Motivations for Participation in Collegiate Marching Band

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Purpose Overview

The modern collegiate marching band experience started in the late 1800s out of a campus military band tradition. As the popularity of football increased in the United States, so did the desire to include music and entertainment at contests that were taking place on American’s college campuses. Much of what college bands have done at their most fundamental level over the course of their history has not changed. For example, they perform at football games, play school music, and perform marching drills on the field. The types of performances, style and repertoire have all developed, but the overall role has remained the same.

The size of the school or National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) football classification does not impact marching band activity’s basic function to rehearse several hours a week and to perform at football games. Some collegiate marching bands can perform at small NCAA Division III school stadiums with seating capacities with a few thousand, while others from NCAA Division I schools can perform at stadiums that approach and may even exceed 100,000 seats. Based on traditions and practices at a school, on game days the commitment for members of the band can be as brief as a four hour commitment or as long as nine hours (Fuller 1995). Pep rallies, parades and other such events may constitute extra performances on game days as well. Additionally, some bands may also perform at pep rallies, away games, parades, professional sporting events, and as an exhibition band at high school band festivals and competitions or showcases of collegiate marching bands.

Future school music teachers are sometimes required to participate in the collegiate marching band at their institution. However most students who choose to
participate in collegiate marching bands come from a variety of academic programs. In spite of the large time commitment in both rehearsals and performances, college marching bands continue to typically be the largest student organizations on their respective campuses (Villella 1996).

Research to date has addressed student involvement in college/university activities, athletics and organizations in general, e.g. Astin’s (1984) investigation or focus specifically on certain demographic groups such as Reed’s (1993) work. Other research investigated profiles of collegiate and university band programs (Brozack 2004, Fuller 1995). Other research provides profiles of students who participate in marching band (Villella, 1996 Young, 2001). Madsen, Plack, and Dunnigan (2007) explored the topic of motivation in regards to if a collegiate marching band functions as a recruitment tool. However, there appears to be little research regarding broadly the motivations of college students to participate in marching bands.

The purpose for doing this inquiry was to seek out why students choose to participate in college or university marching bands. What collegiate marching band experiences do students enjoy the most? Does institutional loyalty take a role in student’s choice to participate in the activity? What factors influence a student’s choice to participate in the activity? Exploration of these questions can have many benefits to understanding for directors for the purpose of recruitment and retention.

**Literature Review**

This inquiry examined related research that was organized into three broad areas. The first was research based on college and university marching bands to include historical data, programs and procedures at large. The second area of research pertained
to the recruitment for students into collegiate marching bands and ensembles. The third area of research was to look at the participation in student organizations in general at the collegiate level and to examine their impact on student achievement and institutional loyalty.

**Astin, 1984**

Student involvement is defined as the amount of physical and psychological energy a student devotes to the academic experience at the collegiate level. Astin believes there is value to encouraging less focus on what faculty members do and more on what students do. He argues that student time is a resource for colleges and universities. One of the most important indicators for success in college is living on campus. Campus residence increases the student’s interaction with faculty and other students. They have a better chance than commuter students of developing identification and attachment to the institution. Participation in sports, particularly intercollegiate athletics, has a profound impact on persistence towards achieving academic goals. Other activities include honors programs, involvement in ROTC, participation in faculty members’ research, as well as surprisingly holding a part time job on campus. Additionally, students who participate in social fraternities and sororities achieve higher academic success then those who commute or do not seek to involve themselves in campus organizations.

**Dagaz, 2011**

This article examined the marching bands at two high schools in the mid-Western United States. Using observation and interviews of students, directors and parents, the researcher was able to take note of the development of a close community within the
school. The research found that the tenor of the organization was one that accepted all students and promoted friendships despite differences in socio-economic backgrounds of students. The researcher also took notice that the students, parents, and directors all contributed to the band experience which enhanced further motivation for participation.

Fuller, 1995

The dissertation’s purpose was to give a description of each of the eleven marching band programs in the Big Ten Conference, as of 1994. The dissertation was written in four broad topic areas; a review of the history of marching bands in general; procedures of each Big Ten Band, analysis of data for each Band compared with sister institutions and lastly data including faculty, student leadership, travel, budgets, bowl trips, visual units, the role of the drum major, show design, show arrangers, staffing, were areas of comparison. Data were collected through a questionnaire that was sent to each Big Ten Conference marching band director. Under procedures, description of each school’s audition/pre-season process was described. Having this information assisted in ascertaining motivation depending on the rigor of each institution’s audition process in regards to institutional loyalty.

