complex and nuanced themes presented here will help counselors at ASA deliver better guidance to their students. That may include reflecting on the apparent contradictions that surface in their personal stories, a task made easier if they engage in the recommended reflection exercise.

Limitations

Limitations in Data Collection

In qualitative data collection, participant comfort with the evaluator can result in limitations (Creswell, 2014). In observations, participants may feel as though the evaluator is intruding, leading to a censored retelling of their perspective. In interviews, the participant's comfort with the evaluator may affect their ability to clearly articulate their experiences. I strove to avoid these pitfalls by establishing a strong rapport, aided by the multi-interview structure, and allowing the participant to select the location for the interview to increase their comfort. I feel confident that I established good rapport with my participants. The fact that I am a musician ended up being much more helpful than I anticipated. Being able to reflect their story with short anecdotes of my own established me as one of 'their people' early on. However, this is my perception of events. The limitations listed above may still be present.

Artifact collection is potentially limited by access to the artifacts' creators. Because so many of the resources presented by Sharon are third-party resources, it was

difficult to understand the intentions behind them. Engaging in co-connoisseurship with Sharon helped address this concern by providing an opportunity to get feedback and background on the documents selected.

Many of these limitations deal with issues of subjectivity. Are the participants censoring their behavior due to being observed? Are the interviewee's presenting an accurate description of events? Are the artifacts representative and current? In a criticism and connoisseurship study, many of these factors may be considered features rather than bugs as long as they are acknowledged ahead of time. Eisner (1994) describes it this way:

The efforts to eliminate through convention the subjectivities that must inevitably enter into any interpretation of reality seem to be less candid than an up-front recognition that a human being is providing his or her best effort to describe, interpret, and appraise some aspect of the world in which he or she lives (p. 346).

A further limitation is that this study did not explore the salience of how the race or ethnicity of the participants or that of their students interacted with the research questions. According to ASA's 2021-2022 Annual report, the 5th-12th grade student population is 6% Black/African American, 3% Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, 32% Hispanic/Latino, 1% Native American, 7% two or more, and 51% White, which is roughly the same racial and ethnic makeup as the city of Phoenix (ASA, 2023). The participants all presented as White, and it stands to reason the students who interact with them come from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. Had this study explored race and ethnicity, it likely would have impacted the findings. And it is important to note that these findings may not be transferable for counselors of color.

Researcher Limitations

Researchers point out that the focus on the researcher's expertise or connoisseurship puts a lot of power in the hands of the researcher (Donmoyer, 2014; Stufflebeam, 2001). Donmoyer (2014) refers to it as "reliance on an all-knowing connoisseur/critic" (p. 445), while Stufflebeam (2001) highlights the dependence of this approach on the researcher's qualifications and indicates some skepticism about accepting a criticism from anyone less experienced than Eisner himself. The onus was on me as researcher to cultivate a relationship with stakeholders, establishing my expertise and building confidence in the value of the report. It also required that I make clear the collaborative nature of the endeavor, including looking to the stakeholders as co-connoisseurs (Miller, 2018). Striving for humility and professionalism was key.

Related to the power placed in the researcher's hands, this method relies heavily on the ability of the writer, me in this case, to present the events effectively and evocatively. As such, the effectiveness of this endeavor is limited by my writing ability.

Time Constraints and Access Limitations

Finally, research time and number of participants are consistently a limitation cited in research. While the number of participants in this study meets the minimum suggested by Uhrmacher et al. (2017), it stands to reason that even more nuance and complexity would be unearthed if additional teachers had been able to participate. Similarly, if I had been able to spend more time with the participants, it is possible more color could have been added to their accounts, increasing the richness of the description.

Opportunities for Future Research

Start With Younger Students

The purpose of this project was to get a better picture of the counselors at ASA, broadly defined, and their work guiding music students through college and major choice. The next logical step in learning more about the music student college choice process is to look at the other players, particularly students and parents. One takeaway from my time with these participants is that the decision to major in music appears to happen earlier in the process. When they get to Sharon, they have often already made the decision. Future research should focus on high school students, starting freshman year.

The Intended Versus the Received

Most participants indicated they aren't closing doors or forcing students in one direction. Instead, they all consider their rolls to be one of presenting the information and letting the student make the decision. Future research should investigate whether the intended curriculum matched the received curriculum. Are students actually feeling resourced or pushed in one direction?

Use a Broader Definition of Counselor, Including Parents

This study established a broader definition of counselor, considering other actors that influence a student's college choice. Given this broader definition, future research should consider how other individuals play a counseling role in a student's life. An obvious first step would be to engage the parents. There are references in the narratives to how influential parents are and that they are not always reliable discerners of their student's gifting. Profiling parents of music majors may reveal profiles (e.g., musical themselves, non-musical and so they are impressed with their student's ability,

contentious, etc.). A McDonough-style research project that builds on the one presented here by including students and parents would be fascinating.

Coda – “What a Way to Spend the Day”

To end, I want to present the text of a song that I kept coming back to during this process. The song is “Why?” from the musical *Tick Tick Boom* by Jonathan Larson (2001). The refrain “Hey, what a way to spend the day / I’m gonna spend my time this way” is the siren’s song or the musical bug given shape and sound. It illustrates the pull to music that I heard over and over again from my participants as well as the realization that some things are worth more than money. It is how I feel about music, and any time I hit a wall in researching and writing this dissertation, this song was a source of comfort and motivation. As Laura would return to the classroom to remember why she is doing what she’s doing, I returned to the piano to play and sing my way through this piece. I’ve included the text below, but I encourage you to go find a recording and listen to it.

“Why?” from *Tick Tick Boom* (Larson, 2001)

When I was nine,
Michael and I
Entered a talent show down at the Y

Nine A.M. went to rehearse by some stairs
Mike couldn't sing
But I said, "No one cares"

We sang "Yellow Bird" and "Let's Go Fly A Kite"
Over and over and over
Till we got it right

When we emerged from the YMCA
Three o'clock sun had made the grass hay

I thought,

Hey, what a way to spend a day
Hey, what a way to spend a day
I make a vow, right here and now
I'm gonna spend my time this way

When I was sixteen,
Michael and I
Got parts in "West Side"
At White Plains High

Three o'clock went to rehearse in the gym
Mike played "Doc," who didn't sing
Fine with him

We sang, "gotta rocket in your pocket"
and "the Jets are gonna have their day tonight"
Over and over and over
Till we got it right

When we emerged,
Wiped out by that play
Nine o'clock, stars and moon lit the way

I thought,
Hey, what a way to spend a day
Hey, what a way to spend a day
I made a vow
I wonder now
Am I cut out to spend my time this way?

With only so much time to spend
Don't wanna waste the time I'm given
"Have it all, play the game" - some recommend
I'm afraid, it just may be time to give in

I'm twenty-nine,
Michael and I
Live on the west side of SoHo, N.Y.

Nine A.M.
I write a lyric or two
Mike sings his song now on Mad Avenue

I sing, "Come to your senses

Defenses are not the way to go"
Over and over and over
Till I got it right

When I emerge from B Minor or A
Five o'clock, diner calls, "I'm on my way"

I think,
Hey, what a way to spend a day
Hey, what a way to spend a day
I make a vow - right here and now
I'm gonna spend my time this way
I'm gonna spend my time this way

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