

**The Passion and Grit of Music Majors: The Impact of Studying Music at the College Level
on Mental Health**

By

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Abstract

This thesis explores the perceived stress that collegiate music majors experience within their degree. Anonymous surveys documenting perceived stress were collected from students at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point in order to gather data based in phenomenology on music major versus non-music major stress. While music students are experiencing high levels of stress, it appears their stress is perceived at a lower level due to the community they experience and resources provided during their studies.

Key words: music study, collegiate, perceived stress, time management, community, grit

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Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction

My journey with my mental health is not something I have ever kept secret from the world. I strive to have positive outlooks on life and the events that have occurred in it, but I cannot lie and say I have never struggled. A time in my life that my mental health was at its lowest was while I was in my undergraduate; in particular, the spring of my sophomore year.

Leading up to that semester, I was working my hardest to figure out how to balance my life and studies. I paid my own way through college, so I had to work while trying to figure out the proper schedule to pass my classes. Unfortunately, I neglected a lot of areas of my life during this time and found myself struggling to maintain friendships, and hardly eating or sleeping. At the end of my fall semester I found myself facing my biggest disappointment of my college career: failing a mandatory interview to join the professional education program at my university. Due to my negligence on maintaining friendships, I had no one to fall on to ask for help with how to process this information and how to proceed. In my mind, I summed it up to not working hard enough in my studies and choosing to be oblivious to the fact that the real reason was the panic attack I had right before the interview that was caused by a lack of sleep. I worked harder for that spring semester than I have in my entire life, and that Spring of 2019 was the first semester I made the Dean's list. As for the mandatory interview, those were deemed unnecessary that following semester, so I was able to join the professional education program a semester later than my classmates.

The kicker in this is that I have no memory of that spring. I know what classes I took because they are on my transcript, but I neglected so much of my mental and physical health to

try to succeed that I did not retain any of that information. I have talked with music colleagues of mine who share similar college experiences, and recognize that my experience is not so unique. When I sat down to decide my research topic, I knew it had to be on how studying music at the collegiate level affects one's perceived stress.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is to determine the effect of studying music at the collegiate level on collegiate students' perception of their mental health and stress levels, and to suggest preventive measures to help students and those who work with them navigate this important area of health and wellness. By the end of this thesis, I hope readers understand the depth of study that collegiate music students aim for and how that manifests in their perceived stress levels, so that readers can aim to help students to combat stress and further mental health struggles.

The research question that this study aims to answer is: What is the impact of studying music at the collegiate level on students' perception of their stress levels and overall mental health?

Importance of the Study

This thesis will be of merit to music students and professors, universities, the field of music, and future educators. Working with this data can benefit students, professors, and universities to help guide students through their degree in a manner that keeps perceived stress at a manageable level, and information drawn from this research will help the field of music to alter their courses so that students are not reaching dangerous levels of perceived stress. Future researchers can use the figures found in this study to look further into this research question, or to guide their own research.

Definition of Terms

In order to assist readers in the understanding of this research, there are a few terms I would like to specifically define. When talking about students' stress, or perceived stress, I am referring to their feelings of being overwhelmed, tense, anxious, or agitated as a result of various experiences in their life. This research focuses on stress as a result of the study of music, and the study of music in this regard is the focus of music at the college level in order to obtain a degree in music performance or education. The participants of this study took the Grit Scale Test by Angela Duckworth, which focuses on the idea of grit. Grit is a combination of passion and perseverance an individual has; to have passion is to experience a strong emotion towards something, and to have perseverance is to strive to obtain something even if the means are difficult.

In summary, Chapter One introduces this study by presenting the purpose of the study and the research question it aims to answer, the importance of this study, and a definition of terms to assist readers. Chapter Two will be a review of the literature related to this study.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

In the previous chapter, Chapter One, I introduced this study about stress amongst collegiate music students and gave some information about why I was inspired to research this topic. In this chapter, Chapter Two, I will review the literature related to my study of college music students and their stress. Almost all the scholars in this literature review agree that college students experience stress to some degree. Many authors included here talk specifically about stressors on music majors including time spent in rehearsals, practice, music classes, and general education courses. In order to further this discussion, I have organized my review of the literature into the following sections: Stress and Higher Education, Demands of Music Study, and Brain Research and Stress. In the first section on stress and higher education, I will include scholarship from authors who discuss stress in the university at large and stress in music programs on the university level. In the second section, I will share literature that focuses on the demands of music study. In the third section, I will present several studies concerning brain research and stress.

Stress and Higher Education

In this section, I will present information from scholars who study stress in the university at large (Baghurst & Kelley, 2014; Blanco, et al., 2008; Hudd, et al., 2000; Kohler Giancola, et al., 2009; McKean, 2000; Misra, et al., 2000; Ross, 1999; Saleh, et al., 2017; Bhujade, 2017), from other scholars who have looked specifically at stress in music programs at the university level (Demirbatir, 2015; Demirbatir, et al., 2012; Demirbatir, et al., 2013; Gilbert, 2021; Jääskeläinen, et al., 2020; Payne, et al., 2020; Plapp, 2011; Robson, et al., 2017; Sternbach, 2008).

Stress in the University at Large

Baghurst, et al. (2014), scholars in the areas of education and athletics, addressed stress at the collegiate level saying, “Cognitive interpretation or perception of stress in a person’s life will generally have both physiological and psychological effects. Some of the negative physiological consequences of ongoing stress include hypertension, high levels of muscle tension, and lowering of immune system defenses.” They continue, “Psychological effects such as anxiety, depression, interpersonal problems, and ineffective cognitive processes may also be manifested” (p.439). Similarly, Blanco, et al. (2008), researchers in the study of distribution and addictive disorders, in regards to psychiatric disorders among college students, stated that “College-aged individuals may have less well-developed coping mechanisms or less experience than older adults with romantic disappointments and interpersonal losses, making them particularly vulnerable to the effects of these and related stressors” (p. 1435).

Hudd, et al. (2000), a group of scholars who studied the repercussions of stress on health and self-esteem, reported in their study that students who frequently experience stress were more likely to believe that their health and health habits were worse and their self-esteem tended to be much lower than college students who did not experience stress as frequently.

Kohler Giancola, et al. (2009), a group that concentrated on psychology research, focused their research on specific stressors and discovered that key stressors for college students often include family-school and school-work conflicts. Ross (1999), who focused on gathering data for a future stress management program, noted that the majority of the college students in their study were more frequently stressed by daily problems than major life events and went on to suggest that some stresses might actually be motivational. Alternatively, a research director at the University of California, McKean (2000), observed that general pressure and self-imposed stress

were key stressors more so than changes and conflict. Misra et al. (2000), scholars that again focused on the specific stressors that college students faced, found similar findings stating that college students reactions to stress were often self-imposed and their reactions often manifested as "...persistent lack of energy, loss of appetite, headaches, or gastrointestinal problems" (p.133).

Bhujade (2017), who advocated for a mental health program to be formed in all colleges, talked beyond stress to mention anxiety, depression, and other mental illnesses. They noted that stress is something that is perceived by the individual and, depending on the circumstances, stress could be the cause of a student developing a mental illness. Their research of a population of college students confirmed this and they stated "...one can safely conclude that 20 to 25 percentage of [the] student population worldwide [is] suffering from psychological distress" (p. 749). Saleh, et al. (2017), another group of scholars centered on the research of psychology, concur with Bhujade (2017) that collegiate students are suffering from high levels of stress, depression, and anxiety. They suggest that mental health programs should focus more on the predictors of stress since "Each student deals with the same stress differently" (p.2).

Stress in Music Programs at the University Level

Demirbatir (2015), a music education professor at Uludag University in Turkey, has researched relationships between psychological well-being, happiness, and educational satisfaction within a group of university music students. Findings from this study have shown that adding health and wellness courses to music degree programs could lessen students stress, psychological, and physical problems. In a related study, Dermirbatir, et al. (2012), a group of researchers looking into students' vulnerability to mental health problems, chose to compare music students to students in medicine. They discovered that the average depression, anxiety, and stress scores were higher for music students than they were for medicine students, and the course

load was deemed more vigorous for music students than medicine students. In yet another study, Demirbatir, et al. (2013), scholars looking to see further if listening to classical music would act as a “healing force” for music students, determined that music students are indeed at risk for mental illnesses and poor psychological well-being. Their research also concluded that listening to classical music had no effect on this risk or the students’ well-being.

Gilbert (2021), a music education professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, conducted a study that had students take the Burns Anxiety and Depression surveys. The findings of this study showed not only that music students had higher depression and anxiety scores than non music majors, but also that “...there was a strong, positive relationship between anxiety and depression” (p. 69). Payne, et al. (2020), a group that also reviewed self-reported data on anxiety and depression in music students, looked further into this data to find the reasons behind the numbers. They noted that music students were enrolled in a significantly higher course load, spent copious amounts of time in rehearsals and practice and, on top of it all, many of them still held a job. Similarly, Plapp (2011), revealed that much of the stress of the music major came from “...excessive non-credit course[s], studio and private practice loads, expectations for participation outside of coursework, practicing toward an ill-defined concept of ‘success’, and poor time management skills” (p. 65).

