



STUDENT RESEARCH ARTICLE

Student Satisfaction with Music Therapy Education Programs in the United States of America

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Abstract

Music therapy education is unique in that it includes academic coursework, practicum, and internship. Due to the gap in the literature regarding students' satisfaction, this is an important topic that must be assessed to improve future music therapy education. The purpose of this exploratory survey study was to investigate the educational satisfaction of final year undergraduate music therapy students, music therapy students who have finished undergraduate coursework but not started internship or are in a master's equivalency music therapy program one or two semesters immediately before internship in the United States of America. The aspects of students' satisfaction studied include academic experiences (e.g., coursework, practicum, internship), interactions with faculty/supervisors, and available resources (e.g., information, financial aid, availability of instruments). Findings showed that students were satisfied with their university experience, especially with the diverse client experiences and clinical work-related coursework. The largest concerns were excessive non-music therapy related courses, limited practicum supervision, and overabundance of outside work which led to students feeling overwhelmed. As the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected the level of participation and respondents' responses, I will use this study as a baseline by which to compare the results of a future replication study. Educators may be able to use the findings when creating or making changes to educational policies, which may lead to higher students' satisfaction.

Key Words: Student Satisfaction, Music Therapy Education, Undergraduate Education, Graduate Education

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Introduction

The music therapy student experience differs from that of other professions. During the bachelor's degree or master's equivalency degree academic coursework, students are required to take courses to build musical foundations, clinical foundations, music therapy knowledge, general education knowledge, and take electives (American Music Therapy Association, n.d.-a). Students are also required to complete at least 180 clinical hours prior to internship and a minimum of 900 hours during the internship (American Music Therapy Association, n.d.-b). By the time of graduation, students should: (a) have an initial understanding of all theoretical models; (b) be musically skilled in piano, voice, guitar, and various instruments; (c) have knowledge and experience with improvisational approaches and incorporating existing musical repertoire, structured music activities, and receptive approaches; and (d) be knowledgeable of other subjects that will assist in clinical work, such as music analysis, voice notation, physiology, medicine, and others (Wigram et al., 1999). As a result, it is important to investigate students' satisfaction to improve the future of music therapy education and prepare students for later clinical practice or future advanced degrees. Existing studies on student satisfaction primarily focus on educators' (e.g., university faculty, supervisors) perceptions (Allen, 1996; Rushing et al., 2019), whereas few studies evaluate the student experience from their point of view. One study showed that students' satisfaction is directly correlated with career outcomes (Shenkenfelder et al., 2020).

In this exploratory survey study, I aimed to discover the educational satisfaction of music therapy students in the United States of America who: (a) were in their final year of undergraduate coursework, (b) finished undergraduate coursework but not

started internship, or (c) were in a master's equivalency program one or two semesters immediately before internship. I, myself, was a music therapy intern at the time of this study and was highly interested in understanding my peers' perceptions. I was excited at the prospect of learning about students' thoughts, especially due to the vast differences in music therapy education amongst various institutions.

An Academic Free-Market Conceptualization

In the modern age of higher education, institutions' economic prosperity is dependent on students' decisions to re-enroll each year. Johnson et al. (2016) recognized students are more likely to remain at their university if they are involved in academics, activities, and feel a sense of community

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), the average cost of tuition (in the 2017-2018 academic year) for a full-time undergraduate student to attend a four-year private university was \$43,139, and the average cost to attend a four-year public university was \$20,020, (in current dollars). As a result, universities are putting a higher focus on students' satisfaction and retention (Bowman, 2020; Johnson et al., 2016; Saunders, 2014; Shahsavar & Sudzina, 2017; Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2017). This point of view led to the use of a customer satisfaction model, which investigates and measures students' satisfaction (Bowman, 2020; Johnson et al., 2016; Saunders, 2014; Shahsavar & Sudzina, 2017; Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2017). In this model, students evaluate their institutional experiences and whether it meets their expectations (Johnson et al., 2016).

Academic free-market conceptualization parallels the economic system of the United States of America. In such a system, university education is seen as a product

purchased by a “customer” (i.e., student), who chooses between various “products” (i.e., colleges) to determine the one that best suits their needs, desires, and expectations (Saunders, 2014). Since students are seen as customers, “businesses” (i.e., universities) aim to meet their needs, encompassing both academic and non-academic experiences (Saunders, 2014). Students are also gaining a larger voice in the information learned and the method in which it is taught (Hines, 2017; Molesworth et al., 2011).

