

**An Examination of Student and Faculty Perceptions Regarding Music  
Education Transfer Student Preparedness and Experiences**

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### Abstract

Transfer students account for growing numbers in four-year music education programs. To better understand this increasing population of students, researchers employed parallel method design. One strand investigated music education faculty members' ( $n = 83$ ) perceptions of transfer student preparedness, procedures, and expectations to understand admissions processes (e.g., curricula, assessments) employed to evaluate incoming transfer students. The other strand examined music education transfer students' ( $n = 12$ ) academic, social, and personal preparedness to study music education in a comprehensive four-year music education program. The following research questions served as a guide for data collection and analysis: (a) What themes emerged for students throughout the investigation of the transfer process? (b) What are transfer students' perceptions of academic and musical preparedness once making the transition to four-year institutions? and (c) What are college professors' perceptions of transfer students' academic and musical preparedness upon arrival at four-year institutions?

Findings from both student and faculty perspectives suggest that transfer students exhibit three common concerns throughout the transfer process. These concerns were academic, social, and personal. Further, transfer students' preparedness also emerged as a theme mentioned by music faculty as an obstacle for incoming students. Themes also included performance on departmental diagnostic assessments, various modes of communication among music faculty (i.e., applied, classroom), students, and university/college administrative personnel. Researchers provide an analysis and suggestions for addressing these concerns from multiple perspectives as well as suggestions for future research.

## **An Examination of Student and Faculty Perceptions Regarding Music Education Transfer Student Preparedness and Experiences**

An emerging consideration in higher education is the continual rise of enrollment in junior or community colleges (JUCOs). While nearly 20 million students attend colleges and universities every day, students increasingly opt to stay closer to home and save money by first attending a nearby JUCO (Hossler et al., 2012). Hossler et al. (2012) found that nearly 40% of their participants attended multiple universities within the first six years of study, with almost 62% indicating that they transferred from a two-year to a four-year institution. Additionally, approximately 65% of those graduates enrolled for at least three semesters at a community college (National Research Center, 2017). Traditionally, these two-year institutions focused on increasing access and helping students prepare for university-level studies (Trainor, 2015); however, it is unclear the extent to which this impacts music education due to a gap in the literature. Therefore, noting an increase in JUCO transfer students, as well as greater transience and mobility amongst students in four-year institutions (Trainor, 2015), we designed this study as a way to better understand the perceptions surrounding, and preparedness of, music education transfer students.

### **Transfer Population: Rationale and Infrastructure**

Gardner (2012) refers to collegiate student transfers as the “new normal,” with about 12% of undergraduates—nearly 3.4 million students—enrolled in American two-year colleges (Frye, 2009). While institutions generally record overall enrollment trends, collecting data for music education majors remains a difficult task due to the vast network of JUCOs and their intended missions. While many JUCOs began with a mission to prepare students for “upper division baccalaureate studies,” they now focus more upon preparing “students for the completion of a four-year degree in music” (Brophy, 1997, p. 749). Given a change in enrollment and

institutional philosophies, tempered expectations for transfers as they relate to matriculation and adjustments in preparedness for university study should be expected.

An examination of why students are increasingly beginning their post-secondary education at community colleges reveals diverse reasons. For many students, community colleges serve as a pathway to higher education. Low-income, minority, and first-generation students are more likely to attend community colleges than four-year institutions (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). According to Ma and Baum (2016), 44% of all African-American and 56% of all Hispanic undergraduates in the United States currently attend community colleges. Several researchers posited possible factors for increased JUCO enrollment, including: (a) remaining closer to home (Johnson et al., 2005), (b) imposed limitations at many four-year institutions (Evelyn, 2002), (c) high admissions requirements and rising tuition costs (Mills, 2006), and (d) offering students time to improve their educational records and increase their likelihood of being admitted to a four-year institution (Long & Kurlaender, 2009). In response, accessibility to higher education has emerged as a topic of interest for many states. For example, Tennessee, Oregon, New York, and Rhode Island initiated first steps by offering free tuition or last-dollar programs for residents to attend community colleges at no cost with additional states following suit (Powell, 2018).

