

Innovation Case Study

My Life as a Musician

Diana Tolmie: Lecturer in Professional Practice, Queensland Conservatorium

CONTEXT

Since 2011, My Life as a Musician (MLaaM) has been delivered as a suite of core courses offered within the Bachelor of Music programme at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University. Its overarching purpose is to create industry prepared graduates via the developmental awareness of career identity, career pathways, and career support skills.

Course	Degree year	Student # (average)	Learning Outcomes (LO) and Assessment (A)	Student Lifecycle
1020QCM	1	145	LO: Degree engagement, student musician identity formation: “what does it take?”, career options, and opportunity recognition. A: Short theoretical quizzes, Career analysis and 5-year plan, Networking report plus Learning Support Activities (LSA) including career motivation analysis and invoice formulation.	Transition In
2020QCM	3	95	LO: Enterprise and persuasive writing A: Self promotional/employment tools, grant application, Project Plan (group assignment)	Transition through/out
3020QCM	4	30	LO: Creative entrepreneurship & persuasive speaking A: Presentation and report based: Industry case analysis, and creative entrepreneur pitch.	Transition out/up

RATIONALE

Following the research of Professors' Gemma Carey and Don Lebler, and a Bachelor of Music programme review, it was determined that undergraduates required further skills to support their growing need to sustain portfolio careers in lieu of declining linear employment (such as orchestral and opera work). My 2017 doctoral research has revealed that from the 261 surveyed portfolio musicians, the majority (68%) perceive their music industry as shrinking: i.e. less employment available and an influx of more musicians; and becoming territorial: i.e. impenetrable networks, greater competition and greater monopolisation of available work. Not only are future musicians required to adopt portfolio careers, they will need to embrace the skills of job-creation and rely less on contract work.

However, my recent related doctoral research has revealed that more than 2/3rds of students begin their degree with a romanticised understanding of the music industry. Although these career goals act as the major driver for the work ethic required to prepare for a high profile music career, the disappointment often encountered later in the degree can cause lowered career confidence. In short, there is the likelihood for a negative student experience and potential reduction of successful graduate outcomes. Thus, my MLaaM philosophy is to allow students to develop a positive career identity, create effective and efficient degree engagement, and develop the foundation for degree transition to future employment.

DESCRIPTION

Aligning with my RRRI model (Real, Relevant, Respectful and Inspiring) of vocational course delivery (Tolmie, 2017 PhD Thesis) the courses are delivered considering:

- The skills current musicians require to sustain their career
- The career challenges/opportunities musicians are currently experiencing
- The transferability of music skills within non-music domains
- The students' career goals and perception of employment
- The students' employment activity throughout their degree

Complementing the above self-exploratory assessment and activities, the courses involve strong industry engagement in the form of student interviews, expert assessment panels consisting of venue and festival management, professional musician interview videos, and Q&A sessions with professional musicians. Students are encouraged to peer review and work in groups to develop their professional inter/intrapersonal skills and social capital growth.

IMPACT

Following a CV analysis of the 2015 and 2016 third year student cohort, it was revealed that consistently 82% of the students are employed in music performance and/or teaching employment. Many of these students are initiating their careers as independent musicians and engaging with online promotion.

Just thought I would tell you how I am going outside of con. Life is great! I successfully got 3 jobs in one day - with a massive thanks to your MLAAM subject (former student Cassandra Hansen, personal message, 2014)

Looking back at my earlier formative years at the Conservatorium, I now see clearly that My Life as a Musician has fixed me up in the open market as a sustainable client pleasing, sole trading, small business. Eternal gratitude to DT. We should start a closed MLaaM group to share successes, learning curves as we continue? (former student Bart Seaton, facebook posting 2016)

I just realised I didn't tell you the awesome news!! I got both the grants I applied for! So that's \$15000 funding for a \$18000 PD trip. I'm stoked. Thanks for providing a great introduction and guide to grant writing. Honestly couldn't have done it without you :) (former student Monique Bartkowiak, personal message, 2016)

Projects that have been workshoped in class assessment and gained a life of their own include the Queensland Philharmonia Orchestra, Brisbane City Opera, and Soundstruck Percussion.

Industry musicians and key arts advocates feel the courses are vital and are keen to contribute:

"I am giving up my precious time because I believe inherently in the value these courses bring to the students" (John Kotzas, CEO Queensland Performing Arts Centre).

81% of the 261 surveyed musicians (Tolmie PhD research, 2017) agreed that the business and career skills required to sustain one's employment to be "Necessary". Many respondents lamented they wished they had such education included during their undergraduate training as it would have reduced time otherwise wasted in the trial and error method adopted throughout their career (89%).

Awards:

- Griffith Awards for Excellence in Teaching: 2014 Group Learning and Teaching Citation
- Griffith Awards for Excellence in Teaching: 2016 Highly Commended – Employability within the Curriculum

Publications

- Tolmie, D. (2013). *Designing a tertiary music institution course to create industry-ready graduates*. Paper presented at the Creative Arts Learning and Teaching Network Symposium, Hobart.
- Tolmie, D. (2014, 15-18 July). *Identifying, analysing and aligning 'The Dream' with vocational preparation: An investigation into first-year music undergraduate career aspirations and motivations*. Paper presented at the Commission for the Education of the Professional Musician, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.
- Tolmie, D. (2015). From 1-2-1 instrumental to large class academic teaching: a case of the 21st century conservatoire lecturer. In C. Klopper & S. Drew (Eds.), *Teaching for learning and learning for teaching*. Rotterdam: Sense Publications.
- Tolmie, D., & Nulty, D. D. (2015). Aligning student attitudes, assessment, and curriculum design: A case study using "My Life as a Musician" vocational preparation strand. In D. Lebler, S. Harrison, & G. Carey (Eds.), *Assessment in music education: From policy to practice* (pp. 279-292). Dordrecht: Springer International Publishing.
- Tolmie, D. (2016). *My Life as a Musician: designing a vocation preparation strand to create industry prepared musicians*. Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University. Unpublished: ongoing PhD research.