

**Use of Performance-Merit-Based Awards in Recruiting Music Students**

by

**Wilton Colby Carson**

B.M.E., Florida State University, 2005

M.A., Florida State University, 2010

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This dissertation was presented

by

**Wilton Colby Carson**

It was defended on

May 8, 2020

and approved by

Dr. Thomas Akiva, Associate Professor, Psychology in Education, Learning Sciences and Policy

Director, Schoolwide Doctor of Education (EdD) Program, University of Pittsburgh

Dr. Jill A. Perry, Associate Professor of the Practice, Administrative & Policy Studies School of

Education, University of Pittsburgh

Denis Colwell, Jack G. Buncher Head of the School of Music, Carnegie Mellon University

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. B. Jean Ferketish, Associate Professor, Administrative & Policy

Studies, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh

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Wilton Colby Carson, EdD

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This qualitative study explores first-time, first-year music majors experiences with performance-merit-based scholarship awards, how the awards affected their college decision, and those experiences related to admission professionals' understanding and perceptions. In order to meet enrollment goals admission professionals in schools of music need to understand music majors' perceptions of financial aid and scholarships. The purpose of this study is to provide greater insight and evidence for admission professionals as they work across campuses to improve yield. The inquiry question that guided this study was: how important are performance-merit-based scholarships in the decision-making process? The study included individual interviews with seven admission professionals and 19 first-time, first-year music majors, from doctoral research universities with schools of music across the country. The music majors and admission professionals who took part in this study indicate that performance-merit-based scholarships are very important. Performance-merit-based awards factor into the decision to attend an institution because they not only reduce out-of-pocket costs for music majors, they also offer a perception that the institution wants the music major to attend. This study provides insights into how undergraduate applicants to schools of music at large universities understand and use scholarships in their decision-making process. The study achieves the goal of providing a deeper understanding of how two important sets of stakeholders, admission professionals and music majors, understand the use of performance-merit-based awards in the admission and decision process. This study concludes with a discussion of implications for practice that admission professionals can use to

guide future discussions, both internally (among university units discussing scholarship practices) and externally (with prospective and admitted music majors discussing scholarship opportunities).

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## 1.0 Problem Area

In a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Beckie Supiano (2015) states that, “College affordability has become a nearly universal concern among American families” (para.6). When it comes to applicants who are looking to major in the arts – specifically, music –this concern is consistent, yet there are many factors unique to music applicants. In many cases, talented musicians come from families with enough financial resources to invest in the honing of the craft, yet still see a need for support with the cost of tuition. This becomes an issue if universities only provide need-based funding and no merit consideration. At a recent Music Admissions Professionals Roundtable convening there was a 30-minute discussion about scholarships – specifically the fact that music applicants and their parents expect scholarships, and use offers from one school to appeal for more from another. This conversation among peers, as well as many conversations with families making difficult college decisions based on financial awards, have led me to believe that the issue of scholarships should be addressed moving forward. Many musicians are hesitant to major in music, and those who are inclined to do so audition at multiple institutions for many reasons. One of the primary reasons is to see which institution will make them the best financial offer. In the pages that follow I will introduce the current thinking around performance-merit-based scholarships, review literature about financial awards in higher education, and introduce a needs assessment for a school of music.

In an April 2019 article on the Inside Higher Ed website, Greg Toppo wrote about a well-known small private college, Oberlin College and Conservatory, considering changes to its music structure. Along with creating an official music minor, the institution is considering a bold change

in enrollment – decreasing music conservatory enrollment by 100 students, while adding 100 students to the liberal arts program. This move is primarily budget motivated. Toppo writes that,

Oberlin predicts that the shift would also bring in millions more in revenue. As recently as 2017, the liberal arts program saw net revenues of \$23.9 million, while the conservatory lost \$11.1 million. That’s not because of different tuition rates -- the two programs are priced identically, college officials said. But conservatory students bring in about \$10,000 less, on average, since the two schools are in search of different pools of students. *To be competitive among other conservatories, Oberlin must offer these prospective students more aid than it does liberal arts students* [emphasis added], who are enrolled in what's officially known as Oberlin's Arts & Sciences program. (2019, para. 4 and 5).

While financial aid is a big factor, it is not the only factor in weighing the decision, admitted undergraduate students are dealing with many different factors when they are making a final decision about where to enroll – and they typically only have from April 1 to May 1 to consider all options. In many cases, perceptions of the students and family members are a final determining factor. As St. John (2000) notes, “perceptions of college costs and the ability to pay have a direct influence on enrollment and persistence. Perceptions of costs are important for the recruitment process because colleges compete with each other for students, and many colleges are quite clever in the ways they construct tuition and aid policy” (p. 64). That is, institutions consider the impact of pricing strategies, the effects on institutional budget, and the impact of aid offers in creating and publicizing their policies (St. John, 2000, pp. 65-67). If applicants or their family members perceive an institution as out of reach, financially or otherwise, they may not even choose to apply.

If an admission representative convinces a family to apply, because aid is available, and then the admitted student does not receive any scholarship or aid the family feels that they have wasted time and money on the process. St. John (2000) writes “it is important that institutions maintain an open experimental attitude about their investments in student aid...Given that more than two-thirds of students receive some type of aid in most public colleges and universities, there is a clear need to try out new approaches” (p. 68). After also looking at aid’s effects on retention the author concludes that “student aid offers have an immediate and direct effect on whether students enroll. They also have an influence on whether students can afford to continue their enrollment” (p. 72).

Enrollment managers across the country are working every year to meet specific annual goals, while also looking to meet strategic goals set by institutions. Variations in awarding practices and procedures among peer institutions can benefit or harm enrollment efforts depending on clarity in policies and procedures. Various pressures, from above and below, can be confronted with teamwork among enrollment professionals across campus, and through data sharing. Goff, Williams, and Kilgore (2016) note, “In theory, administrative decision making in higher education becomes more effective when relevant data is readily available” (p. 27). The authors go on to describe an effective strategic enrollment management process that includes, the use of internal and external data collected and turned into analytics reporting portfolio which can shift “the attention of reporting systems from transactional data gathering to shared performance understandings that can be leveraged throughout the enterprise on a timely basis” (p. 27). The authors’ point is to move institutions from collecting data to sharing information and applying the knowledge gained to improve service to students, and in turn meet objectives set by the institution (pp. 32-33).

Fine and performing arts schools and colleges on university campuses fill unique roles that, in the least, enrich the college experience for those enrolled at the school, and at best engage and connect the school with the surrounding community. Generally, they are distinctive sources of arts for the campus and surrounding community. Schools of music in many research universities provide between 100 and 400 performances a year, many free and open to the public. They bring the community to campus, and campus to the community. In many cases, important to recruitment and enrollment for the campus overall, they also offer opportunities for non-majors to participate in ensembles and classes. This can be a recruitment tool for other areas on campus – engaging talented students who are also interested in maintaining music participation in college, even if they do not intend to major in music. Therefore, having a successful school of music benefits not only the school, but also the campus and community surrounding the campus.

However, schools of music can also negatively affect these same institutions as indicated by the Oberlin example above. When we look at the institutional budgets, several factors come into play. First, a large number of faculty are required in order to offer training on various instruments, direct ensembles, and teach academic music courses. Second, many music students receive scholarships based on their performance-merit, which must be considered when anticipating revenue. Also, many schools of music have their own admission or recruitment staff member(s), or, if not, the school likely has a primary staff member in the larger university office. Depending on the staff, and whether they are part of the music or university office staff, additional financial considerations can be weighed – these include salary for the position, travel costs related to music specific recruitment and events, and costs related to decisions staff may make (from purchasing advertising in a specific context to awarding of scholarship dollars). Either way, the person responsible for recruiting and enrolling musicians must be aware of the many factors

involved in the process, and the varying viewpoints of institutional stakeholders, applicants, and family members.

Particularly important to schools of music is transparency in the decision-making process for all involved. That is, prospective students should know the general guidelines about admission and scholarship consideration, and if a school offers merit or need-based aid or a combination, and faculty members should be aware of what happens from a financial aid standpoint after they decide who may be admissible to their studio so that the expectations of the faculty, the prospective student, and their family can be adequately managed. The faculty member involvement in the process in music is a strength, in that they are building personal connections with prospective students. The connection can become a weakness, however, if the faculty misinform prospective students about the process or what to expect, or if they get so connected to a student that they advocate so much for funding for one student that it becomes a detriment to others. If, for instance, awarding one student \$30,000 means that there are not four or five \$5,000 awards for others that could come if given that relatively smaller amount, then the studio or school could fail to meet enrollment goals.

### **1.1 Inquiry Setting**

The school of music at Large University (pseudonym) has an international reputation of success, and is consistently listed among peer institutions that are top ranked schools/colleges of music and conservatories in the country. Many students and alumni are successful and speak well of the School and University. From 2016 to 2019, applications to the undergraduate programs offered by the school of music have increased by 29.8%. Based on these facts, it appears that



marketing, recruitment efforts, and reputation are not obstacles to reaching enrollment goals for the school. The enrollment goals are not being met, however, in the “yield” season (the one month between offers of admission being released and admitted students deciding where to attend).

The school of music has around 300 students enrolled each year, between all programs ranging from first-time, first-year (freshmen) to post-masters’ level certificates. There are 90 to 100 faculty members – some full-time, some adjunct. Over the past nine years there has been an average of 727 applications per year, and an average admit rate of 41 percent. The school has 12 full-time staff members, including a Director of Recruitment and Enrollment, Associate Director of Admission and Student Services, and Director of Marketing who work together in recruitment initiatives. The Director of Recruitment and Enrollment is the school of music staff member ultimately responsible for meeting enrollment goals.

There is a simultaneous application process for Large University – one academic and one performance-based. Faculty from each artistic area review auditions and make recommendations for admission based on artistic merit. At the same time, applicants are reviewed academically by Large University’s Undergraduate Office of Admission for academic admission to the university. Students audition from across the United States and over 20 countries. The application opens every fall for admission to the following fall; over the course of an academic year interested parties submit online application materials, some including prescreening videos, recommendations, and audition (live (on campus or in two regional locations) or via video recording).

By April 1 each year, an admission decision is made between the school of music and the university’s Office of Undergraduate Admission, and yield season begins. Here, yield season is the month of April – the timeframe that (according to accrediting bodies) admitted students have to decide (without negative consequence) between schools to which they are offered admission.

Admitted students receive a need-based award from the Undergraduate Office of Admission. The need-based awards at Large University are determined by the Office of Undergraduate Admission, and based on information found in the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and College Scholarship Service Profile (CSS PROFILE), with little consideration for artistic merit. The school of music has a small amount of money provided by the University and some endowed funds to provide artistic merit consideration. Because of the limited funding, very little merit funding can be awarded before initial need-based financial aid packages are released.

Through a review process during the yield season, the Director of Recruitment and Enrollment can make merit-based adjustments to awards. I held the position of Director of Recruitment and Enrollment for the Large University School of Music from January 2015 to February 2019. The Director is the primary point of contact for admitted students and their families, as well as a primary decision maker in the use of approved funds in the review process. Reviews must be initiated by the admitted students or family members, and adjustments can be made from institutional (university) funds or endowed (school of music) funds. The school has a limited number of endowments for scholarships and can award from those funds as it sees fit, as long as any individual donors' limitations are met (e.g. awards may be limited to a specific instrument). Institutional funds are set annually by the University, and are limited to a certain amount per student, which is also set by the University. The limits are placed based on institutional funds and other prestigious awards on campus. If a student is awarded institutional funding, but declines admission to the University, it is the University's policy that those funds may not be re-awarded to another student. Endowed funds can be used in any increment and may be re-awarded if the admitted student declines admission.

## **1.2 Stakeholders**

Stakeholders have varied perceptions of financial aid and scholarships (Brown, 2007; Perna, 2008; Seltzer, 2017; St. John, 2000). Faculty and staff members within the school of music see needs differently than university-wide stakeholders, who have differing perceptions from admitted students and their families.

### **1.2.1 School of Music Faculty**

The members of the music faculty tend to think primarily in the silos of their individual studios, since within a school of music there are different (and sometimes multiple) teachers for each instrument. Ideally the applicants whom the faculty members hear and think are the best for their personal studio would be offered and accept admission. Those students would then stay in their studio for four years, without worrying about financing their education.

Currently, the school of music enrolls a mix of the best admits and those whom faculty members think are simply admissible. This is because the best admits in faculty members' opinions are typically highly skilled and admissible to many schools. Those applicants also predictably receive large merit-based awards at other institutions. In many cases, the student who is admitted follows the money, and the faculty do not understand why Large University and the school of music do not offer more money to the students they would like.

### **1.2.2 School of Music Staff**

The music staff members would like to meet enrollment goals of the university (external) and the school (internal) in order to have the correct instrumentation for ensembles and to have the appropriate number of students enrolled in music classes and studios. Faculty members typically enjoy having full studios, and staying busy with lessons and teaching; similarly, faculty who teach the larger classes prefer to have an immersive full classroom environment where ideas vary and everyone learns from one another. This ideal enrollment would also be helpful in recruitment – prospective students and their families would see robust offerings, content, faculty, and (ostensibly) less openings for new students. These observations could boost the reputation of the school, and eventually lead to increased interest and applications.

Currently, some studios (where applied instruction takes place) are meeting goals on a regular basis, while the school is consistently below goals and needs in others – one studio has not enrolled a freshman in six years. This unsteadiness in enrollment can have negative impact on faculty and student morale. It is important to note that the studio mentioned above does have graduate students (and that graduate funding is very different from undergraduate), because this study will focus on undergraduate students and yield only, graduate admission information will not be collected or discussed. Noting this is to say that the lack of freshmen is not attributable to a “bad teacher” situation, where admitted students simply do not want to come, since that situation would be likely to affect graduate enrollment as well. Instead, conversations occur each year with admitted students who would like to attend, however, they have received better financial awards from other institutions and feel they cannot turn them down.

### **1.2.3 University-Wide Stakeholders**

While the Office of Undergraduate Admission would like the enrollment goal for the university (and its individual schools) to be met, they would also prefer to spend as little money as possible and have the most return on investment. Currently, the school of music gets near its goals, not always meeting them, and usually (after rounds of negotiations with admitted students) has awarded more scholarship than the university leadership would like.

Meanwhile, the executive leadership and board want the university to be successful fiscally, meet enrollment goals, and continue to be on many prospective students' radar as an institution they would like to attend. The leadership and board members also want to have access to performers for events and alumni who are in the public eye in order to continue to retain and grow national and international attention. Large University currently has a varying array of quality of performers at university events, and alumni with inconsistent national attention.

### **1.2.4 Admitted Students and Family Members**

Admitted students and their families ideally want to attend their first-choice institution, and would like for it to be at low to no cost. Many see their musical preparation (lessons, instrument purchases, ensemble participation, and the like) as something to be rewarded or even reimbursed. Currently, some of the best musicians receive need-based awards that are sufficient, however others are unable to attend due to financial need that goes unmet, and many choose not to attend because they received considerably better financial awards from another institution. St. John (2000) notes that, "Student aid offers have an immediate and direct effect on whether students

enroll. They also have an influence on whether students can afford to continue their enrollment” (p. 72).

### **1.2.5 Comparing Stakeholders**

In the case of Large University – members of the Office of Undergraduate Admission think of the bigger picture of the entire student population, fiscal health, and institutional standing. The school of music is specifically focused on attracting and retaining students who are talented, and also fill specific areas within ensembles and performance areas. At the same time, applicants and their families are looking for a place that feels like the right “fit”, as well the best financial situation (which in many cases includes performance-merit funding).

Scholarships, financial awards, and the practices surrounding them are key factors for each of these stakeholders. Many university stakeholders want to leverage reputation, alumni, and other benefits in order to spend less in awards and attract students – they propose that those admitted students who do not receive need-based awards consider the value of Large University, indicating alumni awards, success, and average salaries. While this approach may work for some other (more lucrative) majors, many schools of music are competing for a small pool of applicants, and find that merit awards make a difference in filling sections of ensembles, classes, and studios. Applicants and their families feel they have invested in training to get where they are, and see those previous dollars and hours spent as an investment in college preparation that should be paid back with scholarship.

### 1.3 Problem of Practice

The Large University Office of Undergraduate Admission does not know the impact performance-merit-based scholarships have on yield – the merit scholarship as a competitive tool in attracting the most qualified undergraduate musicians. The school of music at Large University attracts highly-qualified, well-trained musicians to apply every year; and every year it loses talented admitted students to other institutions. The next few anecdotal examples illuminate how financial aid awards (including merit scholarships) may be one of the biggest factors in enrollment decisions of undergraduate music majors. Knowledge of this problem comes from direct conversations between the Director of Recruitment and Enrollment and applicants and families during the month they have to decide which school to attend. Additional confirmation of this problem comes from a 2018 survey of admitted students sent by the school of music. Large University does not know if their merit scholarships are commensurate with other schools. When asked about the reasons for their final decision, 57% of admitted students chose “Financial Assistance / Scholarships” when asked “What was (or were) the most important factor(s) in your decision to Accept/decline our offer of admission?”.

The Large University school of music is not meeting undergraduate enrollment goals. A primary reason for this, based on interaction with admitted declining students, is the lack of performance-merit-based scholarships. Every year, schools of music across the country compete among themselves for the most talented musicians. In many cases the admitted student's decision comes down to finances. Merit-based scholarships, or lack thereof, play a key role in an admitted student’s family’s decision of whether or not to enroll at an institution.

Undergraduate admitted students are considering many different factors from April 1 to May 1 (yield season). In many cases, perceptions of the students and family members are a final

determining factor. As noted earlier, applicants may come from families with financial resources to invest in training, which becomes an issue if universities only provide need-based funding, and no merit consideration. Also illustrated above, many musicians who are hesitant to major in music audition at multiple institutions in order to see which one will make them the best offer.

While the technical challenge inherent in this problem is money – how much can be spent, and what will it take to accept an offer – the dollars and cents are only part of the challenge. The enrollment challenge involving merit scholarships cannot be “resolved through the application of authoritative expertise and through the organization’s current structures, procedures, and ways of doing things” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 19). Simply looking at budgets and adjusting slightly has not made improvements.

Instead this has become what Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky (2009) call an adaptive challenge and it requires a need to change priorities and habits; to shed entrenched ways and generate new capacity to thrive. Each of the stakeholder groups within the institution needs to consider scholarships from a different perspective in order to get to a common ground, and will have to consider the perspectives of prospective students and their families.

#### **1.4 Inquiry Question**

In order to better understand music performance merit scholarship practices and perceptions, and how they affect admitted student’s decision making, I have developed the following question. This question is intended to address the problem of practice related to yielding admitted students.

- How important are performance-merit-based scholarships in the decision-making process?



## 2.0 Review of Supporting Scholarship

In today's academic terminology, "merit aid" can mean many things; merit is associated with academic performance or talent in the arts, sports, or another field. Raymond Brown (2007) explains;

Merit aid is an umbrella term used for the vast majority of the myriad types of nonneed-based [sic] financial aid available to students. It is exclusively gift aid; that is, merit aid refers to money that does not need to be repaid. In the vernacular, though, it is rarely referred to as merit aid. Instead, the term scholarship has become a catchall for the many forms merit aid takes. (p. 39).

It is important to note that scholarship has become a "catchall" term for financial aid awards, where years ago, scholarship had to do with supporting scholars. And now the Webster's definition has "no mention of that student needing to be scholarly. Or needing to be needy, for that matter" (p. 39).

Throughout the literature, various discussions occur about merit aid and scholarships. For the purpose of this discussion, I focus on merit aid as it relates to performance in the arts (as opposed to academic performance). Many aspects of performance merit-based scholarships are considered by institutions awarding them, and the applicants considering them.

