



**Culminating Experience Thesis: Reflective Paper**

*Operational Project "The A69s"*

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The original idea for my culminating experience was to manage, brand and market a band to successfully obtain consistent gigs by networking with clients, promoters and venues both in Spain and internationally. The goal was to assess the demand and market potential for a live performance band and to measure the success of a multinational group in an international market. I also hoped that the band would increase the exposure of Berklee College of Music and its musicians in Valencia, throughout Spain and abroad. The outcome was a band named “The A69s”. Comprised of an international line-up of Berklee musicians in the Master's program we became a group dedicated to funk, blues and having a good time. My strategy was to have the band perform a variety of popular and danceable songs in various styles so that any audience can enjoy our high-energy shows.

Initially it was my idea to form a band as a side project while in school to help me to continue to build my performance skills and managerial experience. I came to the conclusion, however, that the band would be best suited as my Culminating Experience for a Master's in Global Entertainment and Music Business from Berklee College of Music, Valencia Campus because the project includes: Marketing, Branding, Live Performance, Promotion, Production and many other important facets that can directly be applied to my studies.

In order to first facilitate the creation of a general business band, I began reaching out to other members of the business program in hopes of finding musicians who were interested in participating in a band. I proposed my idea while

introducing myself to other business students in the first week of classes and I outlined my experience in the entertainment field and my background as a performer. By the end of the week I was able to find a full roster of musicians interested in participating. The final line-up included: Vocalists-Mikaela Allen, Ankie Titular and myself. Guitars-Felix Mayr-Melnhof, Jad El Alam. Drums-Carl Pires. Percussion-Rozelle Mc Barnette. Flute-Mikaela Allen and Bass-Daniel Toledo. Most of these musicians already had extensive performance experience, while others had never played in a cover band before but were intrigued with the idea of performing with one in Valencia. In our preliminary rehearsal I explained that the ultimate goal of establishing this band was to obtain credible performance experience and that any voluntary time spent for the band would, hopefully, be reciprocated monetarily in the near future.

I knew that the importance of consistent weekly rehearsals was crucial to the success of a band and coordinating member schedules was often the most difficult aspect of managing The A69s. Each member of the band had different priorities and obligations and finding times that suited everyone's schedule proved to be a big challenge. In order to alleviate conflict of schedule or double booking, verbal communication became the most effective way of determining the best times for future rehearsals. This was often done during rehearsals or I would personally contact individual members electronically for their availability. Once a rehearsal time was decided on, I created a Google Calendar event and invited all members so it was shown on their personal calendars. I also made sure that there was rehearsal

space available for our use. This was done via the Berklee Intranet where I was able to access the availability information for Berklee's ensemble rooms.

Another essential aspect of a successfully functioning business band is an easily accessible demo. Creating a demo became an imperative for me after speaking with the owner of a live performance club "The Black Note". He explained to me that the best way to get booked by his venue or any other was to give them a physical demo with a bands recorded material. I knew then that I had to immediately begin working on The A69s first recording project. After speaking with a number of Music Technology and Innovation students, I met with Corey Ashe-Bradford who expressed his interest in helping to record our first track for our demo. The band unanimously chose "Let's Stay Together" by Al Greene to record first. Initially we reserved 3 studios in hopes to record the entire band at once but we unfortunately ran into technical difficulties and were only able to record bass and drums. So as not to waste the entire bands time, I began reserving studio time for one section at a time. This made the recording process take more time than I would have hoped but eventually we got all of the recorded material we needed. I then scheduled mixing and mastering sessions with Corey and gave my input on the overall sound. In the end I was pleased with the outcome and I was able to then create a SoundCloud and upload our first sample of music onto the internet. <https://soundcloud.com/the-a69s>

After seeing how long of a process recording one song would take in the studios with such a large band, I sought other means to expedite the process. I contacted Liz Teutsch, associate professor of technology, and requested a session on Berklee's scoring stage. She agreed and offered to have the recording session as an advanced MTI class. I also spoke with Stephen Webber, program director of Music Technology and Innovation, who suggested that as a cover band we should include a medley into our demo. We chose record a medley of the songs "Give me one reason" by Tracy Chapman, "Ain't No Sunshine" by Bill Withers and "Mercy" by Duffy as well as our own version of "Baby I'm Yours" by Breakbot. Despite the fact that it took the MTI students longer than expected to set up for us, we were able to record everything in one hour. Unfortunately during a mixing session with Ian Kagey we discovered some issues with the tempo and decided not to upload the recording. Later in the semester we were given the opportunity to record on the scoring stage again with Patrice Rushen and chose to re-record "Baby I'm Yours" by Breakbot to a click track and "Le Freak" by Chic. We had a phenomenal session and we were able to record quality material. After both sessions I worked closely with Ian Kagy to listen to the tracks we recorded and choose the best takes. Unfortunately, despite all of our hard work, I was unable to find anyone with the time to mix and master these tracks and they never made it onto our soundcloud page.

One of the biggest hurdles we faced as a band of international students was finding equipment. Berklee provides all the equipment that we need on campus but we could not expect every venue we planned to perform at to have all the

equipment we required. I initially looked into a local music rental shop in Valencia “Call and Play”. I went their office to receive a quote for the equipment we would need which totaled to 377.70€. This proved that we simply would not be able to afford renting equipment for every gig. I then spoke with a number of faculty members at Berklee who directed me to Gael Hedding a staff member here at Berklee. He was able to give me helpful advice on the best possible way to transport equipment and how that can impact who will be interested in hiring us. He also indicated that the school would allow us to borrow materials in order to perform at city venues. I worked with Gael to find the best options for the equipment needed and successfully completed Berklee’s Off Campus Equipment Request forms for all of our gigs. The equipment requested and used: Bass Amplifier, 2 Guitar amps, 2 foot switches, 2 guitar chords, 2 congas, bongos, drum kit. Another essential aspect of transporting equipment was Alejandra Menendez Gonzalez who offered to transport equipment and was invaluable to the success of our first two gigs in Valencia. For future gigs we used taxi services for our Valencia gigs and a car rental service for our gig in Barcelona.

