

Reflective Paper

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Berklee Valencia Culminating Experience

June 2019

Summary

In Fall 2016, I had my first dream of creating a company. It was not extremely detailed, nor did it make much sense, but from that day forward I was driven and passionate about turning that dream into a living reality. Two years later, I was thankfully granted the opportunity to lay the foundation for that dream via Berklee's Global Entertainment & Music Business Master's program. Before my acceptance, my knowledge of the business world was slim to none, and I had no idea of how I would ever start the company I had been dreaming of two years prior. However, with a year of consistent help and guidance, I was able to complete a foundational plan that I am now confident will set the course for a successful entrepreneurial journey.

My culminating experience is the business plan for my future company, J. Porter Studios; a limited liability company based in Northeast Ohio that facilitates the needs of developing musicians and artists looking to increase their knowledge and understanding of the musical arts. The core activity of J. Porter Studios is housing various subsidiaries that facilitate the learning and preservation of music and the performing arts. More specifically, the first subsidiary of J. Porter Studios, The J. Porter Arts Studio, provides music instruction to learners of all ages, using a tailor-made curriculum and a creative atmosphere to enhance the students' learning results and overall experiences. This would be comparable to the structure of Starbucks, providing a quality product while simultaneously offering customers a helpful, comfortable space to operate in. The Arts Studio provides a similar experience, with our core product being a well-developed curriculum that accompanies a creative space that makes clients "feel" good. This is our key differentiator, because no other studio in Northeast Ohio is conducting business this way. Ultimately, our

main goal is to conveniently provide a multitude of quality musical services and resources, while simultaneously keeping the pursuit of excellence and positive energy at the center of everything we do.

The Process

The journey from inception to where I am now with the creation of J. Porter Studios spans three years, beginning in 2016 when I was earning my undergraduate degree at Clark Atlanta University. My piano professor and pedagogy teacher Mark Boozer identified my entrepreneurial spirit from conversations we had about my future, and when I shared my ideas of creating a company, he stepped in and gave me some of my first tools to start building it conceptually. He changed the structure of my piano pedagogy course so that my final deliverable would be a business plan instead of a final exam, and he also gave me a rubric and detailed instructions for how the plan would be written and presented. This was the first time I was able to freely express all my ideas for my company in an organized, guided fashion, and this ultimately shaped my dream into its first realistic form.

Though that plan was highly influential and helpful, I knew that Mr. Boozer was not an experienced entrepreneur or business instructor, and I had a strong desire to professionalize my business plan so that it would hold up against professional critique and function as a blueprint for creation, rather than an organized narrative of great ideas. I had no knowledge of spreadsheets, nor any realistic financial projections to give shape to my concepts. This was the point when I began looking for graduate programs that specialized in music business, and Berklee Valencia was a perfect fit for my desires and goals in regards to my education and potential career.

Coming to Berklee and enrolling in the entrepreneurship practicum gave me everything I was looking for in a program for my development as a future entrepreneur. The Fall accounting course was extremely helpful and impactful, especially with the skills I gained using Microsoft Excel. Alex Perrin was very patient with the class and he challenged us while still being supportive and available when we felt overwhelmed. His course definitely changed my life and gave a lot of shape to the way I developed my financial projections later in the school year. When I returned for the spring semester, the entrepreneurship practicum allowed me to develop my plan piece by piece, which was especially helpful because such a lengthy and critical document can be a bit intimidating. The course structure allowed me to think more critically and linearly, which consequently caused me to develop a more refined and specific business plan that was far more realistic due to the way my thoughts were ordered as the course progressed.

I feel especially blessed to have taken Alex's course while simultaneously being advised periodically by my CE advisor Tony Woodcock. This combination was truly ideal because the structure and organization I obtained in the classroom was matched with constructive critique, realism, growth, and professional guidance during my meetings with Tony every few weeks. He was extremely hands on and consistent with me, constantly challenging me to expand my vision for the company and plan as far ahead as possible. He was definitely the creative and professional drive for my CE, while the entrepreneurship practicum provided the solid base on which all of that could be developed. From January to May, I worked on my plan and watched it transform from a combination of cool ideas to a feasible business plan with accurate market analyses, financial projections, and a realistic plan of action. Because of my courses and advisement, I am now certain that I am capable of starting and running a successful business when I return to the U.S.

Results

My Culminating Experience (in reference to the process and the final deliverable) was everything I expected to be. In my application video for the GEMB program, I clearly stated that my ideal capstone project would be a fully fleshed-out professional business plan; one that would allow me to go back to the U.S. with a plan and a clear understanding of where I want to take my business in the future. With the excellent help of my advisors Alex Perrin and Tony Woodcock, that is precisely what I achieved and I am extremely grateful for the seeds that they have sown into my future.