There are several limitations to the free-market conceptualization of higher education. First, many students choose their institution as they enter emerging adulthood, a time between adolescence and adulthood which is present in many industrialized countries. This is a time in which students have increased independence to explore work, their view of the world, and love during a time where there is no certain future (Arnett, 2000; Syed, 2016). As a result, studies show students’ demands of colleges and universities may be based on short-term goals, rather than their understanding of a quality education (Shahsavari & Sudzina, 2017). The prefrontal cortex is still developing during the emerging adulthood phase, reducing inhibitory responses and emotional regulation, which may lead to more impulsive behaviors (Pharo et al., 2011). Consequently, students’ choice of an institution may be based on factors other than coursework (e.g., peer pressure, academic clubs, facilities). Saunders (2014) indicated students do not have a comprehensive understanding of how universities may evolve while they are in attendance; therefore, students may be unaware of whether their needs will be met by the institution.

Despite the limitations of numerous researchers' free-market frameworks, the conceptualization thoroughly acknowledges students' importance in the educational process and the importance of their satisfaction on the economic health of the higher education system (Bowman, 2020; Hines, 2017; Johnson et al., 2016; Saunders, 2014; Shahsavar & Sudzina, 2017; Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2017). Due to the high costs of education, many students make large sacrifices to obtain their college education (e.g., take out loans, familial monetary contributions); therefore, institutions compete to attract prospective students (Wach et al., 2016). Music therapy coursework requires academic courses, practicum, and internship (American Music Therapy Association, n.d.-a; American Music Therapy Association, n.d.-b). Students may be unable to concurrently work while in school due to the high demands of the program. These high demands are magnified during the music therapy internship in which students work, on average, 40 hours per week. Due to this investment, institutions and educators should keep students' satisfaction in mind and, whenever possible, strive to incorporate students' thoughts into music therapy curricula. However, all changes to curricula must be approved by the American Music Therapy Association and accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music.

Music Therapy Students' Satisfaction

Most of the existing literature views the issue of students' satisfaction and student experience from an educator's (e.g., internship supervisor, university faculty member) perspective. Dvorak et al. (2017) created a theoretical model to determine the process of music therapy student development. In their study, the authors offered a six-step developmental progression and asserted that if higher educators understood this

developmental process, students' overall educational experience and careers could be improved.

One study investigated practicum experiences. Wheeler's (2002) phenomenological study examined the experience of four practicum students. This study provided insight into the positives that students saw in their practicum experiences and improvements that they anticipated would lead to more effective clinical practice.

There are existing studies identifying effective supervisory techniques for internship. In a study investigating gate-keeping practices in National Roster internship sites (as certified by the American Music Therapy Association) and academic programs, Hsiao (2014) reported that many National Roster internship directors provide support to their interns through increased supervision and frequent contact with their faculty advisor. The author also stated that a method of communication between a student's university and internship site is warranted during internship. For example, Drexel University utilizes a learning agreement, which is a contract between the intern, supervisor, and academic program. It identifies competencies students wish to improve on and professional goals (S. Horowitz et al., personal communication, June 6, 2020).

Rushing et al. (2019) surveyed numerous music therapy internship supervisors using an online survey to evaluate specific supervision approaches, influences on their supervision style, and their views on the required competencies. Evidence showed supervisors utilized their theoretical approach during instructional supervision, such as basing their feedback on the Person-Centered Approach and Systems Approach (S.

Horowitz et al., personal communication, June 6, 2020). Despite the value of these findings, none have been written from a student perspective.

Many conservatories around the world have conducted studies assessing the satisfaction of their music students. Serenko (2011) discussed how students' satisfaction is an especially salient topic to study using the American Satisfaction Model. They found students often select their university or choose to continue attendance based on information they read online, comparing the educational opportunities of various institutions, and listening to alumni's opinions of their university experience. In addition, Stewart et al. (2015) explored policies and "rewards" that motivated faculty and students in the educational environment. The researchers also examined how student participation led to students' future success using a researcher-made scale.

Conversely, there is extensive research in students' satisfaction from a student point of view in other professions. Studies, such as Sears et al. (2017), identified factors that are associated with the satisfaction of students. Ang and Dipolog-Ubanan (2019) found factors such as language difficulties, family responsibilities, racism, and others affect student satisfaction. Additional factors, such as universities' culture and the characteristics of students in attendance may also play a role in students' opinions regarding their university education (Ang & Dipolog-Ubanan, 2019). Studies identified factors leading to student dissatisfaction (e.g., academic performance, racism, public transportation) and determined policies and other actions that can rectify it (Ang et al., 2019; Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2017; Williams et al., 2018). Using data from the United Kingdom's National Student Survey (NSS), Burgess et al. (2018) studied students' satisfaction through six subscales: "teaching quality, assessment and

feedback, academic support, organization and management, learning resources, and personal development, plus [an] additional rating of overall satisfaction” (p. 4).