While every college, school, and department on any campus may have specific needs and goals, schools of music have an additional layer of needs in looking to fill specific seats in ensembles and studios. For instance, there may be a year when a school is looking for zero to two flutes, one soprano, and 12 violins (among other various studio openings); while an admissions representative may be able to enroll 13 to 15 students. If they do not fill the studio needs, there can

be major issues. Ensembles have specific needs for instrumentation, and opera productions need specific voice types. If one is missing from the roster, a professional must be hired, and paid, or the show will not go on. If there are too many of an instrument, then some students may not receive the performing or lesson opportunities promised when they were prospective students, leading to dissatisfied students.

Studies have found that different stakeholders have different perceptions of financial aid and scholarships (Brown, 2007; Perna, 2008; Seltzer, 2017; St. John, 2000). It is clear that universities, colleges and schools within them, and applicants and their families see financial awards differently. Universities want to use them sparingly, schools see them as a way to make enrollment goals, and applicants and families see them as a reward for hard work and/or payback for investment in lessons and instruments.

Adding to the differing perceptions – and the layers that admitted students and their families must work through – every institution prices itself differently, and awards financial aid for various reasons, sometimes making it difficult to compare schools. As St. John (2000) notes, “perceptions of college costs and the ability to pay have a direct influence on enrollment and persistence [students remaining enrolled through graduation]” (p. 64). Variations among peer institutions can benefit or harm enrollment efforts depending on clarity in policies and procedures. “Perceptions of costs are important for the recruitment process because colleges compete with each other for students, and many colleges are quite clever in the ways they construct tuition and aid policy” (p. 64).

In the following pages I will consider the factors involved in performance-merit-based awards. First, I will introduce enrollment management and merit aid – how the professionals responsible for recruiting students use merit. Next, I examine institutional level considerations

surrounding merit aid – including effects on tuition and budgets. Finally, I look at student and family members’ perceptions, preconceptions, and practices in decision making – including how scholarships and financial aid effect decisions. By looking through these lenses I show the aspects of merit aid awards that are weighed by professionals and institutions in recruiting students, and students and families in making a decision about which institution to attend.

## **2.1 Enrollment Management and Merit Aid**

Hossler and Bean (1990) use the term enrollment management in describing recruitment and enrolment process – they define enrollment management as “an organizational concept and a systematic set of activities designed to enable educational institutions to exert more influence over their student enrollments” (p. 5). Professionals in the field of enrollment management must be aware of their institutions’ practices, supports, strengths and weaknesses as they look at the lifespan of students from prospective applicants to applicants, from applicants to enrolled students, and from students to alumni. The best enrollment managers are looking at the entire student experience, from application to graduation, not only recruitment and enrollment. They look to support students throughout the higher education experience. Hossler and Bean describe it this way:

Organized by strategic planning and supported by institutional research, enrollment management activities concern student college choice, transition to college, student attrition and retention, and student outcomes. These processes are studied to guide institutional practices in the areas of new student recruitment and financial aid, student

support services, curriculum development, and other academic areas that affect enrollments, student persistence, and student outcomes from college. (p. 5).

Linked to enrollment management and financial management of an institution is financial aid. In 2000 Don Hossler wrote an article titled “The Role of Financial Aid in Enrollment Management” in which he reviews the literature and trends of the time around awarding financial aid and enrollment management. He finds that financial aid’s role has changed a great deal in a short amount of time and now has a “more sophisticated and complex role” in the enrollment process (p.77). This finding, though from the early 2000s, remains true today. Hossler goes on to delve into the connections between financial aid and enrollment management systems, and the incentives institutions have for linking the two. A primary point is that the field is focused on attracting and retaining students, and goals are set which include efforts in size, diversity, talent, and the like. To achieve these goals requires scholarships, tuition leveraging, and a link between recruitment and financial aid activities (pp. 78 – 87). Institutions must be aware of the links that they are creating on purpose, and those that may be happenstance.

Enrollment managers, admissions representatives and stakeholders across a campus community have a responsibility to help the right students find their “right-fit” school, while ensuring that their institution is serving its constituencies and mission. As the National Association of Admission Counselors (NACAC) Code of Ethics and Professional Practices (2018) states:

Our profession strives to ensure that the students we serve and all of our colleagues are valued and supported. We thrive by embracing and engaging our unique identities, experiences, and perspectives, and we are committed to increasing the enrollment and success of historically underrepresented populations. We are dedicated to promoting college access and addressing systemic inequities to ensure that college campuses reflect

our society's many cultures, stimulate the exchange of ideas, value differences, and prepare our students to become global citizens and leaders. (p.1).

Enrollment objectives, and practices around decision-making, can and do change as offices of admission work to satisfy various constituencies across campuses as well as members of the board or governing body. Adam Johnson (2016) finds that, "the practice and philosophy of enrollment management has been and remains in flux", going on to say that, "new or revised approaches toward recruiting, retaining, and graduating students seem to be announced or presented through national associations, conferences, and consulting organizations at a hastening pace" (p. 25).

In a recent blog on the Edvance Foundation's website, Scott Jaschick (2017) looks at the findings of a 2017 Survey of Admission Directors sponsored by Inside Higher Ed and Gallup. He looks specifically at the enrollment patterns that are prevalent in the results. In reviewing the findings, he comes to recommend systemic solutions. Jaschick notes that an increasing number of colleges are not meeting new student enrollment targets, and that the issue of missing enrollment targets "is a growing issue since most colleges and universities are heavily dependent on tuition revenue; hence, the size of the incoming and returning classes directly impacts their financial bottom line" (para. 5).

Moving forward, Jaschick looks at current processes, such as recruiting students who can pay full tuition, coming shifts (such as addressing debt concerns), and solutions - currently admission professionals are using incremental and tactical tools. Jaschick recommends a broader view and connection to comprehensive and complex changes, as opposed to the current solutions which do not connect to challenges and opportunities currently faced in higher education (para.

10). If admissions representatives at schools and universities want to face the downward trend associated with meeting enrollment goals, they must be prepared to work differently.

In 2017 Gallup and the Strada Education Network, compiled a baseline report to begin assessing how consumers perceive education (when reflecting on their past experiences). The authors hope for this information to serve as a call for leaders and policy makers to connect more closely with supporters, constituencies, and alumni to provide a better, “more purposeful experience for their students and graduates” (p. 19). This can be accomplished, in part, by combining the elements of Strategic Enrollment Management and strategic planning – using data to clearly chart a path forward in the students’ best interest.

The report finds that higher education institutions are not empowering students, because they are not listening to them. Data is collected in campus communities often and effectively, but an important voice in the exchange is frequently missed – the voice of the students. The report finds “the consumer perspective is surprisingly absent” (Gallup & Strada, 2017, p. 2). As the landscape of higher education changes, and comparisons between higher education and the consumer market become more prevalent, the stakeholders at the university level must accept these changes and find ways to work with them. One way, as suggested by these findings, is to involve the consumers in the conversation.

Jacqueline Cooper (2009) argues that institutions have adopted the language of business. She asserts that, “it is time for colleges and universities to look seriously again to the business community to see how effectively it uses branding and marketing with language and music” (p. 17). Cooper’s article is specifically about branding and marketing in recruiting, however it speaks to the broader trends noted in the Gallup and Strada Education Network report above. Namely,

institutions are using some influences from the business sector without incorporating interrelated aspects. An example given is businesses using “the client’s language” – Cooper asks:

how often do university marketing teams actually study the language and speech patterns of high school juniors and seniors or ask their team members to take a ride on its university’s campus bus transportation system to hear how undergraduate students interact and talk to each other? (p. 16).

Another aspect of recruiting that has been overlooked and would greatly empower students is the discussion around race. Jamaal Abdul-Alim interviewed various admission experts to discuss race, privilege, and inequality on campus and in recruiting efforts for his 2017 article “Committed to Diversity”. In Abdul-Alim’s interview with Quinton McArthur, Associate Director of Admissions and Director of Diversity and Targeted Outreach at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), McArthur said, “as admission officers, we have a unique viewpoint on the educational pipeline because we see so many different schools, so many difference[sic] resources and lack thereof, that we have an insight into communities that sometimes they don’t recognize and others don’t recognize” (2017, p. 33).

NACAC has an Inclusion, Access and Success Committee, and states that the association “recognizes and seeks to educate the community on the substantial benefits derived from a diverse student body and the complexity of the admission process” (National Association of Admission Counselors, n.d.). Diversity encompasses various factors at a university – from diversity of race, ethnicity, and gender to diversity of income level, background, and family members’ education level (first generation college students). As Anna Ortiz and Silvia Santos (2018) point out:

Colleges and universities increasingly embrace diversity in its multiple forms, and many have established diversity as an important institutional value. But definitions of

diversity vary across campuses, and diversity goals range from increasing access for underrepresented students to infusing diverse perspectives in the curriculum to building democratic campus climates that promote social justice. Each of these is a noble objective. Some are more difficult than others to achieve. But all are essential to the work of building institutions that fully realize the promise of diversity (para 1).

Returning to Abdul-Alim (2017), the author notes that in shaping a diverse and reflective class, admission representatives are supporting the institution's mission, "diversity should be a focal point of a university's mission, the admission office must take on an active role to help execute that mission" (p. 32). Therefore, diversity of all kinds must be considered throughout the process. In speaking with Abdul-Alim, MIT's McArthur states that, "if you've been in college admission, particularly selective college admission, you've seen patterns emerge from different schools and different places ... we do have a responsibility to provide guidance and intervention in order to improve the state of affairs" (Abdul-Alim, 2017, p.33).

Diversity is important within schools of music as well. Appropriately balanced ensembles and studios are only part of the equation for a director of admission or recruitment and enrollment; having ethnic and/or racial diversity within these areas is also important. Various organizations and non-profits are dedicated to diversity in the arts. One, The Sphinx Organization, has the mission and vision to "transform lives through the power of diversity in the arts" (Sphinx, n.d., para. 1). Organizations such as Sphinx are working to provide pathways for typically underrepresented groups to music, and many specifically to schools of music through scholarships and connections.



## 2.2 Institutional Level Considerations Surrounding Merit Aid

Moody's Investors Services is, according to their website, "a leading provider of credit ratings, research, and risk analysis" (Moody's, n.d., para. 2). Moody's uses a scorecard to rate institutions based on "four broad factors that are important in [the] assessment of university ratings" (Yale, 2017, p.1). Those factor categories are Market Profile, Operating Performance, Wealth and Liquidity, and Leverage. Moody's "which rates more than 500 public and private non-profit colleges and universities, downgraded an average of 28 institutions annually in the five years through 2013, more than double the average of 12 in the prior five-year period" (McDonald, 2014, p. 2). Since many colleges and universities depend on tuition for some or much of their revenue and operating costs, this trend is causing many stakeholders stress. Because of this, the idea of Strategic Enrollment Management is beginning to take hold more broadly on campuses nationwide.

The 2007 report, *A Practical Guide to Strategic Enrollment Management Planning in Higher Education*, presented by the Education Policy Institute, notes:

Strategic enrollment management (SEM) is an institution-wide responsibility and the central focus of the institution's overall strategic plan. SEM focuses on what is best for students and how to ensure their success while addressing all aspects of the institution's mission. Just like overall strategic planning, strategic enrollment management starts with the institution's mission (p. 6).

Langston, Wyant, and Scheid (2016) find that enrollment projections are important to fiscal planning and Strategic Enrollment Management processes. The idea of enrollment projections is equally important for individual schools and colleges (units) on the same campus. While a central office of a university has an overall goal, most individual schools also have various goals and

objectives. This is especially true in schools of music, which must fill certain seats in ensembles and productions. Larry Weinstein sheds light on this in his 2009 article – he frames the challenge facing music programs as one of balancing ensembles and student-to-teacher ratios, while employing many teachers and justifying increasing budgets to central offices. He goes on to describe a “total quality management approach” to recruitment (pp. 367–369). At the same time, as individual units are working toward specific goals, institutional missions are guiding central recruitment efforts.

St. John (2000) concludes severely that,

Without adequate student aid, growing numbers of students become periodic consumers, taking their courses as they can afford to do so. This means reductions in persistence rates, an outcome of increasing importance in the domain of public accountability. Institutions simply cannot afford to ignore these patterns (p. 72).

Raymond Brown (2007) makes a point that scholarships, if unfunded, contribute to the rising cost of higher education, as printing money to cover government debt is a cause for the rise in inflation (p 40). He goes on to say that because of out-of-control scholarship practices in higher education, scholarships have come to be expected by families, and that professionals must be aware of the “migration of a family’s ‘ability’ to pay to its ‘willingness’ to pay” (p. 42). In other words, those who may be able to afford college (based on income or other financial considerations) may not be willing to pay (because they want to save, retire, or the like).

As an enrollment management professional, I field multiple phone calls and emails from admitted students who are declining, stating that they would have come had our financial offer been comparable to other schools. This could be a result of what Brown (2007) calls the “countless music scholarships in higher education” (p. 40). That is, merit scholarships are available to

musicians at many institutions at varying levels. Though Brown makes a case to award less scholarships, he goes on to say that merit awards are not likely to go away, since institutions use them to enhance profiles, to work within market forces driving competition for students, and to “make the class” by reducing costs to competitive levels (pp. 44-45).

Financial aid awarding and strategy is seen as valuable to institutions working to recruit and retain students, and for its strategic value to institutional planning (Schuh, 1999, p193). These points are especially true for schools of music where, “unlike many other majors, music majors typically require an audition and the use of scholarship money in the selection process” (Curtis, 2012, p. 4). Brown ends his thoughts on “merit aid madness” with the projection of a lost middle-class on college campuses, where there will be funding for merit and for the neediest of admitted students, but no funding for those who fall in the middle of the pack (p. 46). This thought is echoed in other, more recent, discussions: “colleges and universities eventually draw resources from low-income students who need financial aid in order to pursue high-achieving and wealthy students” (Seltzer, 2017, para. 27).

In 2007 Raymond Brown quoted Redd’s 2000 study, in which he finds that the “rapid increases in discounting [tuition] have resulted in losses in net revenue, have not improved retention or graduation rates, and have caused institutions to decrease spending on instruction and other vital services to students” (Redd, 2000, p. 32). This is countered by more recent literature cited earlier (Curtis, 2012; Seltzer, 2017). However, it is important to acknowledge Robert Brown’s (2007) point that there is a perception on the “cocktail circuit” about scholarships – while wealthy families may not need them, they perceive them as a talking point among peers (p. 41). Brown also describes non-need-based aid given for factors other than merit (based on factors such as faith, race, or citizenship), noting that these awards help express the values of an institution. He

continues the discussion noting “[t]he Robin Hood theory of economic redistribution would suggest that those who are from families able to pay the full price will supplement those who cannot.” (p. 45). Brown notes that merit aid honors accomplishments while lessening the “sting” of full price school, while warning that if the practice of merit awarding continues at a fast pace, many schools could end up with no need-based aid (pp. 44-45).

### **2.3 Student and Family Perceptions, Preconceptions, and Practices in Decision Making**

While there can be a case against merit awards (see Brown, 2007), Rick Seltzer’s (2017) review of a study by Royall & Co. also makes a case for these awards. He notes that “[s]ignificant numbers of students who are sensitive to college costs mean significant numbers of students who can potentially be won over by an institution offering additional financial aid” (para. 13). Seltzer continues a discussion with Royall & Co.’s managing director who points out that even the timing of awards in comparison to other institutions releasing awards can make a difference in admitted student’s final decision (para. 15). That is, being the first to offer an award can make a difference in a student decision to accept the offer, as they perceive being wanted by the institution.

Robert Curtis (2012) cites Filter (2010) in noting that, “the more a student or the family would have to pay out of pocket for their education, the less likely they were to enroll in their first choice institution” (p. 36). Cost is an increasingly important factor in decision making for admitted students and their families. In her 2015 article, Becky Supiano notes that, “even after going over colleges’ aid awards with the nonprofit [UAspire], some students were still surprised by what they owed. For low-income students, a discrepancy of a few hundred dollars can be enough to derail

college plans” (para 20). Cost of attendance not only impacts the decision to attend, but has been shown to have a positive relationship to graduation (Schuh, J. 1999).

Supiano (2015) reports that scholarships can be used to lighten what is a big financial step for families (para. 2). Seltzer (2017) echoes this in his conversation with Farrell in finding that there has been an increased concern over costs in decision making since the recession (para. 10). The discussion continues to consider the effects of marketing alongside aid strategy and the value proposition of a specific institution (para. 15, 18). While it is also true that “the cost-of- attendance reason can become a catchall for students explaining their choice not to attend a college” (para. 16), these factors should be evaluated carefully when considering merit awards.

Larry Weinstein (2009) reports in his article on Total Quality Management that music programs must be systematic in recruiting in order to balance the needs of the school and the “distinct mission vision and values of the institution” (p. 368). As stated earlier, many admission representatives find that scholarships are a deciding factor for many admitted students. Balancing the strategic plan of the institution and the needs of the school can become difficult with the additional layer of budget constraints. St. John (2000) finds, “student aid does make a difference in first-time and continuing enrollment decisions” (p. 62).

In a study of over 7,000 accepted applicants to one college (all majors), over three years, Braunstein, McGrath, and Pescatrice (1999) found that, “financial aid is highly significant in the enrollment decisions of accepted applicants” (p. 252). In many cases, perceptions of the students and family members are a final determining factor. As Tucciarone (2007) states, “... parents, siblings, and friends are the key influencers in search and college choice because they are part of a continuous dialogue with prospective higher education students” (p. 34). In researching what influenced students’ college choice, major, and career decision Workman (2015) found that,

“while most students felt supported by their family through the process, some experienced pressure. These experiences, whether positive or negative, directly influence the student’s decision making process” (p. 29).

The following, significant, point is made by the authors of the report, *On Second Thought: U.S. Adults Reflect on Their Education Decisions: June 2017 Inaugural Report*, by Gallup and Strada Education Network:

Consumer insights are used as a valid measure of success and improvement in nearly every other industry. Over the last few decades, consumer insights have been used effectively to inform best practices, redesign models, and drive innovation that enhances the experience for both the consumer and the service provider. When coupled with objective data sets, consumer insights provide a fuller picture of provider-consumer engagement and its outcomes (2017, p. 3).

If industry has been using this model successfully, it would appear that it is time for higher education to truly connect with its consumers (students and their families and alumni).

Kelly Rapp (2005), while comparing high school counselors’ perceptions of merit scholarships and university practices, points out that parents’ understanding of awarding practices and perceptions of awards should be considered an important part of the process, since they have influence in their students’ decision process. Though this article is currently over 10 years old, it discusses an important issue of education and perceptions about scholarships. Rapp finds that there can be gaps between what students are told and what is happening, which can negatively impact students’ perceptions of aid and schools (p. 19). Her point is that high school counselors should be well informed by institutions so that they can help inform families moving forward.

In the same article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* where Beckie Supiano (2015) states that, “College affordability has become a nearly universal concern among American families” (para. 6) she shares that a mother “is looking for colleges with large endowments, figuring that they’ll be able to provide more financial aid” (para. 20). This mother perceives endowments as scholarship funds. This perception has been rebuked for many years, “almost as a matter of definition, available financial aid resources are never adequate to accomplish all the goals that may seem desirable, even at the most highly endowed institutions” (Huff, 1989, p. 13).