My plan is now very well developed and more specific in comparison to what it was when I completed my first draft in undergrad. My original business plan was, more or less, a huge blank canvas that I used to splatter all my wildest ideas on. It was filled with massive concepts and broad expectations without an actual plan for how these things would be achieved. With my CE, I was able to narrow down the things I really cared about in order to gain an understanding of how I wanted to construct my business. I also implemented a plan for phased development after realizing that starting a multimillion dollar company costs millions of dollars, go figure! I knew that I would not have that kind of capital from the beginning, so I scaled down in order to really focus on the necessary steps to build my company from the ground up. This thought process involved me taking the things I can already do that cost little to no money (teaching piano lessons, for example) and building my brand on that, rather than borrowing and investing huge amounts of money from the start. This idea actually stemmed from an exercise we did in Creative Entrepreneurship, in which we were asked to take five euros and turn it into as much money as possible within the given time frame. This pushed me to consider what I could do

to make money *without* spending any money. Piano lessons were an obvious choice for me and I ended up contributing greatly to my team's profits in the end. This moment was when I realized that my focus in the real world should be the subjects that I am already skilled in. I was then able to build my business plan using the foundation of my valuable skillsets as a pianist and teacher.

The business plan I created during my Culminating Experience is the foundation from which all of my other business ventures will evolve in the future. It is a snapshot of the initial execution of a project that still has multiple steps to come later in my lifetime. The J. Porter Studios Business Plan represents the evolution of my focus, logic, and strategic thinking over the course of one short year.

Next Steps

My future goals involve taking the plan I have written and putting it into action. The most essential components to the development of this company from the ground up are a solid curriculum and a substantial amount of personal money for a capital investment. So, first I plan to reach out to my former professor and mentor Mark Boozer to help me with the development of an airtight curriculum that prioritizes students' musical desires as well as foundational skills, bridging the gap between ear training and reading written music notation. The curriculum must cater to all ages rather than just children, and focus on developing the all-around musicianship of each pupil. I will also give free lessons to interested friends and acquaintances to improve my teaching skills and test the curriculum before actually opening the business to the public.

While the curriculum is being developed, I will be putting money aside each month to reach my goal of \$10,000 for the initial capital investment before launching the company

officially. I want to invest my own money to avoid debt and interest fees that could potentially affect my accounting cycle negatively once the business is up and running. Making a capital investment will more than likely benefit me as the CEO, and with my business model being rather simple, I think that starting my company with \$10,000 is a very intelligent and safe investment.

Phase one of J. Porter Studios involves the start and development of The J. Porter Arts Studio, which will establish the culture and financial capital for the next phase: the construction of a facility that not only houses the music lessons, but also provides multiple rehearsal spaces and a performance venue when needed. The Arts Studio will start in a rented studio space, which keeps costs of operation low and allows the company to retain most of its earnings for future investment. The goal is to retain as much capital as possible for the first years until we reach a point that allows us to invest a down payment for the construction of a physical studio that will house all the operations of the company. From that point, we will continue to explore new possibilities for expansion and diversification into whatever markets we see that appeal to what we have to offer.

Contribution to the Profession

This culminating experience gave me the opportunity to create something that will consequently create new opportunities for years to come. My future business is a company that will give people skills; skills that can then be transferred to others or performed for an audience. In both cases the original skill is not only acquired, but it develops a life of its own because it has the capacity and potential to be shared. Who could possibly imagine how much of a domino effect one piano lesson could have on a child that would have otherwise never recognized a talent they had in music? My plan is the technical foundation

for a company whose main product for sale is an asset that keeps producing endlessly; a skillset. Now that I know how I will market and operate this company because of the work I have done this year at Berklee, I have a clear idea of what this business plan really represents. It is the blueprint for a company that will affect a multitude of people and launch careers while evoking change in individuals' hearts and minds, inspiring them to develop and use creative skills to satisfy their various needs and desires.

Personal Impact

My time at Berklee Valencia has been life changing, to say the least. I consider my acceptance into this program a wonderful blessing and I have nothing but gratitude toward the administration that allowed me to take part in such a well-organized, enriching program. The fact that I was able to complete a document that will shape my future as an entrepreneur while living halfway across the world, learning a new language, meeting new friends, and experiencing a culture completely different from my own is astounding. I cannot express my gratitude enough and I am certain that, though extremely challenging, this was one of the best years of my life.

In my hometown of Akron, Ohio, the high school I attended was 98% Black and had a terrible reputation for low graduation rates, poor test scores, and violence. Two of my classmates were killed by gun violence before I reached the twelfth grade, and even more fell victim after I graduated. I am saying this to point out the fact that a young Black kid from my background is not usually expected to be accepted into or complete a program like the one here at Berklee. My culminating experience and the entire Master's degree program is not only a representation of achievement, but also a symbol of hope to another young person that may think their situation is inescapable. I am living proof that no matter where

you come from or what you think is too difficult, you can always rise above unfavorable circumstances. My journey has not been easy, but it was worth every tear and stressful night because I now stand as a reminder to others that they can achieve things they had never imagined before. My culminating experience is another reminder of what is possible if you dedicate yourself to something and endure until it is finished.