According to Shippee (2010), the purpose of the two-year community college music program is to meet students where they are. He wrote:

the approach sums up our clear statement to beginning music majors (partly evident in allowing entrance without audition) that the talents, skills, and knowledge they bring, though often lacking by traditional standards, are the perfect, and only, place to begin from. (p. 82)

Therein lies the consideration of the aforementioned philosophical shift: students may not be prepared for upper level courses at a four-year institution, but rather be prepared to begin a four-year program. Consequently, rigors and expectations upon admission exists as one topic of interest among researchers (Horn & Nevill, 2006; Monaghan & Attewell, 2015). Unlike four-year colleges and universities, community colleges have long maintained an open-admission policy, which affords additional opportunities for many students, including those who struggled academically or socially in high school. Such an opportunity allows for additional future planning with over one-third of students enrolled in community college indicating their intent to transfer to a four-year college at some point (Horn & Nevill, 2006). Considering the nonselective and open nature of admissions, 61% of students at community colleges take at least one remedial course, with 25% enrolling in two or more remedial courses (Horn & Nevill, 2006).

### **Transfers in Music**

Music students' motivations and perceptions of the community college experience are emerging as layers of the community college experience with little supporting literature. Stewart et al. (2015) found that motivations for enrolling in community college music programs included: personal interest in music (86%), personal enjoyment/social contact (70%), development of musical knowledge (66%), participation in a musical performance experience (50%), degree requirement (5%), and preparation for future musical endeavors (3%). Participants listed convenience, cost, location, fitting classes around work schedules, and admission requirements at four-year institutions as primary reasons for their initial community college enrollment. Additional semesters and credit hours emerged as unintended consequences of these students' specific decisions, often leading to remedial courses across the curriculum.

Student remediation (Horn & Nevill, 2006) concerns also extend to music, with JUCO music professors reporting difficulty in gauging transfer student readiness. Anderman (2011) found that community college music instructors lacked confidence that their students could meet four-year institutions' higher expectations. Music schools are not the only academic areas to recognize this instructional gap (Staines, 1996). Libraries have initiated processes to address this issue through assessments, library services, and programs (Stanley Grigg & Dale, 2017; Yeager & Pemberton, 2017). However, unlike library services, minimal research exists regarding supports, diagnostic assessments, transfer agreements, or equivalency charts currently employed in music programs. Given the extent of most music education degree requirements, music students who transfer to new institutions continually encounter academic hurdles through the addition of empty credits. The extent to which these impact music students remains unknown. Monaghan and Attewell (2015) found that only 58% of music transfer students from community colleges are able to transfer "almost all" of their credits but are often unclear on what credits did or did not transfer (p. 83).

One approach to address the transfer process is the establishment and implementation of articulation agreements between institutions that outline transfer policies and procedures. Yet, concerns have arisen as these agreements, when available, often hinder a smooth transition from one school to the next (Roksa & Keith, 2008). Articulation agreements are routinely handled at the university level, and may not be not program (i.e., music education) specific, indicating a need to better understand the kinds of procedures used in music education in order to aid student morale during the transition.

Along with understanding articulation agreements and other music education policies, faculty should be aware of transfer students' perceptions and experiences. Incomplete or

inadequate advising of transfer students may lead to confusion and frustration as demonstrated by Andres (1999), whose student interviewees indicated “difficulty making sense of information, lack of clarity about required practices and policies, and confusion about ‘assigned’ vs ‘unassigned’ credits” (p. 2). For these reasons, there is a need to better understand: (a) students’ and professors’ perceptions of preparedness, (b) diagnostic assessments used in music education admissions, and (c) current trends in the development of articulation agreements between two and four-year institutions.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

Transfer student enrollment is rising across the United States. Given the convenience, cost, and expectations of higher education, JUCOs emerge as the best option for many students regardless of their career aspirations. Furthermore, as degree requirements increase with a lack of clear articulation agreements between institutions, a transfer student is often left to fend for themselves in navigating their degree path. What remains unclear is how these realities affect music education students. Given the number of credit hours required and performance expectations upon arrival, is the emerging transfer culture impacting music education students in any way? With the intent to begin a dialogue towards improving transfer student procedures, policies, and experiences in music education program, we designed this study to investigate students’ and faculty members’ perceptions of music education transfer students’ academic, social, and personal preparedness. The following research questions served as a guide for our study:

1. What themes emerged for students throughout the investigation of the transfer process?

2. What are transfer students' perceptions of academic and musical preparedness once making the transition to four-year institutions?
3. What are college professors' perceptions of transfer students' academic and musical preparedness upon arrival at four-year institutions?

### **Method**

We employed a parallel research design utilizing interviews and an online survey to canvas our target population for maximum context. Prior to data collection, researchers engaged in virtual meetings to identify areas of interest and bias, establish research questions, and generate interview and survey questions. We elected to gain transfer students' perspectives through a multiple case instrumental study design and analysis (Stake, 2006), as we thought that interviews could best capture student experiences and concerns. We used a survey to collect faculty perspectives and music education program information. Details of both methodologies are described below.