Kerstetter, 2011

This study looked at the recruitment strategies of high school band directors to attract and encourage incoming ninth graders to continue participation in band. The study looks at the principles of business marketing and educational marketing. The author examined research on matriculation between the elementary, middle, high school, and collegiate levels. The researcher assembled a questionnaire tool to gather information from directors in a Likert type survey. The results indicated that most high
school band directors only approached this topic casually. Additionally, some of the recruitment practices might have implications for collegiate directors in that some of the methods are the same.

Kokotsaki and Hallam, 2011

The reason for this study was to gauge the impact of making music in collegiate ensembles. Over 60 non-music major university students were asked about the impact of music making. It was reported to have a positive impact on their social, musical, and personal skills. The area that was rated the highest by these non-music major ensemble participants, was that socially that they enjoyed the interaction with similarly minded student musicians. This idea of the social aspect applies to the specific study of the marching band.

Madsen, Plack and Dunnigan, 2007

This examination looked at the reasons why students participate in college marching band. It also explores whether using the marching band as a recruitment tool makes an impact in attracting student musicians to universities. Students were asked to rank their top three reasons for attending the university from a list of fourteen different options. The result was that the second most common reason, statistically, those students chose their institution was in order to be in that specific institution’s marching band. The first factor was the reputation and quality of a specific academic department within the institution. The third factor was the overall reputation and quality of the institution itself.

Reed, 1993

This dissertation explored different types of structured organizations and how participating in one, many, or none impacts a student’s sense of institutional loyalty.
Organizations and groups that were examined included sororities, fraternities, ROTC programs, leadership and scholarship organizations, clubs and units, marching band and intercollegiate athletics. Survey results indicate that there was minimal impact made on student achievement because of participation. However, students who participated in one or many structured groups indicated that they have a stronger connection to the university. This connection positively impacted their perceived gains personally, socially and intellectually.

**Wilson, 2003**

Many small colleges have marching band programs. This dissertation’s purpose was to identify characteristics of small college band programs and what factors interfere with administration of their programs. The definition of a small college was an overall enrollment of 3,000 students and/or a music program with less than 75 music majors. Directors reported having few full time faculty members and a large number of adjunct faculty. Most of the directors spent time recruiting but were not compensated for that time. Also reported was that there were significant budget restraints on equipment funding, maintenance, and scholarship funding.

**Villella, 1996**

Many studies have been conducted to determine the reasons students find satisfaction at a university as well as why they succeed academically. This study was designed to determine if a statistical difference exists between structured groups. A comparison was made between the following structured groups: marching band members, intercollegiate athletes, honors program students as well as the university student population at large. Two of the groups, marching band and athletes require
significant time commitment. The students from the university at large were made of those who were not participants in marching band and athletics. The study concluded that involved students did not suffer academically when compared to other student groups. Other areas of collegiate life that were examined that were articulated to have a positive impact on student achievement were facilities, and experiences related to extra-curricular activities. Also found to be important was positive relationships with faculty.

Young, 2001

The purpose of this study was to examine demographic characteristics and personality types of non-music majors who participate in collegiate marching bands. Information was collected from students to profile certain demographic information from gender and age to more specific information exclusive to marching band participants. Such examples included the number of years in marching band, instrument played, leadership roles. Also collected was other information about college life in general, such as living on or off campus. Additionally, each student was given a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

After exploring the literature, common themes appeared with relationship to enjoyment of ensemble participation, social aspects, student travel, institutional loyalty, all of which assisted in formulating a plan of inquiry.

Procedures

This investigation was a descriptive study employing a survey in which question responses were gathered using on a five point Likert type scale. Survey questions were organized into four main areas, influences that encouraged marching band participation, favorite aspects of marching band participation, favorite types of performances, and the
role of institutional loyalty, based on a combination of themes found in the related literature such as Astin (1984) and Villella (1996).

