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Some perspectives & considerations for pursuing a dual degree in music & an outside field

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About the author

Ryan Chen holds bachelor's degrees in Euphonium Performance and Industrial & Operations Engineering from the University of Michigan. While at Michigan, Ryan performed in a number of ensembles: the Symphony Band, Jazz Ensemble, Latin Jazz Ensemble, Euphonium-Tuba Ensemble, and the New Orleans-style brass band [BlueLine Brass Band](#). He also won the student euphonium competition of the 2011 Leonard Falcone International Euphonium and Tuba Festival. In engineering, Ryan was heavily involved in student organizations, serving as the president of Tau Beta Pi (the engineering honor society) and Alpha Pi Mu (the industrial engineering honor society). He also conducted research at the Center for Healthcare Engineering & Patient Safety, contributing to two published journal papers and giving several invited talks at conferences. After his time at Michigan, Ryan chose to continue graduate studies in engineering, briefly attending MIT for Aeronautics & Astronautics and eventually settling at Stanford University, where he earned a master's degree in Management Science & Engineering. While at Stanford, Ryan worked at Stanford Live (the University's professional performing arts presenter), working on marketing, programming, and artist services efforts. He also was a key member of the Stanford Sports Analytics Club, contributing to award-winning projects at the 2017 NBA Hackathon and the 2016 UNC Basketball Analytics Summit.

Ryan is now in his third season as a Basketball Data Scientist for the Orlando Magic, where he creates predictive models and other assorted quantitative tools to inform roster management strategy. Ryan continues to perform musically as a member of the low brass quartet [Redline.](#), where he also contributes arrangements. He also teaches in the central Florida area, including working with the bands at his high school alma mater, Winter Park High School. In his non-musical non-work time, Ryan's most productive activities are reading the news, exercising, and volunteering his data science skills to help elect progressive candidates to local political office. His unproductive activities probably look like everyone else's.

A BRIEF FOREWORD

I posted the following [on Facebook](#) on July 25, 2020:

To my music teacher friends:

I've been reflecting a bit on whether or not my decision to pursue a dual degree in music and an outside field was a good one and I realized that, at the time I made the decision, I didn't have any perspective from someone who had done it before. I might've liked to have that.

So: Would it be helpful to you to have a document to refer your students to that compiles information about what that life is like and questions they should ask themselves before jumping in?

I've spent a lot of time thinking about it and I think I have a lot of good insights, but just don't know if they actually have value to others or if it's best left as an internal exercise in reflection and introspection.

With many of my friends affirming the value of such a document, I set about creating it. This document is the result of that work. I hope it equips students with more of the information they need to make decisions about their musical futures.