Researchers found that the largest factor determining students’ satisfaction was “‘Teaching Quality’ and ‘Organization & Management’” (Burgess et al., 2018, p. 10).

However, the biggest predictors of overall satisfaction were well conducted and smoothly executed courses. Jabery and Khamra (2013) investigated practicum in the field of special education and discovered frequent student concerns (e.g., connection between practicum and academic coursework) and provided suggestions to overcome these challenges.

The purpose of this exploratory survey study was to investigate the educational satisfaction of: (a) final year undergraduate music therapy students, (b) music therapy students having finished undergraduate coursework but not started internship, or (c) students who are in a master’s equivalency program one or two semesters immediately before internship in the United States of America. The research question was: What is the educational satisfaction of pre-internship music therapy majors in the United States of America? Aspects of students’ satisfaction studied included: academic experiences (e.g., coursework, practicum, internship), interactions with faculty/supervisors, and available resources (e.g., information, financial aid, availability of instruments).

Method

Participants

Respondents included music therapy students of any gender identity that were: (a) over the age of 20 years; (b) proficient in the English language; (c) in their final year of undergraduate coursework, having finished undergraduate coursework but not

started internship, or in a master's equivalency program one or two semesters immediately before internship; and (d) enrolled at a university approved by the American Music Therapy Association.

Measure of Students' Satisfaction

I created a 35-item Measure of Music Therapy Students' Satisfaction (see Appendix), adapting scales created by previous researchers (Ang et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 1983; Jabery & Khamra, 2013; Knight, 2008; Serenko, 2011; Worthington, 1984) and additional questions I created. Seven questions requested demographic information (e.g., United States of America region located in, types of music therapy degrees offered by the university, number of full-time music therapy faculty at the institution). The next 25 items required respondents to rate statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The use of a five-point Likert scale allowed respondents to make more distinctive selections regarding their respective experiences. Five questions pertained to overall experience (e.g., "Overall, I was satisfied with my university experience"). Eight questions pertained to practicum and experiences with supervisors (e.g., "My supervisor taught me specific therapeutic skills intended to facilitate my style"). Three questions investigated coursework (e.g., "Overall, the subjects I am studying fit together well"). Four questions pertained to interactions with faculty members (e.g., "Faculty members make a real effort to understand difficulties students may be having with their work"). Five questions evaluated available resources (e.g., "I have access to necessary musical instruments for practice"). The survey concluded with three open-ended questions required

respondents to fill in a box (e.g., “What do you believe can improve in undergraduate or graduate equivalency university music therapy curriculum?”).

Trustworthiness

As a student highly involved in the music therapy community, I had the opportunity to speak with numerous students across the United States of America over the last few years. Through these conversations, I learned that no two universities are alike as programs differ in their teaching styles and emphases. Thus, I sought to investigate students’ thoughts and opinions of the education they receive. Since my perspective of educational institutions is limited to my experience as a student, it may have impacted how I interpreted these data. There are many intricacies to which I am unaware.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the Measure of Students’ Satisfaction survey tool, I examined the literature in search of similar surveys investigating university students’ satisfaction. I then adapted the existing surveys to better assess the needs of music therapy students and music therapy coursework (Ang et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 1983; Jabery & Khamra, 2013; Knight, 2008; Serenko, 2011; Worthington, 1984). A faculty advisor and I reviewed and revised the survey tool prior to its use.

Procedure and Data Collection

After obtaining IRB approval (protocol number STUDY00012261), I created a Qualtrics version of the aforementioned Measure of Students’ Satisfaction. On August 27, 2020, the faculty advisor and I posted the approved dissemination materials (including the link to the research survey) to numerous social media platforms and pages (e.g., Music Therapy Leaders). The survey was also emailed to all music therapy

program directors in the United States of America to be distributed to their respective students. The survey was open for responses for six weeks, closing on the evening of October 8, 2020. After the survey closed, I offered compensation by conducting a drawing of a total of five gift cards (for those who chose to disclose their email addresses).

After the survey closed, I used IBM SPSS version 27 to calculate descriptive statistics for the quantitative questionnaire items. I calculated the percentages of each demographic questionnaire item, then the standard deviation and mean for all Likert-scale survey questions. I utilized content analysis to analyze the open response questions, by extracting the themes of each question and summarizing them.

Results

Of the 80 recorded survey responses, 51 respondents (63.75%) completed the entire survey. The remaining 29 responses (36.25%) had one or more unanswered questions. However, the calculation of each questionnaire item was treated as an individual descriptive statistic, without the use of inferential calculations. This allowed an analysis of all responses for each individual Likert-scale survey item, regardless of how many people answered it. This method of analysis was appropriate due to the exploratory nature of the study.