#### **Student Interviews**

Given the researchers' locations, a focus was placed on identifying potential participants through local networking, proximity to researchers, and availability. We developed three criteria for inclusion in this study. All participants: (a) were a transfer student, (b) were current students or alumni (after 2015) of a NASM-accredited music unit, and (c) were a music education major or graduate. Twelve participants, selected from four institutions across the west ( $n = 4$ ), midwest ( $n = 4$ ), and northeast ( $n = 4$ ), met all criteria and agreed to participate in the study. Participants ranged from 19 to 30 years old, and primarily followed two paths: they attended a JUCO prior to transferring to a four-year institution, or attended a different four-year institution before transferring to the current four-year institution (see Table 1).



**Table 1**  
*Student Transfer Information*

<b>Student name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Performance Area</b>	<b>Type of Transfer</b>
*#Loren	23	Vocal	JUCO to four-year
*^John	22	Vocal	JUCO to four-year
*David	21	Instrumental	JUCO to four-year
*Bob	22	Vocal	JUCO to four-year
Larry	19	Vocal	JUCO to four-year
Sienna	22	Instrumental	JUCO to four-year
~Miles	30	Instrumental	JUCO to four-year
~Taylor	22	Instrumental	four-year to four-year
Bridget	19	Vocal	four-year to four-year
Alex	23	Instrumental	four-year to four-year

*Note.* \* Purposefully attended JUCO as a “stepping stone” degree to 4-year institution.

^ Recent 4-year graduate.

~ Transferred from a different subject area (i.e., non-music or music education).

# Two or more transfers prior to current-status in a four-year institution.

Each participant engaged in a semi-structured interview (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013) with one of the four researchers. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim using a transcription software program, Trint; transcriptions were then independently verified by the researchers for accuracy. To help consistency among interviews, researchers constructed and utilized an interviewing template (see Appendix A) which specified the order of questions, categorizing them by type (i.e., background, procedure of applying, perceptions about new school, overview). It also served as a framework for recoding interview notes (Miles et al., 2014). Follow-up questions were only asked to clarify meaning or if an interviewer wanted a participant to expand on a story or point.

After all researchers had completed their interviews, each researcher independently reviewed their transcripts to identify main ideas from within the interview. Researchers then met virtually to debrief the entire team with main ideas from each participant and to identify a deductive lens for further analysis. From this discussion, the research team agreed to analyze the transcripts via three “bins,” or categories (Miles et al., 2014): personal, social, and academic. Consistent with Miles, et al.’s (2014) position that “[b]ins come from theory, from personal

experience, and (often) from the general objectives of the study envisioned” (p. 64), these three constructs were generated from notions found in related literature, researcher experience, as well as “best fit” after reviewing all of the interviews. In addition to each researcher analyzing their transcripts using these categories, all transcripts were made available to all researchers via an electronic cloud storage system. One researcher, however, was predominantly tasked with providing a “second pass” at the data within all transcripts.

Finally, we addressed Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four trustworthiness criteria (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) through positionality and several additional techniques. As researchers, our personal experiences as prior non-traditional students, or advisors to transfer students, afforded us the opportunity to view this population with unique insight and context contributing directly to the trustworthiness of our investigation. Other techniques included: (a) member-checking our write-ups with interviewees, (b) peer-debriefing as a research team, (c) identifying our own experiences as possible biases in analysis, (d) source triangulation, by interviewing multiple participants located in four different states, as well as quantitative faculty data, (e) methods triangulation using quantitative data in certain interview questions, and (f) external auditing via presentations at the Society for Music Teacher Education Symposium and within Areas for Strategic Planning and Action team meetings.

### **Faculty Survey**

We constructed a short survey regarding faculty perceptions of transfer students, piloted it for face validity by music colleagues at our institutions, then administered it to determine music faculty members’ perceptions of transfer students’ preparedness upon entrance into a four-year music education program (see Appendix B). Respondents ( $n = 83$ ) completed a 17-item questionnaire on a variety of topics regarding student preparedness. Questions were developed

through a thorough review of the literature, as well as our expertise in advising. There was a mixture of Likert-type (3), short answer (11), and multiple choice (3) items. Likert-type questions were on a seven-point scale with a 0 provided in case respondents were not aware or did not have enough information to provide an answer. This allowed the researchers to account for this to avoid any skewing of the data. We administered the survey through an email campaign using the database of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME).

