

Reasons to Enroll: Music Business Students' Motivations and Requirements

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This paper was presented at the [2021 International Summit](#) of the Music & Entertainment Industry Educators Association
May 17-18, 2021

<https://doi.org/10.25101/21.19>

View the Summit presentation at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6y4H2BLex0>

Abstract

German, British, and North American tertiary music business courses tend to be very different from each other. These programs have different roots, aims, and approaches towards the music business labor market. Still, one characteristic is common: they all build on the desire of aspirants who want to work in the music industry. This study looks into the motivations of students in three countries: Germany, the United Kingdom, and Hungary. Requirements, goals, desired skills and competences are among the topics respondents were asked about.

Keywords: music business education, tertiary music business education

Tertiary Music Business Education, Its Roots and the Different Types of Courses

Music business modules were started in the United States in the 1940s and by the 1970s the education system of these programs was established,¹ followed by the United Kingdom in 1999.² Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, and other countries with more advanced music industries also joined this list later.

North American courses have evolved from several models. These three models are the management model tied to management departments, the model related to communication studies, and the model classified as music-oriented training.³ Therefore courses with titles such as “music business management,” “music management studies,” or “music industry” can belong to management, communications, or music departments.

North American courses consider employability of music business graduates a very important, almost primary focus.⁴ According to a study with 242 educators working for North American tertiary (higher education) music management programs, the success of graduating students can be determined by the following three outcomes:

1. graduates think critically,
2. graduates are employed in their chosen field of the music business,
3. students have excellent communication skills.⁵

In his study,⁶ Strasser differentiates between four different orientations a music business course (or “program” in the United States) can have:

1. the professional concentration, for practicing professionals,
2. the entrepreneurial concentration for the creation and commercialization of actual products and/or services,
3. the research concentration for students who would like to build an academic career, and
4. the practice concentration for experiencing music organization operation first hand. This approach also

focuses on career aspects and the employability of the students.

In contrast, in the case of the United Kingdom, Cloonan and Hulstedt⁷ distinguish three different types of popular music training. The first group includes “musical” courses, the second category is “vocational,” and the third type is “theoretical” training. Music management courses in Cloonan and Hulstedt’s typology can thus be classified in the second category.

The popularity of British tertiary music business management courses is frequently justified by the steep increase in the number of applications⁸ and the huge number of applicants.⁹ In 2015, a study, titled *Learning the music business*,¹⁰ commissioned by the British music industry organization, UK Music, presented the deficiencies of these courses. The main conclusion of the research is that many of these programs neither provide the knowledge necessary for students’ success in the labor market, nor the satisfaction of music industry employers.¹¹ As a result, graduating students do not enjoy positive discrimination within the labor market compared to aspirants without a music management qualification, therefore these courses fail to provide the benefits that they claim to offer.¹² For all these reasons, the value and professional prestige of these training programs in the United Kingdom is still questioned.¹³ In the case of British tertiary music business courses, the relationship between the music business market and employability of graduates is still the subject of serious ongoing professional debates. Some educators and researchers working in this field consider a stronger focus on employability a threat to critical thinking.¹⁴

The reason for the differences between the ideological background and practical implementation of North American and British music management education may be found in the theoretical roots and effects of British music industry courses and also in the decades long experience of North American training in this field.¹⁵ These differences can also be seen in teaching methods used and in the training goals and directions set by these programs.¹⁶ North American tertiary music management courses are characterized by a high proportion of music business professionals working part time at the university and part-time in business, most of whom do not have a doctorate.¹⁷ In the United Kingdom, many of the MA course leaders do have academic rank and publish in academic journals.

Moreover, British tertiary popular music courses can be linked to the Frankfurt School’s critique of mass culture,¹⁸ especially to judgments of Theodore Adorno about the violent standardization of cultural experience. These provided the bases for the development of Popular Music Studies in the United Kingdom. Beginnings of the discipline can

be traced back to the time of the Beatles¹⁹ and was created with the intention of studying (and somewhat legitimizing) popular music.²⁰ Popular Music Studies presumably had a strong influence on music industry management research and the development of music business education in the United Kingdom. The predominance of a theoretical approach within the British tertiary music management programs²¹ and their resistance to vocationalization²² may be linked to this aspect but further research is still needed.