Alternatively, Jääskeläinen, et al. (2020), researchers looking at music students specifically in Finland and the United Kingdom, suggest that it is hard to separate the typical workload of a music student into what is work, what is studying, and what are further possible contributions to stress. Looking at the workload from a different angle brought more factors that could be causes for a music student's stress, primarily this belief that talented artists on social

media are the bar for success, which creates further stress for students as they try to reach that goal faster.

Robson, et al. (2017), scholars focused specifically on music performance anxiety (MPA), looked at correlations between MPA, self-efficacy, and depression. Their findings within the music students sampled included high indications of MPA and depression, and stated that the findings “should merit concern for music educators” (p. 868). Comparably, Sternbach (2008), a research director at the Center for Arts and Wellness in Virginia, reported findings of MPA and elevated stress. They discuss the key fact that most music students are not taught how to handle MPA and are left to just figure it out as they go through their college career. Sternbach suggests that the solution here is to have teachers address MPA and wellness in their teaching, so that students begin to learn how to cope with MPA and to understand they are not alone in dealing with it.

Demands of Music Study

In this section, I will share my findings from scholars who looked into the demands of the study of music (Bernhard, 2005; Burland, et al., 2007; Bernhard, 2007; Clark, et al., 2011; Conway, et al., 2010; Cumberledge, 2017; Evans, et al., 2016; Gavin, 2012; Hildebrant, et al., 2012; Legette, 1993; McClellan, 2014; Miksza, et al., 2019; Nogaj, 2020; Orzel, 2010; Payne, et al., 2020; Perkins, et al., 2017; Pitts, et al., 2016; Royo, 2014; Mantie, 2013).

Burland, et al. (2007), researchers looking to foster beginning music students' academic skills, looks into the initial skills and attitudes of first-year music students. They introduce their findings by acknowledging that all first-year students are navigating a world and skills they may not be familiar with, but argue that music students have to take it a step further when involving performance concerns. Clark, et al. (2011), a group of scholars looking into the physiological

demands of music performance, asks the question “...what sort of athlete do musicians need to be?” (p. 137). They looked into the heart rate (HR) and oxygen uptake of musicians as they performed; their findings showed that HR and oxygen uptake during performance was matched to moderate to intense physical activities, despite performance being an action that, usually, requires no large physical movements. This indicates that the music career could have just as bad physical burnout as there is mental and emotional burnout. Looking more into burnout within the music degree, Payne, et al. (2020) looks at burnout caused by the course load music students often have. They summarize their study’s results by stating “...music education majors are highly busy, enrolling in an average of 16.5 credit hours (not including zero-credit courses) and rehearsing 9.75 hours a week; a majority of them also work for an average of 13 to 15 hours a week” (p. 50). These numbers are the mean of their studies, meaning that some students may be significantly more involved than just this.

McClellan (2014), a scholar from the Loyola University in New Orleans, looked at the social identity of music students and how that affected their stress. They found that music students did indeed strive to find themselves a place within the music department in terms of identity. Some of these identities benefitted the students in a positive manner, while others became over stressed trying to fit the identity they wanted. Similarly, Conway, et al. (2010), researchers looking into these same perceptions of identity and tension, found that students at times stressed over fitting into the identity of their degree. The primary differences occurred between the different music degrees, such as education versus performance, and then could be broken down into further identities from there. Mantie, (2013), of the College of Fine Arts, Boston University, investigated the important focus on why someone would choose to spend multiple hours a week for rehearsals. The common themes that emerged were “...stress release, a

love or enjoyment of music, social or friendship aspects, and a belief that participating in their music ensemble was a productive use of their leisure time” (p. 46). These themes are in turn part of one's identity within their music program and instead of reflecting that rehearsals are a negative time commitment, this study suggests that rehearsals tend to be positive to those involved. This may suggest that despite the time commitment, making music is an important part of the wellbeing of musicians when done in a positive setting.

Cumberledge (2017), a professor in the School of Music at the University of Louisville, explored the time usage amongst students in their college marching band. The focus groups for this study were students that were music majors and in marching band, students that were in one or the other, and students that were not marching band or music majors. When compared against each other, the groups that consisted of students that were music majors, marching band or not, always had higher times spent in class, doing homework, and doing individual practice. Evans, et al., (2016), a group focusing on the self-determination theory, analyzed the self-motivation of university music students. This study is one of the first of its kind and confirmed that in the right circumstances, practice can create intrinsic motivation that leads to more positive practice. They concluded that more research must be done to determine specifics, but these first steps are still important to understand how students self-motivate. Self-efficacy goes hand in hand with self motivation, and Royo (2014), in their dissertation for completion of a doctorate of philosophy degree, examined four vocal majors and their self-efficacy. They determined that individual self-efficacy did not alter the career path one was on, but that self-efficacy can help refine the goals set forward in the music degree. This insinuates that if one has enough self-efficacy to fine tune their goals, then they will be less likely to experience as intense of stress or burnout.

Bernard (2005), an expert on the topic of burnout amongst college music majors, completed a survey looking into the reasons behind burnout and severity of occurrences. Within this survey, many of the students who ranked high in terms of burnout also reported a higher perceived workload in their degree. Bernard (2007) examines this further and noticed that negative social interactions, which could be anything from criticisms from professors to feedback from peers, also played a big role in the perceived stress and possible burnout of students. In like manner, Orzel (2010), another graduate student looking to combat stress amongst music majors, examined burnout among college students. Orzel addresses the fact that “Symptoms and causes of general stress and burnout have been well researched, but much less has been presented on college musician’s burnout.” Continuing, Orzel states that “...many music students were overburdened with schoolwork and music commitments... no time for things they enjoyed” (p. 4). This stress found in time spent at work and other musical commitments is echoed in other scholars’ writings.

Legette (1993), a scholar from Shorter College, compared attributions of success and failure in music. In their findings, Legette states that “...perceived effort, affect for music, and music ability” (p. 3) were the biggest contributions to whether a music student was going to succeed or fail in the degree. Along with these, Hildebrant, et al. (2012), researchers focusing on the first-year of college for music students, bring up the effect of fatigue, depression, and stage fright in students. They share that while the public views music as a positive experience, music students often face excessive burden within their degrees. The findings of this research showed that first-year students did experience an increase of fatigue, depression, and stage fright throughout their time in their first-year of school; and further stated that “...attempts should be

made to minimize the stress level, improve students' ability to cope with stress, and otherwise reduce their risk for injury" (p. 43) and to prevent students from dropping out.

Gavin (2012), a professor at Baylor University, looks at the factors that could affect student drop-out rates in the music degree. Gavin concluded the reasons for withdrawal were "...dismissal from the applied music studio, erosion of personal confidence as a musician, realizations about their feelings toward music versus their feelings about teaching in general as it related to their personal career goals, and personal life issues" (p. 310). They do note that, of the students surveyed, all reported staying active in music even after dropping the program.

Alternatively, Pitts, et al. (2016), a group of scholars in the department of music at the University of Sheffield, looked instead at how the length of time a student has been rooted in music could affect their decision to drop out. They suggested that starting late in music, or taking breaks away from it, could push a student to be more likely to drop out than someone who was actively in music from a young age. While choosing to focus on how previous participation in music affects a student's decision, Pitts, et al. still recognizes that the music degree and the intensity of the degree are causation for a student to consider dropping out of the music degree.

Perkins, et al. (2017), scholars of the performing arts from the United Kingdom, looked at what served as an enabler to health among music students versus barriers to their health. They noticed in their study that the differences between enablers and barriers are complex and require further breaking down into things like lifestyle, support, and environmental barriers/enablers. The complexity of the findings still indicated that there is a strong need for a health and wellness focus in music degree programs. Wellness among university music students was also looked into by another group of music-based scholars, Miksza, et al. (2019). Their findings also strongly indicated that we need to have a wellness focus in music degree programs due to high levels of

stress found in these programs. Nogaj (2020), a professor of the psychology department at Kazimierz Wielki University, shares their findings on coping strategies for stress. The research of their study “...suggest that music students are more aware of the emotions they feel, both positive and negative; express their emotions more easily; and can effectively use their knowledge about the emotions they experience” (p. 89-90). This means that music students are capable of understanding their stress and coping with it, it sometimes just requires more engagement in realizing these aspects about themselves.

Brain Research and Stress

This section will discuss research on the brain’s response to stress (Tost, et al., 2015; Spiro, 2003; McEwen, 2012; McEwen, 2013; de Kloet, et al., 2005; Kitzrow, 2003; Luruli, et al., 2020; Felsten, 2003; Conrad, 2011; Byrd, et al., 2012; Bremner, 1998; Duckworth, 2016), and more specifically discussing scholarship on the brain in regards to stress and music (Lennard, 2018; Steyn, et al., 2016; Osborne, et al., 2002)

Brain Response to Stress

Spiro (2003), a reviewer of the book *The End of Stress as We Know It*, shares with us some of the most valuable moments within the book. They share that the book reveals the dangerous repercussions of elevated stress levels, such as developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result, and shares the unfortunate truth that there will likely never be an “end” to stress. McEwen (2013), the author of the book that Spiro reviewed, researched how the workings of the brain over time can lead to maladaptive lifestyles in response to stress. They explain that stress not only can lead to bad coping habits and development of problems such as low self-esteem, but also that “Stress hormones progressively impair brain function” (p. 674). Equivalently, Bremner (1998), another scholar looking into the damage that stress can have on

the brain, stated that “Studies in animals showed that stress results in damage to the hippocampus,” (p. 797) and further looks into studies on humans that might suggest the same result. De Kloet, et al. (2005), researchers of the brain in response to stress, also noted the negative response that the brain has to stress. They noticed that over time, imbalances of adrenal corticosteroid hormones could introduce stress-related diseases.

