

Culminating Experience Reflective Paper

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Cristina Nadal

The process of developing my Culminating Experience Project has been one of both professional and personal growth. It has been a months-long process during which I have faced up and downs that ultimately have prepared me for what is next: going into the music industry as a well-equipped professional. During this reflective paper, I will share my main takeaways of the past year. More importantly, I will try to convey what I believe were the strongest and weakest elements of the experience, in an effort to help future students.

THE IDEATION PROCESS

In a way, the ideation process for this project started even before arriving in Valencia last August; it started back when I was just researching Berklee's Global Entertainment and Music Business program and came across the description of the culmination experience. From the onset, I knew I wanted to do something related to my home country: Puerto Rico. Although Puerto Rico has had a long history of success in the Latin music industry, and in recent years, the global music industry, there is very little written about the subject. Hence, I wanted to help change that by contributing my own personal project.

I had some ideas before arriving in Valencia, but of course, during that first semester there were many moments I questioned what I really wanted to do. For a moment, I wanted to stay away from the Research Paper format and move into an Operational Project: I thought the ladder would give me more "real life" experience and would give me the opportunity to network and collaborate with other professionals.

However, even though I wanted to something more “practical,” the truth is that all the ideas that were coming to mind were better presented in the Research Paper format.

I knew the subject would be Puerto Rico, but struggled to find the angle, the scope that would make the project specific, interesting and insightful. Then, around October, I watched Puerto Rican superstar Bad Bunny’s performance of his hit single “*Estamos Bien*” on The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon in which he sang the song with pictures of Hurricane María’s effect in Puerto Rico on the background. It was an emotional, heartfelt performance of a song that, right until then, I had perceived as a fairly simple, catchy trap song about being “ok” no matter what. What I had failed to realize was the context in which the song was created and released. Bad Bunny was using his art to send a message to all Puerto Ricans: it did not matter what had happened to us, it was ok, we were ok, we would get through it.

This performance sparked my interest in the subject. I started thinking of similar songs that had come out since the Hurricane’s passing in Puerto Rico...and before I knew it, I could name at least 10. I would say the ideation process was a fairly smooth one. Once I had the subject identified, I had to spend some time deciding the scope of the paper: even though I wanted to do a lot, I had to be realistic. Moreover, I had to find a way to veer my project towards a business angle, rather than only a creative analysis of the songs. In the end, I think I managed to merge both worlds (the creative and the business) for a fairly encompassing view of the subject.

THE SCOPE

One of the big problems I faced during this project was wanting to do too much. I believe this obsessive need to cover more subjects and information, deterred me from my ultimate goal at times. As they say, less is more and when I started realizing it, I believe I started to move forward with a clearer view towards the culmination of the project.

Another aspect that I did not realize could become such an issue was that of missing data. Thanks to Berklee and classes such as the Data Analytics course, I was able to identify myriad data sources that could be very beneficial to my project. However, once I started using them in more detail I started noticing big gaps in the data. Of course, this is mostly related to the fact that the songs and artists I decided to study were not as big as mainstream American artists, but I never thought the problem would be so recurrent, even with “bigger” Latin artists. In the end, I had to pick and choose the data and sources that were the most complete and accurate.

THE ADVISING

Having an advisor guide me during this whole process has been one of the most positive aspects of this experience. Above all, it has given me the chance to meet a great professional in Prof. Tony Woodcock, who has supported me along this journey since day one. He was insightful, respectful and, above all, committed to helping me develop a successful project. He gave ideas, but never imposed; he was keen on helping rather than instructing and I believe this is reflected in the final outcome. I also feel like he did much more than being an advisor for this specific project, he went beyond that and was always keen of knowing more about myself both personally and

professionally. Lastly, and in a more practical scope, we managed to keep a very consistent schedule of meetings every few weeks, which helped me stay in track in terms of timing.

THE FACULTY

Other faculty members also helped along the way, with more informal meetings and guidance that was also greatly beneficial to my experience; from discussing ideas with Prof. Dyson to determining the right data sources with Prof. Perrin. Moreover, having at my disposal resources spearheaded by the Berklee Valencia Library was also very helpful, especially in the formatting process of the paper.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Although I did start the research process early, I believe I could have been more consistent with my working schedule. Researching and data collecting takes time, a lot of time. I underestimated this, especially at the beginning. However, once I was able to identify this, I believe I was able to adjust my habits and find a “happy medium” in which I was able to work on the project without forgetting my other courses and extracurricular activities.

Another aspect of the research process that could have gone better was that of networking. To put it simply: it is hard, especially when you do not know the people first hand and you are also on the other side of the world. Moreover, it is not only about meeting the right people or finding someone’s email, it is the fact that these types of professionals have complicated calendars and even if they want to help you, in the end

they might not be able to aid you as much as they want. I did, however, confirm what is quite evident: networking is easier when you have a middle man. The professionals I was able to contact for the project, were many times friends or acquaintances of people I knew. It was thus through existing relationships that I was able to foster new ones.

THE COURSES

The courses at Berklee have been diverse and encompassing. I believe I have learned many topics that were completely alien to me and those that I *did* know about, I now have a much more comprehensive view on. I especially enjoyed courses such as the A&R, Music Publishing and the Global Distribution classes, all of which influenced my research paper in different ways. I would encourage Berklee to also include more “practical” classes or sessions that take us out of the classroom and into the studio, for example. I believe this would help us, the business students, be more prepared to work with artists and musicians.

THE VISITING PROFESSIONALS

One of the aspects that I enjoyed the most from this experience was getting to be part of conversations with a great variety of music business professionals. Each week, they would give us a new light on the industry. I especially enjoyed the visits of Fruzsina Szép and Yvette Noel-Schure, among others. It was inspiring to hear them speak so candidly and honestly about the industry. I also enjoyed the few times we got to hear from past students since they were always able to give us great tips and suggestions to better prepare us for the future. Although not directly related to my research paper, I

always found these sessions helped me understand that, in the end, every “CEO” “marketing director” etc...is a human and thus we must treat them as such. A point of improvement in these sessions would be without a doubt more diversity: more women and more people outside the US/UK “world.” Sometimes I felt we were getting the same view over and over again and by bring in more diverse speakers, the students can receive a more “realistic” view of the music industry, beyond the western world.

THE COMMUNITY

One of the most positive aspects of this experience was living it in the context of a university community in which highly talented students co-exist. Many ideas for my project came from conversations from the Berklee community or, for example, once people knew the subject of my study, I had more than one person come up and say: “Hey, I heard this song that I think fits your project!” This encouraging environment was crucial for the development of my project and, without a doubt, I believe it would have turned out very differently if it would have been done in another context.

THE LEGACY

I am aware that my project is one among many. Nonetheless, I am proud that I am doing a contribution to my island, albeit a small one. As I explained before, there is not as many research studies about Puerto Rican music as one would expect, considering the island’s influence in the now global Latin music industry. With that in mind, I am very happy I was able to complete this project and hope that it will inspire

other people to tackle the subject of music in Puerto Rico – because there are many angles that can be explored and investigated.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, what I learned the most during the development of this project is that you have to be passionate about what you are doing. That is the essential key in order to deliver a quality product, of which you are proud. If you are not passionate about what you are doing, it is very hard to complete it. This, I believe, can be transposed to any situation in life including, of course, the job you choose. Therefore, I believe this experience gave me valuable knowledge and tools that I will must definitely be using in the future.