

Summer Camp: Developing a Recruiting Hotbed That Teaches High School Students Music Production

Steven Potaczek
Samford University

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Abstract:

Technology has forever changed the way music is produced, recorded, and distributed. An understanding of new music production techniques is essential for today's musician. Incorporating music production technologies into the music classroom can help expose students to contemporary music-making practice, engage students in this process, and instill confidence in their abilities to be musically creative and productive. To be sure, the days when musician, producer, and engineer were three separate entities are rapidly drawing to a close. Having a full range of production abilities has become more and more non-negotiable for contemporary musicians. The need to educate musicians in this field is essential for the future of our industry.

This research was conducted in order to develop and host a repeatable summer camp that teaches students modern music technological skills. Since its inception, this pilot program has gone on to create camps that are now viable avenues of college recruitment, as well as created a prototype that has been utilized by several higher education institutions across the United States. This presentation covers some of the literature review that led to the curriculum design, as well as details the pros and cons/highs and lows/advantages and drawbacks of a weeklong summer camp that helps high school students become better acquainted with some of the helpful, but oftentimes confusing, tools of our industry (including Pro Tools and Ableton Live). It also includes sections on setting goals and requirements, investigating and developing curriculum, interviewing and hiring personnel, creating artist lineup for the final project, and a post-event evaluation.

The course modules were selected from three general topics in the field of study: commercial songwriting and ar-

ranging, recording session management, and using a digital audio workstation to record, edit, and mix. These three topics were selected because of their correlation of relevance to the field, and upon interpreting feedback given during a pilot test phase of the project. Due to the creative leaning nature of the topics covered, the camp naturally lends itself to interested students. The camp has been so successful in fact, that it has since grown from its first year, to become one of the most effective on-ramps for prospective students for any department in the university.

Keywords: experiential learning, simulation, summer camp, scenarios development, music business, learning outcomes, higher education, commercial music, music education, music production, songwriting, Pro Tools

Introduction

Advancements in technology have disrupted the way music is recorded and produced. This need not be bad news, as the proliferation of inexpensive hardware and software solutions has freed the artist to create without having a multimillion-dollar budget. For instance, 2019's top selling artist, Billie Eilish, wrote, recorded, and edited her entire album with her brother in his bedroom. An understanding of new music production techniques is required for musicians to capitalize on these advancements, however. Incorporating music production technologies into the music classroom can help expose students to contemporary music-making practice, engage students in this process, and instill confidence in their abilities to be musically creative and productive.

Summer Camp

For colleges and faculty, high school students may be one of the best demographics to focus on. Aside from benefiting students who are actually old enough to comprehend the concepts, recent data shows that the potential payoff for university music programs is strong: colleges today are searching for efficacious avenues of recruitment and thankfully, high school students are hungry for learning twenty-first-century musical skills. Furthermore, students that start their educational journey at an institution that introduces empowering concepts to them, often remain loyal over a longer period of time.

But why specifically utilize the summer camp format for these students? Without a doubt, producing meaningful educational content for learners during the short summer months is a significant amount of work. While not the only solution, summer camp is an easy answer due to the fact that most of higher education's prospective students have the summers off from their normal day-to-day obligations. In response to the available bandwidth of summertime youths, recent studies reveal that every summer more than ten million children attend day or resident camps sponsored by churches, not-for-profit youth agencies, and independent operators.

In 2007, the *Journal of Family Issues* published a study that explored the outcomes of a one-week or longer educational course experience from the perspective of parents. A national sample of almost 2,300 parents responded to pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys about their children's growth experiences at camp. Parents perceived statistically significant gains from pre-camp to post-camp in ten youth development constructs with the highest effect sizes related to adventure/exploration, independence, making friends, positive identity, and peer relationships.

Experiential Learning

Due to the creative nature of music production, experiential learning may be one of the best ways to educate on the topic. Aristotle is known to have said, "The things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them." Experiential education is considered an integral component of education today and students need practical work experience in order to be competitive in the job market. According to American education theorist David Kolb, "Experiential learning consists of a four-step cycle: concrete experience, observation and reflection, forming abstract concepts, and testing in new situations."

Put into Practice

As a result of this data, I was privileged to be asked by Dr. Rebecca Chappell (Anderson University) to help start one of the first college-based music business, songwriting, and production camps designed specifically for high school

students in 2010. The camp has continued every year since its inception and has gone on to become one of the top recruiting strategies for Anderson's School of Music, generating over \$4.8 million in tuition. Originally grant-funded, the camp has since gone on to be self-funding and is a part of the university's larger offerings of summer camps. Instructors in years past have included Grammy Award-winning professionals in the field, as well as several MEIEA members from other higher education institutions (Tonya Butler, Keith Hatschek, etc.).

This specific camp is a six-night/seven-day experience from 9am to 4pm. Students meet together in the mornings for large-format classes which focus on the fundamentals of music business, then break off into smaller afternoon classes focusing on students' special interests. The camp can even be taken for college credit (three hours that fulfill the "Intro to Music Business" course at Anderson University).