**Questionnaire**

The first topic addressed in the questionnaire was the degree to which other people influenced the student’s decision to participate in collegiate marching band. For example, did one’s high school band director, parent or faculty advisor encourage collegiate marching band participation? The second topic in the questionnaire was to examine what factors helped the student independently decide to join marching band. Examples ranged from receiving promotional materials to seeing the band perform at a live performance. Next, the questionnaire included to what degree certain aspects of collegiate marching band is valued by the individual student. For instance, questions regarding the enjoyment of band camp, the performance, or general appreciation of the activity itself. Lastly, students were asked to what degree they enjoy specific types of performances such as home football games, away football games, and parades. Additionally, there were four concluding questions to ascertain the level of influence of institutional loyalty.

Once all appropriate university approvals were granted, the survey was activated on an Internet based survey page. A pilot of the survey was done by Oregon State University. Meanwhile a hard copy letter was sent to selected collegiate marching band directors indicating their schools have been invited to participate in the study. The letter informed directors that they would be emailed the survey link five days later with a request to forward the participation invitation and survey link to their current marching
band membership in the 2011-2012 academic school year. Also mentioned was that the survey would remain open from February 7-27, 2012.

Participants

Two categories of schools were selected for participation in the study. The first categories being marching bands that are member institutions of the Big Ten and Southeastern (SEC) athletic conferences. These two conferences were selected based on frequent media comparison of both leagues and because of geographically representing a large region of the country. The schools that are members of the Big Ten Conference are: The University of Illinois, Indiana University, University of Iowa, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, University of Nebraska, Northwestern University, The Ohio State University, The Pennsylvania State University, Purdue University, and The University of Wisconsin. The schools that are members of the Southeastern Conference are: The University of Alabama, University of Arkansas, Auburn University, University of Florida, University of Georgia, University of Kentucky, Louisiana State University, University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, University of South Carolina, University of Tennessee, and Vanderbilt University. All of these schools participate in the NCAA Division I-Football Bowl subdivision.

The second category of schools made up of institutions that often participate in the annual Collegiate Marching Band Festival held in Allentown, Pennsylvania. The Collegiate Marching Band Festival is a showcase/exhibition of college and university bands from across the Northeast region of the United States and represents a variety of public and private schools at the NCAA Division I, II, and III levels.

A list of all of the bands that have participated in the festival’s 16 year history was
provided by Vivace Productions, the organizing sponsor of the event. Eighteen schools were selected to include a representative sample of public, private and NCAA Division I, II, and III. The selected schools were with their respective NCAA division classification in parenthesis:

1. Four private schools: Gettysburg College (III), Lebanon Valley College (III), Liberty University (FCS), Moravian College (III)

2. Four Eastern Pennsylvania public schools: Bloomsburg University (II), Kutztown University (II), Shippensburg University (II, No music major), West Chester (II-Large music school)

3. Four Western Pennsylvania public schools: Clarion University (II), Slippery Rock University (II), California University of Pennsylvania-(II-No music major), Indiana University of Pennsylvania-(II-large music school)

4. Four Division I-Football Championship Subdivision schools: University of Delaware, University of Massachusetts, Morgan State University, Towson University

5. Two Football Bowl Subdivision schools: Rutgers University, Temple University.

Other schools have participated in the past such as Penn State, Boston College, and Eastern Michigan, for example, but have not attended recently enough for their current band members to have participated in the Collegiate Marching Band Festival.

Survey participants were be asked to identify their institution so that perhaps additional trends for further research can be archived. For example, if it was found that the favorite performances for all Big Ten marching bands is away games, or that there’s particular enthusiasm at particular schools to do parades, this might be information that would be valued by directors for recruitment, retention and planning reasons.

Results
The on-line survey ended on March 11, 2012. There were 2,718 respondents who completed the survey. Of the 42 schools that were invited to participate, 27 schools responded. Nine out of twelve of the Big Ten Conference members, six of the twelve Southeastern Conference, and twelve of the eighteen Collegiate Marching Band Festival participants elected to partake in the survey.