Another writing by McEwen (2012) begins to take a look into the factors that lead up to this stress response. They take note that stress is perceived on the individual level and furthermore affects individuals differently. The focus of McEwen’s research here is on the social environment, and one of the important findings was that stress in early life, such as an adverse childhood, altered future brain responses to stress. Similarly, Tost, et al. (2015) also looked into environmental influence and found that response to the physical environment had a huge effect on the development and shaping of the brain. They presented information that the environment can largely shape the mental health of an individual. Byrd, et al. (2012), a group of scholars looking into the factors associated with mental health at different levels, first stated their concerns over mental health problems growing in volume and severity. They address their findings in which factors positively correlated with mental health compared to factors that negatively correlated. “Suicidal tendencies, work/life responsibilities interfering with school work, negative perceptions of the campus climate, and perceived limited faculty interaction were all inversely related to mental health” (p. 188). They also made sure to note that alcohol consumption, while included in the study, was not a factor in either negative or positive mental health responses. Felsten (2003), a professor in the department of psychology at Indiana University, reviewed how the stress response of college students increased the likelihood of a depressed mood. In their studies, Felsten suggests that elevated reactions to stress indicate a

likelihood of diminished ability to function in everyday activities as well as the high possibility of a depressed mood. This is a strong indicator that stressors in life do have the ability to affect mental illnesses.

Kitzrow (2003), a licensed psychologist and professor at the University of Idaho Counseling and Testing Center, shares in their paper the needs of today's college students. After pointing out the increase of mental health problems that is being noticed across many campuses, they recommend what colleges can do in response. Kitzrow's main stance is that universities need to have the staff to have counseling centers for their students. Luruli, et al. (2020), researchers looking primarily into study demands of students, concluded in their findings that high study demands negatively impact the student's motivation to study and "Furthermore, the findings suggest access to study resources would enhance students' study engagement and student well-being" (p. 184). While this seems like a small adjustment for universities to make, if it can boost student motivation and wellness at all, then it should be a move the university wants to make. Duckworth (2016), the author of *Grit*, begins to address what students need to do to find their own motivation. Duckworth suggests that understanding of oneself can help to develop positive stress coping mechanisms and prevent development of mental illness. Conrad (2011), another author, wrote *The Handbook of Stress*, which elaborates on these ideas as well as dives further into looking at the response of stress in the brain. This book covers both broad and detailed concepts of stress and aims to cover and simplify other writing on the topic. They write that while stress is often viewed negatively, it can also work as a positive, adaptive response when the body understands how to perceive and process stress. Conrad's book should be a tool for all when it comes to understanding what stress really is.

Brain Response to Music and Stress

Osborne, et al. (2002), two scholars who focused on the cognitive processes in music performance anxiety (MPA), reported that following a behavioral model for social phobias may help us to understand the experiences one with MPA might have. The use of this model would not only give educators and musicians a better understanding of MPA, but also a model for how to cope with and combat the effects of MPA. Another group of scholars studying psychological well-being of music students, Steyn, et al. (2016), took this a step further and analyzed the effects of mindful training for music students. Their study reports that the practice of mindfulness may have significant benefits to psychological well-being of music students, as well as improvements in performance anxiety.

Abstractly, a scholar of musicology and music cognition, Lennard (2018), looked into the way that music can actually shape the brain. Lennard discusses the findings that non-musicians process music in the non-dominant cerebral hemisphere, while musicians process it across both non-dominant and dominant hemispheres. This is largely due to the way that musicians use music as contrasted with non-musicians use of music. Understanding how music can physically alter the brain may give us insight into how we can use music to strengthen the brain and prevent mental illnesses.

Chapter Two has examined scholarship concerning stress and higher education, demands of music study, and brain research and stress. To better understand stress amongst collegiate music students, it is important to research these topics of stress in higher education, demands of music study, and brain research and stress in order to know more about the different responses collegiate students have to stress, and how the study of music might interact with that stress. The literature included here forms the foundation of this research because it helps to better examine

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my research question: What is the impact of studying music at the collegiate level on students' perception of their stress levels and overall mental health?

Chapter III: Design and Methodology

Last chapter, I reviewed pre-existing literature about stress and higher education, demands of music study, and brain research and stress. In Chapter Three, I will now disclose my design for this research project and share my methods of analysis. I have created the following subsections for comprehension of the reader: Process, Participants, Qualitative Research, Data Collection, and Analysis. As I noted in Chapter One, the research question guiding this study is: What is the impact of studying music at the collegiate level on students' perception of their stress levels and overall mental health?

Process

My process for conducting this research began with wanting to understand why so many undergraduate music majors who I studied alongside were reporting large amounts of stress and often feeling overwhelmed in their study. I gathered data by asking students to document their perceived stress every week over the course of a semester by using online surveys. These students I also had take Angela Duckworth's Grit Test to see what they felt their strengths were when it came to processing different stresses. I also needed to survey educators within the college that my sample students attended to see if they were aware of the perceived stress levels their students were encountering. I shared a virtual recruitment poster with the music department and other departments on campus to find students who were interested in my research topic, and those who wanted to participate reached out to me via email. The students who showed interest signed an Informed Consent form (see Appendix A), and were reminded each week of the semester to fill out the weekly survey. They were reminded to complete Duckworth's Grit survey at the beginning and end of the semester. Out of the students who showed interest in my research, I had eight (8) music majors and five (5) non-music majors submit data for my

research. Professors within the Music Department were emailed a survey to complete one time at the end of the semester. I had six (6) highly regarded music professors respond to my survey. The information from all of these surveys was then compiled for an analysis of coding for themes.

Participants

My participants were selected through use of voluntary response sampling. This kind of sampling allowed students at the university to volunteer themselves for my research instead of me directly contacting them first. They were able to see what my research was about by viewing a virtual recruitment poster I shared with various departments on campus, and then they could email me for more details. This voluntary response sampling was used for the participants who were educators, except the recruitment process was different. The professors of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Music Department were all emailed the link to my survey, and they could choose whether to respond to it or not. Sampling methods are important to research since they determine the strength and variability of the data one could collect. Because I tried to understand stress among collegiate music students, I used this type of sampling to gain a balanced sample of collegiate music and non-music students. In order to help answer questions about stress among music students, specifically at the collegiate level, I also needed educators that taught in the field of music to participate in online surveys for my research. Once these details were confirmed, and having acknowledged this voluntary sample of students and educators came specifically from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, I was able to gather all of the participants' university emails to send them the Informed Consent form (see Appendix A) so they could consent to having their submitted data from surveys collected. It should be noted that while I initially wanted to focus on data from first-year students due to first-years' having the highest dropout rate in the study of music, my final collection came from both first-

and second-year students. The genders and backgrounds of my sample of students, and the educators surveyed, was diverse and entirely random based on who volunteered for my research.

Qualitative Research

This is a qualitative study informed by Phenomenology. Teherani, et al. (2015), describes Phenomenology as a gathering of qualitative data that allows the analysis of data based on participants' individualized experiences. The online surveys I administered to both students and educators allowed me to collect narrative qualitative data about participants' perceptions of stress among collegiate students. Furthermore, administering Duckworth's Grit test provided insight into the passion and perseverance of both collegiate music majors and non-music majors to allow me to gather phenomenological qualitative data based on the similarities and differences found between these two groups' perceptions. Qualitative data was also collected from weekly surveys to document perceived stress and the coping mechanisms the participants were experiencing from week to week. Lastly, the surveys given to professors afforded me qualitative data towards gaining perspective of the educators' understanding of students' mental health in correlation with the professors' personal teaching beliefs and the manner they present mental health resources to their students.

Data Collection

My research process required me to send out a virtual recruitment poster to students at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point at the beginning of the fall semester to allow them to volunteer for my research. These participants were students in their first or second year, and half of them had to be studying music while the other half could be studying any other field. Once students began to email me with shown interest in my research, I was able to email them the Informed Consent form (see Appendix A) so they could consent to their data being collected. For

the data collection process, I had participants fill out a few different online surveys over the course of the semester. They first had a weekly survey to fill out, and for this I sent weekly reminders. They also completed Duckworth's Grit survey once at the beginning of the semester and once at the end. To keep their survey submissions anonymous, I gave all participants a number to use in place of their name on the surveys; music majors received odd numbers and non-music majors received even numbers. The participants in my study that were educators were also volunteer based; all the educators of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Music Department were emailed a link to the survey in the final week of the semester, and they responded if they chose to. These responses were completely anonymous since all the educators were from the music field of study. At this point, I would like to note that after my initial analysis of my findings, I chose to send this survey to non-music professors from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point to help further triangulate my data. Once the semester ended and all the data was collected, I organized the data and began coding for themes for my analysis.

Approach to Analysis

My approach to analysis includes coding the responses in the students' weekly surveys, and professors' surveys for themes. Thematic coding links similar themes and allows for categorical organization to set a "framework of thematic ideas about it" (Gibbs 2007).