We requested participation in the survey from participants who met the following criteria: (a) currently a member of NAfME and (b) self-identified as a higher education professor on the NAfME website. Of 5,000 emails sent, along with two reminders, 3829 opened the email, 247 clicked the associated link, and 83 surveys were completed. Following survey administration, we compiled and analyzed data utilizing Qualtrics.

### **Findings/Results**

Over the course of receiving faculty surveys, conducting twelve interviews, and subsequent analysis, three areas emerged as considerable points of focus for transfer students. We identified these points as “bins” and labeled them personal, social, and academic. Within each of these bins resides compartments that interconnect to define each “bin.” Furthermore, participants eagerly offered advice to future transfer students throughout. Interviewees often framed these responses as, “I wish I would have known” comments, or clearly sharing that they want future students to benefit from the knowledge and experience they attained through this process so that they did not have to endure some of the hardships they experienced. These data provide meaningful insight into the obstacles and personal sacrifices made by students to obtain a music education degree. Furthermore, faculty responses provided some context for universities’ perception of transfer student awareness; however, due to a low response rate,

content analysis and attempts to mix methods for deeper meaning were fruitless. Regardless, we report the data collected below and share initial findings, but combined analysis will result in conjecture at best without a better response from music faculty.

## **Student Interviews**

### *Personal*

We present the following data through lenses of bins into which student responses were separated. We categorized topics or stories as “personal” when participants explained how certain conditions or scenarios impacted them exclusively; often they referred to these elements as “concerns” or “problems” they had to navigate. Throughout the different interviews, students expressed four personal concerns we identified as compartments: (a) financial burdens, (b) meeting physical demands of certain required music education courses (e.g., marching band) at older ages, (c) managing feelings of intellectual or skill inadequacy, and (d) needing parental and/or home support for building resiliency for degree completion.

Students frequently cited guidelines requiring transfer students to take one or more courses which did not contribute to the degree program at their four-year institution as a source of contention. Not only did these decisions impact graduation timelines, but they also created complications with finances. Miles, who began his education majoring in English literature at a JUCO, explained his difficulties working to meet financial aid requirements:

Because the credits that I had accrued, most of them unrelated to music ed, I’m going to have over 200 credits by the time I graduate—[somewhere between] 80 and 50 of them are from [prior JUCO]. So, they ended up hurting me with financial aid because there’s a cap for financial aid for undergrads... and you can’t go over that credit limit.

As such, he is not sure when, or even if he will be able to graduate.

David, who graduated with an associate's degree from a JUCO designed to feed into his four-year institution, told of his emotional struggles—feeling that some of his musical skills and knowledge (e.g., playing the saxophone, music theory) lagged behind his peers. He stated that he was thankful for his school's mental health program, claiming that counseling was important for him:

There were couple of low points last semester when I was just in this rough transition of trying to . . . just trying to get through . . . I just needed help with that mental transition of like “I need to work on this, but it's not something that's going to define me as a good or bad person.”

Other participants shared needing a similar support structure from their parents or spouse, since they did not always want to share private information with their advisor or admissions office given the newness of their interactions.

### *Social*

When participants spoke of situations which impacted them in relationship to others, we identified these instances as “social.” Again, four main compartments emerged: (a) social support is important for strength and motivation towards degree completion; (b) age gaps between participants and their peers can cause barriers; (c) simultaneous enrollment in different leveled classes (e.g., a first-year “welcome to a four year institution” course alongside sophomore “introduction to music education” and junior “methods and materials” courses); and (d) interactions with faculty or staff who are not knowledgeable about the (unique) needs of transfer students, or have provided poor advice can cause issues with trust. We note that three of these areas—social support, age gaps, and simultaneous enrollment—all display an overarching idea indicating a need to “fit in.” Taylor, a 19-year old who transferred from a four-year

institution, explained this notion as “finding a home.” He stated that he successfully found his place through Greek life and marching band. “There was just this instant home, and this instant connection. So it made [transferring] a very easy transition, actually.” Larry, on the other hand, did not have the same experience. He too is 19, but transitioned from a JUCO:

...I wasn't really connecting with anybody... it was like starting over, because you get used to your environment at the one place at... and I come here and it's like I don't know anybody. Everybody my age is either in other programs or graduating, meanwhile I'm here for another two or three years.

Lauren initially experienced the same situation as Larry but found that befriending another transfer student was especially helpful.