In the United Kingdom, all higher education creative industries courses were launched after 1992 at former polytechnics²³ and are constructed on the desire of individuals entering this special world²⁴ just like in the case of the music²⁵ and music business management programs.²⁶ This was an area of the creative industries education boom,²⁷ while the United States did not experience the influence of this discipline.

The different roots of North American and British university music industry management courses thus seemingly resulted in different academic approaches, goal systems, and self-determination. This, as we could see above, is also expected to have an impact on the knowledge and employability of students.

German and Hungarian Music Business Courses

The first German speaking music management course was established at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna in 1976 in Austria. In Germany it was the Hochschule für Music und Theater Hamburg in 1989²⁸ which established the first music business related program. In German speaking countries, “today’s music management degree programs are rooted in the establishment of cultural management (*Kulturmanagement*) as an academic discipline in the late 1980s”²⁹ and these courses have a maximum of thirty years of history, “none of the music business BA courses are older than 15 years.”³⁰

There is only a strikingly small number of studies on the German tertiary music business courses, including a study by Wickström, Lücke, and Jóri published in the *International Journal of Music Business Research* in 2015 and one by Frei University Berlin professor Klaus Sieberhaar and his colleague Achim Müller, ordered by the music industry body, Berlin Commission in 2018. These studies make clear that German higher education music business courses are strongly influenced by the national concepts of education.

In the German system, there are two different higher education approaches, called *Bildung* and *Ausbildung*. The former is the so-called Humboldt-concept of higher education, where universities focus on teaching and research, the latter (the *Ausbildung*) stands for applied sciences and its focus is on tools for a future career of students as well as practical skills.³¹ Both approaches have been criticized. In

the case of the Building concept, students are said to have no practical skills, while the *Ausbildung* is characterized as an education where curriculum is dictated by the labor market.

These two approaches can also be identified in the differences between state funded and private universities with the latter taking the practice-based approach.³² In Germany, private universities are more open to popular music courses as state funded institutions prefer high culture oriented bachelor and master programs.³³ Some of these private institutions have gained reputations not only because of the highly educated teaching staff³⁴ and the quality of these courses, but because of the factors they take into account. The dichotomy can be seen in higher education creative industries courses as well. For example, University of Paderborn refers to its music business program as an opportunity for an “academic career or a privileged position within the music- or creative industry or within the artistic realm.”³⁵

Music business programs in Germany aim to combine a broader academic, theoretical knowledge with elements from practice in order “to meet the challenges of current market conditions”³⁶ and tend to follow the needs of the music business. The curriculum “is regularly changed and adapted to the actual conditions”³⁷ which is regarded as a security for a students’ “successful long term career.”³⁸

It is striking how much the German music business education focuses on students’ needs, their requirements regarding practical education, their future labor market success, and also on preparation for their future career.³⁹ Skills and theoretical knowledge go hand in hand in this educational system⁴⁰ and labor market needs are always taken into consideration even at the time of course accreditation.⁴¹ The cooperation between industry and higher education institutions is regarded as a key to program and student success⁴² and “the exchange between the industry, associations, and the university is systematically promoted.”⁴³ Music business course developers are aware that “a good half of the music industry companies have problems finding suitable employees for vacancies,”⁴⁴ therefore graduates who are trained in accordance with labor market needs are respected by employers. Cooperating⁴⁵ and networking with industry and teacher-practitioners are essential elements of the German tertiary music business education.⁴⁶

We can see that the German model is very different from the British music business educational system regarding aims, approaches, curriculum and program design, and accreditation process. This might be interpreted by the different national approaches⁴⁷ including the VET and the dual education system as well as the *Bildung* and *Ausbildung* concept—and also the distinctive roots of music business education in the German speaking countries, especially in Germany.

British, North American, and German music business education are based on very different educational systems and approaches, therefore these three countries cannot be ignored in a research on tertiary music business management courses.

