

A survey of burnout among college music majors: a replication

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ABSTRACT: The principal purpose of the current study was to replicate a previous study to compare perceived burnout levels of college music students by year in school, major, and primary instrument. The secondary purpose was to examine relationships among perceived burnout, academic, and personal variables. Respondents were 229 majors at a public university school of music. Results revealed that string and voice majors reported higher levels of burnout than brass or woodwind majors. Non-music education majors reported higher levels of burnout than music education majors, and freshmen, sophomores, and seniors reported higher levels of burnout than juniors and graduate students. There were correlations between burnout, sleep, exercise and relaxation, but not between burnout, hours of academic credit, classes, lessons, ensembles, homework, practising or non-school work. Conclusions offer recommendations to help college music majors reduce burnout and make the most of their academic and personal lives.

KEYWORDS: Stress, students, mental health

Mental health care professionals have recently stated that challenges facing college students may include anxiety and stress, depression, substance abuse, relationship management, and career issues (Raeburn et al., 2004). Support for this notion was provided by Kitrow (2003), who found evidence of recent increases in the number of students with severe psychological problems and in the demand for school counselling services.

Ross, Niebling, and Heckert (1999) surveyed 100 university students to determine perceived sources of stress and found that the top five influences reported were changes in

sleeping habits, vacations and breaks, changes in eating habits, increased academic workload, and new responsibilities. Kelly (2003) surveyed 300 university students to examine relationships between sleep habits and sources of stress and found that worry about socializing was most related to loss of sleep. These results are particularly challenging when considering that, in a study of 191 undergraduate college students, Buboltz, Brown, and Soper (2001) found that 89 percent of respondents reported some type of sleep problem.

Edwards, Hershberger, Russell, and Market (2001) studied the influence of social interactions on the physical and mental health of 206 university students. Based on student responses to measures of perceived stress, social interaction, as well as mental and physical health, the researchers found that negative social interaction was the most significant predictor of physical ailments. Similarly, Jacobs and Dodd (2003) studied relationships among burnout, social support, personality, and workload of 149 psychology students from a mid-sized, private university. Based on student responses to a 30-minute survey, the researchers found that high levels of burnout were related to negative personality (lack of self-esteem) and perceived workload, while low levels of burnout were related to positive personality (healthy self-esteem), peer support, and participation in extracurricular activities.

Other scholars have suggested that, in addition to these typical college factors, music majors may face unique sources of stress including performance anxiety, perfectionism, career concerns, and lack of respect (e.g., Bernhard, 2005; Raeburn et al., 2004). Hamann and Daugherty (1985) surveyed burnout among music majors and found that “university music students do report significant varying levels of burnout” (p. 6). The principal purpose of the current study was to replicate a previous study (Bernhard, 2007) to compare perceived burnout levels (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment) of college music students by year in school (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate), music major (music education or non-music education), and primary instrument (piano, voice, brass, woodwind, string, or percussion). The secondary purpose, based on the aforementioned review of literature reported in this paper, was to examine relationships among perceived burnout, academic, and personal variables (credit load and hours per week of classes, lessons, ensembles, homework, practising, exercise, sleep, work, and relaxation). Burnout was measured using Gold, Bachelor, and Michael’s (1989) *College Student Survey (CSS)*, while academic and personal variables were measured using a researcher-constructed adaptation of Hamann and Daugherty’s (1985) *Demographic Data Form (DDF)*.

Survey Instruments

According to Vandenberghe and Huberman (1999), burnout is “a crisis of overworked and disillusioned human service workers” (p. 1). This syndrome has been extended to members of the teaching profession and has been categorized into three distinct and measurable components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1986). Gold, Bachelor, and Michael (1989) developed and tested a college student version of Maslach, Jackson, and Schwab’s instrument and titled it the *College Student Survey (CSS)*. The CSS is identical to the original burnout measure except that the term “work” was replaced with “school”, “students” was replaced with

“friends and classmates”, and “job” was replaced with “college” (see Appendix A). Items 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 13, 14, 16, and 20 are indicators of emotional exhaustion (a fatigued feeling characterized by dulled emotional and physical response), resulting in scores ranging from 0 - 54. Items 5, 10, 11, 15, and 22 are indicators of depersonalization (a lack of positive feelings toward other humans), resulting in scores ranging from 0 - 30. Items 4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, and 21 are indicators of low personal accomplishment (a feeling of disappointment due to perceived lack of productivity), resulting in scores ranging from 0 - 48. High scores for emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, as well as low scores for personal accomplishment are considered indicators of burnout. Scores representing emotional exhaustion are: “high” (27 or above), “moderate” (17 - 26), and “low” (0 - 16). Scores representing depersonalization are: “high” (14 or above), “moderate” (9 - 13), and “low” (0 - 8). Scores representing personal accomplishment are: “high” (37 or above), “moderate” (31 - 36), and “low” (0 - 30) (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Based on a study of 147 elementary education majors, Gold et al., (1989) found the *CSS* to be a reliable measure of all three components of burnout ($r = .89, .76, \text{ and } .73$, respectively). Permission was consequently obtained from Dr. Gold to use the *CSS* as a measure of burnout in the current study.