### *Academic*

Participants frequently spoke about ways in which they academically struggled or experienced challenges when interacting with the music or music education program, or its faculty. We assigned these examples to the “academic” bin and again noted four compartments: (a) confusing and erratic course audits, (b) added semesters due to scheduling complications (e.g., pre-requisites, sequencing of curriculum), (c) loss of linearity with coursework, and (d) varying expectations for course demands. Some students became animated when explaining ways in which they encountered academic issues. After asking Loren if she preemptively sought out her advisor(s) if she noticed upcoming issues, she responded:

I didn't know that there were problems until the problems happened. Generally, there was something weird with my transcript. I had been told by somebody that things were OK. You know, everyone tells you should “look at your degree evaluation. It tells you what to do.” I'm like, it looks confusing to me. There's a lot of stuff. Every single class I've ever

taken is on here; it's a little confusing.

Loren spoke passionately about how she constantly was asking questions but was provided incorrect information by her applied teacher, the school of education, another music education faculty member, and the admissions department. It was not until she built rapport with the music education chair, who has come to work one-to-one with all the transfer students, that she felt more confident in her progress and her future course trajectory:

We sat down, and she'd been the most helpful. We sat down with everything and like made a document where, "this semester take these things, and this semester take these things," [which outlines] up until I graduate, so for like four semesters. And that's just so much easier for me to just look at that and be like, "OK, this is what I need."

Most students reported that figuring out course schedules can be challenging. Taylor spoke about how important his advisor was in helping him stay on track, given that many music classes are pre-requisite based—"you have to take you know theory one before you take theory two, before theory three, before four"—and only offered once a year at a specific time, which could conflict with another music-education required course. Students conveyed the critical importance of identifying a faculty advisor immediately upon arrival at a new university. They described this person as one who was knowledgeable about the transfer process, a fierce advocate, and one that "would go the extra mile" to ensure their success. They continued that there were additional advantages if one could establish these connections prior to arrival.

### ***Student Advice***

At the conclusion of each interview, we asked participants two very specific questions: (a) Would you recommend transferring to others? and (b) What advice would you provide to others who are considering transferring? Participants commonly shared that they would not

recommend the transfer process based on their experiences. While some enjoyed decent experiences, the end did not justify the means for them as they completed their degree program. The lack of transparency on requirements and transfer credits served as the crux of their feelings on this issue. Participants offered sage advice including, “Be comfortable with who you are, and don’t be afraid to ask questions and be your best advocate,” indicating that the pathway of a transfer student is often lonely and depends entirely on self-preparation and support. Joining groups outside of the music building and extending one’s network also emerged as themes with our participants.

Students shared additional nuggets of advice from several bins including: (a) find ways to cope that help overall mental health (e.g., listen to music, meditation), (b) find a support group to “make a home” on campus, and (c) find a sole source of information, such as an advisor, as soon as possible. They followed each of these statements with testimonies of experiences they endured throughout the transfer process serving as the genesis of these thoughts. They closed with the following, “Get everything in writing” and “Don’t overload yourself trying to catch up” (Composite quotes from all participants; see Table 2).

## **Faculty Survey**

### ***Faculty Perceptions***

Faculty shared that transfer students reported to campus generally unprepared ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) for the rigors of music education study. While we found overall preparedness to be near the median, this finding was inflated due to a stronger perception of preparation for performing ensembles ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ). The remaining areas all fell below the median. Faculty cited aural skills ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ) and piano ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ) among the weakest areas for preparedness for music transfer students.



**Table 2**  
*Transfer Student Advice*

Personal	Social	Academic
Be comfortable with who you are and don't be afraid to ask questions and be your best advocate.	Join groups outside of your large ensembles as soon as you arrive on campus and extend your network.	Find a sole source of information such as an advisor ASAP.
Find ways to cope that help overall mental health (e.g., listen to music, meditation).	Find a support group to "make a home" on campus. Especially helpful if they're in similar situation.	Ask as many questions as you need ... once you're here, things move quickly.
"...find somewhere that's right and find somewhere that you feel wanted to be there."		Get everything in writing.
		Don't overload yourself trying to "catch up."
		"...knowing what classes you need to take in the years you're going to be at the college [and that] they will transfer." (Meet with an advisor during your JUCO semesters to ensure a smooth transition.)

However, outside of preparation for ensemble participation, music faculty indicated foundations in music education as an area of strength for transfer students ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ). Both areas of perceived preparedness can reflect the structure and communication between universities and the transfer partners. While these perceptions rank the highest, they remain marginal, at best, and indicate a need for more investigation to determine the reasons for the perceived unpreparedness (see Table 3).