In Hungary, the large number of potential employees, as well as the dynamically developing local and international market, can validate the intention to start a tertiary music industry management program. Currently there are no official vocational education (called OKJ), nor higher education music industry management courses in Hungary. There have already been attempts to kick-start tertiary music industry management training in Hungary. From 2011 to 2014, the Department of Consumer Behavior of Budapest Corvinus University hosted the subject Music Management and Marketing. This fourteen-week course was initiated with the intention of becoming a laboratory for a future music industry management course. However, due to the knowledge management needs discovered, the training was not started at Budapest Corvinus University but within a private school called Zeneipari Hivatal. Future employees are trained by non-profit semi- and non-formal courses⁴⁸ such as the private school mentioned above.

The domestic Hungarian music market has undergone spectacular development over the past ten years. According to the latest report of ProArt, published in November 2020, the revenue of the Hungarian music industry increased by 1 billion HUF from 2017 to 2018,⁴⁹ its estimated total revenue was HUF 73.5 billion in 2019⁵⁰ (approximately USD 250 million or EUR 210 million).

Methodology

The aim of the current research was to look into the reasons for enrollment, requirements, and motivations of students who have been accepted into programs taking place in three different countries: Hungary, the United Kingdom, and Germany. Unfortunately U.S. students were unapproachable for the researcher at the time of the research.

The Hungarian sample was taken from graduates of -Zeneipari Hivatal. In the case of Germany and the United Kingdom, third year bachelor students were invited to fill out the questionnaire. The German sample was taken from a university course based in Cologne and the U.K. respondents attended courses based in London or Leeds. The research started in March 2020 and was finished in August 2020. Students were contacted via their course mates and course leaders.

The questionnaire had four different sections. The first part was to gain some information on the respondents such as nationality, country of origin, and the current country of studies. The second section referred to the financial circumstances respondents had such as the source of the tuition fee

and extra activities undertaken to earn money for tuition. The third part was about decisions made by the respondents such as reasons to enroll, previous possibilities, and moving to another country.

Finally, questions were asked about the characteristics and requirements regarding music business courses: how vocational they thought a music business course should be, what sort of skills or knowledge it should provide, what kind of course content it should have, and what kind of teachers should teach there.

The questionnaire was filled out by thirty-three people and resulted in thirty-two valid responses. Although the respondents attended courses in the three focus countries, eight different countries were represented including Spain, Sweden, Serbia, Turkey and Italy in addition to the Hungarian, German, and British participants. Six students studied in the United Kingdom, fourteen in Germany, and twelve in Hungary. Ages ranged from nineteen up to thirty-nine. In the case of the Hungarian sample, students were participants of an adult learning course instead of a university program.

Results

Out of the thirty-two respondents, thirteen students claimed their course to be expensive. Six students had to save money and four others had to borrow money to participate. It is also important to emphasize here that the tuition fee of the Hungarian training was one tenth of the British course. Out of thirty-two, seventeen students received family support during their studies, and in the case of eleven students, their families paid for the course. Six students could not ask for such help, six students asked for a loan, seven had an extra job, and six other students worked part time to gain the money for the course. Twenty-four students out of thirty-two worked to cover their expenses. Four students described their family as wealthy, and nine as above average, one student defined themselves as poor.

Participants were asked about other subjects and options as well that they had considered prior to applying to their music business course. Here students could choose more than one option. Music course was selected eleven times as well as management, followed by arts (9), marketing (8), and other options such as culture (5), economics (5), law (4) and sociology (4), philosophy (2), journalism (1), and politics (1) were also considered. Many of these students already had a bachelor or a masters degree in subjects such as arts (3), communications (3), management (2), business (1), economics (1), literature (1), sociology (1), and pedagogy (1).

Twenty-four students tried to get into the music business prior to the course by undertaking volunteering work (10), internships (9), or in the form of applying for a job (9),

managing a band (8), starting their own projects (13), or asking their networks (1). Twenty-two students out of the thirty-two respondents had no plan B as a career option, meaning they want to succeed in the music business.