The *Demographic Data Form (DDF)* was developed by Hamann and Daugherty (1985) for a study of student burnout. Permission was obtained from Dr. Hamann to use the *DDF* to survey variables of interest in the current study (credit load and hours per week of classes, lessons, ensembles, homework, practising, exercise, sleep, work, and relaxation) (see Appendix B).

METHOD

The *CSS* and *DDF* were distributed to student mailboxes of 603 majors at a public university school of music in New York State. One week following the initial distribution 181 surveys remained unopened in student mailboxes. These potential respondents were excluded from further use, leaving a final usable subject number of 422. Of these 422 respondents, 153 had returned completed surveys within one week. A follow-up letter was distributed and another 56 completed surveys were returned, providing a total of 209 responses (49.53% of 422). In order to address the concern that non-respondents’ answers might differ from those of respondents, a further 20 non-respondents were selected randomly, contacted and asked to complete the *CSS* and *DDF*. The responses of these 20 respondents did not differ significantly from the other respondents in any question category ($p > .05$), so these answers were combined with the respondents’ data ($N = 229, 54.27\%$ of 422).

RESULTS

Descriptive data were computed for all *CSS* responses, including means and standard deviations for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment, by levels of year in school, major, and primary instrument (see Tables 1, 2, & 3).

Table 1: Means and standard deviations for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment by year in school*

	N	EE Mean/SD	DEP Mean/SD	PA Mean/SD
Freshman	28 31	34.18 / 9.25 33.26 / 7.57	8.29 / 5.75 10.00 / 5.45	33.84 / 7.62 31.90 / 8.02
Sophomore	50 55	33.85 / 9.63 33.43 / 9.93	9.58 / 6.23 9.64 / 8.33	31.16 / 6.58 31.80 / 7.62
Junior	52 58	30.68 / 11.19 29.61 / 9.73	8.38 / 7.55 8.43 / 6.23	33.80 / 6.87 34.16 / 7.53
Senior	53 63	32.25 / 10.21 33.57 / 9.37	11.21 / 6.41 11.76 / 6.74	33.46 / 7.93 32.53 / 7.82
Graduate	20 17	25.25 / 11.07 25.18 / 10.92	6.80 / 6.42 5.53 / 5.93	37.20 / 4.37 37.29 / 4.62
Total	203 229	31.82 / 10.51 31.86 / 9.75	9.25 / 6.68 9.72 / 6.99	33.40 / 7.13 33.03 / 7.63

*Original study data in regular font
Current study data in bold font

Table 2: Means and standard deviations for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment by major*

	N	EE Mean/SD	DEP Mean/SD	PA Mean/SD
Music education	124 158	31.90 / 10.35 30.87 / 9.45	9.06 / 6.54 9.34 / 6.90	33.31 / 7.29 33.36 / 7.58
Non-music education	79 71	31.68 / 10.81 34.06 / 10.11	9.53 / 6.94 10.55 / 7.17	33.54 / 6.62 32.31 / 7.74
Total	203 229	31.82 / 10.51 31.86 / 9.75	9.25 / 6.68 9.72 / 6.99	33.40 / 7.13 33.03 / 7.63

*Original study data in regular font
Current study data in bold font

According to Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter’s (1996) categorizations, means for all respondents were “High” for emotional exhaustion (31.86), “Moderate” for depersonalization (9.72), and “Moderate” for personal accomplishment (33.03). Descriptive data were also calculated for *DDF* variables, including means and standard deviations for combined subject responses (Table 4). All results were compared with those from the original study.

Table 3: Means and standard deviations for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment by primary instrument*

	N	EE Mean/SD	DEP Mean/SD	PA Mean/SD
Piano	12	33.25 / 8.89	9.91 / 5.73	33.92 / 8.06
	21	31.05 / 11.14	8.62 / 6.30	30.48 / 8.39
Voice	56	31.55 / 9.99	9.20 / 6.46	34.63 / 5.25
	63	34.21 / 9.48	10.97 / 6.71	31.73 / 8.09
Brass	41	29.56 / 10.97	9.20 / 6.82	34.39 / 7.25
	43	29.60 / 8.77	8.02 / 6.76	35.51 / 7.03
Woodwind	45	31.66 / 11.68	8.00 / 7.00	32.87 / 8.12
	44	29.69 / 9.88	7.27 / 6.29	34.50 / 6.87
String	36	32.54 / 10.15	9.24 / 6.69	32.11 / 7.95
	45	31.53 / 10.21	12.04 / 7.67	31.53 / 7.22
Percussion	13	37.31 / 8.51	13.38 / 6.39	29.92 / 6.33
	13	37.77 / 5.51	11.23 / 7.13	35.54 / 7.11
Total	203	31.82 / 10.51	9.25 / 6.68	33.40 / 7.13
	229	31.86 / 9.75	9.72 / 6.99	33.13 / 7.63