Demographics

Many respondents were final year undergraduate students (44%) who had not yet started internship. Participants were mostly from undergraduate only institutions (33.8%). Respondents indicated their program sizes ranged from 8 to 1,000 students. However, these sizes are likely inaccurate due to the ambiguous wording of the

question (“Please estimate how many students attend your program including all degrees”). They indicated that they attended universities with mainly two full-time music therapy faculty members (45%). Table 1 provides further demographic information.

Table 1

Respondent Demographics

Characteristic	n	%
Are you a:		
Pre-internship final year undergraduate student	33	44%
Pre-internship undergraduate student waiting to start internship	23	30.7%
Pre-internship graduate equivalency student	16	21.3%
None of the above	3	4%
Region		
Great Lakes Region	21	29.6%
Mid-Atlantic Region	11	15.5%
Midwestern Region	5	7%
New England Region	1	1.4%
Southeastern Region	19	26.8%
Southwestern Region	5	7%
Western Region	9	12.7%
Type of available degree program		
Undergraduate only	23	33.8%
Undergraduate and Graduate Equivalency certificate	10	14.7%
Graduate certificate only	1	1.5%
Undergraduate and Master’s	9	13.2%
Undergraduate, Graduate Equivalency, Master’s	20	29.4%
Undergraduate, Graduate Equivalency, Master’s, Doctoral	5	7.4%
Is the university:		
Urban	44	63.8%
Rural	25	36.2%
Is the university:		
Public	42	60.9%
Private	27	39.1%

Overall Satisfaction

Respondents expressed overall satisfaction with their university experience ($M = 3.9$) and indicated they were confident their professors cared about their academic success and well-being. Tables 2-6 provide the means and standard deviations for each Likert-scale questionnaire item.

Table 2
Overall Satisfaction

Questionnaire items	National (n=80)		Great Lakes Region (n=21)		Mid-Atlantic Region (n=11)		Midwestern Region (n=5)		Southeastern Region (n=19)		Southwestern Region (n=5)		New England Region (n=1)		Western Region (n=9)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Overall, I was satisfied with my university experience.	3.9	1.0	3.8	1.2	4.0	0.7	4.6	0.5	3.8	1.2	4.0	0.0	5.0	N/A	3.5	1.1
I feel prepared for internship, from my coursework and practicum.	3.6	1.0	3.4	1.1	4.0	0.9	3.8	0.4	3.8	1.1	3.8	0.5	4.0	N/A	2.8	0.9
Prior to enrollment, I had high expectations that my university's School of Music would meet my personal requirements.	4.3	0.9	4.2	1.1	4.4	0.7	4.6	0.5	4.2	1.0	4.0	0.8	4.0	N/A	4.4	0.7
Please rate the quality of your university's School of Music program given your tuition.	3.5	1.1	3.7	1.2	3.3	0.5	3.4	1.1	3.6	1.1	4.0	1.2	4.0	N/A	3.1	1.2
Thinking about the time when you entered your university's School of Music program, how likely is it that you would choose this program again?	3.9	1.2	3.7	1.2	3.8	1.0	3.8	1.3	3.8	1.3	4.0	1.2	5.0	N/A	3.7	1.1

Table 3
Practicum

Questionnaire items	National (n=80)		Great Lakes Region (n=21)		Mid- Atlantic Region (n=11)		Midwestern Region (n=5)		Southeastern Region (n=19)		Southwestern Region (n=5)		New England Region (n=1)		Western Region (n=9)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
My supervisor taught me specific therapeutic skills intended to facilitate my style.	4.0	1.0	3.7	1.0	4.6	0.5	4.6	0.5	3.9	1.2	4.0	0.8	5.0	N/A	4.0	0.9
I feel comfortable facilitating group discussions.	3.7	1.0	1.4	1.2	3.8	1.0	3.8	0.8	4.0	0.8	3.5	1.0	2.0	N/A	3.4	1.1
I feel comfortable planning a session.	4.2	1.0	4.2	1.1	4.4	0.5	4.6	0.5	4.2	0.7	4.3	1.0	3.0	N/A	3.88	1.6
I feel comfortable with diagnosing client needs.	3.6	1.0	3.3	1.2	3.7	0.9	3.6	0.9	3.8	0.8	4.0	1.4	4.0	N/A	3.6	1.2
I feel comfortable evaluating client progress.	3.9	1.0	3.6	1.3	4.1	0.4	4.2	0.4	4.1	0.9	4.0	0.8	4.00	N/A	4.00	1.1
I feel comfortable with using guitar in clinical sessions.	4.2	0.8	4.2	1.1	4.1	0.6	3.8	0.4	4.4	0.8	4.3	0.5	5.0	N/A	4.1	0.8
I feel comfortable with using piano in clinical sessions.	3.6	1.2	3.5	1.1	3.3	1.0	4.6	0.9	3.9	1.1	3.8	1.3	2.0	N/A	3.1	1.6
I feel comfortable with using percussion in clinical sessions.	3.8	0.9	3.7	1.2	4.0	0.8	3.8	0.4	3.9	0.6	3.5	1.3	3.0	N/A	3.9	1.0