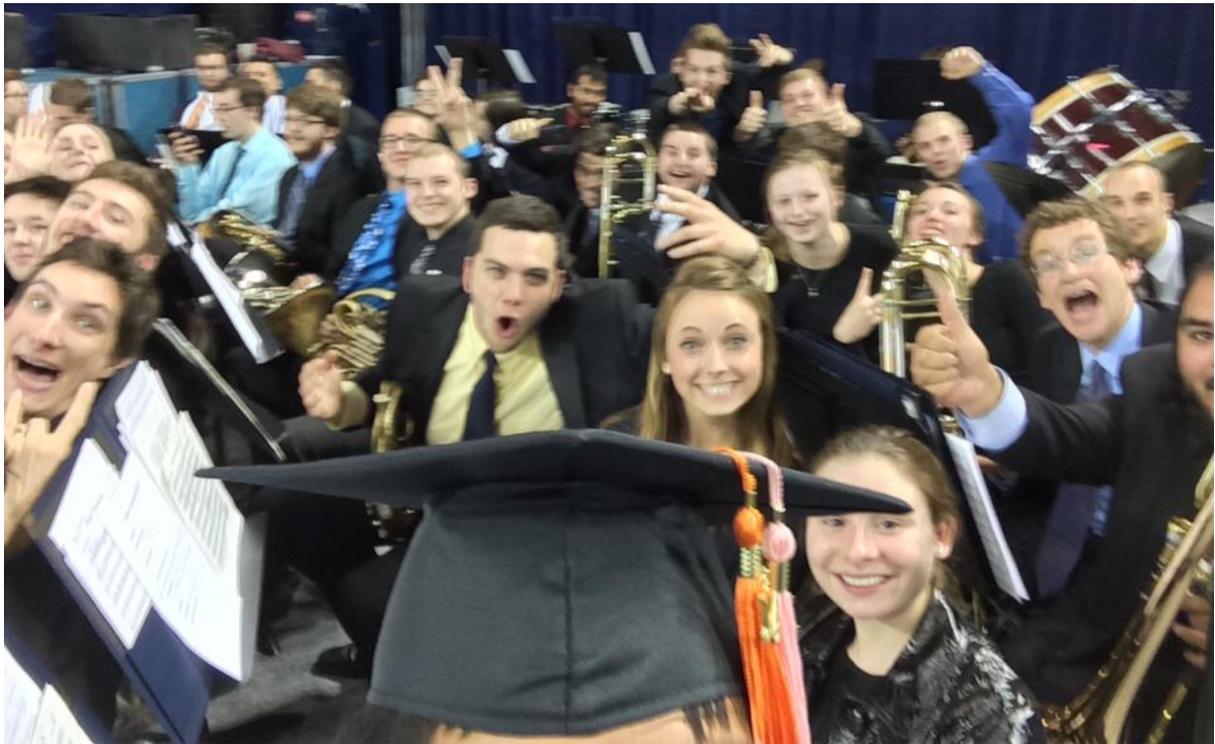
I should note that, in the rest of the document, I don't articulate an opinion as to whether a student should or shouldn't pursue a dual degree in music and an outside field. However, I'll say here that I'm generally very supportive of the idea in the abstract - my experiences in both music and engineering have irreplaceably enriched my life. Additionally, I want to note explicitly that my intention to avoid articulating this opinion applies to the situations of students who are currently not considering a dual degree in music and an outside field but are maybe feeling some (external) pressure to consider it.

I plan for this document to evolve as I survey people with relevant experiences and incorporate their perspectives - major revisions will be noted below. Please feel free to contact me at ryan.chen@umich.edu with questions and comments.

*R.C.
August 5, 2020
Orlando, FL*

N.B.: Throughout this document, I use "DDMOF" to refer to "dual degree in music and an outside field" and "OF" to refer to "outside field."

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Maybe the best encapsulation of my DDMOF experience - walking off the stage at engineering commencement, (failing to accurately take) a selfie with the band. Pink tassel for music, orange tassel for engineering!

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

1. What do you want to gain from the experience?

In my mind, there are two sliders that move somewhat independently - one is how serious you are about maximizing your musical outcomes and one is how serious you are about maximizing outcomes in your OF. If the values are percentages, it's really hard to be at 100% seriousness for both and any increase in seriousness in one makes increasing/maintaining seriousness in the other more difficult, but not impossible. It's understandably difficult to gauge these levels of seriousness before you're actually living the life of a DDMOF student, know how much you enjoy/despise the tasks associated with studying each field, and have to make tradeoffs based on your many commitments (more on tradeoffs in the next question).

Since most students considering pursuing a DDMOF are likely academically serious and have had some sleep-deprived homework-filled nights, maybe this hypothetical scenario is relatable and therefore helpful to frame levels of seriousness: it's midnight, you're mildly tired, and you have an important project for a class in your OF due at noon tomorrow and a lesson with your teacher at 10:30am tomorrow. You estimate that you have 6 more hours of work to finish the project. You also know that you've only practiced once for 2 hours this week. With an expectation of the 6 hours of work meaning that you'd at most get 4 hours of sleep before your 10:30am lesson, which facet of life would you cut a corner on first? Rush the project and possibly get a worse grade? Skip practicing, hack through your lesson, and apologize to your teacher? Get only 2 hours of sleep? Some combination of the above? I'm not sure if I've experienced this exact situation, but it at least feels like (a la Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*) "story truth."

Personally (and this is the result of much difficult introspection, attempted objectivity, and subsequently, "feelingsball"), I was probably at about 70% for music and 90% for engineering.