Rick Seltzer notes that the Royall & Co. study of more than 54,000 students admitted to schools in 2016, is a new study, without data from previous years to compare, “but [they find that] the 2016 results support the idea that students are much more conscious of costs in the years since the Great Recession [of the late 2000s]” (para. 9). John Schuh (1999) found that “the size of a scholarship award can have a direct relationship with persistence to graduation in a specialty college” (p. 200). While Schuh’s research does focus on specialty colleges – colleges of fine arts in a university setting - and the Royall & Co. study looked at scholarships in general, Ryan Curtis’ (2012) work focused specifically on music majors. Curtis found that “financial factors had the greatest influence on music majors actually enrolling in a specific institution followed by institutional, academic, and personal/social attributes in that order” (p ii).

Curtis discusses various models of college search and college choice processes and the “Courtship procedures” involved in the phases (pp 12-20). He goes on to point out that perceptions of awards have affected decisions for decades. “An interesting point made by Jackson’s (1978) research is that the amount of financial aid seemed to be less important than the simple offer of any financial aid” (p. 24). As Curtis points out,

while specific groups of students within a university may bring a level of status to the university such as athletic teams, artistic, or academic populations, universities that try to recruit and enroll these students require a better understanding of the factors influencing the college choice process (2012, p.2).

Studies have consistently found that interest in financial aid and scholarships crosses social class lines and is a factor in final enrollment decisions, and that students will apply to institutions regardless of institutional costs if they perceive scholarships as a possibility (Chapman, 1984; Curtis, 2012; St. John, 1990).

## **2.4 Summary**

While all faculty and staff involved in recruiting students see the enrollment drop as a problem, little is currently being done at institutional levels to change processes in a way that may positively affect enrollment decisions of qualified musicians. In order to have a positive effect, institutions need to understand perceptions of admitted students and families regarding financial awards. Schools of music nationwide are having discussions about scholarships and best practice on a regular basis. Though the best practice for one school will be different from another, finding ways to clearly define awarding practices and awards is a clear goal for many institutions – the general consensus is that money is one of the most important factors in an admitted students' decision to enroll or not. However, more research is needed to find if this is true.

Enrollment managers are aware that the role of financial aid and scholarship is important in the yield process – there is a budget that must be maintained while also trying to attract the most qualified admitted students, most of whom have multiple offers of admission. They are also



questioning the number of applicants to institutions, and if this number is dwindling – numbers are changing based on population and different options for high school graduates (outside of traditional college). If there are fewer qualified applicants for the same number of openings for musicians in schools across the country, then even more pressure may be placed on institutional budgets to yield students. Conversations among peer institutions are leading music admission staff at various institutions across the country to wonder if a lack of qualified applicants is leading to more competition for the best applicants. If so, then what will the strategy be to remain competitive? Becky Supiano's (2015) discussion of affordability brings up questions that should be considered for musicians as well.

As I noted earlier, in many cases, talented music applicants come from families with enough financial resources to invest in the honing of the craft. This becomes an issue if universities only provide need-based funding, and no merit consideration. If a university only provides need-based funding, considerations cannot be made for families who appear to have the resources to pay for college, even if they see their investment in music as an investment in college and career preparation. If performance-merit-based funding is available, the same student may receive a decent amount of scholarship making the school with merit funding more appealing.

Many musicians appear hesitant to major in music, and those who are inclined to do so audition at many institutions for several reasons – one of which is to see who will make them the best offer. The offer of scholarship adds to a perception that the institution wants the student. In aligning recruitment efforts with the mission and strategic plan, offices of admission are better able to recruit students in line with the institution's goals (e.g. a diverse student body), and not simply focus on getting people in the door, or focusing solely on the financial drivers.

For institutions, McArthur's point to Abdul-Alim in 2017 must be taken seriously by schools of music, in two ways: 1) representatives should be encouraging diverse populations to apply, and encourage faculty members' full consideration of those populations though they may not be at the exact levels of some others their age, while 2) keeping realistic goals, and not sacrificing the level of musicianship in the school. While Raymond Brown's discussion of lost revenue, was valid in the early 2000s, I believe that the pendulum has swung back to need-based funding in recent years, and further research could be done to compare current need and non-need-based awards. This is especially true for admission representatives in schools of music who not only visit schools, but also youth ensemble rehearsals, state conventions of musicians, and performances by organizations such as Sphinx.

Admitted students at the undergraduate level are considering many different factors when they are making a final decision about where to enroll – and they typically only have from April 1 to May 1 to contemplate all options. One important factor weighed in the decision process is funding, including every type of funding offered, from grants and loans to scholarships given for any reason. Nevertheless, aid funding is different at every institution, and students and their families have different perceptions of aid.

Recruitment and admission personnel need to find ways to balance the needs of the institution and the school; sometimes this means not enrolling the best student, or spending more on one person's scholarship than an institution may otherwise offer. Enrollment managers across the country are working every year to meet specific annual goals, while also looking forward to meet strategic goals set by institutions. As stated before, various pressures, from above and below, can be confronted with teamwork among enrollment professionals across campus, and through data sharing.

I second the call that we cannot ignore these patterns, we must take thorough care in assessing data and trends of all students and of specific student populations on campuses to ensure that needs are being met, and that experiences are positive on the whole. Listening to the student – and making a concerted effort to view them as a consumer – in this regard could provide useful data. This careful examination may lead to new findings that can influence decisions moving forward. I plan to use the findings from my research to help better inform institutions about the importance of performance merit-based aid in recruiting and retaining best students for the institution.

### **3.0 Methods**

As noted in Chapter 1, the Large University Office of Undergraduate Admission does not know the impact of performance-merit-based scholarships as a competitive tool in attracting the most qualified undergraduate musicians. The school of music at Large University attracts highly-qualified, well-trained, musicians to apply every year; is not meeting undergraduate enrollment goals; and needs to consider scholarships from different perspectives. The inquiry question was designed in order to better understand music performance merit scholarship practices and perceptions, and how they affect admitted students' decision making.

#### **3.1 Inquiry Question**

The final inquiry question was derived after considering many questions intended to address the problem of practice related to yielding admitted students. Original questions included the following: how are students becoming aware of scholarships; what perceptions of merit scholarships exist among music students; what are the barriers to pursuing scholarships for applicants; and what sources and strategies exist for students interested in scholarships? Considering these four questions, and questions that evolved from them, in relation to one another led to the creation of the final question used in the study:

- How important are performance-merit-based scholarships in the decision-making process?

### 3.2 Research Design

My inquiry design is a qualitative needs assessment using one-on-one interviews with admission professionals and first year music majors. Mintrop (2016) says that, “through a systematic process of data collection and analysis, needs assessments help organizations set priorities and identify the actions necessary for a desired result” (p. 34). For this study I assessed “reactively”, as Mintrop (2016) describes it “to search for new strategies, tactics, and approaches in an aim to improve” (p. 35). If Large University can appropriately adjust the awarding of performance-merit-based awards to school of music students, then the faculty and staff can understand if awards truly are the reason for low yield, or if they need to look further at other factors. Mintrop (2016) goes on to note that,

assessments are often used as a preliminary process to plan improvements and thus should focus on examining identified gaps or wants from the perspective of those who are receiving the product or service. Needs assessments, a critical element of design development studies, help researchers question assumptions and collect data to inform the solutions and interventions best suited to address a specific problem of practice (p.35).

Many faculty and staff in the school of music assume that students are choosing other schools because of aid, and conclude that if Large University offered additional performance-merit funding, then more students would choose to attend – however there is no evidence to prove that these assumptions are true. Watkins, Meiers, and Visser (2012) would describe this as beginning “with a solution before we understand the performance need or gaps in results to be addressed” (p. 17). Until student needs and university awarding practices are assessed, a clear strategy for moving forward, to yield more students, cannot be created.

### 3.2.1 Rationale for Methodology

Watkins et al. (2012) describe needs assessment as “the group of activities that lead up to decisions that result in actions” (p. 2). The authors recommend using needs assessments tools and techniques and to avoid questions that would result in unrealistic expectations: “By going far beyond simply asking people what they want, you can create a needs assessment that collects valuable information from multiple perspectives and that guides justifiable decisions” (p. 36). Looking forward, I aimed to see if the belief that additional performance-merit-based aid will yield more students is an unrealistic expectation or not. That is, by answering my inquiry question I hope to better understand if financial aid is as primary a factor in yield, as believed, or if other factors need to be taken into consideration.

It is clear that needs assessments are a primary part of the improvement process. I used a qualitative frame to interview admission professionals and first-time, first-year students from participating peer institutions. As Donna Mertens (2015) describes it, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 236). This approach allows the researcher to “make sense of a situation without imposing preexisting expectations on the phenomena under study” (Mertens, 2015, p. 236). The interview protocol for music majors (Appendix A) was intended to be more open-ended than that for the admission professionals (Appendix B) to continue to allow for the “ability to pursue topics that emerge during the course of the conversation” (Morgan, 2014, p. 54). Interviews were chosen over surveys or focus groups in order to allow for more understanding of student choice and decision making without imposing my preexisting expectations.

The data collected through the interviews can be used by Large University's school of music to consider similarities and differences among peer institutions and better understand perceptions of first-time, first-year college students surrounding scholarships. This information may then be used by Large University's school of music to attempt new processes that may increase yield. Further, this study should be adaptable to other schools across the country to inform their awarding practices. I intend to provide insights to Mintrop's (2016) questions "How should we describe the behaviors that are focal for our problem of practice?" and "How can we make sure that our assumptions about our problem can be backed up by evidence?" (p. 33). While admission professionals speak anecdotally about scholarships and student decisions, and some have institutional data, little has been done to find evidence of performance-merit-based scholarships and their direct connection to yield.

As is noted in the Review of Literature, while research about scholarships and major perceptions in the admitted student's decision process exist, research related to performance-merit-based scholarships and admitted musicians' college decision is not available. Understanding the dynamics of this unique performance-merit-based scholarship process requires discussion and inquiry. Qualitative research is appropriate to use in this setting because as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state, "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" going on they say that it "involves an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world" (p. 3). The meaning people assign to performance-merit-based scholarships is key to understanding their use in yield. Creswell (2007) takes the description of qualitative research further when he notes that we conduct this type of research when "we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue" and goes on to say that the detail is established "by talking directly with people . . . allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature" (p.40).

### 3.2.2 Perceptions and Merit

As indicated in the Review of Supporting Scholarship, as I was researching merit-based awards I found that merit became a catchall for various awards, that there was very little to be found which included student perception, and even less about music-specific awards. I found Laura Perna's (2008) article "High School Students' Perceptions of Local, National, and Institutional Scholarships" and her resulting themes useful to my understanding of perceptions around scholarships. Though her work is over ten years old, and not specifically about schools of music, I find it relevant to the work of understanding perceptions that music majors have about scholarships which has not been studied in such detail. In her opening she notes that, "relatively little is known about scholarships from colleges and universities and other nongovernmental sources" (Perna, 2008, p. 4), I believe this is especially true of schools of music.

Perna's 2008 study used data from 15 descriptive case studies to examine local, national, and college scholarships. She and her team conducted case studies at 15 high schools in five states, including three from each state. Each of the three schools in a state were from the same district/metropolitan area (to control for other factors); additionally, one was from above average, one from average, and one from below average student achievement and socioeconomic status. As Perna (2008) states the "study explores high school students' perceptions of scholarships, including the sources that students use to learn about scholarships and the reasons that some students do not apply for available scholarship aid" (p. 4).

Perna (2008) goes on to say that the study "assumes that students form perceptions about scholarships within the context of their families, but that these perceptions are shaped directly and indirectly by various forces outside of the family, particularly characteristics of the school a student attends" (p.5). She notes that previous studies show that high school counselors provide a range of



messages about aid which can vary based on school, counselor, and demographic information about the student (among other things). I think that musicians have additional layers to the messages from private instructors, music teachers, and other musicians. In the end, Perna uses the case studies to answer two questions: “What are high school students’ perceptions of scholarships?” and “What forces contribute to these perceptions?” (2008, p. 5).

Perna and her research team gathered data for multiple descriptive case studies through various means, including focus groups with 9th- and 11th-grade students and 9th- and 11th-grade parents as well as semi-structured interviews with teachers and counselors. The goal was to collect from different sources and perspectives in order to compare. The team found that, “six themes emerged from [the] data analyses: (a) awareness of scholarships; (b) perceptions of institutional scholarships; (c) motivations for pursuing scholarships; (d) barriers to pursuing scholarships; (e) sources of information about scholarships; and (f) potential strategies for encouraging more students to pursue scholarships” (Perna, 2008, p. 6).

Perna’s (2008) first theme, “awareness of scholarships”, centers around the idea that at least some high school students see scholarships as a way to pay for college (pp. 6-7). My interviews have questions that center around the awareness of scholarships. Responses to the questions compare students’ awareness, and pursuit, of scholarships (availability, type, etc.) to institutional uses of scholarship (and their reasons or funding).

“Perceptions of institutional scholarships”, Perna’s (2008) second theme is of interest to those who award scholarships. She found that “although a few students reported that their college choices would not be influenced by financial aid offers, several parents stated that their children would attend the institution that offered the most generous aid package” (p. 8). The responses to

my interview questions allow me to compare students' perceptions of institutional scholarships to the admission professionals understanding of the perceptions.

Perna's third, fourth, and fifth themes – “motivations for pursuing scholarships”, “barriers to pursuing scholarships”, and “sources of information about scholarships” – are closely related. While motivations have primarily to do with offsetting the cost of attending college, barriers (real and perceived) effect those motivations, and the sources of information (from previous children's experiences, to high school counselors, to the internet) inform students' moving forward in the pursuit of scholarships (Perna, 2008, pp. 9-12). The responses from students and admission representatives (about finding and offering scholarships respectively) stand to inform us if students and families are receiving information that admission professionals are working to impart, and if that information is helpful to the decisions that applicants are making.

“Potential strategies for encouraging more students to pursue scholarships” is Perna's final theme. In her article she identifies educating students about benefits of scholarships, encouraging students to apply, working with outside organizations, and coordinating and centralizing scholarship information (pp. 12- 13). I used this approach because I believed that interview responses may inform important next steps for the school of music as it seeks to meet undergraduate enrollment goals.

### **3.2.3 Selection of Peer Institutions**

The institutions chosen are peers of Large University's School of Music. The chosen institutions are peers specifically of the school of music and may not be the same peer institutions that the University chooses for itself at large – as many of those institutions do not have comparable music programs. An initial list of peer institutions was drafted based on 2018 cross-application

information (institutions that many applicants to Large University School of Music listed as also applied to) and anecdotal conversations with applicants, faculty, and staff of Large University about schools that are peers and/or competitors for students.

The initial list of peer institutions included 12 institutions, 11 schools of music at larger universities and one conservatory. Since there was only one conservatory, I decided to remove it from the list since there would be no other conservatories to compare. Conservatories differ from schools of music at universities in terms of student experience and tend to have far more performance-merit-based awards.

After a review of most recent data available (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, n.d.) the 2015 Carnegie Classification of the overall institutions using IPEDS data revealed that all but one institution in the remaining list are classified as a Doctoral Universities. All institutions are classified as “Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity”, except for one which is classified as “Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus” (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, n.d.). Because of the classifications and the desire for a most comparable group, I decided to remove this school from the list. This process left me with 10 total institutions, including Large University, all classified as Doctoral Universities with a school of music (see Table 1 for a comparison).

**Table 1. All institutions invited to participate were research universities.**

University Identifier	Students in fall cohort (Freshman class)	% full-time first-time undergraduates awarded any financial aid (all types)	Total amount of aid awarded to full-time first-time undergraduates	% full-time first-time undergraduates awarded institutional grant aid	Total number of Music Majors
Large University	1,552	60	\$29,385,205	49	~500
Current Institution 2	1,461	88	\$38,966,616	85	~900
Current Institution 3	3,550	55	\$58,098,760	47	~500
Current Institution 4	1,985	61	\$47,433,172	54	~600
Current Institution 5	3,066	64	\$65,117,496	58	~1,000
Current Institution 6	6,675	65	\$65,722,820	51	~1,000
Current Institution 7	977	69	\$20,995,445	59	~300
Current Institution 8	7,654	77	\$55,009,626	58	~1,500
Current Institution 9	1,599	70	\$42,848,313	63	~200
Current Institution 10	1,368	68	\$27,596,031	52	~500

### 3.3 Participant Recruitment and Selection

The participants in this study were music admission professionals from various four-year institutions and first-time, first-year music majors. As previously noted, each institution is classified as “Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity” (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, n.d.). I contacted a music admission professional at the 10 peer institutions via email. I described the problem of practice I was focused on and the plan for conducting this needs assessment through interviews. I discussed my expectation that they directly reach out to their first-time, first-year music student body and connect me with four to six students to interview. I anticipated around 50% of those contacted to opt in.

Opting in, in this case, meant that an admission professional from the school responded positively to my initial request for participation – which was sent to staff at each of the 10 peer institutions. The email was sent with a request for response within one calendar week, a follow up email was sent three days later, and a final reminder was sent on the date responses are due. Once the final list of participating institutions was identified, the admission professional of the music program was asked to schedule an interview and to provide contact emails for first-time, first-year music students who entered school in the fall of 2019, and would be interested in participating in the interview. The intention was to administer the interview only to recent high school graduates who completed the admission process in the previous academic year so that participants were in their first year of school and majoring in music.

The process for music major recruitment was similar to the admission professional process. Once I received contact emails for students, I reached out via email to introduce myself and my study. I indicated that I received their contact information from the admission professional, who had been in touch with them, and asked if they would be willing to schedule a phone interview.

Since the peer list, including Large University, is 10 institutions long, I understood that there could have been a maximum of 10 institutions participating (which could lead to 70 interviews if each admission professional provided six music majors), though I felt this was unlikely based on institutions willingness and/or ability to share financial aid policies and the availability and willingness of student participants per school.

### **3.4 Participants**

I use the term admission professional to describe admission office leaders throughout this paper to indicate an employee within an institution whose primary job duties include participating in admission and financial aid decisions for undergraduate music majors. Institutions use a variety of terms to describe an admission professional – for instance: admission representative, admission leader, or admission staff. Because of the various institutions that offer undergraduate music programs, many formal titles for such a position exist. Some examples of titles for this type of position across the country include Dean of Enrollment Management, Director of Admission, Associate Director of Admission and Financial Aid, and Director of Recruitment and Enrollment, to name a few. These admission professionals have experience in recruiting music majors to their institution, participating in the admission processes (identifying qualified students for the particular institution), and administering financial aid (participating in and / or communicating financial aid decisions).

My goal was to have a minimum of four to six schools (in addition to Large University) participating in this process for a total of five to seven institutions included in the final comparison. After anecdotal conversations among peers I was encouraged that I would meet the goal. I intended

to interview the music majors from the participating institutions first, in order to use the information from their responses to inform my semi-structured interviews of the admission professionals. I ended up conducting the interviews with admission professionals and music majors concurrently because of various schedules, lags in communication, and when I heard back from participants about availability.

Seven admission professionals responded positively to my request for participation. Three declined to participate citing university policy or concerns of higher-level music faculty (deans or directors). Of the seven participating schools five agreed to connect me with students, and two declined. Because the admission professional at each institution contacted students first, I received contact information for interested students only, the number of students participating from each of the five schools ranged from two to six (see Table 2). In total, 26 interviews were completed with participants from seven institutions. The seven admission professionals (AP) are identified as AP1 through AP7, and the 19 music majors (MM) are identified as MM1 through MM19 In Table 2 Current Institution 2 through Current Institution 7 are the same institutions, in the same order, as in Table1. Table 2 omits Current Institution 8 through Current Institution 10 as they declined to participate in the study.