Table 4
Coursework

Questionnaire items	National (n=80)		Great Lakes Region (n=21)		Mid- Atlantic Region (n=11)		Midwestern Region (n=5)		Southeastern Region (n=19)		Southwestern Region (n=5)		New England Region (n=1)		Western Region (n=9)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
I can see the connection between my courses and future career prospects.	4.2	1.0	4.1	1.0	4.4	0.5	4.8	0.4	3.9	1.3	4.3	0.5	5.0	N/A	4.5	0.5
Overall, the courses I am studying fit together well.	4.0	1.0	3.9	1.0	4.4	0.5	4.6	0.5	3.8	1.3	4.0	0.0	4.0	N/A	4.4	0.7
Information learned in class adequately prepares me for clinical practicum sessions.	4.0	1.0	3.8	1.1	4.1	0.6	4.4	0.5	3.8	1.1	4.3	0.5	5.0	N/A	4.0	1.1

Table 5*Interactions with faculty*

Questionnaire items	National (n=80)		Great Lakes Region (n=21)		Mid- Atlantic Region (n=11)		Midwestern Region (n=5)		Southeastern Region (n=19)		Southwestern Region (n=5)		New England Region (n=1)		Western Region (n=9)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Faculty members make a real effort to understand difficulties students may be having with their work.	4.1	1.1	4.0	1.3	4.0	1.1	4.8	0.4	3.9	0.9	3.7	1.5	5.0	N/A	4.4	1.1
Faculty members take an interest in my progress.	4.3	0.9	4.1	1.1	4.4	0.9	4.6	0.9	4.2	0.8	4.0	1.0	5.0	N/A	4.3	1.0
Faculty members are approachable.	4.2	0.9	4.0	1.1	4.5	0.8	4.8	0.4	4.0	1.0	4.0	1.7	5.0	N/A	4.1	0.8
I conducted research with faculty members.	2.5	1.0	2.7	1.4	2.1	1.1	2.0	1.7	2.2	1.2	3.0	2.0	1.0	N/A	3.5	1.2

Table 6
Available Resources

Questionnaire items	National (n=80)		Great Lakes Region (n=21)		Mid-Atlantic Region (n=11)		Midwestern Region (n=5)		Southeastern Region (n=19)		Southwestern Region (n=5)		New England Region (n=1)		Western Region (n=9)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
I am facing financial difficulties paying for college.	3.3	1.4	3.2	1.7	3.4	1.3	3.2	0.8	3.8	1.3	2.7	1.2	5.0	N/A	2.8	1.0
I am receiving adequate financial aid.	3.1	1.1	3.4	1.1	3.1	0.4	2.6	1.8	2.8	1.2	3.0	1.0	3.0	N/A	3.5	0.8
I have access to necessary musical instruments for practice.	4.1	0.9	4.0	1.1	3.9	1.1	4.2	1.3	3.4	0.6	4.3	0.6	5.0	N/A	4.0	1.1
I have access to necessary musical instruments for practicum.	4.2	0.9	4.2	1.0	4.3	0.7	4.6	0.5	4.2	0.7	3.7	1.5	4.0	N/A	4.1	1.1
I have been given adequate information regarding music therapy internships (i.e. university affiliated internships and national roster internships)	3.3	1.4	3.2	1.7	3.4	1.3	3.2	0.8	3.8	1.3	2.7	1.2	5.0	N/A	2.9	1.0

Students gave low ratings regarding opportunities to conduct research with faculty members ($M = 2.5$), adequate amount of financial aid received ($M = 3.1$), and access to sufficient information about music therapy internships ($M = 3.3$).

Open Responses

To analyze the qualitative data, I identified common themes and topics expressed by respondents in the three open response questions:

1. "What did you enjoy most about your coursework and practicum?"
2. "What did you enjoy least about your coursework and practicum?"
3. "What do you believe can improve most in undergraduate and graduate equivalency university music therapy curriculum?"

A summary of all themes that emerged are shown in Table 7.

