

## **Culminating Experience Reflection**

Trevy Kiy

The Culminating Experience project was one that I was very excited about upon arriving to Berklee Valencia. The opportunity to engage in a year-long academic project that allowed me to choose my focus based upon my career goals and personal interests was a very influential factor in the decision to attend Berklee Valencia. Throughout the course of the project, however, the format and overall completion process of the project drastically failed to meet my expectations, leading to a frustrated and stifled output.

### **1. Project Summary**

For what became the final incarnation of my Culminating Experience, I drafted the business plan for Hit Brewery, a company that I have been developing on my own throughout the year. Hit Brewery is a brewpub and recording studio that is currently growing from a small, homebrew based, nanobrewery into its ideal status as a competitive local brewpub upon returning home to Southern California this fall. The brewpub will be set apart from its competitors by featuring an attached recording studio, heavily steeped in craft beer culture, that will allow me to connect with a target market that I know extremely well, independent musicians. My business plan took steps to define the business idea and analyze key business factors, such as the company's market, industry, and financial aspects.

## **2. Results: How the project did and did not align with expectations**

Although developing the business plan for Hit Brewery allowed me to work on a project that aids in the development of my company, the project did not align at all with my goals for the GEMB master's program. When starting the program this past September, I had the goal of taking my previous music education at Berklee College of Music, and applying it to my music business curriculum and practical experience in order to leave Berklee Valencia with the ability to enter the independent music industry as a solo artist and entrepreneur.

The key aspect of this goal was my focus on independence. I will never work for or under a major label or other major music company, like LiveNation or AEG Live. For years, I have said that I would much rather prefer having a strong, loyal local fan or consumer base than global exposure and recognition. With that said, the GEMB program at Berklee Valencia, and in turn, my Culminating Experience project, did not align with these goals at all. As I now sit mere weeks away from graduation, I have simply received an education that is a mere overview of the many possible jobs within the major music industry. I know, theoretically, what an artist manager does, what a booking agent does, and what a publisher does. This overview of information has not helped me meet my goal of possessing the skills of a practical independent, DIY musician. My Culminating Experience project, consisting of a theoretical Hit Brewery business plan embodied this inability to meet these goals.

This inability is not a product of a lack of effort or ambition on my part, but rather, a persistent discouragement and disrespect of my goals at the hands of my advisor. My initial project proposal, which was repeatedly denied, is one that I feel

best allowed me to accomplish my personal goals. This operational project entailed the practical development and execution of my career as a rapper under the name Pappagiorgio. The bulk of my career goals upon graduation currently center around my musical pursuits. Having never taken the opportunity in the past to truly focus on development and implementation of my brand and product as a rapper, I felt that the Culminating Experience embodied the perfect opportunity to finally do so. I was further encouraged by the fact that the initial presentation of the CE project included the option of an operational project consisting of the recording and release of an EP. My original idea went far beyond this “approved” option, including the following practical business operations of an independent artist.

1. The development of the Pappagiorgio brand, including logo, website, and social media management, and other important marketing practices.
2. The development of tangible, quality product. This initially was to include 3 separate musical projects, 2 full-length albums and a mixtape, allowing me to release enough content to promote and perform over the next handful of years.
3. The learning of music video production and the development of substantial video content.
4. The planning and execution of a tour through Europe over multiple cities and countries...an opportunity that I may never have again.
5. The strategic release and marketing of my various musical releases.

The above project would have thoroughly challenged me as a student and developing professional within the independent music industry. The above project would have also perfectly matched my goals for the program. However, due to reasons that I still do not understand, this project was met with significant negativity, and my proposal was denied. Looking back on this initial proposal, I am left with the overwhelming feeling that this project was viewed by my advisor as me just wanting to hang out in the studio all year and rap. Quite to the contrary, this project would have pushed me educationally, creatively, and professionally in ways that would have prepared me to attempt to establish a career as a hip hop artist. The lack of support that I received from my advisor on this project left me with the feeling that this career ambition was not taken seriously, merely viewed as a hobby. Furthermore, I feel that not enough faith and trust was put in me as an adult master's level student, to independently push myself to ensure that a project centered around my operations as a hip hop artist would be of a high academic caliber.

As I attempted to comply with these requests, I shifted my operational project to reflect the development of Hit Brewery. By focusing on the practical development of the business operations of Hit Brewery, the project would have allowed me to learn as much as possible about the entrepreneurial process, start-up operations, while still allowing me to incorporate music related elements from the previous project. Once again, this extremely practical operational project was denied in favor of a business plan.

### **3. Plan of action/process**

I realize that the development of a business plan is an important aspect of starting a business and I was actually already beginning to draft one up at the time of determining that this would be the entirety of my Culminating Experience. Initially, although not my first choice, I was at least excited about the fact that the CE project allowed me to focus on Hit Brewery. However, as I proceeded to work and develop my business plan, the project became very 100% theoretical and completely abandoned the desire for my project to be operational, not providing me with any opportunity to implement my goals and gain practical experience.