**Table 3**  
*Faculty Perceptions*

Perceptions of Preparedness	Mean	SD	Variance	n
Transfer students' overall preparedness	3.92	1.24	1.55	83
Preparedness for your institution's studio expectations	3.52	1.52	2.30	83
Preparedness or readiness for ensemble participation	4.60	1.58	2.50	83
Preparedness for your institution's theory sequence	3.19	1.68	2.81	83
Preparedness for your institution's aural skills sequence	2.98	1.53	2.34	83
Preparedness for your institution's piano sequence	3.05	1.64	2.70	83
Preparedness for your institution's music education academic sequence	3.75	1.69	2.84	83
Preparedness for your institution's teacher education (School of Ed) academic sequence	3.53	1.81	3.26	83

*Note.* Data collected from seven-point Likert-type items.

### *University Issues*

Faculty reported that their music units had structures in place to guide students effectively through the transfer process ( $M = 5.99$ ,  $SD = 2.56$ ). Furthermore, faculty felt that the colleges or universities were a bit weaker in this regard on a broader scale ( $M = 5.78$ ,  $SD = 2.36$ ). Fifty-six percent of respondents indicated that it would take four to five years to complete the music education degree after one year of study at the community or junior college level, while 43% of the respondents indicated a minimum of four to five years to complete the music education degree after two years of study at the junior or community college (JUCO) level. This would require a minimum of five to six years to complete a music education degree. They further indicated that it was essentially the “same as if they started here.” For those who completed an associate’s degree or two years of community or junior college, 55.4% reported that it would take a minimum of three years; however, 86.7% reported that three years was most likely. Ultimately, they reported that it takes “longer than they usually expect.” See Table 4 for faculty responses regarding length of time needed to complete the music education degree after the transfer.

**Table 4**  
*Program Completion*

<b>After One Year of JUCO</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>After two years of JUCO</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
3 years	11	2 or 2.5 years	3
3 to 3.5 years	3	2 to 3 years	19
3 to 4 years	20	2.5 to 3 years	7
4 years	31	3 to 4 years	17
4 or 5 years	5	4 years	6

### *Impact and Conflicts*

Forty-five percent of faculty participants reported that remedial courses are usually required for music education transfer students. This directly impacts time on campus and

ultimately timely completion of all degree requirements. Furthermore, faculty also indicated that general education requirements revealed inconsistencies that often created conflicts. These conflicts extend students' time at the university or are very difficult to navigate for both students and faculty. Finally, 56.96% of the respondents indicated that transfer students encounter conflicts or negative impacts from music-specific requirements once arriving on campus. These delay enrollment in specific courses or require special permission to complete due to the circumstances.

### ***Other Considerations***

A general theme of other considerations for transfer students is that they are all unique. Each student has their own story, struggles, and successes. The issues they face vary based on geographical location, family needs, and program design at both schools. However, while every experience is different, we can glean from participants' experiences how transfer students can be better prepared to enter the four-year university. This may include exploring ways to develop mentoring or other programs that help transfer students to make the transition more smoothly. One respondent objected to all of the survey's questions because all transfer students are different individuals. Others felt that a support system was needed. Regardless, transfer students are a population necessitating more study to determine how to best serve them and ensure their success in music education programs across the nation.

### **Discussion**

The current study underscores the challenges encountered by the emerging population of transfer students (Evelyn, 2002; Frye, 2009; Gardner, 2012; Hossler, et al., 2012; Johnson, et al., 2005; Katsinas & Tollefson, 2009; National Research Center, 2017). Frye's (2009) research suggests that almost ten percent of college students will graduate from an institution in which

they did not begin their studies. If this trend holds true for music education majors, maintaining current practices without addressing this growing transfer demographic could have impacts beyond enrollment including student wellbeing. Establishing more effective protocols for accepting transfer students, as well as continuing to develop articulation agreements among peer institutions, could lead to diminishing impacts of obstacles transfer students commonly encounter. Furthermore, with funding as a constant issue for most music administrators (Buckner, et al., 2015; Lanich, 2020; Loveridge, 2018; Reilly, 2018), transfer students and their attendance at four-year universities becomes more critical when considering operating budgets and overall vitality for music units. Given the ominous overtones of the “enrollment cliff” (Grawe, 2018), the longevity and viability of some regional four-year institutions could create additional issues for JUCOs, larger institutions, and their constituents. While this trend operates somewhat on the periphery of this study, it introduces a dimension worth serious consideration when advising students to select both college and career paths. Conversely, rising tuition and educational costs (Mills, 2006) will continue to play a role in influencing students’ decisions, as we saw from several of our participants who were direct in citing their financial reasons for initially attending a two-year university.