If your pursuit of either music or your OF is just for the credential of the degree, then you have to be really clear about the implications of that mindset. In music, just skating by and doing the bare minimum to get the degree doesn't offer too many substantive benefits if you're already also pursuing a degree in an OF. Sure, you do go from "almost certainly unable to cold email a high school music teacher offering to teach sectionals/lessons" to "maybe they'll see your college degree in music and consider it a little more," but the results of doing the bare minimum to graduate from music school look thoroughly unimpressive to most people who know what to look for. On the other hand, if your study of your OF is just for the piece of paper, that degree could still hold some value (depending on what the OF is and how recognized your school is within that OF).

If you have strong convictions about substantively achieving in both music and your OF, the next question is for you...

2. How much do you care about FOMO?

There's a long list of things I would've liked to do if I were only a music student. There's another long list of things I would've liked to do if I were only an engineering student. Life as a DDMOF student requires making calculated decisions and tradeoffs about your priorities in each field. You're going to miss out on some opportunities - are you okay with that?

One of the tradeoffs I made is about practice time, as mentioned previously. The only times I got to actually practice like a music student were the summers, when I worked a full-time research job in engineering and spent most of my time away from the job with musicians. I remember practicing for 5 hours a day for 2 weeks leading up to an audition for the River City Brass in the summer of 2012. I ended up being one of two finalists with Lance LaDuke and getting called to sub on some concerts. I think back to that experience a lot because it was one fairly concrete piece of evidence that, with a level-ish playing field, I could achieve some semblance of the success I was hoping for in professional music. However, predictably, I didn't have time to practice like that during the school year and I also didn't continue a full-time study of music after college, so my "real" career potential in music is still a

big unanswered question for me. The question of what to do over the summers is a venue for tradeoffs too - for a lot of seriously aspiring musicians, summer festivals take up large amounts of the summer, which makes them unavailable for many internships and other professional advancement opportunities that are becoming increasingly necessary in many OFs.

One sacrifice I made in my engineering education was not applying for an honors program that I think has a lot of value. The program takes 5 years for a typical engineering student to complete and grants the student both a bachelor's and master's degree; it also includes internship placement, study abroad experience, leadership seminars, and access to industry leaders. If I were only an engineering student, I would've wanted to be part of that program without hesitation - many of my friends and people I admired were part of it. However, thinking about being in school for 6 years (maybe more) and the odds/logistics of finding a study abroad experience that would satisfy my educational goals in both music and engineering made me decide against it.

Pursuing a DDMOF is littered with these sorts of decisions where you have to reflect on your priorities and make tough choices. It's both not for the faint of heart and not for those who can't effectively introspect and use that information to drive decisions.

3. How efficiently do you practice?

You will almost assuredly have less time to practice than you'd like. How much can you tighten up your practice habits? For those who like to track their practice with a journal, it can be a great tool to stay organized and methodical in accomplishing concrete progress in practice sessions. It will be exceedingly unlikely that you have more than 2 hours to practice per day - for me, getting 6 hours of practice in a week was unusual! Because of the little time I had to practice, I was mentally locked in every second I was in a practice room. Observing some other musicians' practice habits is pretty discomfiting in contrast. I think the broader point I'm trying to illustrate is that your life in a DDMOF could very well end up looking like mine and you have to think about whether you're able to thrive musically with a more limited practice schedule.

4. A QUESTION NOT TO ASK YOURSELF: Could you imagine yourself making a living in anything other than music?

Implied: would you die without studying music? If not, you should study an OF, either solely or in addition to music.

The answer for most aspiring musicians is probably "probably" and the answer lacks substantive insight - a lot of very accomplished musicians could not only thrive in OFs but also have no shortage of imagination or motivation to pursue those opportunities. (And a lot of very accomplished musicians *are* currently thriving in OFs, either as their sole focus or alongside a career in music.) Framing the study of music as a pursuit of last resort is awful and harmful for a bunch of reasons, but I'll just highlight one - why does music have to be something studied out of desperation? Why can't music stand on equal footing with other academic disciplines? I don't know the specific numbers, but I wouldn't imagine the financial/career outcomes of music students to be significantly different from many humanities students.

So, don't ask yourself this question. Instead, if you have sufficient career prospects in music for your personal definition of success, then you probably shouldn't use career considerations as a basis for deciding not to study music. There might be many other reasons to decide against studying music, but not this one.