**Table 2. Participating Institutions, Professionals, and Students**

Institution Pseudonym	Admission Professional Identifier	Number of Student Participants
Large University	AP1	6 Total MM3, MM4, MM5, MM6, MM8, MM17
Current Institution 2	AP2	2 Total MM2, MM13
Current Institution 3	AP3	4 Total MM1, MM7, MM14, MM16
Current Institution 4	AP4	2 Total MM18, MM19
Current Institution 5	AP5	5 Total MM9, MM10, MM11, MM12, MM15
Current Institution 6	AP6	0
Current Institution 7	AP7	0

### **3.5 Institutional Review Board**

I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval prior to conducting interviews. All participants were read an introductory script, and asked to verbally consent before recording of the interview began. The introductory script is included at the beginning of each of the interview protocols (Appendixes A and B).

### **3.6 Data Collection**

As noted when discussing participant recruitment, I worked with admission professionals at institutions across the country to have them participate in the study, and to introduce me to first-



time, first-year music majors. I gathered information from admission professionals and music majors regarding their perceptions of performance-merit-based scholarships and those scholarships' effect on yield.

Data were collected in the form of one-on-one semi-structured interviews, via phone, between November 2019 and January 2020. I conducted individual interviews with admission professionals and first-time, first-year students from peer institutions. Interviews were recorded, with participant consent, and later transcribed by hand. The seven admission professional interviews ranged in length from 23 to 42 minutes, and interviews with students (19 total) ranged from 10 to 25 minutes, resulting in over eight hours of audio recordings. Each participant was assigned a unique identifier before transcription, in order to protect identity and confidentiality. After transcription, final transcripts were stored in a secure database.

John Creswell (2007), in his discussion of the researcher as the instrument in qualitative research, notes that researchers “may use a protocol – an instrument for collecting data – but the researchers are the ones who actually gather the information. They do not tend to use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers” (p. 38). This is true for me and my interview design. I designed the protocol used to gain responses from students and peers in the admission field in order to better understand perceptions overall.

Good interviews are able to get information through questions designed to elicit responses on a specific subject. David Morgan (2014) notes that open-ended interviews have an “obvious strength” in the “ability to pursue topics that emerge during the course of the conversation” (p. 54). That is to say that a semi-structured interview can include topics of interest to the researcher and those that the interviewee brings up.

### **3.6.1 Interviews of Admission Professionals**

The individual interviews with admission professionals (Appendix B) were designed to allow me to better understand institutions' practices as well as their perceptions of admitted students' decision-making process. The admission professionals represent what Morse and Richards (2002) call "expert participants" people who are most knowledgeable about the subject matter (p.36). In constructing my interview protocols, I left room for follow-up questions that may come from participants' answers. I strove to make my initial questions clear but not leading. For the professional interview protocol (Appendix B) I relied on the assumption that high level admission staff in schools of music are able to answer questions about many factors of the process of admission and financial aid, that others in the school may be unable to answer. To test the protocol, I interviewed three admission professionals who were not participants in this study, and made edits to refine the questions asked in order to more directly respond to my inquiry question.

Designing an interview protocol to be administered to people who are in similar positions across the country provides valuable information about the broader environment shaping the problem of practice. Lee Wilcox (1991) notes that, "the critical importance of financial aid as a factor in college enrollments is obvious to even the most casual observer of higher education" (p. 47). Being able to share this information with central administration at Large University should provide a bridge to a discussion of changes that could be considered in the awarding processes. As Garvey Berger and Johnston (2015) say, "understanding other people's perspectives is a central tool in bridge building, because until you know how others see the world, you'll have little opportunity to influence or learn from their perspective" (p.22).

By investing time in learning about the perceptions of those in the field, along with their perceptions of reactions from applicants and admitted students to their individual institutions, we

can see what similarities and difference exist in the environment. Friedman (2015) notes, that in order “to advance [enrollment] managers’ understandings of enrollment management systems, it is critical to reframe these systems, to expand research perspectives beyond organizational considerations and characteristics, and to view the enrollment management enterprise as an operational entity or work group housed within the institution it serves” (p. 10). Friedman conducted semi-structured interviews with senior enrollment managers, and surveyed “mid-level managers”. Building on her research will allow for further connections between music admission and more broad enrollment management perspectives.

### **3.6.2 Interviews of Music Majors**

The interview protocol for music majors attending these schools (Appendix A) was designed to allow me to better understand admitted students’ decision-making process, their perceptions of scholarships, and – ultimately – the importance they placed on performance-merit-based scholarships. By designing an interview to ask current students (who have recently gone through the admission and scholarship process at many schools) about their experiences and thoughts regarding specific areas using the themes Laura Perna found, we stand to learn more about our problem from our priority population’s perspective. By working to understand student perceptions of financial assistance and merit aid we will be better able to assist prospective students and applicants in the future.

In designing interviews for music majors, I referred to Nathan Sykes (2019) article “9 ways to get millennials and Gen Z to take your surveys”. While I understand that interviews are different from surveys, Sykes’ article provided useful insights to communicating with students who are from Generation Z. Sykes makes it clear that these digital native generations (including first-time, first-

year college students who were born in the early 2000s) are different than previous generations. In his section number two “Keep it short” Sykes recommends being aware of shorter attention spans, only gathering information that is absolutely needed, and capturing information quickly (paras. 9 – 11) – this is true of surveys or interviews. I did not test this protocol with music majors; however, I did share it with colleagues who were not participants in this study, and made edits to refine the questions asked in order to more directly respond to my inquiry question.

In constructing my interview protocol, I worked to be succinct while still collecting information I was interested in – perceptions of scholarships. Sykes says “remember that the main purpose of surveys is to collect valuable information” and warns against going “so far off the rails chasing engagement that you forget to incorporate the one question or series of interactions that will tell you the most about your topic.” He concludes, “that rings true for any demographic or generation — millennials and Gen Z included” (Sykes, 2019, para. 35).

### **3.7 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

After recording the interviews, I transcribed the 26 interview recordings. After transcription of these interviews, I reviewed them for accuracy at a separate time by listening to the recording while reading the transcript. Following the accuracy check, I read through each transcript and completed an initial round of open-ended coding. Codes are “word[s] or short phrase[s] that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for apportion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4). I used Provisional, Inductive, and In Vivo coding. The Provisional code began with Laura Perna’s (2008) article “Understanding High School Students’ Willingness to Borrow to Pay College Prices”, and

included codes developed through an inductive process. In Vivo coding, using words that came directly from the participants, allowed me to use the participants' voice, and to allow for patterns to emerge – using often repeated phrases in the participants' language allowed me to see these patterns clearly (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p.74).

These comparisons provide insight into what perceptions of merit scholarships exist among music students and admission professionals. Transcripts were coded in order to find recurring ideas. After an initial round of coding I reviewed transcripts again to check for missing codes, and began to look for connections to the provisional codes based on Laura Perna's (2008) article "Understanding High School Students' Willingness to Borrow to Pay College Prices".

The primary focus of my analysis was based on performance-based-merit funding and the perceptions and outcomes that are produced from these awards. As noted earlier, Perna's (2008) six themes are "a) awareness of scholarships; (b) perceptions of institutional scholarships; (c) motivations for pursuing scholarships; (d) barriers to pursuing scholarships; (e) sources of information about scholarships; and (f) potential strategies for encouraging more students to pursue scholarships" (p. 6). These themes center around the awareness of scholarships (students' awareness, and pursuit, of scholarships) and institutional uses of scholarship (and their reasons or funding).

The themes that the provisional code is based in also compare students' perceptions of institutional scholarships to the admission professionals understanding of the perceptions. As noted earlier, they stand to inform us if students and families are receiving information that admission professionals are working to impart, and if that information is helpful to the decisions that applicants are making. And the themes can inform important next steps for the school of music

as it seeks to meet undergraduate enrollment goals. In addition to Perna's themes, I paid close attention to find any other themes that emerged from the data.

As has been noted, "perceptions of college costs and the ability to pay have a direct influence on enrollment and persistence. Perceptions of costs are important for the recruitment process because colleges compete with each other for students..." (St. John, 2000, p. 64). By working to understand student perceptions of financial assistance and merit aid, we will be better able to assist prospective students and applicants in the future. Answers to questions asking for definitions of merit-based and need-based aid allowed for finding connotations assumed about merit versus need.

### **3.8 Limitations of the Methodology**

While the study intended to engage multiple stakeholders, both sets of interviews were informed by those who chose to participate, there may be a potential group that is underrepresented or not represented at all. The interview protocols collected information about institutional practices and student perceptions; however, the researcher did not have access to specific awards offered, accepted, and/or declined between institutions and first-time, first-year college students.

## 4.0 Findings

By using the methods outlined in Chapter 3, I sought a better understanding of my inquiry question: How important are performance-merit-based scholarships in the decision-making process? This chapter describes the findings from the interviews conducted with admission professionals and music majors at the seven participating institutions.

Keeping the initial list of peer institutions as similar to each other as possible proved beneficial for many reasons. Admission professionals indicated several similarities to other institutions in the study. For instance, all but one institution indicated that financial awards can combine need and merit. All seven institutions allow for appeals in some form, four of the seven professionals feel that applicants and their families use appeals as a bargaining process, and all seven have some thought or evidence that students are comparing their awards among each other.

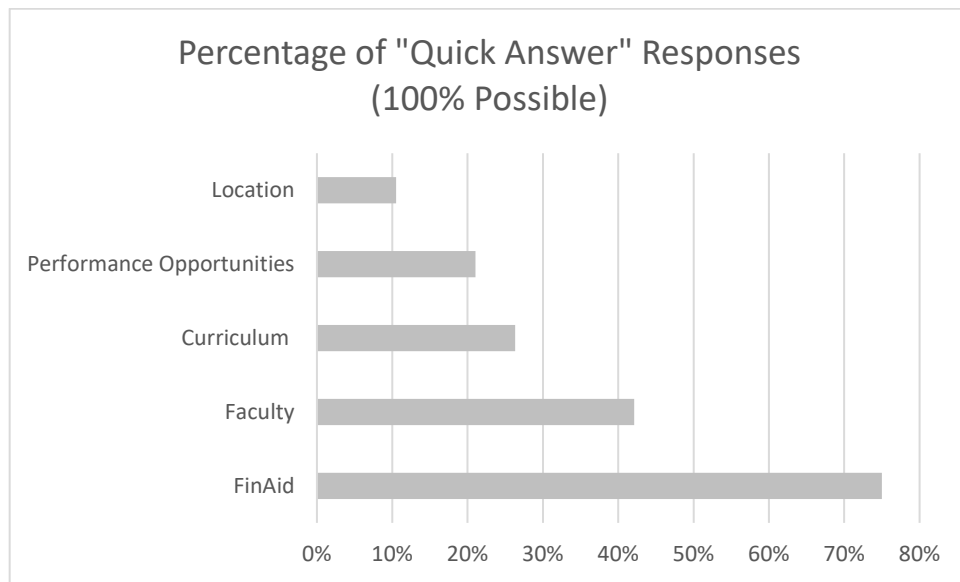
Music major participants also indicated similarities, especially in their interests. Because each of the institutions included a school of music at a research university, interests outside of music (and multiple interests in music) were common. Ten of the 19 students interviewed were either currently, or considering, double majoring or minoring in an area outside of music; and three additional students were currently pursuing, or considering, a second focus within music – only seven were currently only interested in a single music major. These options would not generally be available at a conservatory or at some other types of institutions.

On average students applied to six schools (one only applied to one school, and one to 10). When answering a “quick answer” section of the interview, music majors were asked what was most important in their decision. The music majors were asked to answer the following four questions as quickly as they were able:

- a. What was most important in your decision: Faculty or Financial Aid?
- b. What was most important in your decision: Financial Aid or Location?
- c. What was most important in your decision: Curriculum or Financial Aid?
- d. What was most important in your decision: Financial Aid or Performance Opportunities?

Students responded with financial aid most of the time (75% or 57 of a possible 76 times).

Faculty was second most important factor, as music majors responded with faculty instead of financial aid 48% of the time when possible (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Quick Answer Responses by Music Majors**

The sections below present answers to my inquiry question, alongside additional findings. Eight themes represent admission professional and music major responses to the interview questions. Themes are listed with descriptions, number of mentions by participants, and examples in Appendix C. In the following pages I analyze each theme separately and then close this section by comparing the separate themes.



The themes include the six themes from Laura Perna's 2008 work:

1. Awareness of Scholarships
2. Barriers to Pursuing Scholarships
3. Motivations for Pursuing Scholarships
4. Perceptions of Institutional Scholarships
5. Potential Strategies for Encouraging More Students to Pursue Scholarships
6. Sources of Information About Scholarships

as well as two additional overarching themes that emerged:

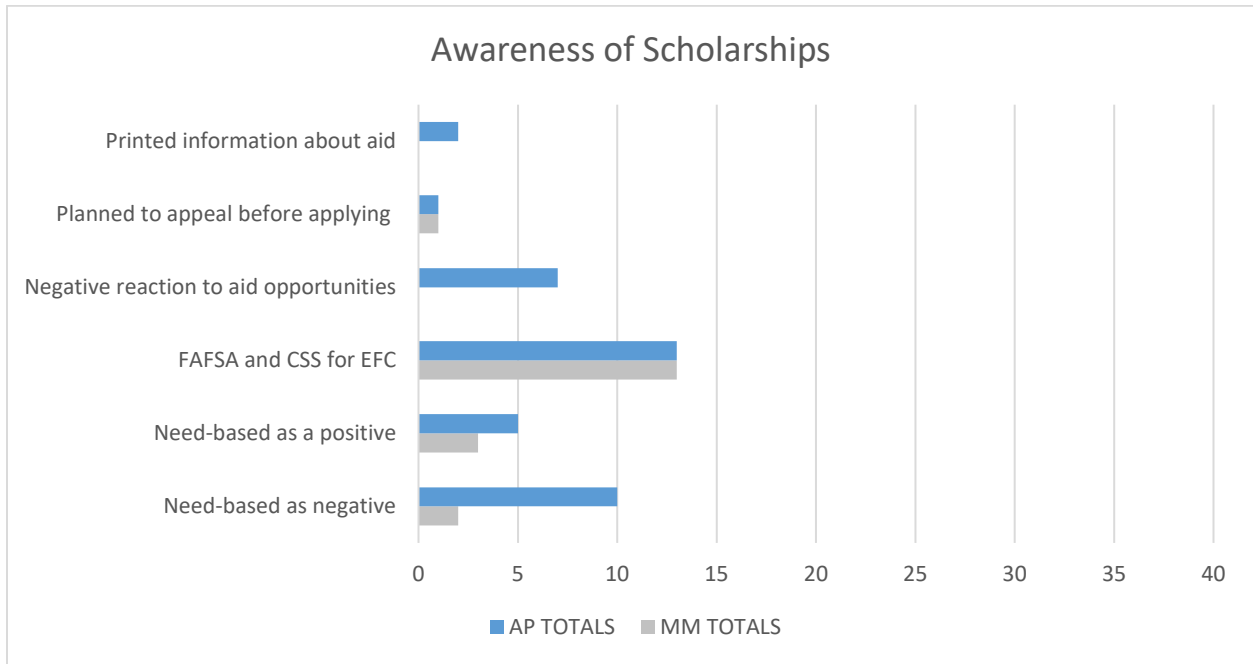
7. Applicant and Family Considerations
8. Institutional Matters

The two themes emerged while grouping inductive and In Vivo codes from the interviews. Both of the new themes focus more on one subset of interview subjects – Applicant and Family Considerations more on music majors, and Institutional Matters more on admission professionals. Applicant and Family Considerations encompasses factors that were brought up in relation to a music major making the decision to attend a school, including scholarships and appeals. Institutional Matters has more to do with sources of aid, awarding practices, and internal campus communications. I begin the discussion of the findings with the six themes from Laura Perna, presented in alphabetical order, and move on to the two newest themes.

#### **4.1 Awareness of Scholarships**

Admission professionals and music majors who participated in this study were clearly aware of scholarships. Figure 2 shows the number of mentions of categories that emerged under

the theme Awareness of Scholarships and illustrates the frequency of each category, comparing admission professionals and music majors.



**Figure 2. Awareness of Scholarships**

Issues related to Awareness of Scholarships were mentioned the least by the combined respondents – 25 times by admission professionals and only six by music majors. This theme focuses on music majors’ awareness of scholarships, and admission professionals’ perceptions and understanding of music majors’ awareness. The low number of mentions may be because the participants in this study were aware of scholarship possibilities – having recently gone through the application and audition process, and having had the conversations around awards that are discussed in later themes. The most mentions by admission professionals was need-based as having a negative connotation. For instance, AP6 put it in the following context when discussing various aid:

Need-based grants, I think folks are now keenly aware, are changeable. Your family situation devolves into something much worse; you could be reevaluated – you could get more help – that would be great. But, if your situation gets better, or older brother graduates from college, now there is only one in the family who’s in college, financial aid could be less. And those grant dollars could change. And I think people are keenly aware of that, and don’t perceive those awards with nearly the [same esteem, they perceive them] with a different level of esteem than they do merit scholarship.

Only two music majors mentioned need-based as negative. MM3 saw need-based as a negative, because he believed he was ineligible for need-based awards, “I think need-based scholarships are just for people who weren’t given the same opportunities that a lot of other kids were given growing up.” While MM3 saw the awarding of need-based awards for others, he still expected to receive merit-based awards.

Both groups, admission professionals and music majors, had some interviewees who saw need-based as a positive – five admission professionals and three music majors spoke to the idea of need-based as positive. AP1 used the example of “families who know that they have high need” either simply because of circumstance or because of the EFC from the FAFSA. AP1 noted that “they’re usually pretty excited, because those financial aid packages are absolutely working in their favor.”

As with need-based as a negative, only two music majors mentioned the idea of need-based as a positive. MM6 was happy with need-based aid, “because of the FAFSA – it indicated that I was very high need, so I got a lot of need-based scholarships.” If a family is truly high in need and is applying to an institution that meets need, then they tend to believe they will receive a very large award to make the school a possibility. Sometimes though, as will be discussed in the section on

Institutional Matters, even meeting need does not encourage the admitted music major to attend if they have received no merit award.

An overall negative reaction to aid opportunities offered by universities was the second most mentioned factor related to awareness of scholarships by admission professionals, it was not mentioned by music majors. AP5 noted that,

there is a clear pattern of families that, I think, would probably self-identify as middle class – and probably (by various measures of wealth, assets, income, all of the above) would be categorized more objectively as middle class as well who just consistently do not feel that these [financial aid] methodologies work for them.

AP1 notes, simply, that “There are a lot of families that will not qualify for need, based on those profiles [FAFSA and CSS], and they are less excited, and much more concerned about paying the full cost of attendance to [Large University].” What is most prevalent in admission professionals’ understanding of family’s context around aid is that there is a generally negative perception of need-based, and a positive perception of merit-based aid.

There was one admission professional and one music major who brought up planning to appeal an award before applying to a school, or being awarded scholarship. This recognizes prospective students and applicants who are aware of scholarship opportunities, and of the opportunity to appeal for additional aid, who assume they will need to appeal to receive enough scholarship to attend. As AP7 puts it:

It just seems to be a part of the process now. From when I was in school (which was over twenty years ago) to now, students and parents just seem; it just seems to be what they do. They get the initial award and, unless they’re getting a [full tuition scholarship], they’re just planning on appealing.