Our first two research questions focused on identifying the emerging factors transfer students encountered and their perceptions of academic and musical preparedness. We found that while each student is different, they encountered similar obstacles that were classified in a variety of “bins.” Identifying these personal, social, and academic filters through which they experience their time on campus allows for informed decision-making regarding admission, curriculum, and instruction. For instance, transfer students often feel like they are in between age groups as they join new campuses, creating a sense of confusion regarding the development of

both their social and teacher identities. Awareness of this dissonance allows for curricular or course adjustments that could aid the student in more effectively developing their own identity and connecting with their current cohort.

Another recommendation is identifying a faculty point person or lead advisor for all incoming students. Establishing one point of contact centralizes the transfer process, allows information to stay in one silo, and establishes consistent messaging for all prospective transfer students. Further, advocacy for and communication about articulation agreements becomes both a reality and a resource for future students, while diminishing the negative impact of empty credits and increasing efficiency and productivity of credit transfer for all students. We have found that, under optimal conditions, transfer students can flourish. Given the impact of these stories, the profession should remain committed to helping our colleagues, degree programs, and institutions find ways to improve the interactions with and incorporation of transfer students in music education programs. While three distinct bins (i.e., personal, social, academic) emerged in the current study, they are not separate. Each is interwoven with the other and is part of the individual, which affirms the faculty member who mentioned that “each transfer student situation is different.” Seeing these themes emerge, yet be so interdependent, further confirms the need for more study on this specific topic.

Our final research question focused on college professors’ perceptions of transfer students’ academic and musical preparedness upon arrival at a four-year institution. Given the low response rate from our survey, making any meaningful inferences is not possible. This lack of response also leads to the likelihood of low-response bias; therefore, the discussion that follows cannot be generalized beyond the current study. We focused on reporting what we could and used the current data set as an exploratory tool to better inform development of ensuing

investigations.

We found that college music faculty members perceived transfer students as unprepared for the rigors of a four-year institution. Beginning studies at a JUCO does not save money in the aggregate, as it requires additional time for remediation and acclimation to the new university. Music faculty also struggled with clearly identifying support structures, or even knowing who was in charge of that messaging. While the results of the current study might indicate that defined support systems exist for transfer students, the disconnect between students and faculty perceptions regarding these structures is an area that needs more attention and investigation.

Currently, the transfer student population encounters more obstacles as compared to their four-year counterparts. While both students and faculty acknowledged there are observable differences between the two groups, they both received the same college degree and are products of the same music education program. Higher education stakeholders who wish to better understand and address transfer students' personal, social, or academic challenges, in hopes of minimizing gaps in academic and musical preparedness, might consider several options:

1. Create onboarding programs that minimize these issues at the point of advising and first experiences. Socializing the students as members of the degree programs and creating connections early in the process would be necessary.
2. Establish a mentoring program that would pair transfer students with students already in the degree program of the same age or with similar experiences. Addressing the gaps that exist in age, degree progress, and overall identity are critical in alleviating many of these issues experienced by transfer students.
3. Design recruiting programs focused on developing transfer agreements that ensure smooth transition and timely degree completion.

Connections can then be fostered through various approaches to make transfer students feel more connected as they start a new chapter at a new institution. These findings connect with Monaghan and Attewell (2015) in terms of the positive correlation between higher percentage of transferred hours and successful completion of the degree. Furthermore, such success could potentially alleviate feelings of aloneness, or perceptions of this gap between transfer students and their four-year counterparts. Improving transfer students' morale through better articulation agreements and transparency of the transfer process would go a long way in avoiding disconnectedness (Andres, 1999; Roksa & Keith, 2008).

Based on our findings and experiences, the need for future research on transfer students is critical to aid in transfer students' and faculty members' experiences, as well as the rigor and vitality of our profession. Furthermore, additional investigation is warranted in the domain of faculty perceptions to provide a more robust context for findings. Therefore, we recommend further exploration around transfer students' acceptance in music education programs and offer the following research questions for continued study: (a) What is causing the difference in preparation of students from different JUCOs? (b) Are there different systems of JUCOs, and how does this impact the transfer process? (c) How does age impact social acceptance? (d) What are current reasons individuals transfer? (e) Is there merit to a music education transfer-only advisor in each department? (f) How can music education departments offer social support for transfers? (g) What kinds of outreach exists to local community colleges and JUCOs? (h) How might academic, social, and personal perceptions of transfer students and faculty be similar to or different from non-traditional/alternative students?

In order to successfully assimilate transfer students into music education programs, there is much more work to be done. We hope that this study might inspire some of our colleagues to

further investigate this population. While awareness is a step in the right direction, only further action will uncover viable and effective solutions.