My data analysis plan included three stages. First, I looked at the Duckworth Grit survey results to determine if there were any differences between the eight (8) music majors and the five (5) non-music majors in my study. Next, I collated the results of the professors' surveys by question in order to determine similarities and differences, and to code for themes. Then, I inductively coded the weekly surveys the students submitted towards identifying overarching themes.

The focus of Chapter Three was on my design for this research process. I shared the steps in my individual process and outlined my method of analysis. I will report my findings of this analysis in Chapter Four.

Chapter IV: Findings

In the preceding three chapters, I introduced this study about perceived stress amongst music majors at the collegiate level, examined literature related to the study, and provided a description of the methodology and my approach to analysis. As described in Chapter Three, I collected three types of data: Duckworth Grit surveys from students, weekly response surveys from students, and professor viewpoint surveys. For ease of summary and discussion, all participants will be referred to using a code. The collegiate music majors will be referred to as ‘MS,’ for music student (e.g., 1MS, 2MS, etc.). The collegiate non-music majors will be referred to as ‘NS’ for non-music student (e.g., 1NS, 2NS, etc.). The professors surveyed will be referred to similarly, music professors as 1MP, 2MP, etc., and non-music professors as 1NP, 2NP, etc. The results of this data collection are as follows.

Duckworth Grit Surveys

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance, by Angela Duckworth, shares concerns on our worldly focus on “talent.” When focusing on the idea of talent alone, people tend to forget what all goes into the image of talent. Musicians are a group that often are praised for being extremely talented, while their audience ignores how much practice and motivation had to happen to reach where they are now. Enthusiasm and Endurance, or Passion and Perseverance, are the factors that Duckworth believes creates “Grit.” “It’s often said that the last mile is the longest. Grit keeps you on the path” (p. 291). Acknowledging this, Duckworth created the Grit Scale to use in research on correlations of grit and success. I chose to use Duckworth’s Grit Scale to see if participants that had more grit experienced less stress.

I wanted to see if there was a difference in the grit of music majors and non-music majors when it came to the purposes of answering my research question: what is the impact of studying

The Passion and Grit of Music Majors

music at the collegiate level on students' perception of their stress levels and overall mental health? Music is often considered to be a passion, and so I questioned whether music students might have more grit, which as mentioned before is a blend of passion and perseverance, than non-music students. Participants were given the test found in Appendix B and I calculated scores based on their responses. Duckworth's Grit Scale found in the book provides a guide for calculating not only grit scores, but also separately identifying passion and perseverance scores as well. This scale goes from zero to five, with five being the most grit, passion, and/or perseverance a person can have in this scale.

The calculated scores for grit, passion, and perseverance of each music student participant is listed in Figure 1.1 below:

Figure 1.1

Participants	Grit	Passion	Perseverance
1MS	3.9	3.4	4.4
2MS	3	2.4	3.6
3MS	2.3	1.2	3.4
4MS	3	2.4	3.6
5MS	4.3	4.2	4.4
6MS	3.9	3.6	4.2
7MS	2.6	2.4	2.8

The Passion and Grit of Music Majors

8MS	N/A	N/A	N/A
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The calculated scores for grit, passion, and perseverance of each non-music student participant is listed in Figure 1.2 below:

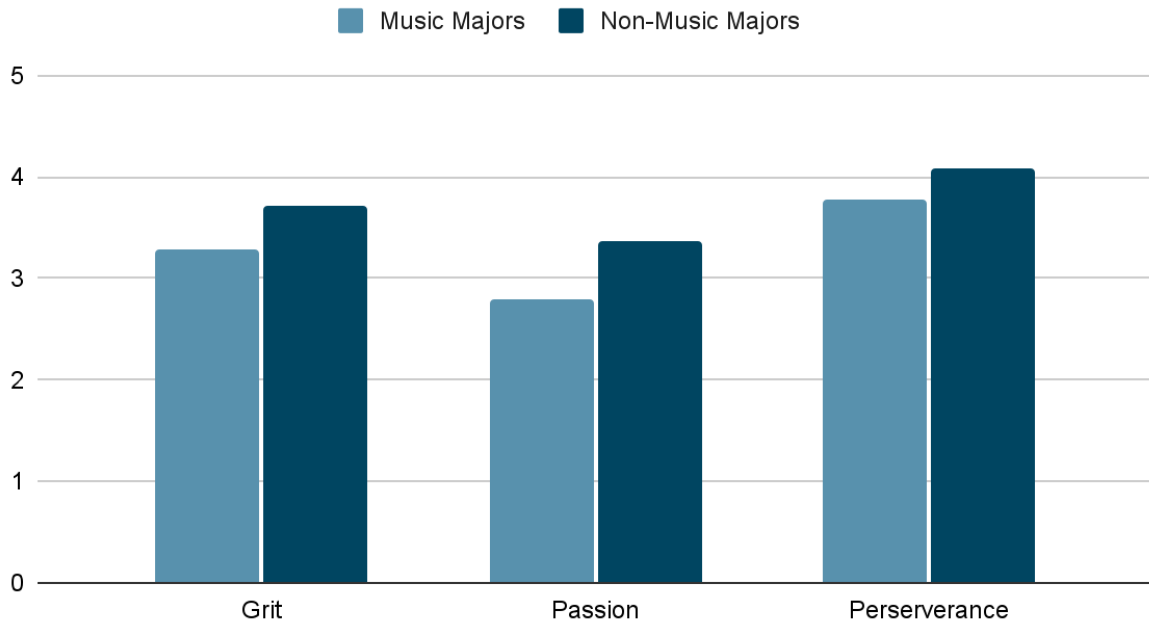
Figure 1.2

Participant	Grit	Passion	Perseverance
1NS	3.8	3.8	3.8
2NS	4.6	4.2	5
3NS	4	3.8	4.2
4NS	3.9	3	4.8
5NS	2.3	2	2.6

At a first look, I did not notice any stark differences between the two participant groups. No participants scored lower than a two at any point, and only one participant ever reached a five. Participant 2NS scored a five in perseverance, and scored quite high in the other categories as well. It should also be acknowledged that Participant 8MS does not have any scores because they did not complete this survey. With the results provided, I averaged out the scores for each student group and each category of the grit test. Both surveyed groups followed a similar trend when it came to the differences in scores of grit, passion, and perseverance, with passion being the lowest scoring category for every participant, and perseverance being the highest. However,

the non-music major students averaged a higher score in every area of the test. The chart (Figure 2) below shows the averaged scores of grit, passion, and perseverance for both groups surveyed:

Grit Scale Scores (Figure 2)



Students' Perceptions

There were two groups of collegiate students in this study: music students (MS) and non-music students (NS). Individuals in both groups submitted weekly surveys (See Appendix B) that included open-ended responses to questions about their stress levels. I inductively coded each group's responses separately for themes.

College Music Major Students - First Cycle of Coding

In the first cycle of coding for music students, forty-four codes were identified in the survey responses. These codes are as follows:

1. Agitated
2. Anxious/Nervous/Worry

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3. Breakdown/Cry
4. Class
5. Content
6. Coping Mechanisms
7. Decompress/Relax
8. Dismayed
9. Distraction
10. Exercise
11. Exhausted/Worn Out
12. Family/Home
13. Finances
14. Food/Beverage Consumption
15. Friends
16. Guilty
17. Homework
18. Illness
19. Job
20. Location
21. Media Consumption
22. Mediation/Reflection
23. Memory/Brain
24. Mental Illness
25. Music

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26. Negative
27. New Experience
28. No Control
29. Performing/Public Speaking
30. Positive Outlook/Feeling Better
31. Planner
32. Practicing
33. Procrastinate
34. Repertoire
35. Schedule/Routine
36. Self Care
37. Sense of Belonging
38. Sleep
39. Stress
40. Studied/Prepared
41. Technology
42. Time
43. Tired
44. Weather

This first part of the process took time, as I went through each individual survey to locate these codes using open coding. After identifying these codes within the student surveys, I completed a second cycle of coding in which I sorted the codes into groups of similar codes,

which resulted in five overarching themes: feelings, wellness, time, music, and logistical stressors.

College Music Major Students - Second Cycle of Coding

Feelings. During my second cycle of coding, I noted that a large majority of the codes related to a theme of feelings. The codes from the list above that related to this theme were agitated (1), anxious/nervous/worry (2), breakdown/cry (3), content (5), dismayed (8), exhausted/worn out (11), guilty (16), negative (26), no control (28), positive outlook/feeling better (30), sense of belonging (37), stress (39), and tired (43). Participants used the above words to describe their reaction to an occurrence that happened during the week. Examples of this include Participant 7MS stating, after they accidentally missed a rehearsal, “This was a pretty shameful incident. I felt terrible for a full day afterwards,” and Participant 3MS stating that “Going to bed early actually made me more stressed because I sacrificed homework time...” Participants often used phrases that described these feelings using quantitative terms, such as “This amount of stress seemed about normal... (1MS),” and “A more positive outlook...(8MS).”

Wellness. Another theme that emerged from the subcodes was related to the theme of wellness. The codes listed above that related to this theme included coping mechanisms (6), decompress/relax (7), exercise (10), family/home (12), food/beverage consumption (14), friends (15), illness (18), media consumption (21), meditation/reflection (22), mental illness (24), new experience (27), self care (36), and sleep (38). These codes were often related to something each participant did to cope with the feelings described, or to trigger a new feeling. Participant 5MS shared that when they “took time to enjoy [their] favorite hobbies... [they] felt happier and more relieved.” This grouping of codes also often related to something that was out of the participants’ control; when asked to reflect upon methods that could have helped their weekly stress,

Participant 3MS similarly stated that “going to school rather than staying home sick” would have made their stress levels for the week go down, despite sickness being something beyond their control.