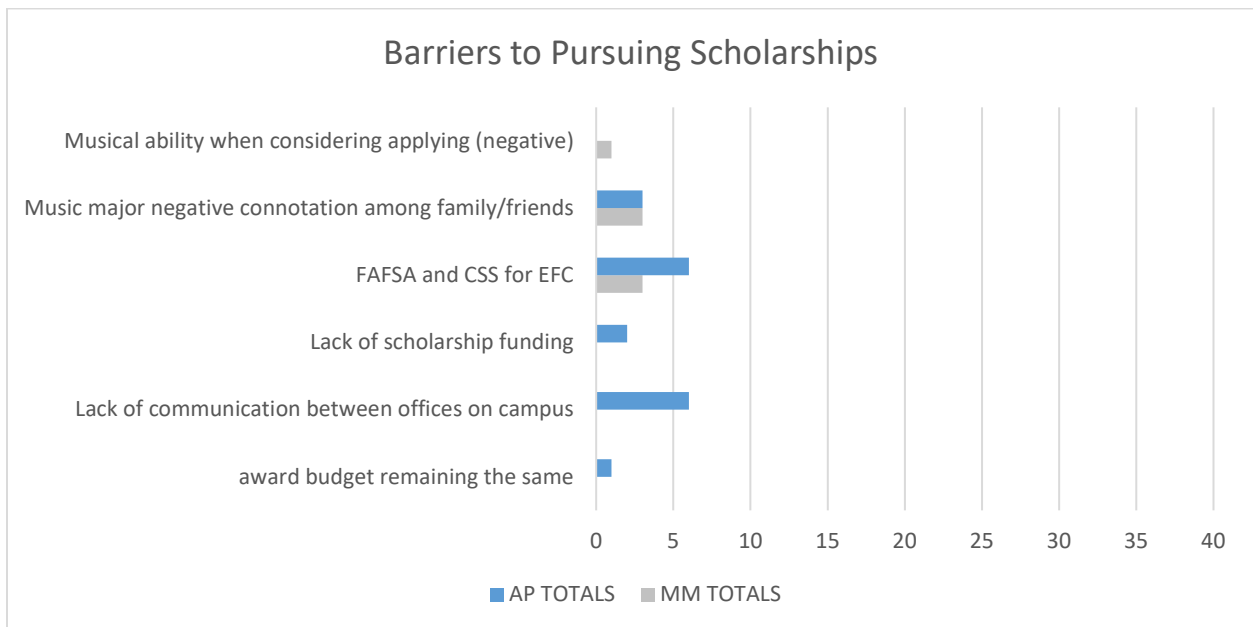
MM3 said “I knew that I would have to probably go through an appeal process.” This was because MM3 “had a very interesting situation at the time. And, I think I was just more concerned on getting into schools and getting offers before looking into scholarships.”

Two Admission Professionals (AP6 and AP7) mentioned printed materials related to scholarships specifically, and identifying avenues families can pursue for aid. AP6 noted that at Current Institution 6 they “give [applicants] another printed brochure that is just focused on audition day, front of mind items. That, again, outlines most of [the possible awards], and provides links to resources on the financial aid website.”

Overall, music majors appear to see the balance of need and merit-based awards in a variety of ways. MM14 specifically compared types of scholarships (merit and need) from a personal perspective, and said that while merit is important, music majors spend money on the training, application, and audition process. Here, MM14 sees need-based as helping to recoup some of the costs associated with the audition process: “I would say that the, the merit scholarship is important and the need-based scholarship is important. Because you spend; I mean audition season is a lot of money.” MM14 went on to say that “it was really sad when I found out that I couldn’t go to my dream school, because I just spent all this money on the audition process, and lessons, and summer programs, and all that stuff.” MM14 ended up choosing Current Institution 3 instead of Current Institution 2, his “dream school”, because the total award from Current Institution 3 (including need and merit) made it possible for him to not “have to worry about any money.”

## 4.2 Barriers to Pursuing Scholarships

Figure 3 compares all of the categories that emerged under Barriers to Pursuing Scholarships and illustrates that, overall, barriers were brought up more by admission professionals than by music majors.



**Figure 3. Barriers to Pursuing Scholarships**

Barriers to scholarships affect music majors' motivations to seek them. These barriers may be real or perceived. All seven admission professionals mentioned Barriers to Pursuing Scholarships, Motivations for Pursuing Scholarships, and Perceptions of Institutional Scholarships in addition to Institutional Matters. Four of the admission professionals brought up the FAFSA and/or CSS Profile in determining awards as a possible barrier for musicians interested in aid. AP1 cites "being at the whim of the FAFSA and CSS PROFILE and how equitable they can really make the world." While AP4 discussed it in context of what experience a family has experienced previously -

[the families] just think FAFSA, older sibling has already gone off to college – didn't qualifying for anything, so they just assume that we are not going to – they're not going to qualify. Then we start talking about this relatively small pool of merit funds that are available and I think they, for the most part, react negatively.

When taking these thoughts about the FAFSA and CSS PROFILE into account, it is also important to put it in the specific context of the college major as music. Many families who may display little or no need have not only spent money on lessons, instruments, etcetera (realizing that it can be an expensive craft), they are also hyperaware of job and salary prospects. There can be a negative connotation of majoring in music among family and friends. This sentiment was echoed by admission professionals and music majors. AP1, for example said that “a lot of families are worried about return on investment, and immediate opportunities” going on to say families are also “very concerned about the amount of debt that their students are taking on knowing that they may not, likely, have the most stable career immediately following graduation.” This is very different than some other majors, especially at institutions like those included in this study.

As an example, Large University's Undergraduate Office of Admission uses information to show return on investment information for families who are considering large amounts of tuition out of pocket. Because of the institution's status, alumni network, and offered majors, the university as a whole is able to note over 80 percent of students employed or in graduate school six months after graduation and an average annual salary (of all recent graduate regardless of major) of over \$80,000. At the same time, the average salary of a musician is “\$46,605 as of February 26, 2020” and “Salary ranges can vary widely depending on many important factors, including education, certifications, additional skills, the number of years ... in [the] profession” (Musician Salary in the United States, n.d., Para. 1). Families who are about to invest in four years

of college see the disparity in these numbers and question the worth of a music major. If they perceive that the only scholarships available are based on need, and that they are not needy, then they may not pursue a scholarship or even apply to an institution.

MM5 put thoughts about tuition and eventual salary in the following context:

Because, I was thinking to myself, my projected job outcome isn't the highest field. So, I probably should just get ahead while I can – and I just don't see a big value of going, \$100,000 into debt for a job that's going to take years to pay that back, if you're lucky.

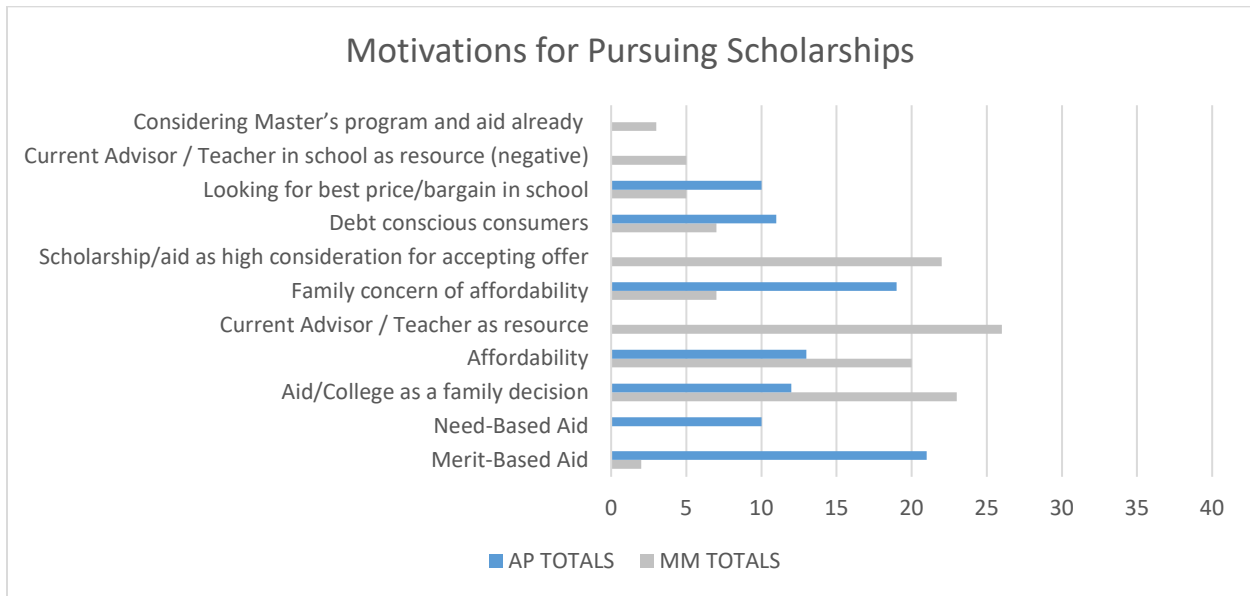
While MM9 simply noted that “It's hard to make it as a musician, period. And so, it's going to be harder if I have a huge amount of debt.” In many conversations, music majors brought up personal concerns about finances after graduation or those brought up by family or friends. While these thoughts and concerns are not all barriers to pursuing scholarships, perceptions about awarding practices, and what may be available based on FAFSA and CSS PROFILE calculations inform applicants decisions to apply to a school and for aid.

This perception from prospective music majors and their families also relates to the lack of communication between offices on campus. As AP1 states, “there is definitely a disconnect between the School of Music and central admission on what the best process and policy to get music students to [Large University] would be in an ideal world.” In the specific case of graduate success, for instance, the ability to highlight successes outside of salary could be key, along with specific information about performance-merit-based scholarship opportunities for musicians (if any exist).



### 4.3 Motivations for Pursuing Scholarships

Motivations for Pursuing Scholarships was one of the most mentioned themes by both groups of interviewees. This theme was mentioned a total of 216 times (96 by professionals, 120 by students). Figure 4 compares all of the categories that emerged under this theme. The comparisons illustrate that both admission professionals and music majors noted that the final decisions about what schools to apply to and attend are family decisions, most of the time not made by the students alone, and that affordability and scholarship/aid resources are important motivations to those families considering a child becoming a music major.



**Figure 4. Motivations for Pursuing Scholarships**

Motivations for pursuing scholarships have to do primarily with offsetting the cost of attending college, whether or not one has the means to pay for tuition. This is one of two themes that were mentioned by all 26 participants.

Admission professionals' understanding of music major motivations for pursuing scholarships is centered in merit-based awards (amounts, continuity, and awarding practices), family concerns of affordability, and the family's role in the decision to apply to or attend certain institutions. Admission professionals across the country noted that they were aware of family concerns of affordability, and working to find ways to make their institution accessible for admitted students. AP5 mentioned being "heartened by the fact that I think some serious and genuine [internal] discussions are taking place around this." AP5 went on to say that he had had a conversation the day before our interview with a colleague from the financial aid office. He said, "we are all thinking about it a lot ... deans, directors, faculty, administrators – everybody really seems to be thinking about [accessibility] more than ever. And I think that's a really hopeful sign of potential things to come."

While AP5 notes accessibility, AP6 discussed other considerations, such as those families who look for the best bargain, those who are encouraged to appeal, and those who are truly trying to afford to attend. AP6 starts the conversation of appeals with those who can afford to pay full tuition, but expect scholarships and/or do not want to spend their money:

There are some families – sadly, sometimes it's the people who have unlimited resources – who portray their goal as getting the best deal. That it has very little to do with where, 'Bob' or 'Sue' is going to actually go to school [or] the quality of what's on offer. But, 'can I keep as much of my wealth as possible?'

AP6 goes on to mention other reasons for appealing, including the simple fact that many people are aware of the ability to appeal, and see it as a bargaining process –

For others ... yes, they want to appeal, and yes there's more of an awareness now of one's ability to do so, culturally. 'Yes, well you should ask for more' – I mean, and

sometimes it's the darn teachers who are telling them to do so. You know 'you should ask for more.'

AP6 went on to introduce those appeals from people who are trying to afford to attend their first-choice school,

in some cases I think it's wholly justified – they are simply trying to make two ends meet – 'I really want to go to this school' and 'my family is going to have a second mortgage, and my little sister is going to get nothing if we do this right now, the way it is – can we make any progress on that?' You know – there's a little bit of hyperbole there, but you get the idea.

AP6's explanations encapsulate much of what admission professionals said in the interviews, and what they encounter during yield – individual circumstances that are specific to certain music majors and their families.

Music major motivations for pursuing scholarships fell primarily to financial concerns and current advisors and teachers as resources for information. Financial concerns, in this case, encompass many factors including: aid/college as a family decision, affordability, family concern of affordability, scholarship/aid as a high consideration for accepting offer, debt conscious consumers, and looking for the best price/bargain in school. MM3 reflected many of the music majors when saying "I had known that money was going to be an issue for college." Students made multiple references to being able to afford college (especially specific schools) as difficult decisions, and highlighted conversations with parents. MM7 simply noted that "I was lucky enough that [Current Institution 3] gave me enough money that I could actually consider coming here." While MM2 took out some government loans, and has parents who are able to pay some tuition, however the parents expect to be paid back:

[my parents and I] just had a long discussion about [which institution to attend]. We had a discussion about money, and my dad basically told me, ‘if all goes well, if I still keep my job, we should be able to afford this’. But I am going to have, I think, \$24,000 in debt at the end of this (and that may increase, I’m not sure yet) – I am going to have to pay that back. My dad told me – ‘you need to be part of this, this money that we’re giving to the school for you – you need to partake in that’. So, I’m going to have to pay that off ... I mean I haven’t thought too far into the future for that yet, but once I start making money, I will have to start paying it back, of course, to student loans and also to my parents.

Meanwhile, MM16 chose to apply to large private institutions, because she made assumptions about aid based on the size of the institution “a bigger university usually has a lot more money to give. So, I was kind of thinking music would make it possible for me to attend a private school out of state.”

Some music majors quoted specific scholarship numbers from multiple schools that they had been offered the year before. MM8 summed it up by stating that “when I got the letters back, and the financial aid that was a really, really, really big impact on where I went – because some of these schools didn’t give a lot of money.” MM12 put it simply “the fact that I got a great scholarship there really was why I went.”

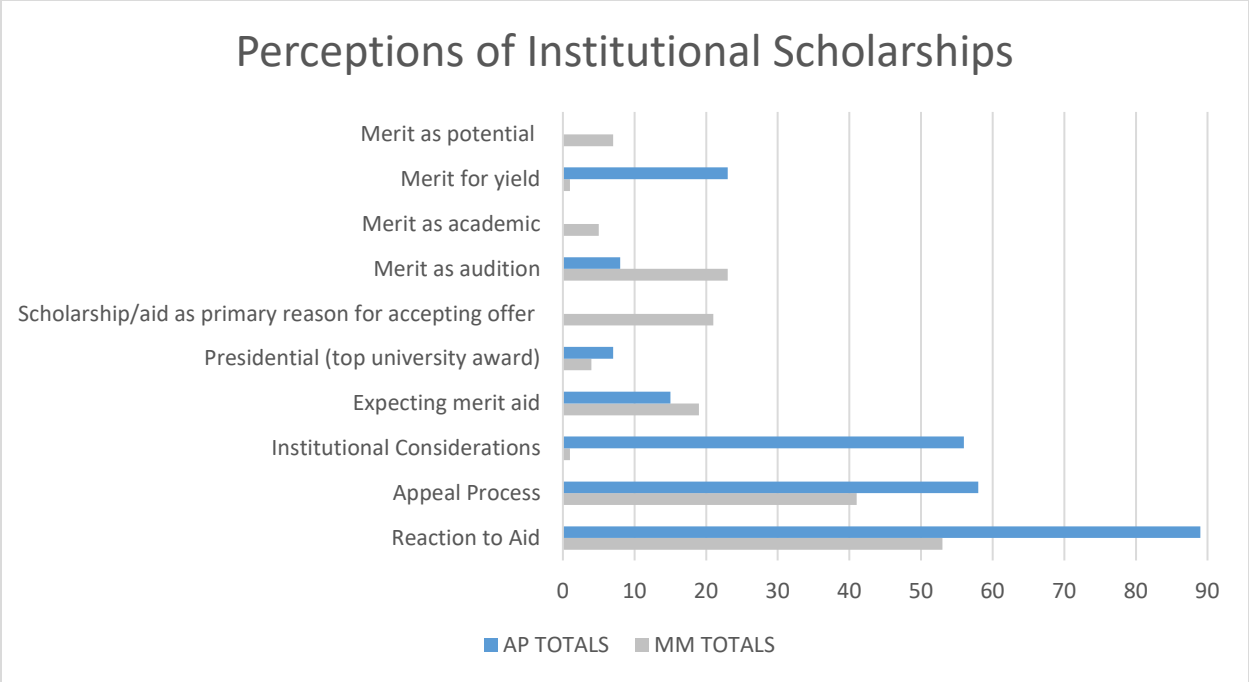
When discussing their current advisors and teachers (during their senior year of high school) as a resource in the process, most music majors said that they had a positive experience. MM10 said that he “ended up camping outside my college career office at my high school” for junior and senior year of high school, and that “they were very supportive of my endeavors.” MM3 relied on teacher recommendations of where to apply saying that he, “generally applied to schools that [his] teachers had recommended for [him], based on their understanding of the current

program there, and the level of teaching that was at all of these schools.” Though most music majors had positive experiences with college counselors some did not. MM6 said that he, “wasn’t really made aware [of opportunities for scholarships] by [his] high school counselor.” He went so far to say “she tried to tell us, but she wasn’t very great at her job.” MM6 felt that his counselor did not share information about scholarship possibilities with enough time for students to actually pursue them.

Music majors cannot always rely on college counseling offices at their schools, because of the specific nature of the music admission process. In many cases the current music teacher serves as a primary resource for information. As MM2 noted, she “only had one person in [my hometown] that really knew about out of state schools and going to the music conservatories . . . my private lesson teacher,” she went on to note, though, that her teacher had gone to [Current Institution 7], “which was free for him, so he really didn’t have to deal with [financial aid] as much.”

#### **4.4 Perceptions of Institutional Scholarships**

Perceptions of Institutional Scholarships was the most mentioned theme by both groups. Categories related to perceptions were mentioned a total of 431 times (256 by professionals, 175 by students). Admission professionals are definitely aware of music majors’ perceptions, and the increased frequency in Figure 5 shows similar spikes among admission professionals and music majors. Figure 5, which compares the categories within this theme, has a different scale than other figures related to themes because of the large number of mentions by both admission professionals and music majors.



**Figure 5. Perceptions of Institutional Scholarships**

Perceptions of Institutional Scholarships – applicant and family perceptions of awards (including award amounts and the message that an award sends) and how awards factor into the decision-making process – is the second of two themes mentioned by all 26 participants. Not only mentioned by all participants, this is the theme that was the most mentioned by both admission professionals and music majors.

Four of seven admission professionals discussed students expecting performance merit awards. AP3 made clear that music majors do understand the difference between a merit-based and need based award, and the difference perceived between the two:

If they see a large merit award, it’s a huge compliment to them and they feel accomplished. Versus money coming from the Federal Government, based on their financial circumstance, I think it will greatly affect our yield.

When asked if merit aid was helpful to yielding appropriate students, each of the admission professionals answered with a version of a resounding yes. Admission professionals specifically spoke to merit scholarships as important to yield in various ways, but AP4 summed up internal discussion at the institution by saying that “it can be a really difficult ‘pitch’ for us to emphasize just how important it is to us to have merit awards to compete against other institutions that those applicants are applying to.” Merit for yield was brought up a total of 23 times by admission professionals, many of whom brought up a point that families consider when looking at awards – that need-based awards can change year over year but, as AP1 said, “Merit receives a more positive response, because it is the guaranteed amount over their four years.”

When asked if music majors were expecting merit awards AP4 said yes, and that no matter what the dollar amount of the award was, “there’s an expectation that a scholarship is going to come and, even if we give what we consider to be a large scholarship, it’s not as though it comes as a pleasant surprise to someone.” This sentiment was echoed by AP3, who said that “our students are really expecting a significant amount of their tuition to be covered.”