5. How much importance do you assign to being in/close to the center of a group of friends?

Of course, never say never, but it's unlikely that you will be the main mover and shaker within a group of friends. If you're taking advantage of the opportunities available in each field, you'll likely have many more commitments than your friends and as a result be less present for shenanigans. Musicians pretty much only hang out with other musicians, so even their academic/performance commitments tend to overlap. You'll likely have other things to do either instead or in addition. To preview a bit of the next

question, a lot of the friends you make when you start college will graduate before you too, which may shake up your social life. Lastly, because there's a limit to how much degree progress you can make in each degree when you're pursuing multiple, the friends you make through classes early on in your time in college will eventually pass you academically.

One of the best shorthand ways I've found to convey my personal experience along this axis is that I'm invited to a lot of weddings, but not in the wedding party. I was involved in a lot during my time in college - rose the ranks and served as the president of three different organizations (two engineering honor societies and Phi Mu Alpha), conducted engineering research, served as an academic peer advisor for my engineering department, and ran a brass band. The close friends I made in these mostly disparate settings are *my* best friends within that setting, but I'm largely not among *their* best friends.

6. How long are you prepared to be in school?

This is a tough question to answer before you're actually living the life - how should you know whether you're ok with being in school 5, 5.5, or even 6 years when you're in high school or a freshman in college? I'll illustrate some of the ramifications of being in school for longer than 4 years to help give a sense of what it's like:

Most scholarships/financial aid aren't configured for students to be in school longer than 4 years - are you/your family able to make the money work? Do you have family considerations beyond financial ones?

You likely won't graduate alongside most of the friends you came into school with - they'll have gone on to graduate programs or have entered the workforce while you're still in school. Invariably, you'll lose some degree of connection to those people once they're no longer in the academic trenches with you. If your level of conviction in the value of the DDMOF isn't high, you could feel at that point that the world is passing you by.

7. Which universities interest you?

Again, I envision two sliders moving independently. Assuming that you're able to ascertain the quality level of your education in music and in your OF at each university, you should have a good sense of, at a high level, how good of a fit that university is for your educational goals. Ascertaining those quality levels is a massive question somewhat beyond the scope of this document, but I'll leave some quick thoughts. Roughly speaking (and every situation is different), I think your teacher, ensembles, the rest of the music students, the facilities, and any special programs/initiatives a school has are, in order, the most important factors for assessing the quality of your potential education at a school. For your OF, the criteria can vary widely. I'll say that in engineering, my list of factors would include faculty instruction, quality of students, vibrancy of student life within the academic unit (student organizations, research work, etc.), and support staff.

Once you have a sense of how you appraise the quality of education you'd get in each field at each university, you probably should take into consideration a combination of these education quality sliders and the previous sliders about your seriousness of maximizing outcomes in each field. With those 4 numbers, take some sort of weighted sum like $w_m q_m + w_{of} q_{of}$, where w_m and w_{of} represent the weights of your seriousness in music and your OF respectively and q_m and q_{of} represent the quality levels of education you'd get at a university's music school and your OF respectively.

As a sweeping generalization, I think that students should be seeking universities that maximize the sum of the slider values for education quality. I'll consider 4 broad categories of universities:

- Music bad, OF bad
- Music good, OF bad
- Music bad, OF good
- Music good, OF good

The "music bad, OF bad" category of schools doesn't merit much serious consideration and is easy to discard.

You probably should only choose a school from the "music good, OF bad" category if both of the following two items are true: 1) your OF is one where you're confident you can achieve your career goals in the OF without going to a good school for that OF, 2) you're largely studying your OF as a matter of getting the piece of paper and not because you really want to maximize your outcomes in your OF.

Similarly, you probably should only choose a school from the "music bad, OF good" category if your interest in studying music is just for the piece of paper that gives you some access to a small set of employment opportunities; for the most part, a bad musical education will severely hamper your ability to achieve substantive professional goals in music irrespective of your motivation level. This dynamic is much more true of music than it is of most OFs.

Finally, the schools in the "music good, OF good" category are likely to be among those that make the final rounds of consideration. Universities in this category empower you to continually make the decision about how seriously you want to pursue each field instead of limiting you from the start.