What Students Most Enjoyed

I identified the aspects of music therapy education that students most enjoyed by analyzing responses to the survey question, "What did you enjoy most about your coursework and practicum?" 53 respondents (66.3%) provided a written response to this question. The most common theme was the enjoyment of diverse client experiences ($n = 13$) in practicum. One respondent shared that, "Getting to experience all different populations was helpful in choosing internship sites to apply for and having experience in multiple facilities." Equally, respondents identified that they enjoyed coursework that was related to practicum experiences ($n = 13$). One individual stated that "coursework is often rich in content and can connect to practicum experiences."

Many respondents ($n = 13$) believed the most effective teaching practice they experienced was the opportunity to put information learned in the classroom into clinical practice. A student shared that, throughout her college years, "I... enjoyed making

connections between the coursework and practicum experiences- learning something in class and having it click in my session the next week or going to class and having a question answered and having a problem suddenly make sense.”

What Students Enjoyed Least

I identified student concerns by analyzing responses to the survey question, “What did you enjoy least about your coursework and practicum?” 53 respondents (66.3%) provided a written response to this question. The most common complaint students identified was the requirement of courses unrelated to music therapy ($n = 6$). Students especially expressed concern over the abundance of music classes (e.g., music history) that seemed unrelated to clinical practice. As one individual said, “I wish there were more classes specifically tailored to the music therapy degree. Many classes that I took seemed like they should have been helpful to my major but were not actually beneficial to me.”

Limited practicum supervision was also a concern for students ($n = 6$). Some respondents expressed frustration about the sudden shift to telehealth, due to the COVID-19 pandemic ($n = 3$). One respondent said, “With the move to telehealth, it feels like we’ve been thrown right into the fire.” Another shared that, “We have not been taught how to do this, but rather thrown into the fray without guidance.” A few students also identified that their professors were largely overworked ($n = 3$), which led to a decrease in the quality of education. One student shared, “The professors have too much to do, so they take several months to give feedback from course work and level exams.”

Table 7
Open Response Questionnaire Item Themes

Question	Themes	n	
“What did you enjoy most about your coursework and practicum?”	Enjoyment of diverse client experiences	13	
	Enjoyed coursework that was related to practicum experiences	13	
	Enjoyment working with clients	11	
	Professors’ genuine concern and caring for students	8	
	Supervision	7	
	Working with colleagues	4	
	Feeling prepared for practicum as students first take practicum courses, then co-lead with other students, then lead alone	3	
	Work with practicing music therapists	2	
	“What did you enjoy least about your coursework and practicum?”	Requirement of courses that were unrelated to music therapy	6
		Limited practicum supervision	6
Excessive outside work		5	
Confusion regarding professors’ expectations		4	
Frustration about the sudden shift to telehealth, due to the COVID-19 pandemic		3	
Professors were largely overworked, which led to a decrease in the quality of education		3	
Large professor turnover rate		3	
Lack of classes tackling important information (e.g., neuroscience, research)		2	
No assistive technology education		2	
Uncomfortable speaking to faculty		2	
“What do you believe can improve in undergraduate or graduate equivalency university music therapy curriculum?”	Little client diversity	2	
	Lack of preparation for finding internships	2	
	Lack of observations before starting to lead sessions	1	
	More classes specific to music therapy	8	
	Desire for more education about cultural awareness, sensitivity, and diversity	5	
	Not overworking students	5	
	Necessity for more faculty	5	
	Desire for internship preparation	5	
	Additional client population variety	3	
	More time to learn	4	
More practicum experiences	4		
Unhealthy culture of the music therapy program	3		
Necessity of additional support from faculty	3		
Decrease number of required unrelated courses	3		
More guitar education	3		
More training about assessment at the beginning and throughout treatment	3		
Additional education about goal and objective writing	2		

What Students Feel Can Improve Music Therapy Education

To identify students' thoughts on possible educational improvements, I analyzed responses to the survey question, "What do you believe can improve in undergraduate or graduate equivalency university music therapy curriculum?" 57 respondents provided a written response (71.3%).

The most common response was advocacy for more classes specific to music therapy ($n = 8$). As one student pointed out, there should be "more of a focus on music therapy and psychology classes than prerequisite/gen ed music courses that are not applicable to the field." Multiple students suggested that lengthening music therapy training may allow for the use of a holistic education model, looking at both the information students learn and information about students as individuals.

Discussion

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the educational satisfaction of final year music therapy students in the United States of America. I, myself, was a music therapy intern at the time of this study and was highly interested in understanding students' thoughts, especially due to the vast differences in music therapy education amongst different institutions. To my knowledge, there are no previous studies authored from a student's perspective.