Music majors made clear that the merit award and or perception of what that award meant were important to their decision. Awards sent the message that the school wanted the student. MM9 understood that the merit award she was given by Current Institution 5 was the best merit award they could offer. Because of this she declined a half-tuition award at another institution (among others).

After I didn’t get the full scholarship [at another school], and I got the half a ride [to that school] – I was like ‘well, okay, that’s still a lot of money, which is good’. But, [Current Institution 5] gave me 15,000 dollars [not near half tuition], and that is the most money that they give a singer, so at that point I was like, ‘well, okay – that’s the greater

gesture, in terms of [Current Institution 5] kind of wanting me more than [the other school].’

When asked about merit scholarships, music majors consistently brought up the idea of merit awards as related to how much a school or teacher “wants” a student. MM17 said quite clearly that merit scholarships show “how badly [faculty and staff] want you to go to their school . . . they can incentivize that [desire for a student to attend] by giving you merit-based scholarships.” MM19 said that,

[Merit-based aid is] not based at all on your financial situation. It’s given to you because of your talent, how well you did in the audition, the potential that the teacher thinks that you might have, and what you might bring to the studio.

It is clear that music majors perceive merit awards as displaying an interest in a particular student for their abilities. MM7 summed up her thoughts on merit awards by saying that they indicate a school saying “we really want you at this school, we’re going to give you money, you play well.”

While music majors perceived merit awards as a school’s desire to enroll a particular student, most also expected scholarships from every school to which they applied – as MM2 put it “if you get accepted, you are going to get a scholarship. That is, like, it’s almost 100% guaranteed.” MM9 simply said that she “got scholarships from every school.” While MM3 brought up an important point: music majors talk to each other about awards. He said that he knew the schools he was applying to had scholarships available

because my friends that were either a grade ahead of me, or two grades ahead of me, also went through the same program that I went through – and a lot of them got very,



very hefty scholarships from universities and conservatories. So, I was pretty aware that the schools that I was applying to would give out money.

Yield was one of the most mentioned factors when discussing perceptions of scholarships with admission professionals. Although not using the term yield, 12 music majors did note scholarship and aid as a primary reason for accepting an offer of admission – those twelve music majors brought up the subject 21 time. MM3 made it clear that scholarship was the deciding factor once the schools were narrowed down – “at that point I was like, okay whatever school gives me more money – I will just end up going to, because I could honestly see myself at either school.” When asked about aid, MM5 said “Oh 100% yeah – that’s probably the sole reason I picked my school”, MM10 said “my process was just that – who gives me the most money”, and MM2 said that for their family “the financial aid, well obviously it was kind of a big deal – and ... it did change what school I went to.” It is clear from these comments among others, that the scholarships, and perceptions of what they mean are a large part of the decision process for admitted students.

MM14 expressed what his family discussed in the decision-making process –

you need to go somewhere that gives you enough money at the end of the day.

Although [Current Institution 2] was calling me, and they wanted me, I just couldn’t afford to go to the school. Although, I wanted to really go there. So, it was kind of – money, city, over school.

MM14 ended up at Current Institution 3. When asked if he was attending his first-choice school he responded “No – oh no, oh God no. This had to be, like, last”, but he ended up attending because of the scholarship awarded. When he inquired at Current Institution 2 (his first choice) about an appeal, he said was told “you can appeal, but there is nothing – don’t expect much more than what we have given you.” MM14 considered that response a letdown, deciding “I guess I

won't appeal because you're telling me I shouldn't expect any more than this. Then I'm not going to waste my time." The perception that Current Institution 3 wanted him more than Current Institution 2 because of the award offered, combined with the cost difference because of the awards was the reason MM14 ended up at the school that was originally his "last choice".

#### 4.5 Potential Strategies for Encouraging More Students to Pursue Scholarships

Overall, music majors are aware of scholarships, and admission professionals are aware of their messaging to families. Figure 6 illustrates the categories within this theme, and identifies faculty as a large consideration for music majors in how they learn about scholarships, and think about possibilities. Admission professionals should make sure that faculty are aware of any messaging around scholarships, and how to best work with music majors as they move forward.

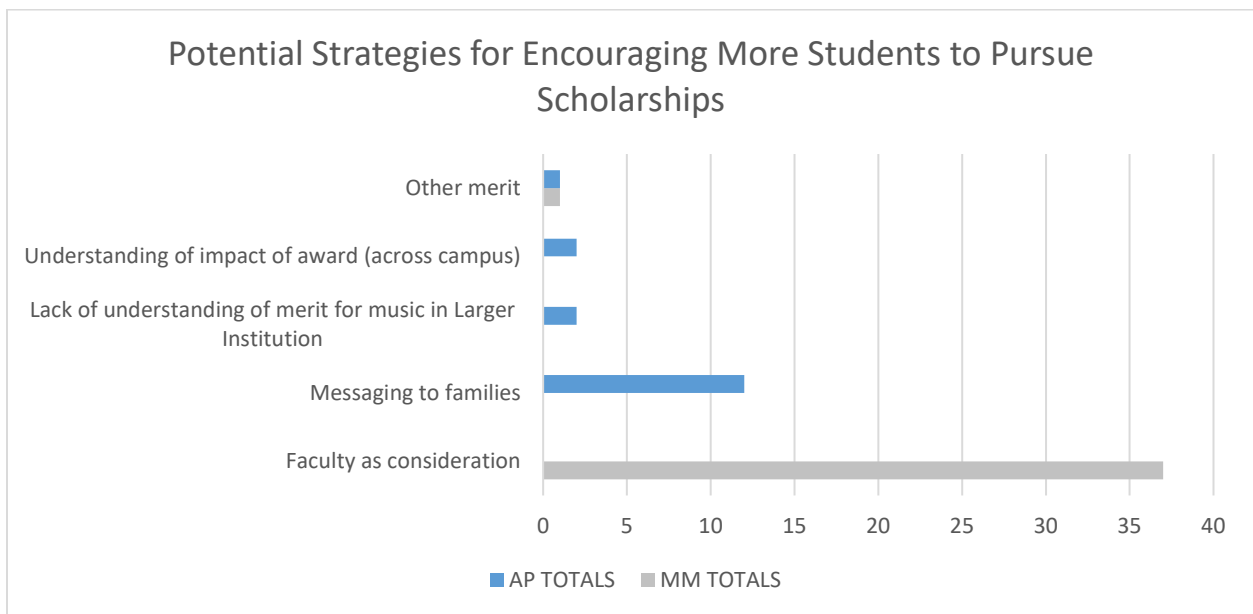


Figure 6. Potential Strategies for Encouraging More Students to Pursue Scholarships

Potential strategies, in Laura Perna's 2008 article, were related to encouraging scholarship applications. While music majors do not seem to need encouragement to apply for scholarships, strategies that schools of music could use, and many do, align with educating students about benefits of scholarships, encouraging students to apply to a school (and, therefore a scholarship), working with outside organizations (to find additional scholarship opportunities), and coordinating and centralizing scholarship information (Perna, 2008, pp. 12- 13).

Admission professionals mentioned many ways that they were messaging information to families. AP5 succinctly stated what others discussed as well, encouraging students to pursue scholarships, while also making them aware of limited funding – “shift the conversation for students and their families away from how much money are you giving me [to] what program am I really choosing” in order to consider “how does that [school/program] align with what my future goals are, what my future opportunities might be.” This shifts the focus of scholarships away from being solely about money to include opportunities they may be able to take advantage of.

AP4 also highlighted messaging to families, and packaging awards in a way that is most effective – “when one is awarded a need-based scholarship, it doesn't say on their enrollment package ‘need based scholarship’ it just says ‘[Current Institution 4] Scholarship.’” AP4 further clarified that “we want to make it clear – but we don't want the first thing you see to be no merit money, if you qualify for need based, or vice versa.” Messaging to families, how scholarships are discussed with prospective students, as well as how they are presented to admitted students, is considered very carefully by admission professionals.

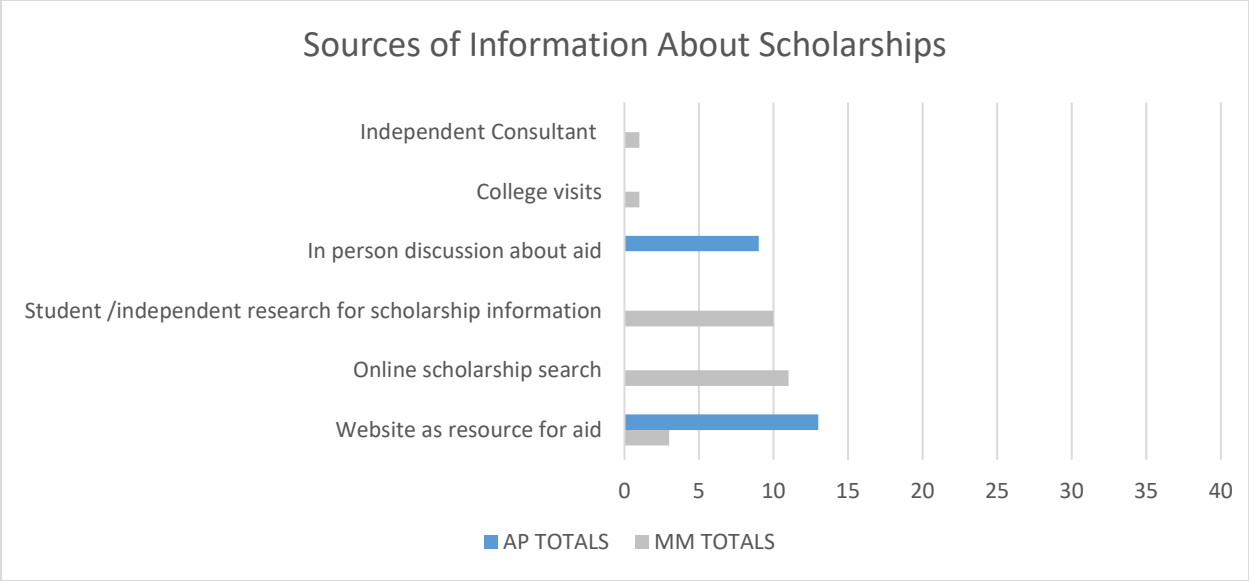
The most mentioned factor by music majors in regard to being encouraged to pursue scholarships, or appeal them, was faculty members. Faculty members mentioned most often include the faculty at the university; and occasionally a current private teacher or high school

teacher. For most majors in schools of music, especially performance-based majors, a music major is planning to spend many hours (at least one hour a week) with a single professor as their primary instructor. Music majors made it clear that they take this into consideration. As MM8 noted – “I took those live auditions really seriously, because it was a chance for me to meet the faculty, and really see if they were a good fit for me.” MM3 said quite simply that, “you are looking for the teacher. So, if you can’t find that teacher that you have a connection with, then you probably shouldn’t be going to that college.” Those same faculty are also encouraging appeals, and in some cases going to the admission professional on a music major’s behalf. MM18 pointed out that they reached out to a professor and said,

‘I need some aid. I really want to come to your school. This school is my top school, but I won’t be able to attend if I don’t get any money’. And [the teacher] immediately talked to the financial aid staff at the school and said ‘Hey, I have this student who needs money to come here’, and I immediately got \$20,000 a year scholarship, which was great.

#### **4.6 Sources of Information about Scholarships**

Most information about scholarships is being found online by music majors, who are independently searching for information, as can be seen in the categories illustrated in Figure 7. In most cases admission professionals are finding ways to follow up online information with direct conversations with music majors and their families.



**Figure 7. Sources of Information about Scholarships**

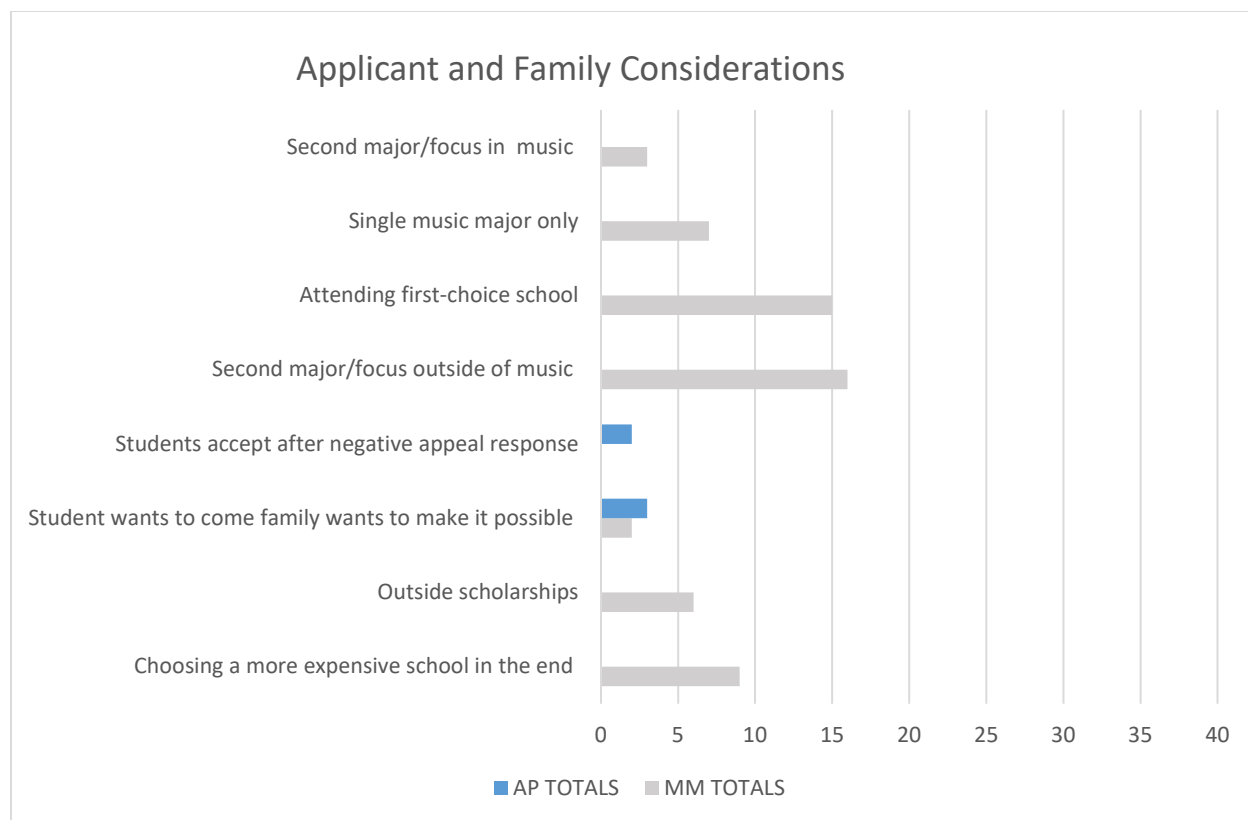
Source of information, from previous sibling and friends’ experiences, to high school counselors, to the internet, inform music majors moving forward in the pursuit of scholarships. One hundred percent of admission professionals see their website as a source of information about scholarships, and all but one brought up in person discussions surrounding scholarships. Professionals noted website resources from basic information and links on institutional websites to webinars about financial aid. In person discussions were brought up as being, in many cases, from follow up conversations to a family’s internet research. As AP4 put it “we try to be as transparent on our website as possible, and then answer questions as directly as possible when asked.” In person conversations also happen with families when they are on campus for visits and auditions. AP6 said that “on audition days we do a full presentation of information about – I call it the ‘how long ‘til I get an answer, what about the money session.’”

The two most mentioned sources of information by music majors were online scholarship searches and independent research for scholarship information. Two music majors mentioned high

school classes about applying to colleges, others mentioned no help from high school counselors, while others were somewhere in between no help and a full class dedicated to the process. It is clear that most music majors and their families use online research when looking for schools to apply to and information about aid available - as MM4 noted, "I did a lot of scouring online, did quite a bit of that." MM7 discussed the organization needed in order to compare scholarships – "I knew that they existed – but I did a lot – it just took a lot of research. A lot of spreadsheets." Music majors and their families are looking to individual schools' sites and online searches for information about scholarships available as they pursue the best choice and value for continuing their education.

#### **4.7 Applicant and Family Considerations**

Applicant and Family Considerations was one of the only three themes that all 19 music majors brought up (in addition to Motivations for Pursuing Scholarships and Perceptions of Institutional Scholarships). First-time, first year music majors clearly involved their family members in much of the decision-making process. The theme of Applicant and Family considerations was mentioned 58 times by students and only five times by professionals. Figure 8 illustrates the categories within this theme.



**Figure 8. Applicant and Family Considerations**

This is the first of two themes that emerged outside of Laura Perna’s six themes that I used with the provisional codes. This theme emerged while grouping inductive and In Vivo codes from the interviews. Applicant and Family Considerations encompasses the factors that were brought up in relation to a music major and their family making the decision to attend a school. Applicant and Family Considerations were most often cited in conversations with music majors and include considerations such as the ability to have a second major or minor, families working to make it possible for the music major to attend his or her first choice school, and financial implications related to college choice. Three admission professionals brought up applicant and family considerations, primarily in relation to finances.

Nine of the 19 music majors interviewed are either pursuing or considering a second major or focus outside of music. The ability to have a secondary area of focus was important to these music majors. MM3 said that he “wanted to go to either a university with a school of music or a conservatory that had a university attached to it; or had a five-year program with a university.” Therefore, he “only applied to universities and two conservatories with colleges attached to them.” Similarly, MM11 “looked at university programs with music schools that advertised options for double majoring.”

Some music majors plan to have two majors and then end up reconsidering, like MM16 who said “I originally wanted to double major, but then, after I got to school, I decided to just minor instead.” While others start out with a single music major but are interested in the possibility of other majors, like MM18, who said that “at the moment I am currently just doing clarinet performance. I am open to adding possibly philosophy as a double major or dual degree.”

Three of the music majors were exploring second majors or focuses in music. MM1 is a piano performance major “interested in double majoring in vocal performance”. MM4 noted that she is “a saxophone performance major, as of right now, but [she] intend[s] to add on a music entrepreneurship minor.” While MM14 is majoring in “voice performance with a minor in arts administration.” The remaining seven music majors are focused on a single music major only.

When asked if they were currently attending their first-choice school, 15 of the 19 music majors (79%) indicated that they were. The responses ranged from an emphatic “absolutely” from MM4 to MM16’s reflection that Current Institution 3 was not originally the first-choice, “but it moved to the top of the list throughout February.”

From the institutions’ point of view, AP1 and AP 7 noted experiences when students accept an offer of admission even after negative appeal response. In some cases, the music major and



their family have decided to attend the school, but try to bargain in the appeal. As AP7 points out “I have had experiences, anecdotally, where I have spoken to a student, they got a great award, they appealed ... they got more [money] – but when it came down to it, they had always planned to come here anyway.” Students and their families are aware of scholarships and appeal processes, and sometimes appeal just to see if they can get additional funding, but the response is “no” and AP1 notes that “sometimes students do still enroll, even if that is the result they receive.”

In other cases, a student wants to come to a school and his or her family wants to make it possible. AP2 put it this way, “I find through our appeals process we identify students that really do want to come here and they’re trying to figure out how to make it affordable.” AP2 was looking at the considerations that families must take into account as they make the final decision to attend an institution. In many cases, the students who want to attend a school most are those who are actively in touch and appealing for additional aid – they also need the aid to make attending possible, or their family decided to make sacrifices. As MM17 put it, they worked with their family to make a dream school the reality:

I thought, ‘know what? I can just go to [different school] and it will be cheaper, better for my family’. But my family kind of knew, I really did want to go to [Large University]. So, they made the sacrifice for me, and told me I could still do it – even though it was more expensive.