There are three tracks available for each student to select from: music business, music production, and songwriting. Business students are taught in workshops such as Music Business 101, Introductory Legal Aspects, Finding Your Niche Market, and How to Get a Job in the Music Industry. These students are introduced to entrepreneurial career opportunities in the marketplace such as being a talent agent, booking agent, record label executive, music products representative, entertainment lawyer, music publicist, and music editor.

Songwriting students participate in four, seventy-five minute songwriting classes with an experienced songwriter. During their lessons, students study the lyrical and musical elements of songs that are currently successful in the marketplace. They are then given the assignment of applying these concepts to their own creations. Creative outlets for these students include being a professional songwriter, solo artist, songwriting band member, composer, content creator, rapper, etc.

Finally, production students are taught a curriculum that introduces basic recording and arranging concepts. They are taught how to utilize Avid Pro Tools to record, edit, and mix creations. Primers are given on topics such as specific hardware, software, equipment setup, functionality, and signal flow. Students are also taught mix concepts such as volume automation, field of space, and the use of plugins. All of this information is presented in a "hands-on" MIDI lab, where students are able to work on their own individual projects alongside professional instructors.

For these production students, the final section of their week includes observing and working alongside an actual producer, several hired "session" musicians, and engineers in creating the final project. This project takes place at a professional studio where students are able to observe and work hands-on with a real mixing console, outboard equip-

ment, and various pieces of musical gear. Students within this track have career opportunities such as becoming a full-service music producer, composer, recording/mixing/mastering engineer, sample and beat creator, etc.

The Final Project

At the camp, any self-declared songwriter/artist has the opportunity to audition at the beginning of the week for a chance to have their song professionally recorded at a local recording studio. Talent is hired to bring the songs to life and songwriters/artists are able to leave camp with a fully produced, mixed, and mastered final product for their career portfolio. Due to financial and time constraints, only the top five to ten songs are usually able to be recorded, but all songwriters, instrumentalists, and vocalists are allowed to watch the process and even sit beside the session musicians—many of whom are touring musicians with internationally known acts such as Mat Kearney, John Mellencamp, and The Band Perry. These students are able to receive personal mentoring as the recording takes place. This process is an invaluable experience teaching students how music is professionally created.

Meanwhile, students in the production track have the opportunity to sit “at the console” in order to help record and produce these songs for their peers. Not only will they contribute to the decision-making process of creating content, but they also get to watch a professional producer arrange and direct the ensemble and/or a professional recording engineer capture the sounds. Once the song is recorded, these students move down the hall to a professional mix suite where they help with the final mix session and work alongside a separate professional mix engineer. The end result is that no matter which track students choose, each one is able to leave camp with a tangible product they can include in their professional portfolio. Everyone leaves the camp with something that they can be proud to say they were, in some way, a part of.

In Summation

While certainly not the only model for such an educational experience, camps like this provide high school students with hands-on learning in ways that spark curiosity, expand their knowledge base, and grow their professional portfolio. Having done this for a decade now, Anderson University has seen many of its former campers move on to not only become Anderson alumni, but also develop fruitful careers within the music industry. Furthermore, opportunities like this provide students of all stripes a chance to actually visit a college campus. Truly, some of the students who attend camps such as this come from homes where college isn't thought of as a viable option. Seeing students like this—who may not otherwise get this exposure—consider college a worthwhile pursuit, is a reward unto itself.

While it certainly requires a lot of gears to move together (Human Resources, housing, camp staff, teachers, etc.), utilizing a summer camp as a part of a larger recruiting strategy has incredible potential to grow music production/business/songwriting college programs. Moreover, camp has the potential to set the bar higher for incoming students. Many entering freshmen have almost no experience in the areas of production, technology, and/or songwriting. Summer camp allows them to dip their toes in, get some foundational knowledge, and subsequently come into college with a deeper skill set than they would without.

Many high school students are hungry for twenty-first-century music skills; many colleges have the faculty and resources to meet this rising demand. If educators are up to it, the potential for a mutually beneficial relationship is there for the taking.

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Steven Potaczek is focused on helping musical artists and students discover and express their potential as creative careerists. As a music producer, he has worked with some of the top names in the industry (The Band Perry, Josh Garrels, and Skillet to name a few), and has successfully partnered with organizations such as MTV, *National Geographic*, and the Heartland Film Festival. He has received numerous industry accolades (including the Gospel Music Academy's "Song of the Year" award and the John Lennon Songwriting Award), toured nationally as a major label artist with a Billboard Top 40 hit, and landed musical placements on several prominent television shows such as *Parks and Rec*, *New Girl*, and *CBS Evening News*.

As an educator, Potaczek has taught at the collegiate level for over a decade and been a guest speaker at various music and film conferences. He holds a Master of Science Degree in Music Technology from Indiana University and developed a Bachelor of Arts in Commercial Music for Samford University that will have concentrations in the areas of Songwriting, Music Production, Live Touring and Performance, and Music Business. Perhaps most importantly, Potaczek absolutely loves inspiring and educating the next generation of music artists and industry leaders.



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