It is important for universities to satisfy students' needs and interests in this hard-pressed higher education "market" (Saunders, 2014). As a result, knowledge of students' satisfaction is both essential for students' educational experience and universities' success in general. It is especially important to investigate music therapy students' satisfaction due to the unique properties of music therapy education.

Overall Satisfaction

In all, respondents expressed significant satisfaction with their music therapy educational experience ($M = 3.89$; $SD = 2.2$). However, students related the quality of their education to lower tuition costs ($M = 3.53$; $SD = 2.2$). Three of the lowest scoring items in the survey included: facing financial difficulties paying for college, receiving adequate financial aid, being provided adequate information about internships. These responses reflect students' thoughts that, although their university education was valuable, the financial hardship did not match the gains. The first two items must be tackled at the university level and are largely out of the control of music therapy programs. The creation of new scholarships, both university-wide program specific, is fully dependent upon the budget allotted to the corresponding departments of colleges and universities. Rectifying students' concerns regarding national roster and university affiliated internships should happen school, regional, and/or national level. For example, it may be possible to provide brief workshops or lectures about effective ways to navigate the internship process. These workshops could be facilitated at the school-level by Board-Certified Music Therapist (MT-BC) guest speakers, Teaching Assistants who are MT-BCs, and music therapy faculty members. Depending on the available resources, it would be effective to also offer these workshops at regional and national conferences.

In addition, respondents indicated that very few had conducted research with faculty members ($M = 3.52$; $SD = 2.2$). Research experience with faculty members is often reserved for those studying at the master's or doctoral level, as those individuals have a strong foundational understanding of research and are in the process of

improving it. Conversely, those in undergraduate or master's equivalency coursework are in the process of gaining a basic understanding of research. Although students did not indicate a desire for research opportunities, it may be helpful to make the opportunity available for qualified individuals who may be interested but feel uncomfortable requesting the opportunity from their professor.

Open Response Questions

Notable findings included student concerns in the open response sections of the survey. For example, a student voiced concerns about their university's practicum placement system by writing that "clinical placements sometimes took a while and wouldn't start until halfway through [the] semester." Some students also expressed discomfort regarding speaking with faculty members. However, many students' suggestions directly addressed identified problems. For example, increasing the number of music therapy faculty members at their respective institutions may resolve undue stress upon existing faculty members, and faculty may have more time to dedicate toward assisting individual students in their needs, such as in the internship preparation and planning process.

Few students mentioned current educational COVID-19 experiences. However, those who did note COVID-19 felt frustrated with their university's solutions to emerging problems. For example, one student stated that, "Right now with the COVID19 restrictions, I feel that I am not honing the skills that I need to due to the limitations of zoom sessions. Not that this is avoidable." Another student shared that due to COVID-19, their "second practicum was switched to mock sessions with a paid actor. While I was able to practice building rapport, I felt I was lacking the actual experience of

working with a real client and addressing their genuine needs.” Students also pointed out the lack of supervision received when they switched from in-person sessions to recorded, telehealth, or mock sessions.

Due to rising costs of higher education in the United States of America, power is slowly shifting from universities to students, and students are gaining a larger voice in courses and teaching methods (Molesworth et al., 2011). It is for this reason that students’ satisfaction should be frequently assessed to offer universities a student perspective about effective resources and courses, for academic, and clinical, success. The responses to the survey provided a holistic view as to students’ comfort with faculty members, practicum supervisors, an overall perspective of the university’s music therapy program, and more; hence, this information can be used to determine how best to nurture students and be effective mentors in their journey as a budding music therapist. However, during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is difficult to assess and tailor music therapy education due to the limitations of the current environment. Music therapy faculty members have gone to great lengths to provide a thorough and effective education to those currently completing coursework.

Limitations

As this exploratory study used a survey design, there was a risk of selection bias, since respondents consisted of a convenience sample. Respondents may have aimed to win one of the five Amazon.com gift cards. In addition, since the sample was relatively small (i.e., 80 responses), there may be low external validity, especially for the New England Region, which only had one respondent.

Extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., illness, increased time spent on electronic devices) may have also affected the level of participation and respondents' responses. To mitigate possible problems caused by these extenuating circumstances, I will replicate this study after the pandemic has passed. Conducting a comparative study, with the results of this study as a baseline, will help correct the limitations of the current study.

Another limitation is that factors unique to each program were neither measured nor considered. Future studies should take into consideration confounding variables which may affect students' satisfaction. For example, universities' culture and student characteristics often play a large role in student satisfaction. Ang and Dipolog-Ubanan (2019) demonstrated that factors such as language difficulties, family responsibilities, racism, among others affect students' thoughts regarding their university education.