Students were also asked about their motivations regarding application. Most of them wanted to obtain “knowledge on the music business” (28), build up a network in the music business (23), get into the music business (20), and were interested but did not know which field (17), or wanted to start their own business companies (15). Out of the thirty-two respondents, ten chose the option that they were a musician/singer and wanted to self-manage and four students were musicians/singers and wanted to be a more cooperative partner of industry representatives. As a motivation behind the applications, three of the respondents have worked in the music business and wanted to go into academia.

With resources provided, students would have studied music business in countries such as the United Kingdom (20), United States (18), Sweden (11), Germany (9), Netherlands (9), Norway (7), and Hungary (5). Additional options added by students were Iceland (1), Spain (1), and France (1).

Respondents also had the option to vote for the aim of a music business course. Twenty-seven students out of thirty-two respondents chose the option, “develop skills and competences that help with employability,” followed by “help to develop industry networks” (24), and “educate on the global music industry” (24). Nineteen students also considered local affairs important and only one student emphasized entrepreneurial skills as their additional answer.

Requirements towards a music business course are an important part of an application. In the questionnaire, students could vote for the content and aspects a music business course could provide. Here they had to put options in order. Skills were number one followed by 2) knowledge on current music business affairs, 3) getting in touch with music business professionals, 4) music business network, 5) job opportunities, 6) visiting venues and companies, and 7) visiting conferences and events.

The students were also asked about the vocational content of the ideal music business course. Ten students highlighted practical aspects such as, “They should teach highly practical and current knowledge” (Respondent Number 1), “hands-on and practical knowledge” (Respondent Number 2), and according to Respondent Number 7, the “main value of a [music business] course is the information not in the books.”

Teachers of a music business course are also important ingredients of a successful program. Students thought practicing music business professionals (30) should teach, followed by former music business professionals who had turned to academia and teaching (26), music business teachers who earned a PhD in economics, law, or any related field

who are currently practicing music business professionals as well (11), music business teachers who were educated as professional teachers (11), and finally music business teachers who earned a PhD in economics, law, or any related field (7).

Current music industry affairs were also reported as crucial to music business training. Twenty-six respondents think that they have to be informed on the current music industry issues and affairs by their course to be able to join in, twenty students agreed with the statement that graduates have to be educated and skillful employees by the end of a music business course, and thirteen students chose the option, “A music business course has to give us a more theoretical knowledge that we can apply to current music business scenarios.”

Students were also asked what sort of knowledge they think is important to have by the end of the course. They had to put these options in order:

1. Being capable of managing a musician, an orchestra, or a band
2. Being capable of organizing a concert
3. Being capable of setting up a music marketing campaign
4. Being aware of compulsory parts of different music business contracts
5. Being capable of successfully networking at a music business conference
6. Knowledge of current music business companies in the country of the music business course
7. Practice-oriented knowledge of music law including authorship and publishing
8. Being capable of organizing and managing an online music streaming campaign
9. Knowledge of the leading international music business companies
10. Being capable of organizing a small music festival
11. Being capable of organizing a national tour
12. Knowledge of various music business markets around the world
13. Being capable of organizing a small international tour
14. Basic knowledge of the venues of the country of the music business course
15. Being capable of managing a recording session of a band I work for
16. Basic knowledge of technical riders for bands and orchestras
17. Being capable of deciding on different sections of a music website.

Teaching tools and practices were also among the questions. According to the respondents, tasks should be related

to the current music business and include marketing plans, management, organizing concerts, etc. (30), seeing music business companies in operation (25), and practicing real life scenarios such as meetings and pitches (25) as well as attending music venues (24), and music business conferences (22). Music business literature on real life scenarios were chosen by thirteen students.

Discussion

In the United Kingdom, creative industries courses tend to be more affordable for upper-middle class students, and this sector is also dominated by this part of the society.⁵¹

We could see that the majority of students in this study had to plan their participation due to the high tuition fees these courses cost. Participants, underpinning literature sources,⁵² saw this course as a channel and path to their dreams and this may have been a major factor when they decided to enroll. These are all important pieces of information when it comes to course and curriculum design. The cost of these courses can be a rather important aspect as creative industries courses tend to be labeled as the “cash cows” of higher education⁵³ and in many cases, “vocationalism” is also underlined by the growing pressure of training needs within higher education due to societal changes.⁵⁴ Students in this research were highly aware of industry needs.