In reporting who influenced their decisions to participate in collegiate marching band, participants in general did not consider the listed individuals to have strong influence on their participation choice. Participants most often identified a “moderate” influence by parents (24.8%) and high school band directors (23.6%). All other possible influences received at least one response from a participant: other family members, high school marching band instructional staff, high school private teacher, college private teacher, and college advisor. Although in some instances, the latter list of people were reported to have contributed to an affirmative decision for collegiate marching band participation, their influence was most often rated as” not applicable” or “no influence.” However, there were some respondents who indicated a very high level of influence by these same adults. Other family members have a very strong influence on 10.8% of the respondents, advice of high school marching band staff member strongly influence 8.7% of the participants, a high school private teacher 6.1% of participants, a college private teacher 1.5% of the participants, and college faculty advisor very strongly influenced 2.5% of the participants. (See Table 1)

When asked about reasons that impacted the decision to participate, among all of the respondents, all of the provided prompts make an impact. However the highest rated factor was seeing a clip of the band performance on the internet with an average rating of
4.66 or “very strong influence.” It is worthy to note that of all the questions in the section about reasons impacting participation in marching band, seeing the band perform at a home football game was the second highest rated factor of 23.8%.

The four most popular aspects of collegiate marching band participation, rated as a “strongly like” by the majority of the participants were the performances (73.4%), social aspect (73.4%), enjoyment of the activity itself (70.8%) to feel connected to school (68.8%), and enjoyment of playing instrument (62.8%). It is interesting to note that the only aspects of marching band that did not receive a rating of “strongly liked” by the majority of the participants were band camp and band rehearsals. (See Table 2)

When inquiring about favorite types of performances, the highest rated venue rated highest by the most participants at “strongly like” were home football games (74.2%), bowl games (63.9%), away football games (42.9%), and performing as an exhibition band at a high school band festival/competition (32.1%). Exactly 30.0% of participants “like” parades. The rating of “not applicable” was reported for categories of performing at a professional sporting event and at a showcase of college and university marching bands, as most of the respondents might not participate in these types of events. However, for those bands that have participated in such an event, it was rated “strongly like” by 26.6% of the participants for collegiate showcases and by 26.3% of the participants for professional sporting events. (See Table 3)

It was found that only 7.6% of respondents were required by part of their degree program to participate in collegiate marching band. Of the 169 students who indicated that they were required to participate, only 26 (7.0%) said that they would not participate if given a choice.
When asked about receiving a stipend or some other form of remuneration for collegiate marching band participation, 73.6% of the students said they did not receive any such compensation. Of those students who do receive compensation, 83.9% said that they would participate anyway, whereas 5.0% and 11.0% said “no” or “maybe” respectively.

Next, when asked about the marching band making an impact on selection of their respective institution, 53.0% of the respondents selected “yes.” Thirty five percent said “no” and 12.0% said “maybe” to that question. A majority of the students (54.6% of those responding) indicated they would have still chosen to participate in collegiate marching band if they had decided to attend another institution. Meanwhile, 258 (11.6%) said no and 751 (33.8%) said “maybe” regarding marching band participation at another school.

Lastly, respondents were asked if they agree with the following statement: “I have always been a die-hard (insert school name) fan, so I would have participate in (insert school name)’s marching band no matter what.” The response to that statement was: “yes”, 31.6%, “no”, 48.6%, and “maybe,” 19.8%.

Conclusions

The purpose of this investigation was to examine motivation for collegiate marching band participation. Students from 27 schools (N=2,229) responded to an online survey regarding their marching band experience.

In regard to recruitment, even though many of the listed tools seemed to impact on student choice, the factor with the highest average response was seeing an internet clip of a performance by the marching band. Perhaps effective use of resources might be to
secure synchronization rights for placement of performances on a school’s web page, as opposed to massed mailings and the related expense of such an endeavor. At minimum it would seem, at least posting a traditional pre-game show would be worthwhile.

Consistent with previous research (Kokotsaki & Hallam 2011; Madsen, Plach & Dunnigan 2007; Reed 1993), students seem to participate in collegiate marching band because of their overall enjoyment of the activity itself. As found by Villella (1996), students highly rated the importance of feeling connected to their school with nearly 70% of students responding with the highest rating to this prompt. This was unvarying with all of the schools no matter what the school size, division of football play, or public vs private. Given the popularity of the activity and the importance of institutional loyalty, this perhaps can be a tool for assistance in securing further resources for student travel which will enhance both further.