Lastly, although knowing students' thoughts and opinions may be helpful during music therapy curricula planning, for a music therapy university program to exist, the curricula must be approved by the American Music Therapy Association (American Music Therapy Association, n.d.-b) and accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music (National Association of Schools of Music, n.d.). As a result, there may be limitations as to the extent students can influence changes in curricula and programs.

Conclusion

Since the rise of the modern system of higher education, many fields have studied student satisfaction to attract prospective students and retain those in attendance. However, previous researchers in the field of music therapy have not

studied this phenomenon. It was important to conduct an exploratory study of student satisfaction specifically targeting music therapy students, as the educational process is different from many other fields. The results of the research instrument may have been impacted by the extenuating circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic since much of the higher-education system had to be revamped to provide students with an effective education. In this study, students across the United States of America seemed to be largely satisfied with their university education, but most did not feel the quality of their education matched tuition costs. As some students noted, they felt there were excessive number of required general education courses versus offered music therapy courses. Educators may be able to consider the findings of this study when evaluating their university music therapy educational policies, which may lead to higher student satisfaction.

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Appendix A

Survey: Reflection on Music Therapy Higher Education Experiences

In your responses, please reflect on your music therapy higher education experiences.

1. Are you a:
 - a. Pre-internship final year undergraduate student
 - b. Pre-internship undergraduate student waiting to start internship
 - c. Pre-internship graduate equivalency student
 - d. None of the above
2. What region of the USA are you a part of?
 - a. Great Lakes Region (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin)
 - b. Mid-Atlantic Region (Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia)
 - c. Midwestern Region (Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming)
 - d. New England Region (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont)
 - e. Southeastern Region (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands)
 - f. Southwestern Region (New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas)
 - g. Western Region (Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Guam, American Samoa, Mariana Islands)
3. Please choose the type of music therapy degrees/programs available in the university you are attending.
 - a. Undergraduate only
 - b. Undergraduate and Graduate Equivalency certificate
 - c. Graduate certificate only
 - d. Undergraduate and Master's degree
 - e. Undergraduate, Graduate Equivalency, and Master's degree
 - f. Undergraduate, Graduate Equivalency, Master's degree, and Doctoral degree
4. Please estimate how many students attend your program (including all degrees). _____
5. How many full-time music therapy faculty members teach in your program? _____

6. Is your university considered an urban or rural university?
 - a. Urban
 - b. Rural
7. Is your university public or private?
 - a. Public
 - b. Private

Rate the following items: 1 (strongly disagree)- 2 (slightly disagree)- 3 (neutral)- 4 (slightly agree)- 5 (strongly agree)

1. Overall, I was satisfied with my university experience. ____
2. I feel prepared for internship, from my coursework and practicum. ____
3. Prior to enrollment, I had high expectations that my university's School of Music would meet my personal requirements. _____
4. Please rate the quality of your university's School of Music program given your tuition. _____
5. Thinking about the time when you entered your university's School of Music program, how likely is it that you would choose this program again?

Practicum

1. My supervisor taught me specific therapeutic skills intended to facilitate my style.____
2. I feel comfortable facilitating group discussions. _____
3. I feel comfortable planning a session. _____
4. I feel comfortable with diagnosing client needs. _____
5. I feel comfortable evaluating client progress. _____
6. I feel comfortable with using guitar in clinical sessions. _____
7. I feel comfortable with using piano in clinical sessions. _____
8. I feel comfortable with using percussion in clinical sessions. _____

Coursework

1. I can see the connection between my subjects and future career prospects. ____
2. Overall, the subjects I am studying fit together well. ____
3. Information learned in class adequately prepares me for clinical practicum sessions. _____

Rate the following items: 1 (strongly agree)- 2 (slightly agree)- 3 (neutral)- 4 (slightly disagree)- 5 (strongly disagree)

Interactions with Faculty

1. Faculty members make a real effort to understand difficulties students may be having with their work. ____
2. Faculty members take an interest in my progress. ____
3. Faculty members are approachable. ____
4. I conducted research with faculty members. ____

Available Resources (information, financial aid, instruments)

1. I am facing financial difficulties paying for college. ____
2. I am receiving adequate financial aid. ____
3. I have access to necessary musical instruments for practice. ____
4. I have access to necessary musical instruments for practicum. ____
5. I have been given adequate information regarding music therapy internships (i.e. university affiliated internships and national roster internships). ____

This section asks you to type short responses.

1. What did you enjoy *most* about your coursework and practicum?
2. What did you enjoy *least* about your coursework and practicum?
3. What do you believe can improve in undergraduate or graduate equivalency university music therapy curriculum?

DIFFERENT SURVEY

Please write your email address if you are interested in entering the drawing for one of five \$20 Amazon.com gift cards. _____