There has also been an ongoing debate in the United Kingdom about the roles of industry-related knowledge and vocational training within business courses⁵⁵. The supporters of the vocational turn emphasize that the dichotomy of vocational training and university education is reflected in the educational needs and circumstances of a particular society as times have changed and as an institution, mass education should incorporate training needs as well.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the role of higher education institutions is also being reinterpreted thanks to the digital revolution. In the age of Google, Wikipedia, and vastly accessible knowledge, higher education institutions have to question what they can provide their students with, as a plus.⁵⁷ According to neoliberal education policy, the task of modern universities is not merely to educate the workforce but to train knowledge workers.⁵⁸ From this approach, the new role of higher education includes preparing those for the world of work.⁵⁹ Due to this process, the importance of communities of practice, collaboration with industry, and practice-based research is emphasized. In the United Kingdom, some creative industries researchers and educators started to emphasize the changing role of universities and the codification of practical knowledge.⁶⁰ Other scholars within the field of creative industries (and music business), due to the needs of students and the pressure of high tuition fees, reevaluated the aim and role of these courses and started to refer to their students as “creative (media) workers.”⁶¹

Participants of this study required knowledge that is linked to industry and that can help with their employability as well as gaining skills and knowledge. Out of the thirty-two respondents, only three were considering academia as a career option. All the other respondents (29) were interested in the labor market, and twenty-two respondents had no plan B. According to these numbers, the pressure on, and the responsibility of, music business course designers and educators is huge.

As mentioned above, German and British educational systems have been different. In Britain, some courses do not have any labor market relevance, while German higher education is typically practice-oriented, linked to skills development and occupations.⁶² As Graf and colleagues claimed, “Unlike in Germany (or Austria and Switzerland), in many other countries practice-oriented training programs do not yet enjoy the same level of recognition as academic, classroom-based training programs.”⁶³ In the case of Germany, Siebenhaar and Müller define five aspects that make these courses successful and respected. Music business education at private universities is based on the market, on professional practice, on the needs of the job market, on the needs of students, and their goal of advancing their careers.⁶⁴ German students were aware of that.

Representatives made it clear that the vocational aspect, including skills, competencies, and industry relevant knowledge is important for them and prefer that over theoretical knowledge. The “knowledge not found in books” aspect seemed to be a very important aspect as well as networking and music business contacts.

We could see that most students—regardless of the country where they study—value practical knowledge, competencies, and skills.

Conclusion

The participants, all music business students in Germany, Hungary, or the United Kingdom seem to value the vocational, practical aspect of a music business course. Most of the respondents considered networks, industry knowledge, and music business teacher-practitioners essential.

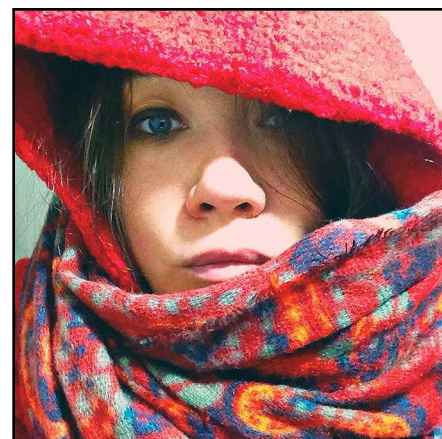
Although the researcher tried their best, due to COVID-19 fatigue and the issues around the research itself, the findings cannot serve as firm grounding for generalization. Limitations include the number of participants and the number of courses involved. This study can serve as a tiny postcard from one country; long, long letters can be written about the same topic, but the length should match the significance of the topic.

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Fruzsina Morcz is now a second-year doctoral student at the Doctoral School of Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences. She is doing her PhD on the relationship between the U.S. and the European higher education music business courses and their relationship with the labor market.



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