Facebook was our main form of outreach for prospective clients and interested parties. Our Facebook page has our demo material, photos, videos and information regarding our upcoming performances and events. Currently our Facebook has 254 likes. Each member has administrative access to the page to help further increase social media impact and reach. An internal Facebook page was also created for the band to help with song selection, set lists and any other pertinent

information that needs to be circulated internally within the band. References for songs via YouTube and song suggestions are also posted and chosen by band vote and overall popularity with the public.

<https://www.facebook.com/Thea69s>

We also created a Twitter account to further extend our social media reach.

(<https://twitter.com/thea69s>)

Photo and video documentation of the band are critical to the distribution of our brand and generating a following. Aishwary Narolia, Gabby Banks, Jasmine Shepard, Aalap Deboor and Jane Kim, all business students, offered to take photos and videos of The A69s at gigs and on campus for our social media channels.

We have so far had seven successful public gigs where we have obtained photos and videos and distributed social media information to gain followers. Our 4<sup>th</sup> official gig and 1<sup>st</sup> paid performance at “El Club Loco” we worked with a local Valencian promoter, Alejandro Canuto, who created his promotion company “Livexmusic” (<https://www.facebook.com/livexmusicpromotion>) to gain greater visibility in the city of Valencia. The gig was featured in three magazines, “Las Provincias” (<http://www.lasprovincias.es/20140115/ocio/agenda/a69s-berklee-concierto-loclub-201401151222.html>) “Levante” (<http://musica.levante-emv.com/a69s-berklee-muestra-musculo-sobre-el-escenario>) and “Atomica” (<http://www.redaccionatomica.com/noticias/2883/the-a69s-berklee-muestra-musculo-sobre-el-escenario/>). For this gig we were given 200 tickets to distribute and were able to successfully have 88 tickets return to the gig.

Our second paid gig I was at Café Belgrado in Barcelona. For this gig we worked with the Latin Grammy award-winning percussionist Max Wright. This gig was one of our greatest accomplishments because we had no established fan base in the city, and the gig turned out to be extremely successful.

Our third paid gig again took place at Club Loco. Once again we worked with Alejandro Canuto for the promotion of the event. For this gig we had 57 guests arrive on our guest list and collected 3euro for each guest, which became an added revenue stream on top of our fixed rate. For each paid gig I was able to keep a portion of the funds generated as retained earnings. This will be used in the future for endeavors such as a band dinner, or to help cover unforeseen expenses. Currently we have generated 1,020.00€ and have 100.00€ in retained earnings.

Initially our budget was funded by the goodwill of those participating. The budget relies on members volunteering their time and collectively contributing to band transportation fees. I was able to avoid equipment expenses by borrowing from Berklee and rehearsal/studio fees because of Berklee facilities. With the help of Berklee students and faculty I avoided photographer/videographer costs, demo engineering fees and equipment transportation costs. With the use of free internet services such as Facebook, Soundcloud and Twitter I avoided fees associated with web design and website creation and marketing. I was also able to directly apply what I learned in my accounting class to the budgeting of this project.



For the final month of July we will have 3 more gigs here in Valencia: A 4<sup>th</sup> of July concert for the Palau de Les Artes as well as a performance at Radio City the same night, and a final show at the Berklee Graduation concert. When the U.S. Ambassador visited Berklee in November, I was able to speak with him and mention The A69s. He said he was hoping to integrate more music at the embassy and I attempted to further establish a relationship with the U.S. embassy and Berklee Valencia but my efforts proved unsuccessful.

The A69s have often been frustrating to manage but ultimately turned out to be an exciting and meaningful experience. The biggest challenges I faced was mediating internal band politics. It was extremely difficult to get each member of the band to achieve a unified commitment to the band and this was reflected in unproductive rehearsals, minor conflicts between members and members leaving the band. However the overall outcome of the project aligned with my expectations. We consistently performed throughout the year and built a fan base in our hometown of Valencia. Although we were unable to travel outside of Spain we were still able to perform in Barcelona, Spain's second largest city.

The A69s helped me to grow as a performer but more importantly as a manager. The band solidified in my mind the importance of communication in a group and the necessity to remain objective by outlining clear goals for members. It helped me to further understand the workings of live entertainment and the marketing and promotion of an event. It also helped me to better understand how

branding plays an important role in gaining a fan base as well as the essentials of budgeting a project.

This experience has helped my career by giving me valuable expertise in numerous aspects of the entertainment industry. I was able to gain a new perspective on live entertainment from the eyes of a performer and manager. In the future I will use these skills when I return to the U.S. and rejoin with my band back home. My U.S. based band is hoping to expand our performance network from the Greater Boston and New England area to include the New York City region. I will use all of the experience I have gained managing The A69s to help facilitate this expansion.

Unfortunately after the end of our final semester here the band will disperse to seven different countries all over the world. Thus, sadly The A69s will no longer be able to perform together. I am truly grateful for all of the help I received from my classmates and from Berklee College of Music, but most importantly I am grateful for the participation of the other members of the band. I know that given the time the band would be able to achieve even greater success and our accomplishments would surely reach new heights!