

A Merging of Passions

My decision to attend a liberal arts school was not an accidental one, although I didn't know exactly what I was signing myself up for at the time. I graduated high school with a multitude of different interests and almost no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I had a strong passion for music and a scholarship to play clarinet, but I had no interest in teaching or relying on performing as a career. Health and anatomy also fascinated me, but I had no idea about what to do with my interests beyond devouring every health article and magazine I could get my hands on. An important factor in why I chose to go to Truman was the fact that it is a liberal arts institution, although I didn't really know what "liberal arts" meant. I had my heart set on going to a liberal arts college because I figured that taking classes in different areas might at least help narrow down what I wanted to major in. However, my liberal arts experience went so much deeper than I expected--it allowed me to merge two of my greatest passions in order to better my community and the world around me.

Music has been a huge part of my life since my earliest memories of listening to my Dad play the guitar from the time I was four years old. I went on to play piano and clarinet for many years as I grew up, joining the school band and performing in clarinet and piano recitals. When I reached the end of high school it felt like I was at a crossroads with music: I either had to make it my entire life and career, or I had to let it fall to the wayside to pursue something else. I started my time at Truman as a music performance major because of this, knowing it was not right almost from the start. My path quickly changed after I began working as a nurse assistant at a nursing home, which led me to fall in love with nursing and switch my major. However, many traditional colleges do not allow non-music majors to play in top ensembles or take lessons. As I was in the process of changing my major, I had images in my head of being ostracized by the

entire music department, slowly pushed out of the top wind symphony and edged out of the clarinet studio. Luckily, the image in my head could not have been further from the truth; when I switched my major my passion for music was renewed, and I was able to take lessons, perform in studio class, and play in the top wind symphony for 3 years, in addition to playing in my own senior recital. I wasn't simply allowed to do these things--I was *encouraged* to do them. I had the best of both worlds, studying nursing while also playing the instrument I love alongside amazing musicians.

As I went further into my college career, I began to seek out ways to incorporate music into other parts of my life. In my junior-level writing seminar about race, class, and gender, my professor spoke endlessly about the importance of responsible community involvement and activism. Those discussions made me realize how little involvement I had with the community outside of Truman, and I wanted to change that. However, community involvement felt intimidating, and I had no idea where to start. Music and community engagement had never really been linked in my mind before college; in high school, music consisted of practicing alone in my room or sharing music with other band nerds. However, I eventually decided to take on a leadership position for the Philanthropies committee of a music organization I was in, Sigma Alpha Iota, hoping that it might allow me to finally be able to engage with my community in an authentic way.

Our mission was to promote service through music within the community. We reached out to places like the local nursing homes, a local day care, the YMCA, and the Community Learning Center, a center for individuals with developmental disabilities. We sang for the nursing home residents, played music games with the kids, and taught some of our friends at the Community Learning Center about expressing themselves through music. At first it felt like

these were only small acts of service, but these events were so full of delight, laughter, and dancing that I realized just how powerful and healing music can be. I was even brought to tears at one event when an elderly woman sang her heart out to “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” with us as tears of joy ran down her face. It was amazing to see how much we could touch people just by sharing our love of music with them, and we made so many wonderful connections with the community that we would not have made otherwise.

While music is one of my greatest passions in life, nursing is the other. I am beyond excited to soon begin my career as an RN. The critical thinking skills, interdisciplinary thinking, and community involvement I have gained through a liberal arts education have led me to the discovery that I can also use music as a healing force throughout my nursing journey. I began to incorporate music into my nursing role last summer in my position as a nurse assistant at an overnight camp. When the nurses grew anxious and burnt-out from long hours, I started having daily singalongs with my ukulele as we organized the health center at night. Even though some were embarrassed to sing at first, all of the nurses were begging me to bring out the ukulele by the end of the summer, laughing and singing along at the end of our 16 hour days. It was amazing to see how a few songs transformed the atmosphere from anxiety-ridden to relaxed and joyful. I hope to continue incorporating music in any way I can throughout my career to help both nurses and patients to heal and cope with difficult emotions.

Although switching my major to nursing felt like I was signing away my ability to immerse myself in many different interests and experiences, the exact opposite turned out to be true. During my time in college, I was able to study and perform music, connect with my community, and explore many of my other interests; I was even able to study abroad three times in three different countries. The diverse background of knowledge and thinking that I have

gained throughout my liberal arts experience has shaped me into a competent, aware, and thoughtful future nurse. I firmly believe that if I were at a different college, I would not have had many of the opportunities that I was offered at a liberal arts institution. Because of my education in interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge and critical thinking, I now have a well of insight that will allow me to use creative and dynamic approaches to serve my future patients and fellow nurses.