Five music majors brought up outside scholarships. Students mentioned various sources for finding outside scholarships from MM9 and MM17 who applied for scholarship opportunities at their high schools to MM6 who said

I auditioned for a few [outside scholarships] that I didn’t get, and I got one through a local youth symphony that I had been really active in. [Being a musician] did impact how

I looked for [scholarships], because I wanted to leverage my unique skills. As opposed to attempting to write an essay about something that I don't really know about, or really care about.

Five of 19 music majors also indicated that they ended up choosing a school that was not the least expensive in the end. Four of the five are also included in the five music majors who discussed outside scholarships. Of the five, one was because the student felt "most welcomed" there, one was for the studio (faculty member), two because the school they chose was always their first choice (and they received enough scholarship to consider it), and one noted that even though his scholarship was largest where he is attending, it is also the most expensive. MM10 did not bring up scholarships, however as he put it:

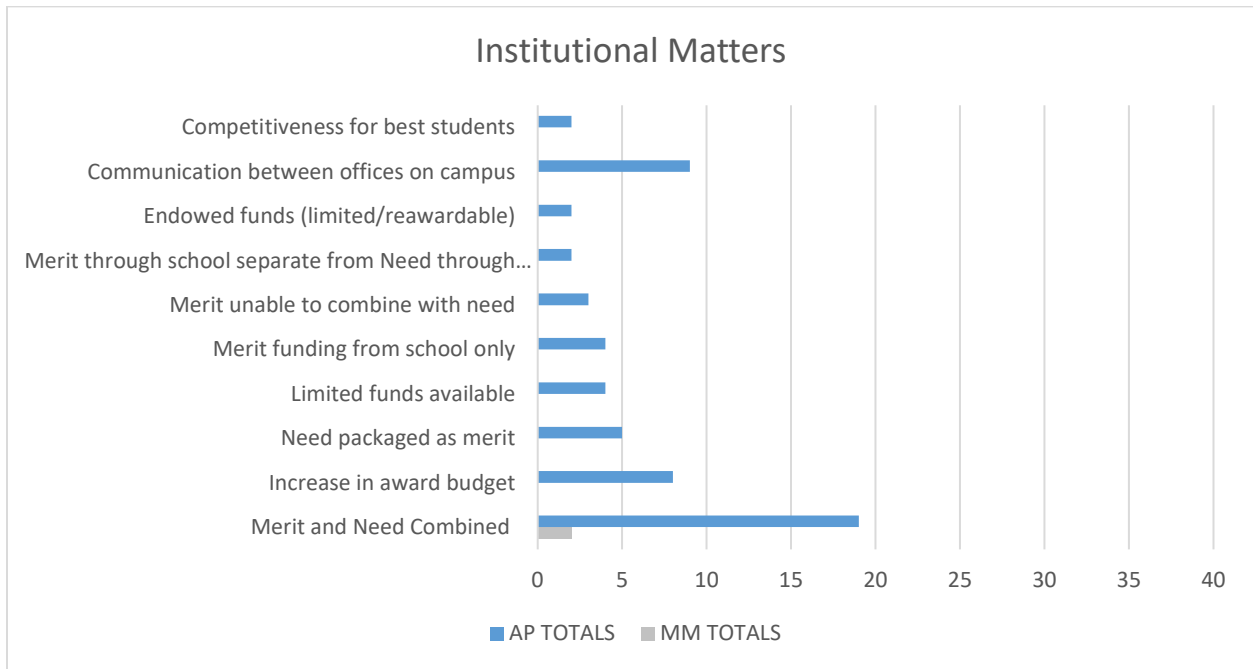
I got better scholarships everywhere – well, better – okay, I mean technically [Current Institution 5] gave me the most money, but [Current Institution 5] also is the most expensive – so it didn't really matter. So, no it didn't, because I got better offers everywhere else. Every place.

MM10 chose to pay more out of pocket, in the end, because of other factors that he and his family considered important moving forward. These factors included faculty, the ability to double major, and name recognition of the school.

#### **4.8 Institutional Matters**

Institutional Matters were mentioned 58 times by admission professionals and only twice by music majors. Figure 9 compares the categories within this theme and illustrates that the combination of merit and need stands out as the most discussed topic within this theme, it is

mentioned twice as much as any other topic. There are many ways to package scholarships, and define and display merit and need. Admission professionals are consistently working to make these two types of aid work together in yielding the best class.



**Figure 9. Institutional Matters**

This is the second of two themes, outside of Laura Perna’s six themes, that emerged from the interviews while coding. Institutional Matters encompasses the factors that were brought up as specific to institutions as they awarded aid. Both of the new themes focus more on one subset of interview subjects – Applicant and Family Considerations more on music majors, and Institutional Matters more on admission professionals. Institutional Matters were most often cited in conversations with admission professionals. This is one of four themes mentioned by all seven admission professionals. One common premise from these conversations was that most institutions try to combine merit and need awards in some way. Music admission professionals work with

offices of financial aid in order to make sure that awards based on merit do not negatively affect need-based awards. This process can also lead to difficult conversations regarding types of awards. For instance, both AP6 and AP7 noted examples of students receiving a great deal of need-based aid, who were then confused that they did not receive an award based on merit. AP7 described one such conversation:

Students who do have a substantial need-based package and they don't receive any merit award – they wonder why. And we have to have that conversation as to the merit scholarships funds are limited and we really are directing those funds elsewhere. You did receive full tuition plus from the university – so why isn't that enough?

In a difference in practice AP3 described the process at Current Institution 3 where the school of music and office of financial aid have worked together “to do a ‘super package’ where, from the students’ perception, it looks like they’re getting a big college of fine arts award – but, quite possibly a good portion of that award is actually need-based.” This changes the perception from the student and family perspective, and they feel they are recipients of large merit awards (in many cases making them more likely to enroll). Current Institution 3 is in the process of changing their awarding practices this year, in order to be in alignment with overall university direction, and music scholarships will be separate. AP3 is unsure how the change will affect yield because, “the previous perception was really positive for somebody who might qualify for need-based aid vs a really negative perception from somebody who doesn’t qualify for need-based aid.” AP3 notes that the school of music has “very limited merit funding ... our merit awards tend to be very small, so if they don’t qualify for any need-based aid, that’s where we kind of get ourselves in a little bit of trouble.” The trouble referenced is in yielding a first-year class, and perceptions of awards offered compared to other schools and conservatories.

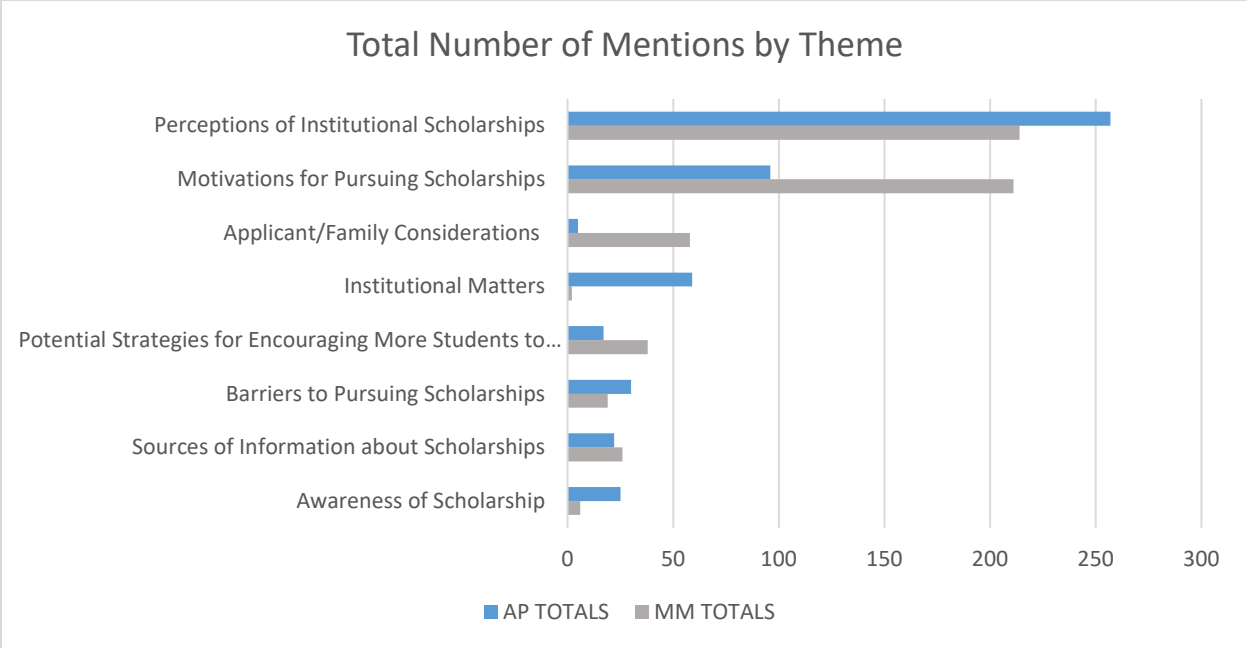
When asked about scholarship opportunities MM14 was one of the two music majors who brought up the combination of merit and need. MM14 noted variations among institutions, saying:

I didn't know until I received my financial aid package that there [were] inside scholarships – like merit scholarships. I mean, some schools explained it to me, but there [were] some schools that I [asked] “is there any scholarship that you guys offer?” Especially going back to [Current Institution 2] – they say that they are a merit and need-based school but, you know things [like displayed need] weren't met – so, it's confusing.

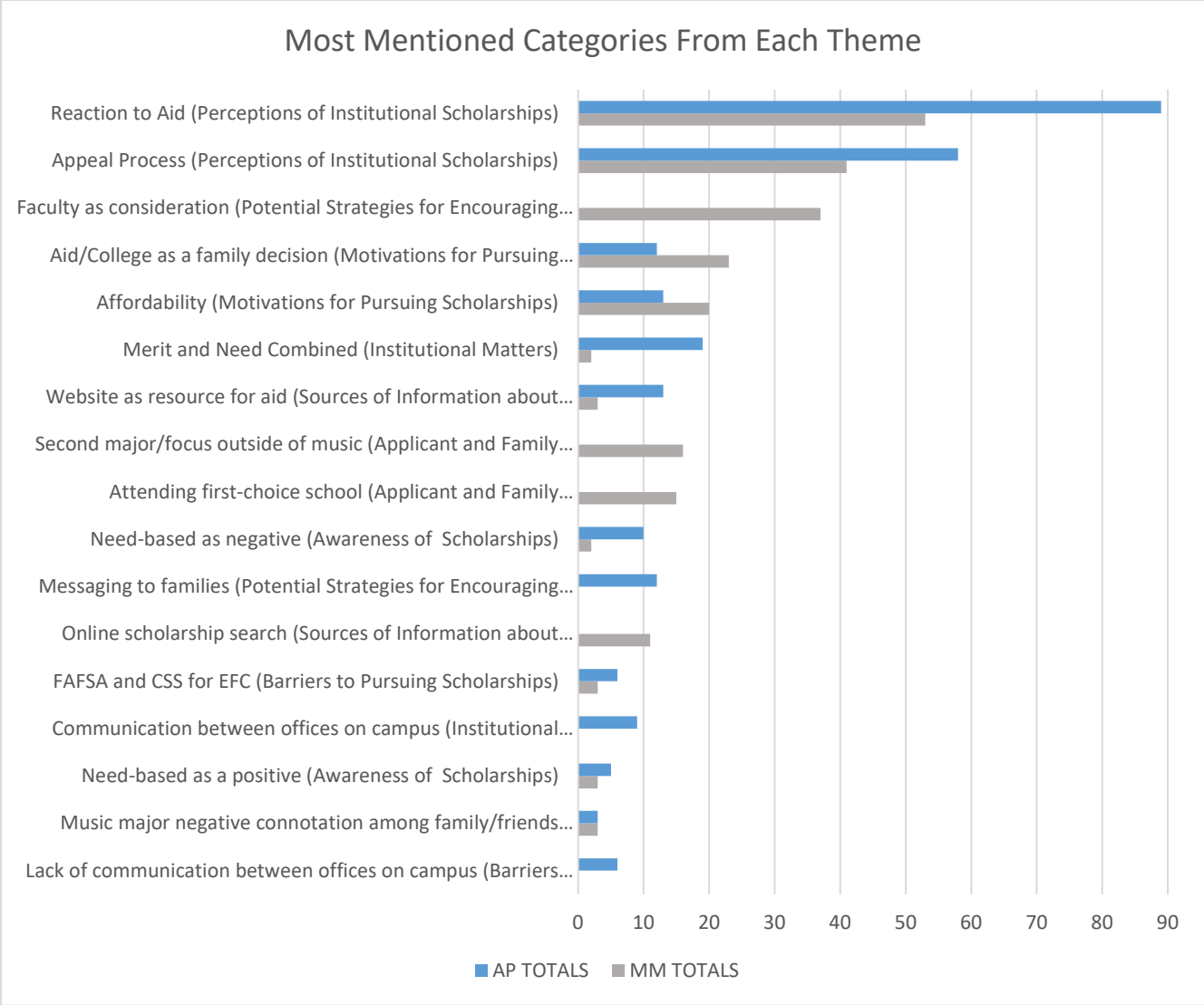
Part of the confusion for MM14 could be clarified with AP2's discussion of Current Institution 2's awarding practices. AP2 discussed changing awards in an attempt to be less confusing for admitted music majors. He said that Current Institution 2 thought that they “needed to be more transparent about the fact that [they are] really an institution that deals in merit scholarships.” That is, Current Institution 2 does “consider need in coming up with merit scholarships, but there's not a separate need-based grant or scholarship pool.”

#### **4.9 Comparison of Themes**

Participants provided insight into performance-merit-based scholarships as being important in the decision-making process. Figure 10 presents the total number of mentions in each theme by admission professionals and music majors, presented in order from most to least mentioned. Figure 11 presents the top most mentioned categories in each theme. The categories are also presented in order from most to least mentioned.



**Figure 10. Total Number of Mentions by Theme**



**Figure 11. Most Mentioned Categories by Theme**

This chapter presented findings to support the inquiry question: How important are performance-merit-based scholarships in the decision-making process? Because the institutions in the study are similar, they share similar types of students as well. Figure 10 illustrates the frequency that each theme was mentioned (themes are listed in order of mentions, from most mentioned to least) and draws comparison between admission professionals and music majors.

These findings suggest that perceptions of scholarships and motivations for pursuing them are important to both admission professionals and music majors. Motivations for pursuing scholarships and perceptions of institutional scholarships were the only two themes mentioned by all 26 participants in this study. There is a clear expectation that music majors expect to be considered for performance-merit-based funding, and in most cases expect to receive it. Music majors also see merit-based awards as the school showing a desire for a specific student to attend as MM9 pointed out when deciding to attend Current Institution 5, instead of the school that offered half-tuition, because the fact that she had received the “best merit award they could offer” made her feel most wanted there.

Music majors also clearly involve their family members in the process of deciding which school to attend. Many music majors in this study are interested in these schools because of the ability to pursue varied interests in addition to music. Scholarships and financial aid are important to prospective music majors in determining which school to attend. Institutions consider sources of aid, appropriate awards, and balancing budgets while recruiting music majors for specific areas. In considering ways to encourage music majors to pursue appropriate scholarships admission professionals focus on appropriate messaging, and music majors reach out to individual faculty members who are a direct conduit between the school and the music majors in many cases.

Music majors do appear to understand the balance between need and merit, however admission professionals and music majors brought up the FAFSA and /or CSS Profile as a barrier to pursuing scholarships. If a family does not believe they will qualify for need-based awards, they may not even apply to the school if there is no possibility of merit-based funding. Admission professionals use their website as a primary source of information about scholarships, and follow up as possible with in person communication. Music majors are, in fact, most often researching



independently and visiting websites (including individual school websites and scholarship search engines) to find information about scholarships.

The data reflects that music majors are knowledgeable consumers who include considerations (such as the ability to have a second major or minor and financial implications) in their decision-making process. At the same time, admission professionals in schools of music are working to recruit, and yield, appropriate students while considering available funds, campus needs and communications, as well as the presentation and nomenclature of awards in their processes.

## 5.0 Conclusions and Implications

Music majors and admission professionals had many similarities in their understanding of scholarships, and perceptions created by institutions. The 19 music majors who were interviewed came from five of the seven schools whose admission professional participated in the study. When they were asked to what schools they applied, 41 individual institutions were mentioned in the interviews. Of the 41 schools listed, 21 institutions were mentioned more than once. The 21 institutions were mentioned a total of 78 times – 39 of those 78 were individual mentions of the seven participating institutions. The number of times these institutions were mentioned in interviews among the various music majors points to the fact that they are peer institutions, and that prospective students consider and compare these schools when deciding where to apply. The findings can be used by Large University's school of music in order to better understand and communicate with prospective music majors, applicants, and their families.

In answer to the primary inquiry question of my study – how important are performance-merit-based scholarships in the decision-making process? – the music majors and admission professionals who took part in this study indicate that performance-merit-based scholarships are very important. As reported in the findings, only five of the 19 music majors ended up choosing a more expensive school (one where they would pay more out of pocket than another school to which they were admitted). This means almost three-quarters of those interviewed did include scholarships as a primary focus in their decision making. All scholarships, including need-based awards, affect the cost of attendance (and would be factors in a decision based on cost). Performance-merit-based awards factor into the decision because they not only reduce out of pocket costs for music majors, they also offer a perception that the institution wants the music

major to attend. MM12 effectively related what many music majors directly said or implied when he said, “the fact that I got a great scholarship [from Current Institution 5] really was why I went there.”

Importantly, depending on the admitted student’s perception of the award – either in nomenclature, or clarity between what is merit versus need – a student could believe that their entire award is merit-based, causing them to feel more “wanted” by the school offering a larger award. A “super package” from Current Institution 3, or scholarship from Current Institution 2 (that bases awards primarily in merit) can look different from awards that are need-based and merit informed (like those that Large University offers). As AP5 said, in many cases you are answering “a ‘do you really want me’ kind of a question.” AP5 noted that “Some [music majors] will phrase it that way. Many of them will not, but you can tell, as you talk to them, that those are some of the perceptions that they’re trying to work through.”

The key findings below help to clarify the importance of performance-merit-based awards in yielding first-time, first-year music majors. These findings serve to confirm anecdotal information that is reflected by common beliefs of admission professionals. The findings primarily elevate the beliefs from hearsay to data; while the final two bring new information to light. They are:

- Students and their families are aware of scholarship possibilities, and are expecting to receive performance-merit-based awards. This confirms the anecdotal information that led me to pursue this study. Thirteen of the 19 music majors (68%) indicated that they expected merit aid.

- Faculty members are important to how music majors learn about scholarships. This is not new information; however, it came up more than anticipated. Fourteen of the 19 music majors (74%) indicated faculty as a consideration.
- Perceptions of awards offered compared to other schools and conservatories are connected to yielding a first-year class. This confirms what many music admission professionals have believed. Twelve of the 19 music majors (63%) indicated that they chose to attend a school because of the scholarship offered, and four of the remaining seven indicated that they saw scholarship as a sign of a schools' desire for an applicant.
- Affordability and financial aid are important to family considerations about what schools to apply to and attend. This is confirmation for institutions that most music majors (in this study, 12 of 19, or 63%) consider affordability when applying to schools, as well as when making a final decision of which school to attend.
- Music admission professionals are aware of music majors' perceptions as well as their other opportunities. Admission professionals from schools of music and music majors aligned in discussion of perceptions of institutional scholarships. This indicates that admission professionals can be relied upon in institutional conversations about merit aid.
- First-time, first year music majors clearly involve their family members in much of the decision-making process. This reconfirms what admission professionals have known – that family context of majoring in music and the awards offered are important to the music major's college choice.
- The two most mentioned sources of information about scholarships by music majors were online scholarship searches (including school websites) and independent research for scholarship information. This information confirms what many admission professionals

have anecdotally considered before, music majors are finding information online before deciding to apply or reach out to an institution. Music majors are researching scholarship information, on their own, online.