8. What sort of music degree should I pursue?

Broadly speaking, this document is mostly aimed at students who are considering music performance degrees. For those considering a DDMOF where the music degree is in music education, a few important additional considerations arise. Music education degrees tend to take longer to complete than other music degrees, so factors related to Question 6 above become more important/constraining. Additionally, music education degrees typically require a term of student teaching and frequent trips to outside schools for observation/field work that are severely constraining in terms of scheduling other classes and taking advantage of other advancement opportunities that may happen during the day - chamber music, student organizations, research work, etc.

I can't speak with much authority about other music degrees, but I think students considering those options should, at a minimum, endeavor to understand the elements of the structures of those degrees that can conflict heavily with their OFs. Specifically, understanding what a good/driven student of that degree typically does beyond the course requirements will likely bring great benefit. To illustrate that point a bit more, the course requirements for a performance degree are typically fairly minimal such that a DDMOF student could reasonably think that the combined courses and workload with their OF are exceedingly manageable. Certainly, depending on the student's goals, fulfilling only the graduation requirements for their degrees could give them exactly the experience they seek. However, just as fully maximizing the educational outcomes in an OF might include participating in student organizations or research work not at all required by the curriculum, most musicians who later achieve professional success saturated their lives with enriching musical experiences beyond the requirements for the performance degree while they were in school. No particular extra musical activity is required per se, but I think of this level of involvement as an unspoken set of requirements for future success. This fuller sense of what "doing well" in both the OF and the music degree program actually entails enables students to make much more informed decisions.

It's also worth mentioning here that many schools offer a BA in music (as opposed to the more common BM), which is a more general degree that offers students the flexibility to choose an area of concentration - performance, musicology, etc. That flexibility may have great value when considering the constraints of the OF while still providing a thorough musical education and giving students the option to continue to graduate school in music.

QUESTIONS TO ASK OTHERS

DDMOF students/alumni (and as much as possible, ones who studied/are studying your specific OF)

- 1. Is/Was the experience of getting the DDMOF sufficiently more valuable to justify the extra time, money, and effort? Specifically, what is the marginal value? Knowing what you know now, would you do it again?**
- 2. Are you enjoying/Did you enjoy the DDMOF experience? What aspects particularly stand out positively/negatively?**
- 3. What, if anything, do you wish you did differently over the course of your DDMOF? What, if anything, do you think are ways that you actively made your DDMOF experience notably better than the “default settings”?**
- 4. What are pieces of advice you’ve received specifically about pursuing a DDMOF that were helpful/unhelpful?**
- 5. Regardless of whether your focus leaned toward music or your OF, did you feel you are/were able to have a fulfilling professional and social life? Do you feel that pursuing a DDMOF helps/hinders you in this respect?**

Students/alumni of the universities you’re considering (better if studying/studied music, better if studying/studied your specific OF, better if DDMOF, better if DDMOF and your specific OF)

- 1. Where are the main buildings for music and my OF located with respect to each other? How difficult is traveling between the two? How much time does the trip take? Is there housing available in a reasonable middle ground or near one of the buildings?**

Many students of a single academic discipline may be able to commute from their home to a general area of campus and stay there for most of the day and return home in the evening. A typical day for a DDMOF student may involve several trips, not only from home to an academic building but also between academic units that may be physically far apart. The travel times can preclude you from taking certain classes because they are too temporally close. Separately but not necessarily less importantly, the commutes can be tiresome and whittle down your stamina, making you a less effective student. Some commutes can make you more prone to being late to obligations too - campus buses, heavy traffic, road work, weather conditions, etc. are all sources of variance.

2. What does it take to actually succeed?

Related to Question 8 in the previous section - degree requirements, especially in music, present an incomplete picture of the path to professional success. For example, I can easily imagine a path to achieving a 4.0 GPA in music performance at Michigan while having not improved substantively at all and having practically zero chance at making a performing career. Good grades in music school are largely easily earned, especially for DDMOF students who are likely academically inclined.

Again, depending on your OF and your goals, maybe only fulfilling the academic requirements for the degree in your OF tends to lead to your desired level of success in that field with enough certainty that you find that path acceptable (especially if you can reallocate that unspent time to musical endeavors). However, I've found that success in most fields is heavily correlated with going beyond required work and I don't foresee that arms race abating any time soon.