Overall, performances were more enjoyable than band camp and band rehearsals. Another area that was strongly liked, was the social aspect of marching band. Given that, it could be beneficial to explore those schools that rated band camp and band rehearsals as highly enjoyable to discern what social experiences and practices might be occurring that enhance those participants’ enjoyment.

The highest rated performance type was home football games. Overwhelmingly, 95.1% of the marching band members indicated that they “like” or “strongly like” performing at home football games. It was interesting to note though that the degree to which respondents articulated “strongly like” or “like” seemed to be related to the division of play and the success of the football team. Schools that play Division I were overwhelmingly rated “strongly like,” while schools that played in Division I-FCS,
Division II and Division III tended to rate home football games “like.” Also, Division I schools that have had historically strong football teams, tended to have larger percentages of their band “strongly like” the home football games as opposed to those schools who have not maintained sustained success.

It appears that students enjoy the travel aspect of the marching band activity. Bowl games and away football games were rated consistently high as favorite performances, although the bowl game tradition is limited to Division I-FBS schools. In regard to away football games, again there appeared to be a relationship between “like” and “strongly” responses and the division of play and success of the team. Conversely, in regards to Division I schools, there was tremendous enjoyment for attending away football games and other out of town travel, regardless of success of the football team.

Similarly, participants from schools that partake in performing at a showcase of collegiate marching bands, overwhelmingly articulated that it was their favorite performance of the year. An implication might be that those schools that do not undertake such a performance might consider participating in one. Another implication could be that the administrations of the Big Ten and Southeastern conferences might advocate such an event, perhaps in tandem with their football conference championship game. In addition to showcasing the conference among sister institutions, such an event could benefit the recruitment of member universities. Three notable events are the annual Collegiate Marching Band Festival in Allentown, Pennsylvania as mentioned before and the Fiesta Bowl Band Championship in Glendale, Arizona which feature high school bands, but also performances by the universities that are participating in both the Insight
Bowl and the Fiesta Bowl as well as the Honda Battle of the Bands Historically Black Colleges and Universities organization held in Atlanta, Georgia.

Of the 169 participants who indicated that marching band was a requirement for them, only 26 respondents expressed that they would not have participated. Given that small number of students who would choose not to participate, it might be worthwhile for those schools that require participation to reconsider such a policy. Even though it might be beneficial for future music educators to have a marching experience, it should be questioned whether forcing a student to do so is worthwhile, or in most cases, necessary.

It would appear a student’s loyalty to a school might be strong as a fan, however loyalty to the marching band activity is greater. Even though the marching band program at respondents’ respective institution may have impacted their school selection decision, students indicated they would have elected to participate in marching band anywhere because of their enjoyment of the activity.

**Further Research**

Although the intention of this study was to examine motivations for all collegiate level marching bands, it might prove interesting to explore further the trends between regions of the country, division levels of football teams, the success of respective football teams, conference affiliation and sizes of the schools to see if there are implications based on those factors. For example, does a school from the Atlantic Coast Conference that plays in the same region of the country have similar likes and motivations as a school in the Big Ten or Southeastern conferences. Additionally, as this study suggested, it would be interesting to see if schools that tend to have consistently stronger football teams have an easier time with recruitment and retention.
Dagaz (2011), cited that the collaborative effort required by the marching band activity as it promotes friendships assisted in overcoming differences in socio-economic status, which would be worthwhile for further investigation. College and university administrators might find it compelling to see if the marching band activity helps in promoting greater understanding of students from different socio-economic environments as well as other cultural backgrounds.

As this might relate to music education in a broader context, similar exploration could be undertaken to examine the motivations of collegiate participation in the concert band, orchestral and choral settings. As indicated with this study, student travel is very popular and perhaps encouraging touring with the concert groups might make for a higher level of student satisfaction and enjoyment, as well as to enhance recruitment efforts. According to Astin (1984), Reed (1993), Wilson (2003), Villella (1996), he implication being that there are broad benefits for institutions to examine their practices as it can benefit institutional loyalty.