- The Estimated Family Contribution (EFC) provided by the FAFSA and CSS Profile can be seen as a barrier to pursuing scholarships. This is a new point to consider; I did not expect EFC to arise as a barrier. Four of the seven admission professionals (57%) and 3 music majors (15%) noted that a high EFC calculation deterred families from pursuing a scholarship or a specific school.

In the end, a majority of families do heavily weigh scholarship awards in deciding which school to attend. This confirms St. John's (2000) assertion that "perceptions of college costs and the ability to pay have a direct influence on enrollment and persistence" (p. 64). As I presumed, music admission professionals (who are colleagues across the country, and have discussions with each other about commonalities) see this clear emphasis on money from families on a regular basis. The music admission professionals, like all professionals in higher education, want to make it work – to meet enrollment goals, be fiscally responsible, and enroll the best fit students for their programs – and are limited by funding and institutional considerations and perceptions. Hossler (2000) noted that achieving enrollment goals requires linking financial aid, recruitment, tuition leveraging, and scholarships – this is as true today as it was twenty years ago (pp. 78 – 87).

Admission professionals and music majors saw the EFC provided by the FAFSA and CSS Profile as a barrier to pursuing scholarships. Music admission professionals are aware of music majors' perceptions of awards (and factors like EFC) as well as their opportunities at other schools. Financial aid practices are, and will continue to be, a key factor in the yield of admitted students, and are also important to prospective students researching online where they may apply. There is

clearly an expectation from students planning to major in music that they will receive a merit-based scholarship. While admission professionals may not see this as new information, the data provided begins to back up this common claim.

For this set of institutions specifically – classified as “Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity” – it is important to note the multiple interests of applicants (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, n.d.). Most of the students interviewed (63%) were looking for opportunities to double major, minor, or take classes outside of music. This is an important differentiator for schools of music in this setting, and can be used in combination with the other findings from this study to help recruit and yield music students.

## **5.1 Implications for Practice**

In the following section I provide insights that address Mintrop’s (2016) questions “How should we describe the behaviors that are focal for our problem of practice?” and “How can we make sure that our assumptions about our problem can be backed up by evidence?” (p. 33). Anecdotal conversations with colleagues and families about scholarships and student decisions, along with some institutional data, led me to pursue this study. This data is a start to helping admission professionals find evidence of performance-merit-based scholarships and their direct connection to yield. This study provides useful suggestions for admission professionals in schools of music (or the arts more generally) when discussing applicant perceptions and expectations with larger campus community.

As the people who have the most contact specifically with music majors, music admission professionals have the opportunity to communicate this information to other constituents within

their institution. They have the unique ability to communicate music majors' specific perceptions and understanding of awards, and their decision-making process not only with offices of financial aid to create the best awards (and name them appropriately), they can also work with their faculty members to make sure that faculty are communicating the correct information to prospective students, applicants, and admitted music majors

### **5.1.1 Implications for the Practice at Large**

Many, if not most, institutions grapple with limited resources, while working to meet enrollment goals and remain fiscally sound. To advance conversations about recruitment and yield across campus, music admission professionals can use information provided by music majors in this study. Admission professionals with information from first-time, first-year students can work to frame conversations in ways that keep the students (consumers) involved, and educated about options. An overall awareness of student and family perceptions and concerns around funding and awards can prove useful when having conversations between offices on campus.

The following implications for practice may be useful to admission professionals in addressing themes that surfaced in this study:

- Institutions need to be willing to look past the Estimated Family Contribution; or at least be aware of how the EFC is perceived, and be prepared to address concerns.
- Admission professionals need to be recognized as a resource for institutions as they work to address institutional concerns related to scholarship awarding and music major yield.
- Admission professionals need to work with their colleagues across campus to make sure that messaging is clear for prospective music students, and that the best message is put

forth in order to encourage the most people to apply and eventually to accept their offer of admission.

- Institutions need to address the expectation from music majors that they will receive a merit-based scholarship. This assumption can be addressed online and in person with students planning to major in music – to clarify whether performance-merit-based awards are readily available or not.
- Since music majors are aware of scholarships, and faculty members have influence on how they learn about scholarships (and think about scholarship and appeal possibilities) these faculty members may be key to properly communicating.
- Admission professionals, at institutions with opportunities to explore multiple interests like those in the study, need to be aware of these secondary interests and how they could be used in addition to scholarship opportunities to affect yield.

It is important to note that many admission professionals indicated that faculty members encourage music majors to appeal. AP6 made an important point: “some of [the encouragement] comes from faculty who have achieved tremendous prominence and have wonderful records of achievement with their students – and for whom someone else was, in fact, always willing to pay the bill.” As admission professionals consider their communication with faculty members about awards, they can keep this point in mind, and allow it to inform conversations – letting the faculty member know that he or she may have been the recipient of exceptional awards (that are not comparable to what the institutions now offer).

The 2017 Gallup and the Strada Education Network report can be used by admission professionals to inform them, as they continue to try to meet students where they are and clearly communicate with faculty – including ways to incorporate the consumer perspective in the



marketing and recruitment efforts (p. 2). Messaging around awards, their basis in merit, need, or a combination of both can be discussed and made clear. AP2, whose institution awards merit-based, need-informed scholarships, provided an example of clarifying communications. He said that they tried “to be more transparent about the fact that [they]’re really an institution that deals in merit scholarships and that [they] consider need in coming up with merit scholarships, but there’s not a separate need-based grant or scholarship pool.”

While students involved in this study were certainly aware of scholarship opportunities, as schools of music seek to meet undergraduate enrollment goals moving forward, their institutions could consider some of the options mentioned by participants in order to engage prospective students with information about scholarship possibilities. MM14 felt that “at the end of the day, you [as a music major] really have to look at your career. You have to look ten years ahead.” MM14 went on to say that “unfortunately, as a high school senior, and it’s rough, but merit scholarship is very important. And I think schools, conservatories especially, need to take account of each student.” Explaining to music majors and their families what awards they received and why is important – adding to that conversation the ways that a specific institution may affect a long-term career may also be helpful if paired with scholarship.

### **5.1.2 Implications for Practice at Large University**

My suggestions for AP1, who is currently the Director of Recruitment and Enrollment at Large University (the institution where the Problem of Practice emerged), are similar to those for the practice at large – to engage the university central offices in further discussion, with some solid proof of music majors’ perceptions, expectations, and awareness. Through conversations with central offices about fiscal responsibility, packaging and naming awards, as well as

communication opportunities to attract students to the school and university, AP1 has the opportunity to promote positive changes to increase yield of admitted music majors to the university.

- Various options for awards and nomenclature should be considered (not unlike AP3's 'super package' allowing all aid to seem to speak to merit).
- Initial awards to music majors should indicate some form of merit, if at all possible, since music majors and their families perceive merit awards as the school's desire to have them enroll.
- The intrinsic and long-term value of majoring in music at Large University should be explored in terms of long-term benefits, and reason to invest in tuition.
- Educate faculty about their part in the process, and how to best communicate regarding scholarships (communicating desire to have a student can be different than saying "you should get more money").

## **5.2 Limitations and Future Research**

While the findings from this study help to fill a gap in the literature about performance-merit-based awards in the music admission process, additional research is needed to see if the findings can be more widely applied at various institutions (not only Carnegie R1 institutions as included in this study). The study was limited by the number of participants who opted into participation, though it engaged multiple stakeholders. Admission professionals were invited to participate and then self-selected to participate, and to provide students to interview. After admission professionals provided student contact information, students were contacted and the

able to self-select to participate. Because of this process there may be a potential group that is underrepresented or not represented at all. The interview protocols collected information about institutional practices and student perceptions; however, the researcher did not have access to specific awards offered, accepted, and/or declined between institutions and first-time, first-year college students.

When it comes to finances, there will always be differences based on income level and family dynamic – some people will follow the money, while others will not care about the money. The information from this study and any future studies could be used to learn about how to best communicate to prospective families about scholarship opportunities, and to admitted music majors about scholarship awards. Additionally, generational information (in relation to college attendance) was not collected as a part of this study. There are opportunities for future research about how first-generation college students may have similar or different perceptions and needs.

One strength of this study is the qualitative focus on similar institutions – all participating institutions were from the same Carnegie Classification. Future research could focus on the same questions within other classifications; this could eventually lead to comparisons among various types of institutions, from conservatory to liberal arts college to research universities.

### **5.3 Demonstration of Practice**

As a result of this inquiry, I plan to produce a report of findings (including figures and tables from this dissertation) and recommendations for change, in the form of an Executive Summary. In addition, I will develop a Zoom presentation for the appropriate team at Large University to use in working to change the awarding process at the institution.

Following Rick Mintrop's (2016) suggestion that "assessments can be scalable to meet specific needs of different projects, can be replicable so they can be used in multiple organizations, and can provide a systemic view of the various social systems within an organization" (p.34), I hope that the results of this study can be used by the current Director of Recruitment and Enrollment at Large University to effectively change awarding processes for the betterment of the school of music, and can also be used by faculty and staff at other institutions in reviewing and adjusting their awarding practices. Having concrete and clear information to present to the University is a first step to this change.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This qualitative study explores first-time, first-year music majors experiences with performance-merit-based scholarship awards, how the awards affected their college decision, and those experiences related to admission professionals' understanding and perceptions. Since this is a single study, the findings cannot necessarily be generalized across higher education; however, it does provide insights into how undergraduate applicants to Large University schools of music understand and use scholarships in their decision-making process. The study achieved the goal of providing a deeper understanding of how two important sets of stakeholders, admission professionals and music majors, understand the use of performance-merit-based awards in the admission and decision process. Admission professionals can use these findings to guide future discussions, both internally (among university units discussing scholarship practices) and externally (with prospective and admitted music majors discussing scholarship opportunities).

## **Appendix A Interview Protocol – Music Majors**

### **Inquiry Questions:**

1. How important are performance-merit-based scholarships in the decision-making process?

### **Introductory Script:**

The purpose of this research study is to study perceptions of first-time, first-year college students' perceptions surrounding scholarships. I am interviewing admission professionals and first-time, first-year students at schools of music across the country.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project, nor are there any direct benefits to you. There will be no payment for participation.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop the interview at any time. This interview will be recorded and transcribed. Information reported will not be identifiable in any way. All responses will remain confidential, and results will be kept in password-protected files.

This study is being conducted by Wilton Colby Carson, who can be reached at 407-362-8738, if you have any questions.

### **Interview Questions:**

2. Where are you currently attending school?
  - a. What is your major?
  - b. What is your instrument/focus?

3. I am trying to understand the admission and financial aid process for applicants to schools of music across the country, and how students decide where to go to school. Thinking back to last year and your college application process – could you tell me about your process of finding and applying to schools?

Possible Probes:

- Can I ask you to list a few schools to which you applied?
  - What were your reasons for choosing these schools?
4. Please tell me about your process of applying for and/ or considering financial aid and scholarships as you considered schools?

Possible Probes:

- Were you aware of scholarship opportunities for college?
  - How did you become aware of various scholarships?
  - Could you tell me if someone helped you look for scholarships?
  - How did your musical training factor into your thinking about scholarships?
  - How would you define/describe “merit scholarship”?
  - How would you define “need”?
5. Thinking about your decision last year – could you describe your process of making the final decision to attend your current school?

Possible Probes:

- Would you say that scholarship offers played into your decision?

- Were you (or did you become) aware of opportunities to ask for a review and/or appeal of your financial aid at any of the schools to which you were admitted?
  - Was a review process helpful to you?
  - Would you say that you are currently attending the school that was at the top of your list?
  - \*if they answered that they are NOT at their first-choice school\* If (insert first-choice school name here) had offered you more scholarship would you have attended?
6. I would like to take a moment for a “quick answer” section. Please respond to the following set of questions as quickly as you are able:
- a. What was most important in your decision: Faculty or Financial Aid
  - b. What was most important in your decision: Financial Aid or Location
  - c. What was most important in your decision: Curriculum or Financial Aid
  - d. What was most important in your decision: Financial Aid or Performance Opportunities
7. As a reminder: I am trying to understand the admission and financial aid process for applicants to schools of music across the country, and how students decide where to go to school. Is there anything else you would like to add and/or tell me about your process?

Thank you.

## **Appendix B Interview Protocol – Admissions Professionals**

### **Inquiry Questions:**

1. How important are performance-merit-based scholarships in the decision-making process?

### **Introductory Script:**

The purpose of this dissertation research study is to study admission staff members' understanding of first-time, first-year music majors' perceptions surrounding performance-merit-based scholarships and financial aid. I am interviewing admission professionals and first-time, first-year students at schools of music across the country.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project, nor are there any direct benefits to you. There will be no payment for participation.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop the interview at any time. This interview will be recorded and transcribed. Information reported will not be identifiable in any way. All responses will remain confidential, and results will be kept under lock and key or in password-protected files.

This study is being conducted by Wilton Colby Carson, who can be reached at 407-362-8738, if you have any questions

### **Interview Questions:**

1. What is your job title?
2. What is your role in awarding financial aid and/or scholarships to admitted undergraduate students at your institution?



3. Over the past three years, would you say that the amount of performance-merit-based-scholarships your institution awards has increased, decreased, or remained the same?

4. How does your institution define the term merit?

*-Probe:* does your personal definition differ from this?

5. What does the term need-based aid mean to your institution?

*-Probe:* does your personal definition differ from this?

6. Does your institution offer performance-merit- or need-based scholarships, or a mix of both to undergraduate students?

Possible Probes:

- Does your school of music / music division see merit-based scholarships as useful in yielding a first-year class?
- How much of your scholarship funding is internal (school/college) funds, and how much is university level (discount rate/ dollars)
- How much is merit / how much is need?

7. How are applicants and their family members made aware of your institutions' scholarship opportunities?

Possible Probes:

- How do prospective students and their family members react to your institution's scholarship opportunities (are they expected or surprising)?
- Do you often interact with Admitted students after they have received an initial award?
- How do admitted students and family members react to scholarships (are they expected or surprising)?

- Do you find a different response from admitted students to merit or need-based scholarships?
  - Do you find differences in perceptions of merit- and need-based aid between central offices (admission / financial aid) and your school?
8. How are merit-scholarships used by central administration on campus - are they offered throughout the university (e.g. academics/sports)?

Possible Probes:

- Are there discussions about funding that are campus-wide?
  - Is music a stand-alone school/college or part of a larger unit (e.g. a College of Fine Arts)?
9. Does your institution offer a review and/or appeal process for financial aid?

Possible Probes:

- Have you seen an increase, decrease, or no change in requests for scholarships and/or reviews in the past three years?
  - As tuition rises are families bargaining or looking for the best deal?
  - Are they encouraged to ask for more money by faculty or private teachers?
  - Do admitted students discuss their offers amongst each other to compare?
10. I am trying to understand the admission and financial aid process for applicants to schools of music across the country, and how students decide where to go to school. Is there anything else you would like to add and/or tell me?

Thank you.

## **Appendix C Data Analysis Coding**

Table 3. Data Analysis Coding

How important are performance-merit-based scholarships in the decision-making process?	AP Total Mentions	MM Total Mentions	Total Mentions	AP Total People	MM Total People	Total People	Description	AP Example Quote	MM Example Quote
Awareness of Scholarship	25	6	31	5	5	10	Music majors' awareness of scholarships, and admission professionals' perceptions and understanding of music majors' awareness	"There is a clear pattern of families that, I think, would probably self-identify as middle class – and probably (by various measures of wealth, assets, income, all of the above) would be categorized more objectively as middle class as well who just consistently do not feel that these [financial aid] methodologies work for them."	"I knew that I would have to probably go through an appeal process because I know that I would have to explain my parent's situation"
Barriers to Pursuing Scholarships	17	7	24	7	6	13	Real or perceived barriers that affect music majors motivations to seek scholarship opportunities.	"They just think FAFSA, older sibling has already gone off to college – didn't qualify for anything, so they just assume that we are not going to – they're not going to qualify. Then we start talking about this relatively small pool of merit funds that are available and I think they, for the most part, react negatively."	"I had thought that I would have no chance to be going to this institution called [Current Institution 3]. So, my view of my own level of knowledge was almost like a deterrent to applying to other schools, because their application was expensive, and I couldn't afford that. So, I wouldn't try."
Motivations for Pursuing Scholarships	96	120	216	7	19	26	Incentive / desire to offset the cost of attending college, whether or not one has the means to pay tuition.	"There are some families – sadly, sometimes it's the people who have unlimited resources - who portray their goal as getting the best deal. That it has very little to do with where, 'Bob' or 'Sue' is going to actually go to school [or] the quality of what's on offer. But, 'can I keep as much of my wealth as possible?'"	"I had known that money was going to be an issue for college"
Perceptions of Institutional Scholarships	256	175	431	7	19	26	Applicant and family perceptions of awards and how awards factor into the decision-making process.	"If they see a large merit award, it's a huge compliment to them and they feel accomplished. Versus money coming from the Federal Government, based on their financial circumstance, I think it will greatly affect our yield."	"After I didn't get the full scholarship [at another school], and I got the half a ride [to that school] – I was like 'well, okay, that's still a lot of money, which is good'. But, [Current Institution 5] gave me 15,000 dollars [not near half tuition], and that is the most money that they give a singer, so at that point I was like, 'well, okay – that's the greater gesture, in terms of [Current Institution 5] kind of wanting me more than [the other school].'"

Table 3 (continued)

<b>How important are performance-merit-based scholarships in the decision-making process?</b>	<b>AP Total Mentions</b>	<b>MM Total Mentions</b>	<b>Total Mentions</b>	<b>AP Total People</b>	<b>MM Total People</b>	<b>Total People</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>AP Example Quote</b>	<b>MM Example Quote</b>
<b>Potential Strategies for Encouraging More Students to Pursue Scholarships</b>	17	38	55	6	14	20	Strategies that schools of music can and do use to educate students about scholarships, encouraging students to apply to a school (and, therefore a scholarship), working with outside organizations, and coordinating information.	"Shift the conversation for students and their families away from how much money are you giving me [to] what program are you really choosing."	"I need some aid. I really want to come to your school. This school is my top school, but I won't be able to attend if I don't get any money."
<b>Sources of Information about Scholarships</b>	22	26	48	7	14	21	Factors that inform music majors moving forward in the pursuit of scholarships	"On audition days we do a full presentation of information about – I call it the 'how long 'til I get an answer, what about the money session.'"	"I knew that they existed – but I did a lot – it just took a lot of research. A lot of spreadsheets."
<b>Applicant/Family Considerations</b>	5	58	63	3	19	22	The factors that were brought up in relation to a music major and their family making the decision to attend a school.	"I find through our appeals process we identify students that really do want to come here and they're trying to figure out how to make it affordable."	"I thought, 'know what? I can just go to [different school] and it will be cheaper, better for my family'. But my family kind of knew, I really did want to go to [Current Institution 1]. So, they made the sacrifice for me, and told me I could still do it – even though it was more expensive."
<b>Institutional Matters</b>	59	2	61	7	2	9	The factors that were brought up as specific to institutions as they awarded aid.	"Students who do have a substantial need-based package and they don't receive any merit award – they wonder why. And we have to have that conversation as to the merit scholarships funds are limited and we really are directing those funds elsewhere. You did receive full tuition plus from the university – so why isn't that enough?"	"They say that they are a merit and need-based school but, you know things [like displayed need] weren't met – so, it's confusing."

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