Time. The third grouping of codes that I identified was related to the theme of time. The codes identified above that were related to this theme were class (4), distraction (9), homework (17), memory/brain (23), planner (31), procrastinate (33), schedule/routine (35), studied/prepared (40), and time (42). Although there were fewer codes relating to the theme of time, these appeared most frequently throughout the music major student surveys. These codes tended to be paired with stress (39) from the feelings theme. “[Specific assignment] always makes me so stressed out. I feel like it takes so much time (2MS)” and “I was mostly stressed because it was a big assignment that I saved for the last minute (1MS)” are examples of participants using these codes.

Music. Another significant grouping of codes revolved around the major of this group of students: music. The codes listed that were found in this theme included music (25), performing/public speaking (29), practicing (32), and repertoire (34). This was another grouping of codes that was frequently paired with codes from the feelings theme, and in particular the code of stress (39). Participant 5MS shared this statement that they felt was important for this research: “There are points in this [music] major where I felt that I belonged, but then I compared myself to others and it made me anxious because I thought I wasn’t as good as them. Many of my peers have had the same feelings, it’s something to take into consideration that we have been constantly comparing ourselves to each other and it mentally damages us.”

Logistics. The final significant grouping was determined to fit the theme of logistical stressors. The codes that were determined to be logistical stressors were finances (13), job (19),

location (20), technology (41), and weather (44). These codes were all connected through the fact that they were entirely out of the participants control; they did not appear as often as other groupings of codes, but still provided significant changes in participants' stress levels when they surfaced. Participant 2MS stated, "I hate storms and there is one happening tonight with high winds which makes me really anxious," in regards to the weather (44). And, Participant 6MS shared that their stress levels were raised by finances (13) because they had to call their insurance company.

College Non-Music Majors - First Cycle of Coding

In the first cycle of coding for non-music students, thirty-four codes were identified in survey responses. These codes are as follows:

1. Agitated/Annoyed
2. Animals
3. Anxious/Pressured/Nervous
4. Breakdown/Cry
5. Cleaning
6. Drive
7. Exam/Test
8. Exercise
9. Family/Home
10. Finances
11. Food Consumption
12. Friends
13. Holiday/Celebrate

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14. Homework/Assignment
15. Job
16. Meeting Requirements/Preparing
17. Media Consumption
18. Meditation/Reflection
19. Memory/Brain
20. Negative
21. New Experience
22. Painting/Knitting
23. People
24. Physical Ailment
25. Planning
26. Positive
27. Public Speaking
28. Relax/Calm
29. Sleep
30. Stress
31. Sports/Team
32. Technology
33. Time
34. Weather/Being Outside

College Non-Music Majors - Second Cycle of Coding

Similar to the group of music majors, the first part of this process took time, as I went through each individual survey to locate these codes. After identifying these codes within the non-music student surveys, I sorted the codes into groups of similarities to discover five overarching themes; these themes were very similar to the music student survey themes. However, the music theme was replaced by the academics theme. The five themes that emerged in the second cycle of coding for college non-music major responses were: wellness, feelings, time, academics, and logistical stressors.

Wellness. First, I determined that the majority of these subcodes fit into the theme of wellness. The codes that fit into the theme of wellness include cleaning (5), exercise (8), family/home (9), food consumption (11), friends (12), holiday/celebrate (13), media consumption (17), meditation/reflection (18), new experience (21), painting/knitting (22), physical ailment (24), and sleep (28). These codes once again connected to moments of altering feelings among participants, regardless of whether it was intentional or not. “I didn’t use social media at all this week and I listened to a lot of music. This calmed me down and helped me to focus more on what I had to do (5NS).”

Feelings. The second theme identified within the subcodes was feelings. The codes listed above that were categorized into this theme were agitated/annoyed (1), anxious/pressured/nervous (3), breakdown/cry (4), negative (20), positive (26), relax/calm (28), and stress (30). Participants in this group often shared their feelings as an amount in the surveys, similar to the music major group. “...work normally does not stress me out as much as [it] did but since there were things missing this made my stress level go up (2NS).” A notable code in this section was positive (26) because when asked to reflect on their outlook for the week to come,

not one survey had a strictly negative outlook, despite some surveys having weeks that indicated as being full of stress, “Positive [outlook] because what happened in the past you can't change, but you can change your future (1NS).”

Time. Another significant theme found in the non-music survey codes was time. The theme of time included the codes of meeting requirements/preparing (16), memory/brain (19), planning (25), and time (33). These subcodes most often surfaced when participants were referring to studying for something academic. Participant 2NS stated, in regards to finals, “My finals are back to back, [with] only fifteen minutes in between them. I am afraid that I will forget something that is important for my finals.” These subcodes, like the subcodes of the wellness theme, were often found in conjunction with the subcodes of feelings. When asked to reflect on what may have helped with lowering feelings of stress throughout the week, Participant 5NS shared, “planning out my week and each day as to what I will do.”

Academics. Next, I grouped the codes that connected to the theme of academics. The codes listed above that fit into this theme include exam/test (7), homework/assignment (14), and public speaking (27). All of the items in this category were identified as creating stress for participants, “I’m very nervous for exam week, and [I’m] very picky about my grades (4NS).” These subcodes occasionally were shown to lessen stress when a participant shared they were done with the activity listed in the subcodes. Participant 5NS stated, “I have an exam in my geography class which is hard for me but other than that the rest of the week should go by smooth.”

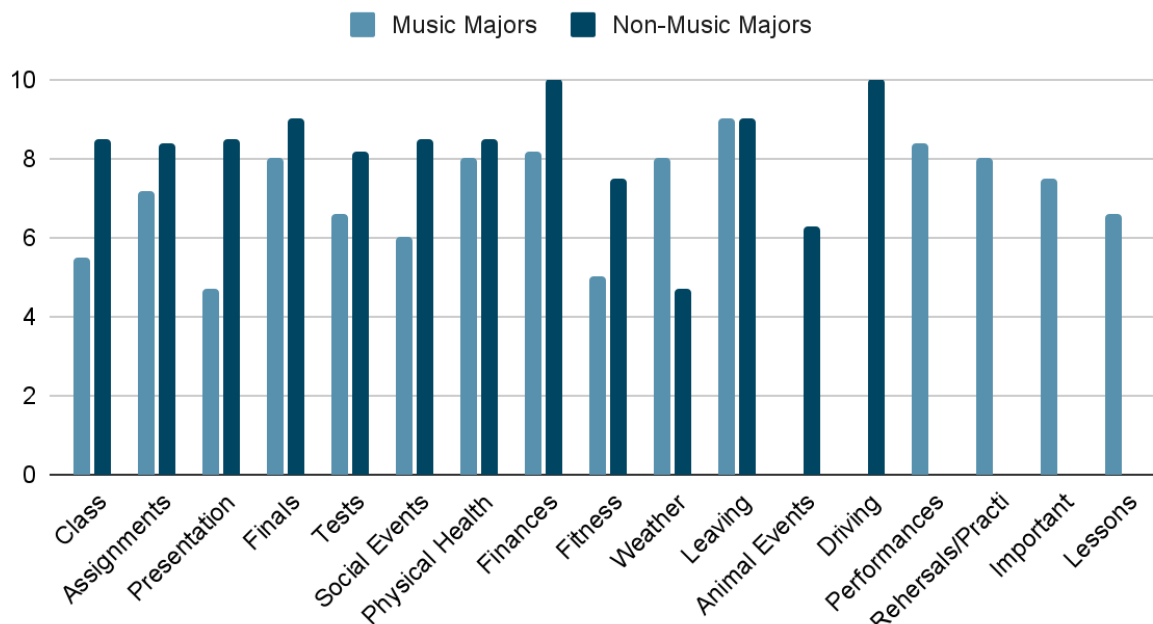
Logistics. The last significant theme found in this list of codes was one that was identical to the final theme of the music major codes; this was the theme of logistical stressors. The codes included in this theme were animals (1), drive (6), finances (10), job (15), people (23),

technology (32), and weather (34). These codes were aspects of life that participants had minimal control over, and created stress beyond the collegiate classroom for them. Participant 1NS found stress in the subcode of people (23), “[Group project] is a little more stressful than normal because one member of my group is not really pulling their weight.” Another participant found stress from the weather (34) when helping their partner vaccinate their animals (1), “The cold weather and icky conditions made it way more stressful than usual. It wasn’t too fun to be outside all weekend taking care of the cattle in the cold (4NS).”

Overall Stress Reported

When participants were asked to rate their stress for the week as whole on a scale from one to ten, one being least stressed and ten being the most; music majors averaged an 8.0 while non-music majors averaged an 8.5. Beyond this, participants were also asked to list as many activities from the week that created stress for them, and to rate how stressed they were based on the same one to ten scale as the weekly stress rating. Many different stressors were given in this section, and there was some correlation between both groups which allowed me to compare their average perceived stress for those stressors. As distinguished in the chart below, non-music major participants consistently averaged a higher perceived level of stress than music majors. The chart indicates each group’s responses for what specific activities gave them stress and how stressed these activities made participants.