Given the time, resources and tremendous popularity of this activity, maintaining a practice of inquiry and reflection is important to maintaining its health so that it continues to flourish.
Table 1

Reasons Impacting Decisions to Participate in Collegiate Marching Band

What reasons impacted your decision to participate in your college/university's marching band?
1-no influence, 3 moderate influence, 5 very strong influence.
Table 2

Aspects of Collegiate Marching Band and Student Enjoyment

Table 3

Student Performance Preferences
References


Fuller, John Allen. (1995). *A descriptive analysis of the eleven big ten conference marching band programs* (Doctoral Dissertation). The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.


Villella, John William. (1996). *Freshmen involvement in a pennsylvania state university and its effect on grade point average and satisfaction with the institution.* Widener University, Chester, PA.

Motivations for Collegiate Marching Band Participation Survey Questions

Factors Influencing Decision to Participate in Marching Band at the Collegiate Level

How influential was advice from the following people on your decision to participate in College Marching Band? 1-no influence, 3 moderate influence, 5 very strong influence.

Advice of your parents: 1 2 3 4 5
Advice of family members other than your parents: 1 2 3 4 5
Advice of your high school band director: 1 2 3 4 4
Advice of an instructional staff member for your high school marching band: 1 2 3 4 5
Advice of your high school private teacher (if applicable) 1 2 3 4 5
Advice of your college private teacher (if applicable) 1 2 3 4 5
Advice of your college faculty advisor 1 2 3 4 5
Advice of friends who were planning to or already were participating in the marching band: 1 2 3 4 5

What reasons impacted your decision to participate in your college/university’s marching band? 1-no influence, 3 moderate influence, 5 very strong influence.

Seeing the band perform at a home football game? 1 2 3 4 5
Seeing the band perform at an away football game? 1 2 3 4 5
Seeing the band perform as an exhibition band at a high school band festival or competition? 1 2 3 4 5
Seeing the band perform in a parade? 1 2 3 4 5
Seeing the band perform at a showcase of college and university marching bands?  
1 2 3 4 5

Seeing the band perform on TV?  
1 2 3 4 5

Seeing the band perform at a bowl game?  
1 2 3 4 5

Seeing the band perform at a professional sporting event? 1 2 3 4 5

Seeing a clip of a band performance on the Internet? 1 2 3 4 5

Receiving promotional materials from your respective college/university marching band at home? 1 2 3 4 5

Receiving a promotional phone call from the marching band? 1 2 3 4 5

Receiving an email from the director of the marching band? 1 2 3 4 5

Receiving promotional materials from your respective college/university marching band at home? 1 2 3 4 5

Seeing promotional materials that were sent to your high school director? 1 2 3 4 5

Were you required as part of your major to participate in marching band as part of a degree requirement?  
Yes  No

If the answer is “yes” to the above question, would you still have elected to participate in marching band?  
Yes  No

What are your favorite aspects of participating in college/university marching band? 1-no influence, 3 moderate influence, 5 very strong influence.
Enjoyment of the activity itself, overall? 1 2 3 4 5

Enjoyment of playing your instrument or participating in the visual units of the marching band? 1 2 3 4 5

The performances? 1 2 3 4 5

Band Camp? 1 2 3 4 5

To feel connected/a part of my school? 1 2 3 4 5

The “esprit de corps”? 1 2 3 4 5

Social aspect of marching band? 1 2 3 4 5

**What are your favorite types of performances?**

Performing at home football games? 1 2 3 4 5

Performing at away football games? 1 2 3 4 5

Performing as an exhibition band at high school band festivals/competitions? 1 2 3 4 5

Performing in parades? 1 2 3 4 5

Performing at a showcase of college and university marching bands? 1 2 3 4 5

Performing at pep rallies? 1 2 3 4 5

Performing at professional sporting events? 1 2 3 4 5

Performing at bowl games? 1 2 3 4 5

**Concluding Questions**

Did the college or university marching band at your respective institution have any impact in the selection of the college or university that you are enrolled at?

Yes  No  Maybe
Had you been accepted at another college or university, would you still have chosen to participate in that institution’s marching band?

Yes  No  Maybe

Do you agree with the following statement? “I have always been a die-hard (insert your school name) fan, so I would have participated in (insert your school name)’s marching band no matter what.”

Yes  No  Maybe