

Culminating Experience Reflective Paper

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1) Culminating experience project summary of project that was completed

For my Culminating Experience, I wrote a research paper surrounding my thesis statement that the business practices of the companies within the commercial music industry have killed creativity in music. To defend my statement, I researched the careers of 5 artists that embody the true spirit of creativity within their work. The artists that I researched, Captain Beefheart, Frank Zappa, Kool Keith, Outkast, and Lupe Fiasco represent various genres and span 6 decades within the music industry. For my paper, I focused on the negative aspects of their careers, including lawsuits, unfavorable record deals, and the industry's response to their creative exploits and actions.

Throughout my paper, I noticed that across the board, creativity was ignored, leaving money on the table time and time again. I make the argument that if the industry valued creativity, trusted their artists, and gave them more creative control, there would be a larger possibility for successful records. The better one treats their artist, the better the product. I further argue that the industry's currently volatile state is not simply due to piracy, but rather, in conjunction with decreasing consumer loyalty in direct response to the recognition of such creative neglect at the hands of record labels. My research paper asserts my opinion that a renewal of creative freedom within the music industry will allow for more variety and a more diverse culture.

2) Results: how the project did and did not align with expectations

Despite being a business student, I am first and foremost a musician. Upon starting the Global Entertainment program, my academic goal was to build upon my undergraduate Music Business degree to further supplement my musicianship and creativity with a strong business background. Initially I had intentions of working on a project that I was extremely passionate about and would help me with my future endeavors for the duration of the program. However, I was unfortunately unable to accomplish this goal due to restraints from my advisor.

Beginning with the proposal process, the Culminating Experience project drastically underwhelmed all of my expectations coming into the program. The proposal process, which I figured would be extremely straightforward and simple, was much longer than I anticipated, as I was met with numerous difficulties. I thought the program was going to be more open to the unique ideas and backgrounds of the students and be more encouraging of and truly support its student body's goals. I also was under the impression that since we are in a Music Business program from an extremely music-centric institution like Berklee, there would be much more music involved. All in all, however, this program felt like a generic business program, having little to do with music, which was ultimately reflected on the Culminating Experience as well. In my experience, it is possible to successfully pair music and business. Throughout my studies and professional experience, I have encountered many musicians, professionals, and students alike that operate under this natural inclination. Most of the leading professionals in the

industry are able to do just that, a trait that I believe is key in the success of these individuals.

The process of actually settling on a project that my advisor approved of was much longer than anticipated. Well beyond the halfway point of the program, I was still in the proposal process, unable to actually begin working on the project. I also expected more profound guidance and to develop a relationship with my advisor, ultimately looking to him as a mentor. Unfortunately, this was not the case. I would have loved to receive more support with my ideas and goals and reflect positively on the experience. Not a single one of my ambitious expectations were met over the course of this project, leading to an extremely frustrating experience.

3) Plan of action/ process: where project met expectations and where it needed to be revised during execution.

Initially, I wanted to complete an operational CE that included an album release, the establishment of my brand as a musician, the implementation of a social media campaign, multiple live performances, and the creation of a web-based drum sample platform that I would use as a means of promotion, education, and the advancement of creativity. Upon proposing this project, I was told that an operational CE of an album release and promotion wasn't for the GEMB students and that it was a mistake to include that option in the slides that explained the project to us at the beginning of the year. I was also told that all of my practical ideas listed wouldn't be enough work for a CE project. I still struggle to understand this

thought process, as my initial idea entailed much more work than any other project idea that was encouraged by my advisor.

Ultimately, I was eventually encouraged repeatedly to focus on only one aspect of my original idea, the drum sample platform I was initially intending to use as a promotional medium. Despite my vision for this platform as promotional, I was repeatedly pushed toward changing this idea into a business, one that would generate revenue. Ultimately, at the hands of my advisor, my CE went from my ideal project of focusing on music and the promotion of creative ideas to one that was entirely focused on money.