Perceived Stress Levels for Various Activities (Figure 3)



Professors' Viewpoints

In order to triangulate my data, I surveyed music professors and non-music professors in order to ascertain if the themes found in the students' responses were also present in the professors' perceptions of student stress. This survey (Appendix B) was only given out once.

Music Professors

The first question asked of all the professor participants was whether or not they were aware of their students' stress in their classroom. A hundred percent of the music professors answered that they were aware of their students' stress, and furthermore, they all stated that they took this awareness into consideration while they were planning class instruction. Participant 3MP explained "I do take [student stress] into consideration, though I also think it is vital to retain certain academic and musical standards in the classroom. I am generally flexible with deadlines and grading when I know that mental health is impacting students' performance." This

group of participants all made mention that they were able to tell when they needed to adjust their teaching to accommodate student stress. “While I do not alter the workload, I am mindful of the kind of feedback I give, which focuses on drawing attention/creating awareness as opposed to judgemental statements (5MP).”

The next portion of the survey had professors reflect on their stress management suggestions to students. All of the participants stated that they presented stress management options to their students either during class time, or during student lessons. The answers from professors to this question was where I saw the most correlation between themes from student responses. Professors stated that they introduced stress management skills such as “time management, effective practice methodologies, nature breaks (5MP),” and “performance anxiety strategies, and creating a positive learning environment (4MP)” to their students, and these were reflected in the student answers. Participant 3MP shared a good sentiment: “I encourage my students to remember that this anxiety is a natural part of what they do, and it will generally get worse the more they try to fight it. I teach that it is more effective to accept and embrace feelings of anxiety, because they do become more manageable with time.” This statement was not reflected as much in the student responses.

Lastly, the survey asked participants to share if they thought their students were perceiving stress higher than it has to be, factors for it, and any last thoughts on why they might think their students are experiencing such high levels of perceived stress. Up until this point, professor responses seemed to echo one another, but here they began to take a couple different viewpoints. Participants 1MP and 5MP suggested that it is unfair to insinuate that students might be perceiving stress higher than it is. “It is pretty callous of me to think that their stress level is being blown out of proportion, I don’t know all of what they are dealing with at any given time. I

think sometimes non-school activities can be so stressful that the smallest extra for class can be what ‘breaks the camel’s back’ (1MP).” The remaining participants brought an opposing point of view, stating that they did believe students were perceiving stress higher than they had to be, and they had a variety of reasons for this. “Much of it seems to stem from a lack of organizational skills. They tend to procrastinate and then are stressed when they haven’t put the time needed into the assignment (2MP).” Along similar lines, “They perceive that being busy is stressful, which it is, but they also tend to make things bigger than they need to be (6MP).” Participant 3MP agreed that students perceived stress at a higher level than necessary, but shared that they believe this is a result of technology; “...so much of our lives today are dominated by anxiety-inducing technologies and communication. The rapid-fire emails, pressures of social media, and constant barrage of information create a whirlwind of stress that makes it difficult for students to focus on a small number of core skills/tasks.”

Non-Music Professors

As mentioned in Chapter Three, I reached a point following my initial data collection where I realized I needed to survey non-music professors as well in order to properly triangulate my findings. I sent the same survey (Appendix B) to the non-music professors since none of the questions were music-specific. Nearly all non-music professors indicated that they were aware of their students’ stress in their classroom; just 15% responded with alternative answers, stating “I am aware of this for some students; others hide their stress and do not share it in ways I can detect (13NP)” and “I’m almost 100% online, so I don’t “see” students enough to gauge this (1NP).” Concerning being asked whether non-music professors adjusted their workload to accommodate their students’ stress, I received a variety of responses. A large majority expressed that they do make accommodations, but only for assignment deadlines. Other professors, like

Participant 10NP, said “Yes and No. I cannot offer less to everyone else based on an individual. I can be in conversations with the individual and work outside the class parameters to accommodate.” One non-music professor out of the thirteen (13) that responded said they do alter the workload. “Yes, during the pandemic I have vastly adjusted workload and assignment length for my own stress as well as [the students’] (2NP).”

In the following portion of the survey, I expressed to participants that I understood not all workloads and classes could be altered easily, and inquired what stress management techniques the non-music professors offered as alternative solutions to their students. This question once again prompted diverse answers. Three responses listed what they either recommended or what they did to help a student lower stress. “Planning ahead, communicating with the instructor (10NP), “Building goals throughout the semester and providing time [in class] to get things done (11NP), and “Support (6NP).” Three other participants shared that they include a stress-related module in *Canvas* (the approved online learning system at the university) that contain links to outside resources or calming activities like guided breathing. Participant 13NP answered “I do not offer specific stress management techniques,” and Participant 4NP matched this, further sharing “perhaps I should!” in their response. Remaining responses talked of doing “check-ins” during class consisting of writing prompts and discussions around stress. When asked whether stress management techniques were shared during class or as a passing suggestion, 61% said class time was taken or responded saying it was both class time and outside that they shared these suggestions. The remaining 39% said techniques were shared as “...more of a passing suggestion or a private conversation outside of class time (4NP).” Participant 11NP elaborates “I’m not a therapist.”

Ultimately, the final question provided the most differentiation in participant responses. This question asked professors to evaluate whether they thought their students were perceiving their stress higher than what they were actually experiencing; with this, I was looking to see if the professors had specific reasons they thought their students might be perceiving higher stress. Nearly half of the responses stated that they believed that students' perceptions of stress were justified and at the level of stress they were likely experiencing. The reasons for this that participants shared included trauma-related responses to the pandemic and school-to-life balance adjustments needed to be made throughout the semester. Participant 10NP affirmed student stress perceptions and stated "I think we are all more stressed than usual." Adding onto the idea that this perceived stress expands beyond the student level, Participant 2NP said "I wish students understood how burnt out their instructors are." Two participants were undecided in their responses, suggesting that it comes down to the individual student to make an accurate response to this question. Participant 1NP did have further thought into this question though; "I think most students could use better time management skills. I also think they work too much. School needs to be something close to a full-time job if [they] really want to benefit from it." Two other participants suggested that students were perceiving stress higher than they needed to, but that fact in turn was raising their stress levels more. "I believe that students are perceiving stress more intensely...there is no doubt, however, that the results of that perception are truly disruptive (5NP)." The remaining participants felt that students' perceptions of stress were higher than they needed to be and pointed out some reasonings for this. "Someone told [students] life should not have stress. They have been protected from it. They lack social skills to navigate socially stressful situations. They lack time management skills. They think they can go to school full-time and work up to 40 hours a week..." Participant 6NP listed off their beliefs of reasons

for students' perception of stress. Participant 11NP responded by asking "...have you seen the news lately. The world is a real sh*t show," and further stated, when asked if there was anything else they wanted to share in the matter of students' mental health "[Students] need to realize it is not just them and it is not all about them."

Conclusion paragraph

In this chapter, I presented the findings of my data collection. This included the results of the Duckworth Grit Scale test student participants took, the overarching themes of *Wellness*, *Feelings*, *Time*, *Logistics*, and *Music/Academics* that I coded from student participants weekly surveys, and the feedback from professors on their awareness of students' stress and what they as the mentors of students do to help students manage their stress. In Chapter Five, I will elaborate on these findings and share the implications for music students, music professors, universities, the field of music education, and future research by examining each overarching theme from Chapter Four.

Chapter V: Discussion and Implications

In the four chapters anterior to Chapter Five, I presented this study on perceived stress amongst music majors at the collegiate level, discussed literature related to the study, shared my methodology and approach to analysis, and reported the findings of my data collection. In Chapter Five, I will discuss my findings and share the implications they have for music educators, students, and future researchers.

“Music students are particularly stressed because there’s a lot they do that isn’t on paper... rehearsals, practices, performances...[none of which are taken] for credit. They’re doing too much and taking too many credits at once. [The music major] should be a five year degree (6MP).” As this music professor from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point indicated, music majors do a large amount of work for their degree that is not included in their credit load. Outside of the hours these students spend sitting in class, many have rehearsals for extra ensembles, a multitude of practice hours required for both primary and secondary instruments, observation and practicum hours to be met, back-to-back performances for weeks straight, and more non-credit items to add to this list; many of these items are not needed for other majors. I recognize that other majors sometimes have extra criteria for those respective students to meet, such as nursing students having clinicals to complete, but of the other majors I interacted with as an undergraduate student, music majors still appeared to be experiencing more stress and moments of burnout. And further on top of these activities, many students work jobs and participate in various extracurriculars to bolster their resume and earn funds to pay for their education. Once these start to add up, it becomes apparent that personal time is nonexistent for music majors. This fact is why it was peculiar to me that the findings of my surveys indicated that non-music majors were charting higher perceived stress, and further interesting that they

charted higher levels of grit than music majors on the Duckworth Grit Test. After culling through my findings, I decided that Community, Time Management, and Grit were three key ideas to answer my research question: What is the impact of studying music at the collegiate level on students' perception of their stress levels and overall mental health?