The problem with developing the business plan for my Culminating Experience is that I quickly realized that I was unable to write the paper on my own terms. As I began to develop the business plan, I was paralleling the document's development with the progress in last semester's Entrepreneurship & Innovation project. As the curriculum of E&I began to wrap up, I realized that my goals as an entrepreneur were not aligned with GEMB's idea of a business owner. For the purposes of Hit Brewery, I will not be taking the typical developmental route of the trendy Silicon Valley start-up that is, quite frankly, narrow-mindedly taught at Berklee Valencia. Where most entrepreneurs rely heavily on a business plan to aid with idea development, securing investors, and practically developing the company, I will not be following such a path. The idea for the business has already been developed after multiple trials and incarnations and I will never pitch the idea to investors. I currently have the capital required to start Hit Brewery and quickly

found that the development of the business plan, per GEMB's standards, did not fit with the way that I intend to develop and execute Hit Brewery.

The process of the project was reflective of this fact. After wasting multiple months proposing project ideas that were subsequently denied, the initial months of the development of my business plan included many pages and sections that I eventually abandoned, as I felt they did not reflect the most pertinent information for the way in which I am developing my company. As the project went on, I began to realize that many of the suggested business plan topics were only there to wow and attract investors, a process that I will not be engaging in for Hit Brewery.

All in all, the process of the project became a battle of how I wanted to present my business versus the way that the GEMB curriculum wanted me to present my business. I became very disappointed at this realization, as I felt that the reality of the project development process drastically did not meet the supposed goals of the Culminating Experience, as detailed at the beginning of the year.

#### **4. Next Steps**

Although the development of Hit Brewery will be a critical part of my future professional endeavors, this particular project will not be continued beyond this point. The Hit Brewery business plan, as I desire it, is completed and I will continue to store it on my hard drive. I don't, however, see me referencing the document much as I implement Hit Brewery's practical operations. Unfortunately, the inability to incorporate practical business operations into my Culminating Experience has

left me in a position that is not very advantageous in the development of my practical goals as they pertain to both Hit Brewery and Pappagiorgio.

Going forward, I will have to independently do those initial trial and error business operations that I attempted to accomplish throughout the Culminating Experience project. The development of my brand and career as a solo artist, which was my initial proposed Culminating Experience, will be especially difficult to implement as I attempt to balance that along with a day job and the development of Hit Brewery. Looking back, the opportunity to use academic time to focus on these operations for my career as an artist would have put me in a much more advantageous position going forward.

Nevertheless, I will be moving forward with the development of both my solo career and Hit Brewery. I have developed a beer production schedule that will allow me to begin to sell beer and promote the Hit Brewery brand in Southern California. In the coming year, I will be developing a studio and beginning to work toward the development of Hit Brewery's ideal format as a brewpub and recording studio as well as managing my own career as an artist. I just wish that given the significant investment made in my education at Berklee Valencia, the program would have left me in a better professional position upon graduation.

## **5. Contributions to the discipline / profession**

When reflecting upon my Culminating Experience, the project's contribution to my professional goals is perhaps the most disappointing aspect of the reality of the project. I was initially very excited to take the opportunity to use this project to

gain as many professional skills as possible, as the project was supposedly designed. In reality, however, I am leaving the program with a project that I unfortunately feel has not provided me with many practical business skills. The more I worked toward completing the project, the more I realized that this project was completely hypothetical. I spent many hours researching and defining theoretical business aspects, such as my target market, industry, and financials. I became increasingly frustrated with my project as I began to discover that opinions regarding the writing and use of business plans is heavily debated by business scholars and successful entrepreneurs alike. One such negative opinion of business plans is displayed in this quote by respected entrepreneur and author Guy Kawasaki.

*“Organizations are successful because of good implementation, not good business plans.” – Guy Kawasaki<sup>1</sup>*

Research outcomes and quotes like this allowed me to realize that I have not even come close to accomplishing the initial goal for my Culminating Experience. I am leaving Berkeley Valencia with a completely theoretical document that will in no way define the actual success of Hit Brewery.

## **6. Impact on the student completing the project**

Ultimately, I have not been allowed to utilize my Culminating Experience to develop the practical skills that I initially looked to accumulate throughout the

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/390028-organizations-are-successful-because-of-good-implementation-not-good-business-plans>



course of this year. The actual result of my Culminating Experience has made it so that I have a high learning curve and barriers to success upon leaving the school and moving forward with my business and artistic ventures.

Although I was ultimately able to complete a CE project that is related to an actual company that I plan to develop moving forward, the fact remains that this project and my year at Berklee Valencia as a whole could have been really great for me. Independently, this year saw my strongest creative output since I began my work in music over 10 years ago, yet I often become disappointed when I realize that if my CE had been allowed to be executed as I originally intended, the year would have been extremely more productive both creatively and professionally. As the course of the program went on, the CE project began to become more involved and take precedence over everything else. This fact would have allowed me much greater academic freedom to focus on the business elements of my music career, such as taking time to perform around Europe as I originally intended. Instead, I was forced to sacrifice the growth of my music career, my original academic goal for the year, in order to complete a project that increasingly felt manipulated by my advisor as the year went on.

It is disappointing that I ultimately reflect negatively on the Culminating Experience project. As the year went on and the GEMB curriculum began to drastically disappoint, I looked to the CE as a positive factor that I could put most of my focus on academically. Unfortunately, this wasn't the case, as my CE became a drudgery that significantly decreased my morale as a student. At this point, I am simply glad to have the project completed so that I can finally return home and

move forward. Hopefully, I will be able to find a practical use for my business plan in the future.