*Original study data in regular font

Current study data in bold font

Comparisons of perceived burnout levels by year in school, major, and primary instrument were determined using a three-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), with year, major, and instrument serving as the independent variables and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment serving as the dependent variables. Results of the MANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences by year in school, major, or interactions between year and major, and major and primary instrument ($p > .05$), but did reveal a statistically significant effect of primary instrument ($F(15, 492) = 2.25, p < .01$), as well as interactions between year and primary instrument ($F(54, 531) = 2.42, p < .01$), and year, major, and primary instrument ($F(33, 525) = 1.56, p < .05$). Post-analysis univariate ANOVAs revealed significant differences in depersonalization by primary instrument ($F(5, 180) = 2.89, p < .05$). Bonferroni post-hoc tests revealed that string and voice majors reported significantly higher levels of depersonalization than woodwind majors, and that string majors also reported significantly higher levels of depersonalization than brass majors (both $p < .05$). Further ANOVA analysis related to initial interactions revealed that non-music education majors reported higher levels of depersonalization than music education majors and that significant differences in burnout were reported by year in school ($F(11, 180) = 2.79, p < .01$). Bonferroni post-hoc tests revealed that freshmen, sophomores, and seniors reported significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion than graduate students, that seniors reported significantly higher levels of depersonalization than juniors or graduate students, and that sophomores reported significantly lower levels of personal accomplishment than graduate students (all $p < .05$).

Table 4*: Means and standard deviations for demographic data form variables

	Mean	SD
Number of credits per semester	15.01 16.05	3.36 3.57
Hours of classes per week	16.24 15.69	5.76 5.25
Hours of lessons per week	1.18 1.26	.69 .77
Hours of ensembles per week	7.01 6.78	4.20 3.98
Hours of homework per week	10.69 10.58	6.45 6.79
Hours of practice each week	11.43 12.76	7.40 7.53
Hours of exercise per week	3.14 2.76	2.79 2.61
Hours of sleep per week	45.65 43.50	7.96 8.12
Hours of work per week	6.54 4.81	10.21 8.49
Hours of relaxation per week	12.97 13.41	7.99 8.13

*Original study data in regular font

Current study data in bold font

Relationships between perceived burnout, academic, and personal variables were determined using Pearson product-moment correlation analyses, with *CSS* and *DDF* data serving as measures of the respective variables. Results of the correlation analyses revealed a moderate positive relationship ($p < .05$) between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization ($r = .54$). Weaker positive relationships (all $p < .05$) were observed between personal accomplishment and exercise ($r = .16$) and between personal accomplishment and hours of sleep ($r = .15$). Moderate to weak negative relationships (all $p < .05$) were observed between emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment ($r = -.34$), between emotional exhaustion and hours of sleep ($r = -.31$), between depersonalization and personal accomplishment ($r = -.26$), between emotional exhaustion and hours of relaxation ($r = -.20$), between depersonalization and hours of sleep ($r = -.18$), between depersonalization and hours of relaxation ($r = -.16$), and between emotional exhaustion and hours of exercise ($r = -.16$). No statistically significant relationships ($p > .05$) were observed between burnout, hours of academic credit, classes, lessons, ensembles, homework, practising, or extra-curricular work.

DISCUSSION

Descriptive data from the current study were comparable to those of the original study. Collectively, respondents still averaged “High” levels of emotional exhaustion, “Moderate” levels of depersonalization, and “Moderate” levels of personal accomplishment. While efforts have been made to advise and educate students about combating burnout – and while moderate levels of depersonalization and personal accomplishment are better than high and low levels, respectively – further and more unified efforts appear necessary. Faculty members might receive training in identifying signs of music major burnout and in knowing campus and professional resources for assistance. This could be particularly important for faculty members who teach non-music education courses (i.e., performance, composition, sound recording, and music business) since their students reported even higher levels of burnout than music education majors.

Furthermore, while direct comparisons should be made with caution, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization means from the current study were substantially higher than those reported by respondents in Gold, Bachelor, and Michael’s (1989) initial study of the CSS (19.13 and 3.08 respectively). Further research seems warranted to determine whether differences in burnout levels exist among different college majors (e.g., music, psychology, education, math, etc.). Further study at the local level – such as qualitative inquiry – also seems warranted to determine possible causes of the “High” emotional exhaustion levels reported by current respondents.