Community

A unique aspect in the life of a music major is the community that is developed over the years that a student is in their undergraduate. Especially in the beginning years of the degree, music majors have the same courses to take and usually in a particular order; this means that an incoming class will often be in the same classes together until at least their third or fourth year. The friendships developed in these classes creates a strong sense of community for the class as a whole, and beyond that, students develop a community due to the classes being in the same building. From their first to last class of the day, music majors are often in the same building with each other. Even when these students are on their own time, they come back into this building that holds their music community in order to practice and complete other music assignments and activities. I know from personal experience that students joke about the music building being their “home away from home” since they often spend more time in the music building than in their dorm or apartment.

This frequency of being in the same building doing the same things with the same people builds friendships beyond what other majors might have, and this results in sharing details of personal lives which is often met with relatability from fellow music majors. For example, a certain playing quiz might have caused a student to break down in a practice room and that student shares it with their friends; it is very likely that those friends also broke down or were heavily stressed out about that quiz. This relatability carries beyond basic stress over an

assignment into more serious mental health matters. As noted in literature reviewed in Chapter Two, depression and anxiety are often prevalent among music students. Robson, et al. (2017) particularly talks about music performance anxiety (MPA) and addresses that music professors should teach their students to recognize that they are not alone in dealing with these mental health concerns. Music professors are well equipped to handle the stress that their students go through because they have been through the same degree and its experiences, and are able to normalize the stress that students are experiencing without eliminating the validity of the stress. As Participant 2MS elaborated after stating that they cover stress management techniques during lessons “lots of therapy going on in there!” This statement might seem to indicate that professors are dismissing their students’ stress by making them believe it is a normal amount of stress, but rather the professors are trying to remind their students that they are not alone.

I believe this overarching feeling that “we are all in this together” is part of what caused music majors to actually document lower stress levels than non-music majors. It seems counterintuitive, but the sense of community among music students who are all dealing with high levels of stress and professors who normalize this aspect of the degree likely makes music majors perceive their threshold of stress to be at a higher level than non-music majors.

Time Management

The concept of time came up frequently in both student surveys and professor surveys, and it showed in both positive and negative lights. The concept of time management reducing stress is something that many authors in the literature review agreed with, including Plapp (2011), who indicated that stress among students in the music major stemmed from poor time management skills. In student surveys, time often came up in response that included stress about not having enough time, such as Participant 1MS stating “Perhaps I could spend even more time

practicing for band, but I barely have enough time to practice everything I need to as it is.” While not having enough time was a big stressor for most students, some students also noted “taking time to relax (4NS) was something that managed stress. It is interesting to me that so many responses indicated that their stress was caused by a lack of time, and yet so many responses to the question “In what ways did you try to manage your stress this week” included taking time to take a break or do other non-school activities. Out of all student surveys, only one mentioned anything in particular regards to time management other than Participant 2MS explaining the five minute method “where you work [five] minutes and then take a break and then work [five] more minutes and then take a break. It sounds like it wouldn’t be productive but it would be better than doing nothing until Sunday night.”

While the students had minimal to say about time management, the surveyed professors had a lot to say about it. Participant 6NP said “they lack time management skills” when asked what factors they believe contribute to student stress. Participant 1NS agreed “I think most students could use better time management skills.” Other professors, both music and non-music, echoed these beliefs; however, the music professors had more to say about time management when they were asked what stress management skills they advocate to their students. Many of them included “time management” in their list of skills, and some elaborated to talk about how to work with their stress when it came to time management. “Talk about executive functions and balancing what needs to be done... Try to talk about focusing the stress/anxiety for good instead of being debilitating. Stress and nervousness means that you care about something, so if you care and want to do it then you need to learn to use that stress (1MP).”

Since the non-music professors did not go into as much detail as the music professors when asked about the stress management techniques they present to the class, I cannot be certain

they do not talk about time management in their classes. However, from the perspective that the non-music professors talked about how the students needed to manage their time better and the music professors saying that they attempt to teach students time management, I have to believe there is more of it happening in music classes. More focused research on what is actually covered by varying professors is necessary to confirm this, but since my own professor spends studio and lesson time early on in our music degree to talk about time management with us, and I know from my music colleagues that this seems to be the case with most music professors in the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, that this statement is probably accurate. This is another reason that I believe music majors tracked having less stress than the non-music majors; music majors seem to have more time management tools that further allows them to cope better than non-music majors.

Grit

The last key idea I want to address is grit. As pointed out by Duckworth (2016), the amount of grit a person has is made up of how much passion and perseverance they have. In my research, non-music majors scored as having higher grit, passion, and perseverance. This shocked me since I had to believe that music majors have a ton of passion due to music being an art, but was incorrect in this gathering of data.

Duckworth's test consists of many matter-of-fact statements, such as "I am a hard worker" and "I am diligent. I never give up." As I sat and considered these statements in regard to the survey results, I was reminded of something that Participant 2MP suggested I look into about "social media and the negative impact of Instagram as it relates to musicians." In my literature review from Chapter Two, Jääskeläinen, et al. (2020) talks about the belief that musicians on social media are often considered to be the bar for success and as a musician, I

recognize this statement to be true. I have to wonder then, if students are considering musicians on social media to be their bar for success, could that be where they internally are knocking their own grit down? Non-music majors often do not have a performance side to their degree therefore, they likely do not have people from their major posting things on social media that could create feelings of comparison for those students that music students have.

What this means for my research is that I believe the music students I surveyed likely read through the Grit Scale Test and followed a thought process similar to this: “I am a hard worker. Very much like me, but probably not as hard of a worker as this musician I follow, so I should answer mostly or somewhat like me.” While the Grit Scale Test is designed extremely well, I think music majors are hard on themselves. It is also likely that the mindset of the student can change on a whim from feeling positive about themselves to negatively, resulting in a flux of answers. More research needs to be done to reach an absolute conclusion towards whether music majors have more grit than non-music majors.

Summary

I began this study believing that music majors were significantly more stressed out than non-music majors, but my findings indicated that non-music majors reported higher stress than music majors. Further research indicated this may be due to the music professors educating their students on important stress management skills; a cross-section of professors in all areas in the university did not feel they had adequate training to assist their students, and others felt it was not their place to cover this with their students.

Implications

Music Students

From this research, music students should take notice of the recurring suggestion from their music professors: practice time management. While taking extra time to write in a planner or contemplate everything to do in a day might seem like a waste, it clearly has its benefits in the long run. From this small participant pool, it is seen that the students of professors who teach time management are already perceiving their stress to be lesser than those students that are not taught time management. The suggestions that professors give to their students is not to cause suffering, but rather to give the proper tools that students need to succeed.

It also should be noted from this research and the included literature review that experiencing stress can have some unpleasant side effects. Sometimes, stress, these side effects, and the attempting to uphold a certain image can cause a music student's mental health to spiral downward. It is okay to take a break or seek professional help when needed; it does not make a student any less of a person.

Music Professors

We can already see from this study that talking about and teaching time management in even small amounts can help guide a student to better manage their stress. Take this knowledge into every class and make time for students to really learn how to manage their time. It can be easy to tell a student to manage their time better when they seem to be struggling; instead, take a moment to pause teaching in the content area and teach the students what time management looks like.

Along with this, music professors should work towards developing open lines of communication with their students. While students might not want to divulge all their secrets to

one of their professors, the music students surveyed for this research do want their professors to see them where they are at. Music students want professors to understand that the study required for their degree is challenging, and sometimes other aspects of life get in the way. This all being said, when you decide to sit down with your student to have a conversation about why they seem to be overwhelmed, to talk about how to manage time, or even suggesting the student explore seeking counseling, make sure the conversation does not come off as accusatory. Music students are struggling to maintain themselves in an image that makes you, their professor, proud. Make sure they know you are also proud of them for taking care of themselves; this small idea can go a long way in the mind of your students.

Universities

As made evident in this research, all university students are experiencing stress to a usually high degree. It can be easy to blame students for spending their time socializing instead of studying, but at all levels of the university, we need to remember that college is pivotal in the lives of students, and being able to socialize is essential for humans. A significant change universities could make to assist in the well being of students is to provide more mental health resources. This means providing classes on skills that will benefit students, like time management, as this research study has proven to be beneficial, to provide counseling and therapy opportunities that would not cause financial strain, and even providing the professors at the university with tools to better approach students that might be struggling. The addition of these resources would benefit the university in many ways; a university that cares about its students will have higher application and retention rates.

Field of Music Education

One professor that was surveyed noted that the music degree should not be a four-year degree. There are so many areas of focus in the music degree and, paired with the reality of life, it honestly is too much to do in four years. The field of music education should work to eliminate this belief that the degree should be completed in four years, and instead encourage students to take more time if they are struggling with the course load. Extending students' time in their undergraduate studies means they have more time to practice secondary instruments and to further delve into the concepts they are being taught. In the end, this would produce students that have a strong knowledge-base on music.

Future Research

For future research on the perceived stress of music majors, I encourage researchers to gather data from a larger participant pool. This research study isolates the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, but we should extend our research to see if the collected data holds true elsewhere. It would be helpful to have participants document data more consistently throughout the study; as well, it would be curious to see what happens when students are given the proper tools for time management to see how much that lowers students' perceived stress.

In short, this chapter was a discussion on the findings of my data collection and the implications of my research for music students, music professors, universities, the field of music education, and future research. The previous chapter was a presentation of the data that I collected from all participants over the course of the semester, and was coded into overarching themes of *Wellness, Feelings, Time, Logistics, and Music/Academics*. In Chapter Three, I shared my steps for creating the design of my research project, as well as the methods of analysis.

