

Dear World-Changing Musicians,

Higher education is experiencing a time of increased focus on how college programs prepare graduates for successful careers. There are state and national initiatives that directly equate a program's worth to post graduation salary levels. For music programs, art programs, and most areas of the humanities, these standards are nonsensical. Yet, the fate of hundreds of programs is being decided right now based on this misguided premise.

We need to do whatever we can to push back against efforts to reduce the immense, multi-faceted, nuanced value of a college music education to post-graduation earning potential. Our music programs must better understand the actual value of the education we offer. Our music programs must decide how best to define success for our graduates.

The Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP), started in 2008 at Indiana University, was designed to do exactly that—measure career outcomes and success in the arts. SNAAP is a survey for alumni of arts institutions that focuses on finding out what graduates of arts programs are actually doing in their careers. The alumni feedback from SNAAP can then help institutions be more responsive to successfully aligning curriculum with preparing the next generation of arts graduates. SNAAP has helped show, through a data-driven approach, that an education in the arts has extraordinary value that extends far beyond the amount of a paycheck.

Music schools can learn a lot from SNAAP and its approach. For music programs, however, the challenge with SNAAP is that it includes graduates from performance, design, architecture, creative writing, film, media arts, illustration and fine arts. That's a pretty broad swathe of programs. Can we take the lessons from SNAAP and apply them to our uniquely individual music institutions? What is success at a music school with a large Music Education program compared to success at a school that primarily focuses on performance? More and more music schools are asking these questions.

As I speak to CMS members at institutions across the country, I am finding out about dozens of initiatives to create alumni surveys to find out what alumni are doing, what aspects of their college education aided them on their career journey, and what aspects of their education could have better aligned to help them reach their goals. Some schools have developed robust surveys that they have administered for years. Other schools are just getting started.

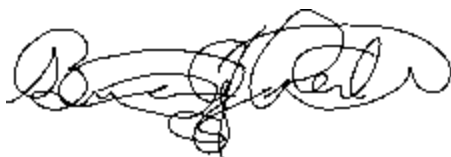
Each school or program shouldn't have to muddle through the challenges of creating worthwhile, actionable alumni surveys alone. CMS is perfectly positioned to bring folks together in a spirit of collaboration. Not only can we share best practices, but also look into the possibility of aggregating data across music institutions. There is enormous power in sharing ideas and learning from each other.

If you are already engaged in this work at your institution, if you would like to be connected with others tackling similar projects at their schools, or you would be interested in starting an alumni survey for your school or department, please fill out the form [linked here](#) with your name, institution and a brief description of your current work in this area.

CMS would love to connect stakeholders who are doing this vitally important work. You are not alone. CMS is here for you, and together we can help uplift our field through the power of collaboration.

Let's collect the data to back up the truth we have always known: an exceptional music education has life-changing value.

Keep Listening. Keep Dreaming. Keep Changing the World.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Pertl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with some overlapping loops.

Brian Pertl
President, College Music Society
Director, Lamont School of Music, University of Denver