Then, since satisfying the degree requirements is an unreliable and insufficient way to attain professional success, what else helps? What did those who have achieved what you'd like to achieve do when they were in school? What does a life that incorporates *that* level of activity *in both fields* look like? Once you have enough of an understanding of what is required for success in each field, you can start to think again about the tradeoffs mentioned in Question 2 of the previous section. *Is there actually a middle ground that allows you to achieve levels of success in both fields that are satisfactory to you? Or might there be an inevitable fork in the road at some future time where you'll have to pick one field or the other, either officially (i.e. drop one of the degrees) or not (i.e. don't drop a degree, but consciously focus on one at the expense of the other)?*

3. What specific support is available to students who are doing something unconventional like a DDMOF?

4. In your estimation, how common is pursuing a dual degree? (DDMOF?)

The answer to this question may imply a level of support for dual degree students even if, from the previous question, they're unaware of the details.

(Potential) Relevant applied music faculty (i.e. your potential teacher)

1. How flexible are you about my work and progress?

Most teachers have probably taught students who pursued DDMOFs by the time you're considering studying with them, so they should have some sense of the demands placed on these students and their willingness to accommodate those students and their demands. If they don't, that's okay! It's something every teacher should think about anyway and you've just provided them the opportunity.

Generally, teachers have a sense of the rhythm of an academic term for their students, but they'll likely have little sense of what your OF is like. As long as you're always working hard, I'd like to think that most teachers would be understanding of ebbs and flows in the rate of your musical progress and accommodate you. Give them a specific hypothetical scenario to respond to - "If there are 3 weeks per term when I'm only able to allocate 3 hours per week for practice, is that ok?" In the midst of the year, they might forget that they said it's okay, but you can remind them of that conversation.

2. How much will you kick my butt anyway?

My teacher was maybe almost too understanding of my competing workloads. As much as it would've stressed me out even more, I might've liked for him to be more demanding of me. I've heard stories of how demanding he would be with some of my studio mates and stories from years past of his demanding nature. Those stories made me think that maybe I could've made greater strides in my playing if he hadn't given me as much leeway. Then again, it's only with the benefit of hindsight and detachment

that I can speak this way - I almost always felt like I was drowning in work, so past me is probably looking at current me and asking for a little break. It's probably in the nature of someone who chooses to pursue a DDMOF to think, no matter how thinly stretched they are over their obligations, that they can always give more. Some combination of optimism and masochism, probably. Definitely a topic for further introspection.

Anyway, I think the takeaway here is that the best teacher-student relationship for someone pursuing a DDMOF is one where the teacher knows that you'll have stretches of slow musical improvement, but also has a good feel within that context how far out to dangle the proverbial carrot and/or how much to use the proverbial stick in pushing you to maximize your improvement.

(Potential) Academic advisors/non-faculty people who can influence your experience

1. How many students are pursuing a DDMOF currently? With my particular OF? What about alumni?

Obviously, we've covered some questions I think are important to ask students with relevant DDMOF experience to share. The only things to point out here are that academic advisors/staff may be able to connect you to those students and that they may have their own (importantly) detached observations about what made successful students successful and what made unsuccessful students unsuccessful.

2. How much of the degree requirements can you satisfy through AP/IB/other college credits in the degree programs you're considering?

Different universities and different degree programs within those universities have different policies about accepting AP/IB credits. Make sure to figure out precisely how much your AP/IB credits can advance you towards completing the degrees and a map out a reasonable graduation timeline.

People qualified to assess your prospects in music/your OF (e.g. current teachers)

1. Based on what you know about my talents and work ethic, what do you think are my most likely outcomes in music/the OF?

You should be asking for as much brutal honesty, objectivity, and specificity here. Since I have formal training in statistics and optimizing decision-making processes, I feel qualified to not only give that piece of advice but to additionally say this - no matter how bad it might make you feel about your situation/prospects, you should always, *always* want as much information as possible as early as possible. Operating from an information deficit only increases the chances that you make suboptimal decisions.

I think the value of honesty and objectivity are fairly obvious, but I want to elaborate a bit on the value of specificity. A specific evaluation is more valuable than a vague one. For example, your private teacher might say, "Oh, yeah, I can totally imagine that you'll end up in a professional orchestra some day." To the extent that they can provide details, you should ask some series of follow-up questions, possibly including, "How long do you think it'd take me to get there? What exactly are those odds? And, if that opportunity doesn't come to me, what do the rest of my prospects look like?"