While statistically significant differences were not observed between graduate and undergraduate students, it is interesting to note that graduate students continued to average lower levels of burnout. As in the original study, this may be due to greater program and elective flexibility in comparison to undergraduate curricula that tend to be more tightly structured by government and accreditation agencies.

The differences in reported depersonalization by primary instrument are found for the first time in this study. While further research is needed to draw substantial conclusions, there may be factors related to the personality of students studying instruments such as voice or string that contribute to these results. This may support previous research by Edwards, Hershberger, Russell, and Market (2001), and Jacobs and Dodd (2003), who found that negative social interaction and personality were significant predictors of burnout among college students.

The results of the correlation analyses were similar to the original study with two exceptions: hours of exercise were weakly related to perceived burnout and hours of ensemble participation had no relationship with perceived burnout. The relationships between exercise, sleep, and relaxation support the research of Buboltz, Brown, and Soper (2001), Kelly (2003), as well as Ross, Niebling, and Heckert (1999), and suggest that the more students can attend to these important activities, the less likely they are to report symptoms of burnout. Specific courses within the curriculum and/or class sessions within existing courses should be reserved for presentations and discussions related to balanced lifestyles. This may be particularly important during freshman, sophomore, and senior years, when students in the current study tended to report higher levels of burnout.

The lack of correlation between burnout and ensemble participation is particularly interesting because hours of ensemble participation had been quite strongly linked to per-

ceived student burnout in the original study. During the period between studies, a decision was made to give academic credit for ensemble participation. While correlation does not imply causation, it is possible that students now perceive less burnout because their efforts receive credit, and they have the possibility of raising their grade point average. In addition to the other curricular areas that were not significantly correlated with burnout (i.e., academic credit, classes, lessons, homework, practising, and extra-curricular work), this finding supports Jacobs and Dodd's (2003) notion that *perceived* academic workload is related to burnout, but that *actual* academic workload is not. Continued efforts should be made to offer credit where credit is due and to help students understand the importance of each class and musical experience in the cumulative process of attaining long-term goals.

SUMMARY

Collectively, results from the current study revealed that string and voice majors reported higher levels of depersonalization than brass or woodwind majors. Furthermore, non-music education majors reported higher levels of burnout than music education majors, and freshmen, sophomores, and seniors reported higher levels of burnout than juniors and graduate students. Correlations between perceived burnout, academic, and personal variables revealed relationships among burnout, sleep, exercise, and relaxation, but not among burnout, hours of academic credit, classes, lessons, ensembles, homework, practising, or extra-curricular work.

Although these results should be interpreted with caution (data were self-reported by 229 volunteer college majors from a single, public university school of music), the findings may be useful to those responsible for revising local curricula, as well as a catalyst for future research and action within the profession, to help college music majors reduce burnout and make the most of their academic and personal lives.

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Article

Appendix A

College Student Survey (CSS)

How often:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day

How Often 0 – 6 Statements:

1. _____ I feel emotionally drained from school.
 2. _____ I feel used up at the end of the school day.
 3. _____ I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day of school.
 4. _____ I can easily understand how my friends and classmates feel about things.
 5. _____ I feel I treat some friends and classmates as if they were impersonal objects.
 6. _____ Working with people all day is really a strain for me.
 7. _____ I deal very effectively with the problems of my friends and classmates.
 8. _____ I feel burned out from school.
 9. _____ I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work at school.
 10. _____ I've become more callous toward people since I started college.
 11. _____ I worry that school is hardening me emotionally.
 12. _____ I feel very energetic.
 13. _____ I feel frustrated by school.
 14. _____ I feel I'm working too hard at school.
 15. _____ I don't really care what happens to some friends and classmates.
 16. _____ Working with people puts too much stress on me.
 17. _____ I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my friends and classmates.
 18. _____ I feel exhilarated after working closely with my friends and classmates.
 19. _____ I have accomplished many worthwhile things in college.
 20. _____ I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.
 21. _____ At school, I deal with emotional problems very calmly.
 22. _____ I feel friends and classmates blame me for some of their problems.
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Article

Appendix B

Demographic Data Form (DDF)

1. Year in school (e.g., freshman, sophomore, etc.) _____
 2. Major (e.g., performance, music education, etc.) _____
 3. Primary instrument (e.g., voice, flute, etc.) _____
 4. Number of official credit hours this semester _____
 5. Average number of hours in classes per week (do not include lessons or ensembles) _____
 6. Average number of hours in lessons per week _____
 7. Average number of hours in ensembles per week _____
 8. Average number of hours of homework per week _____
 9. Average number of hours practising per week _____
 10. Average number of hours of exercise per week _____
 11. Average number of hours of sleep per week _____
 12. Average number of hours of paid or volunteer work per week _____
 13. Average number of hours relaxing or socializing per week _____
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