Chapter Two was a review of literature that guided and supported my research, and in Chapter One I shared the importance and my purpose for this research.

So, what is the impact of studying music at the collegiate level on students' perception of their stress levels and overall mental health? This was the question that guided my research.

While I do not believe I found the complete answer to this, my data shows that collegiate students studying music are perceiving high levels of stress. In addition, my findings point towards the idea that an understanding of time management benefits students and their mental health. As Mel Robbins (2018) said, “Your mental health is everything - prioritize it. Make the time like your life depends on it, because it does.”

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Sierra Sargent, a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point would appreciate your participation in research to determine the impacts of studying music at the collegiate level on a student's perceived stress. This study is a semester long and asks that participants document their stress levels throughout the day, the different activities within their major that cause them stress, as well as extra thoughts and feelings they might be having towards their major, and to document these at the end of each week. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can excuse yourself from the study if need be. The benefit of this study would be providing the music field with information on how to keep students' mental health at a healthy level while still teaching the full material.

It is anticipated that there are no risks to you as a result of participation in this study. There may be discomfort in the higher awareness of mental health for some individuals as you fill out this journal, and if it becomes anything more than a slight discomfort we ask that you remove yourself from the study for a while for your own wellbeing. We also want to provide this information to reach the UWSP Counseling Center (<https://www.uwsp.edu/counseling/Pages/default.aspx>) and the National Crisis Hotline ([800-273-8255](tel:800-273-8255)) if at any reason you feel an increased mental health awareness or response that you need to seek help for.

The Passion and Grit of Music Majors

While there may be no immediate benefit to you as a result of your participation in this study, it is hoped that we may gain valuable information about interpersonal communication when relationships end that will be of future value to society.

Conducting this study over the course of a full semester will allow for more accurate data collection for this research. The information you provide within this study will be recorded anonymously. Information that could identify you will not be released. All collected information will be stored in a locked file cabinet and will not be available to anyone outside of the Principal and Co-Principal Investigators of this research.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you want to withdraw from the study, at any time, you may do so without penalty. Only anonymous information provided will be retained. All identifiable information will be removed from the study and destroyed or deleted.

If you have complaints about your treatment as a participant in this study or believe you have been harmed in some way by your participation, please call or write:

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The Passion and Grit of Music Majors

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Although Dr. Barry will ask your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

Appendix B

Angela Duckworth Grit Scale Test:

1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones:
 - a. Very much like me (1)
 - b. Mostly like me (2)
 - c. Somewhat like me (3)
 - d. Not much like me (4)
 - e. Not like me at all (5)
2. Setbacks don't discourage me. I don't give up easily:
 - a. Very much like me (5)
 - b. Mostly like me (4)
 - c. Somewhat like me (3)
 - d. Not much like me (2)
 - e. Not like me at all (1)
3. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one:
 - a. Very much like me (1)
 - b. Mostly like me (2)
 - c. Somewhat like me (3)
 - d. Not much like me (4)
 - e. Not like me at all (5)
4. I am a hard worker:
 - a. Very much like me (5)

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- b. Mostly like me (4)
 - c. Somewhat like me (3)
 - d. Not much like me (2)
 - e. Not like me at all (1)
5. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete:
- a. Very much like me (1)
 - b. Mostly like me (2)
 - c. Somewhat like me (3)
 - d. Not much like me (4)
 - e. Not like me at all (5)
6. I finish whatever I begin:
- a. Very much like me (5)
 - b. Mostly like me (4)
 - c. Somewhat like me (3)
 - d. Not much like me (2)
 - e. Not like me at all (1)
7. My interests change from year to year:
- a. Very much like me (1)
 - b. Mostly like me (2)
 - c. Somewhat like me (3)
 - d. Not much like me (4)
 - e. Not like me at all (5)

8. I am diligent. I never give up:
 - a. Very much like me (5)
 - b. Mostly like me (4)
 - c. Somewhat like me (3)
 - d. Not much like me (2)
 - e. Not like me at all (1)

9. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest:
 - a. Very much like me (1)
 - b. Mostly like me (2)
 - c. Somewhat like me (3)
 - d. Not much like me (4)
 - e. Not like me at all (5)

10. I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge:
 - a. Very much like me (5)
 - b. Mostly like me (4)
 - c. Somewhat like me (3)
 - d. Not much like me (2)
 - e. Not like me at all (1)

Music Major and Non-Music Major Weekly Surveys:

1. What were you doing right before choosing to fill out this journal? How was that making you feel?

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2. Think of an activity that you completed/participated in this week that raised your perceived stress levels and share what that was:
3. On a scale of 1 (not stressed at all) to 10 (extremely stressed), how stressed did the activity explained in the previous questions make you?
4. Does that activity normally cause that much stress or did something different happen this time? Please explain:
(repeat previous 3 questions 5 times)
5. On a scale of 1 (not stressful at all) to 10 (extremely stressful, how stressful was this week?
6. In what ways did you try to manage your stress this week? Were any of these ways successful?
7. As you're reflecting back on this week, are there any methods you can think of that would have helped in those moments of stress this week?
8. Has this week left you with a positive or negative outlook on the upcoming week and why:
9. Is there anything else you want to share that you feel would benefit this research?

Educator Surveys:

1. Are you aware of your students' stress/mental health in your classroom? This can be awareness of their stress during tests, stress over a certain concept/skill, etc:

(Yes/No/Other)

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2. If you are aware that your students are experiencing stress/mental health struggles, do you consider their stress when it comes to your teaching methods and the workload you provide for a given class?
3. Some classes cannot be altered to accommodate certain stresses (ex. Public speaking can be anxiety inducing when getting up in front of peers, but you can't learn without that 'stressful' experience sometimes), so what stress management skills do you advocate to your students, if any?
4. When you advocate these stress management skills, and for your students to be taking care of themselves, do you take class time to instruct these skills or are they shared more as a passing suggestion?
5. Do you think your students currently are perceiving their stress as higher than it has to be? If so, what reasons do you see as being a factor in this?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to share on the topic of collegiate students dealing with stress/mental health while they are in university.

Appendix C

Figure 1.1

Participants	Grit	Passion	Perseverance
1MS	3.9	3.4	4.4
2MS	3	2.4	3.6
3MS	2.3	1.2	3.4
4MS	3	2.4	3.6
5MS	4.3	4.2	4.4
6MS	3.9	3.6	4.2
7MS	2.6	2.4	2.8
8MS	N/A	N/A	N/A

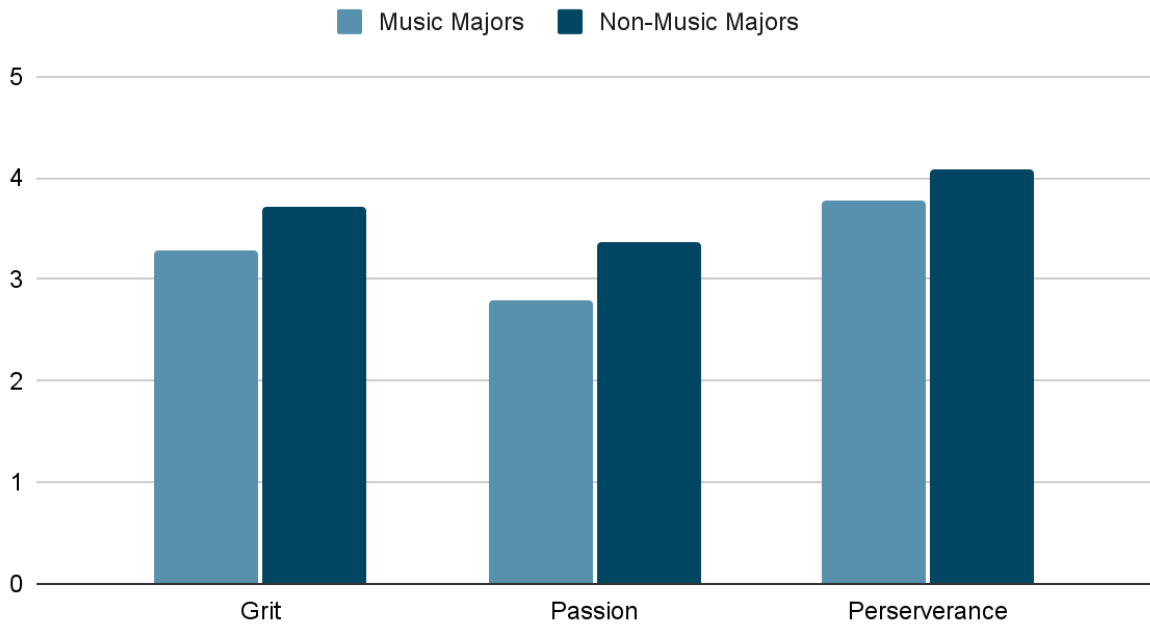
Figure 1.2

Participant	Grit	Passion	Perseverance
1NS	3.8	3.8	3.8
2NS	4.6	4.2	5

The Passion and Grit of Music Majors

3NS	4	3.8	4.2
4NS	3.9	3	4.8
5NS	2.3	2	2.6

Grit Scale Scores (Figure 2)



Perceived Stress Levels for Various Activities (Figure 3)