To pose an illustrative hypothetical example, a student who has a 10% chance of being in a professional orchestra and a 90% chance of not making a living in music should think about their prospects very differently from a student who has the same 10% chance of being in a professional orchestra, but also a 30% chance of being a college music professor, a 10% chance of forming a successful chamber ensemble, and a 50% chance of not making a living in music. Of course, these odds are incredibly difficult to assess, but the process of trying to assess them can give great clarity and insight.

2. What are trends in music/the OF that I should know about?

Related to the previous question, but worth noting separately. For example, employment prospects/average salaries in your OF might be in a period of rapid change around the time you're scheduled to graduate from college. To the extent anyone can forecast trends like that, again, you should want to know.

MISCELLANEOUS THOUGHTS

Workload

Yes, pursuing a DDMOF is more work than pursuing just one of the degrees alone. However, since they stimulate different parts of your brain, sometimes being productive by completing tasks for your study of one field can actually serve as a break from the other. There's some synergy there. The workload of a DDMOF is also likely not a strict sum of the workloads of the component degrees because the courses from one degree program will almost certainly entirely saturate the electives requirements for the other degree and vice versa, whereas students in pursuing a single degree will seek outside coursework to satisfy those requirements.

Program length, AP/IB/other college credits

As discussed above, staying in school for 5-6 years for undergraduate studies may not be palatable or feasible for many students for a wide variety of reasons. If you're interested in a DDMOF and have some runway (i.e. you're a junior in high school or younger), I can't encourage you strongly enough to take as many AP/IB/college classes as you can handle. One of my biggest regrets from high school is not taking the AP Physics C exam, which may have exempted me from 10 credits of engineering course requirements. That's over half of a semester that I could've had back in one AP exam! Starting a DDMOF with a boatload of college credits alleviates a bit of the constraints that the DDMOF will likely put on you in terms of course scheduling, program length, and workload in a given term. The freedoms to take lighter course loads over the course of the DDMOF, graduate earlier than otherwise, and/or choose courses more according to your preferences than scheduling constraints are all well worth the investment of time and effort in your high school years.

Personally, I would've been unwilling to pursue the DDMOF if it would've taken me 6 years to complete. It's hard to articulate exactly why - my parents were financially supporting me throughout college and didn't explicitly say that 6 years of school would be too many. I also didn't have any internal objections about staying in school for 6 years. My best guess is that the social stigma of spending that long in college was one I wasn't willing to bear. Maybe silly, I know. In any case, having a bunch of college credits from the beginning was a key to the whole endeavor - I took 18 or 19 credits every semester except one (16 credits) and was able to finish in 5 years.

Scheduling

Timing of scheduling is important, which is to say that you'll probably find a lot of benefit from controlling (to the extent you can) the ebb and flow of your involvement in music and your OF term by term. Personally, I started out mostly taking engineering classes and my involvement in music school increased over time to the point where I was mostly taking music classes during my 5th and final year. That trajectory was the result of a conscious decision, but I'm not sure that I would do it the same way if I had another shot at it - given the comparatively more social/collaborative nature of music than engineering, if my involvement level in each field were more even across time, I think my professional relationships and social life in the music school would've improved by a much greater margin than my corresponding situation in engineering would've worsened.

Academic staff - help us!

In retrospect, I was woefully unprepared for a DDMOF from a mechanical/structural standpoint. I now know that I didn't know what I wanted, what was possible, or even what questions to ask. In both music and engineering, I wish academic staff were better equipped to specifically help me understand the world I was about to enter and how to navigate it. Short of that, I feel like they should make some effort to curate a directory of students who have pursued DDMOFs and are willing to help, listing their contact information, fields of study, and graduation year. Then, pass that information along to prospective and current students so they can help themselves.

For students, I think the key takeaway from this item is to illustrate that you likely don't know everything you should be thinking about in order to tailor your DDMOF educational experience to your preferences and academic staff may be unable to help you directly. If that's the case, **be proactive** and ask lots of people if they know someone who has relevant experience and can share helpful insights.