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**Appendix A**  
*Interview Template*

Demographics		
Interviewee Code Name:		
Age:	Gender:	Grad Year:
Degree Type/Plan:		Instrument/Focus Area:

Background
<p><b>What kind of school did you transfer from?</b></p> <p><b>Did you transfer locally, regionally, or across state lines?</b> <i>Follow up: If across state lines, was it outside of your first state's national region?</i></p> <p><b>Why did you decide to transfer?</b></p> <p><b>Why did you attend your first school first?</b></p>

Salient Points	Lingering Questions	Physical Observations

<b>Procedure of Applying</b>
<p><b>What was the process like for transferring?</b>  <i>Prompts: course reviews, exams, applications, financials.</i></p> <p><b>Do you think the end results of this process captured your abilities and knowledge?</b></p> <p><b>How well did you know about the requirements for the audit/transfer of prior coursework? <i>Follow up: who was your go-to person to assist you in this process?</i></b></p> <p><b>What do you wish you would have known before you engaged in the transfer process?</b></p>

Salient Points	Lingering Questions	Physical Observations

<b>Beliefs about New School</b>
<p><b>How did/do you feel about your first semester as a new student on campus?</b> <i>Follow up: Did this change with more time on campus?</i></p> <p><b>Who is your four-year advisor?</b> <i>Follow up: How comfortable do you feel with your four-year advisor? Do/did you find that you see/saw your advisor(s) more when problems arise, or in prevention of problems?</i></p> <p><b>Which campus departments did you feel support from during your transfer?</b> <i>Follow up: Any outside of the Music Department?</i></p> <p><b>How would you compare the difficulty of your classes in your first institution to your second?</b></p>

Salient Points	Lingering Questions	Physical Observations

**Overview**

**What was some of the best advice you received during your transfer?**

**What was some of the worst advice you received during your transfer?**

**What helped you get through any of the struggles you encountered due to transferring?**

**Looking back at the overall process, would you recommend transferring to others?**

**What advice would you provide to others who are considering transferring?**











## Appendix B

### Music Education Transfer Student Questionnaire

Q1 Please rate the following items related to transfer students' preparedness for music education studies at a 4 year college/university on a scale of 1-7, with 1 being very unprepared and 7 being very prepared. Please rate 0 for unknown/unobserved.

0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7

Transfer students' overall preparedness ()	
Preparedness for your institution's studio expectations. ()	
Preparedness or readiness for ensemble participation ()	
Preparedness for your institution's theory sequence ()	
Preparedness for your institution's aural skills sequence ()	
Preparedness for your institution's piano sequence. ()	
preparedness for your institution's music education academic sequence ()	
preparedness for your institution's teacher education (School of Ed) academic sequence ()	

Q2 Please describe strengths you typically see in music education transfer students.

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Q3 Please describe weaknesses you typically see in music education transfer students.

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Q4 Please describe the social dispositions of your transfer students (ex: friendly, outgoing, reserved, quiet).

-----

Q5 Please describe the musical dispositions of your transfer students (ex: has a good ear, great sense of phrasing, good ensemble member, weak error detection).

---

Q6 Please describe the academic dispositions of your transfer students (ex: always prepared, gets good grades, is often absent or tardy, doesn't complete work on time).

---

Q7 What types of diagnostic assessments, if any, are given to transfer students? (ex: music theory, piano) When are they given?

---

Q8 Please rate the amount of support your department/school/college of music has/perceives to have in place to help guide transfer students, with 0 being none and 10 being exceptional.

Click to write Label 1

0 2 4 6 8 10



Q9 Please describe the supports your department/school/college of music has/perceives to have in place to help guide transfer students,

---

Q10 Please rate the amount of support your college/university has/perceives to have in place to help guide transfer students, with 0 being none and 10 being exceptional.

0 2 4 6 8 10



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Q11 Please describe the supports your college/university has/perceives to have in place to help guide transfer students,

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Q12 On average, how long does it take transfer students to complete program requirements if transferring after one year of college?

---

Q13 On average, how long does it take transfer students to complete program requirements if transferring after two years of college?

---

Q14 Impacts on curriculum for transfer students...  
Are remedial courses usually required?

- Yes (1)
  - No (2)
  - I don't know (3)
- 

Q15  
Impacts on curriculum for transfer students... Are there impacts/conflicts with general education requirements?

- Yes (1)
  - No (2)
  - I don't know (3)
-

Q16

Impacts on curriculum for transfer students...

Are there impacts/conflicts with music specific course requirements?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- I don't know (3)

Q17 Please list any further information you would like to share regarding transfer students entering into music education programs.

**End of Block: Default Question Block**

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