I was very skeptical when considering this new option, but trusted in the CE's advisory system and explored this option. The platform, as initially created, was to consist of a sample library comprised of breakbeats, live recordings of me playing drum grooves. The main premise of the platform was that I would work under creative commons, opting to give away the breaks for free to musicians and producers, only asking for artistic credit in return. My goal with this platform was to become an influencer and seek out sponsorships, studio gigs, live gigs, and teaching jobs. I spent many of the initial months of the project working on the actual development of this platform, only to have it condensed into a business plan, despite my assertions that it was not technically a revenue generating business. My goals and ideas of the platform as a means of promotion were simply negated by my advisor with statements such as, "you'll find a way to monetize." No attention was paid by my advisor and the program to the fact that I did not want to monetize this platform, pushing me into a business plan that I did not want to write.

I was constantly being pushed in a direction that I was unhappy with when it came to the development of this business plan. After my mock presentations and initial feedback from classmates, I came to the conclusion that this project was way too far from what it was intended to be and how I envision it in reality. Needing to make the most of my significant investment in this academic program, I chose to take the opportunity to leave with a CE that better reflected my goals, that I was proud of, and that contributed positively to the seeking of future opportunities within education.

With these educational goals in mind, I was simultaneously researching for a piece that I was writing, with the ultimate goal of getting published in a music business publication. For the purposes of this paper, I followed my passion for creativity, a constant theme in the multiple CE ideas that I proposed this year, and decided to write a piece about the state of creativity in the music industry. I was inspired to write this piece while listening to my favorite musicians and reflecting upon their careers, which have unfortunately been defined by conflicts with record labels and an overall stifling of creativity. Another goal of this paper was to not lean solely on pathos, but with a strong balance of the emotional component of the argument with supporting music industry research and knowledge. I feel that my paper has a strong topical balance of creativity, musicality, and music industry study that I feel would be most representative of and supported by a Music Business educational program at a music institution like Berklee College of Music. I feel that this piece is a much better reflection of my personality, my background, and my studies here at Berklee Valencia that will ultimately help me with my future

endeavors. Unfortunately, the arrival at this positive outcome was filled with negativity and disrespect at the hands of my advisor that has left me with an extremely negative view on the Culminating Experience project as a whole.

4) Next steps: if the project were to continue, what would the next phase entail?

The next phase includes me revising this paper, continuing to improve its content, and opening the piece up to trusted individuals who could give me feedback and editing support. I will also be receiving feedback from individuals whom I respect professionally and educationally. I will then attempt to get the piece published.

5) Contribution to the discipline or profession

The approach I took on this paper proposes an alternative way to solve the various issues facing the music industry. As I mentioned in the piece, it is easy to blame industry issues on piracy, streaming platforms, and technological advancement. I propose that if industry professionals trust their artists and their creativity, there will smoother transactions and more successful projects. Both sides of the table will benefit from allowing the musician to have creative control of their own art. It is my hope that this piece will be instrumental in opening up this dialogue within the music industry, eventually playing a role in the advancement of creativity, which was one of my running goals for the duration of the Culminating Experience project.

6) Impact on the student completing the work

This research paper has been the perfect marriage of music, creativity, and business. I have been allowed to analytically listen to some pieces that are without a doubt classics within the history of music, as well as learn about the careers, struggles, and music industry dealings of many of my favorite and most respected musicians. This project has also allowed me to leave Berklee Valencia with a document that is a sample of my writing skills. This is a much more positive outcome than my previous project, which would have been discarded of upon graduation.

In this document my opinion on the importance of creativity is expressed as well as my knowledge of the music industry. This is also a piece I can share with potential employers if need be. Given my significant investment in my education at Berklee Valencia, I could not have afforded to leave here with a waste of a project, like my business plan was. My research paper gave me the important opportunity to actually make something out of my time here, an opportunity that I could not pass up when deciding on my CE topic.