

Sean Turner

Kelsey Taylor

English 1101

4th Dec. 2019

A Major Change in Life

Students in the arts have a unique education. It's less about studying textbooks and slideshows than it is about practicing their craft for hours and hours a day in hopes of a perfect product. Although that may sound like a rewarding process, it can go from very fulfilling to very strenuous within seconds because of that strive towards impossible perfection. With this in mind, one can predict that this takes a real toll on the student's mentality and can affect their future in a drastic way. It goes without saying that once a student has reached a peak of stress and frustration, this type of mindset leads to severe mental disorders, such as depression and anxiety. When describing this to someone who has never been involved in fine arts, it might be difficult for them to understand how this may differ from any other college major. By analyzing the psychology of people in the arts and comparing it to the main causes of dropout, it will be clear if students majoring in fine arts have a higher dropout rate than students in more traditional majors. When correlating it to other articles on dropout, the others typically focus on the why, as in "why do people dropout," but there aren't any that focus on the who. This is most likely due to the fact that, unless they are attending a conservatory for their craft, the easiest solution is to just switch majors to something that gives the student more enjoyment and confidence.

Although that's the appropriate decision for some, this paper will oppose that answer and describe why switching majors is not always the easiest or most beneficial solution to a problem that affects so many. The sources used to assist this claim link together to answer the question as to who is more likely to dropout. The first few articles studied will be describing why students

with higher anxiety and depression are usually the most likely to drop out in the first place. From there, that will be connected to how people in the arts are more prone to having mental disorders like depression and anxiety. To clarify, this is usually because of their strive for impossible perfection and the constant rejection that comes with being in such a difficult profession. With a better understanding of why fine arts majors are the most typical of all students to leave school, we as a society will be able to figure out how to make the path to being a successful artist less taxing on young students. This prompts the question of whether the education system should be altered in a way that gives the students a strong enough support system that will help them when they're feeling moments of intense self-doubt and anxiety or if those are just the unfortunate negative side effects of majoring in the arts.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Conrad, Selby M. "*Creative Personality*." Encyclopedia of Giftedness, Creativity and Talent, edited by Barbara Kerr, SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009, pp.185-88.

Although on the outside creative people do not show any significant differences than those that may be around them, Selby M. Conrad took it upon herself to write out all of the differences of the mindset of a creative person. Conrad first lists all the ways a more creative person is different, making a ten-point list of how their minds work and all the factors that end up making

them more imaginative. From there, she describes the contradictory thoughts one might have that lead to a more complicated mentality, for example: “Being both introverted and extraverted... Being both humble and proud” (Conrad). Being able to refer to Conrad’s article about the exact differences and why a person in the arts might be more of a perfectionist than others will let the reader know that playing an instrument or acting is not just a physical activity, it takes a toll on your mindset.

Eisenberg, Daniel. “*Students with depression twice as likely to drop out of college.*” Michigan News, 2009, pp. 1- 2.

<https://news.umich.edu/students-with-depression-twice-as-likely-to-drop-out-of-college/>

Accessed Sept. 29, 2019.

It’s easy to understand that a person suffering from depression might be more likely to drop out of college over a person that’s mentally healthy, but that does not answer the big question: why? Daniel Eisenberg chooses to answer this question and states that the reason depression leads to drop out is because the student starts to lose interest in his or her activities. What makes his article unique, however, is that he addresses how there are still students diagnosed with depression that are still fully engaged in whatever activity brings them joy. But from a general standpoint, it is very common for people (of all ages, not just students) to show a lack of interest in activities while going through depression.

Eby, Douglas. "*Gifted, Talented, Creative, Anxious.*" High Ability, 2019,

<http://highability.org/621/gifted-talented-creative-anxious/> Accessed Sept. 29, 2019.

Hearing that your favorite celebrity or musician still has doubt and anxiety is probably the most comforting thing to know, which is exactly why Douglas Eby starts his article talking about Steven Spielberg and ending with Meryl Streep and the anxiety they have as artists. Through multiple quotes and examples, Eby is able to piece together how and why more creative and artistic people are more subject to anxiety. Being that my research paper is all about how aspiring artists lead to burnout, an article on anxiety would contribute because fear is what drives us as humans to make irrational decisions and think in the moment, rather than the big picture. *Although I already have an article about depression and how that affects an artist, a separate article on anxiety enlightens us on how it's a different influence.* One controls the person's ability because of fear of failure and the other controls their confidence and compares them to others. Out of all the articles on anxiety, this one is the most engaging because of Eby's use of pre-existing successful artists and how they are still not safe from such an ordeal.

Fradera, Alex. "*Here's what the evidence shows about the links between creativity and depression.*" BPS Research Digest, 2018,

<https://digest.bps.org.uk/2018/01/03/heres-what-the-evidence-shows-about-the-links-between-creativity-and-depression/> Accessed Sept. 29, 2019.

Although some might believe the stereotype that creative people are more vulnerable to mood disorders is a myth, Fradera shines the light on all the reasons why it is not. By closely

analyzing how Christa Taylor conducted her experiment and the results she obtained, Fradera was able to explain how there is a correlation between the two. Taylor's experiment involved fine arts students, creative writers, and anyone that had a big name in whichever creative field they specialized in. After performing surveys and picking at the brains of all 36 candidates, the conclusion was that there is a higher number of creative people with mood disorders, the most popular being depression. By analyzing the psychology of people in the arts and comparing it to the main causes of dropout, it becomes clear why fine arts majors have a higher dropout rate than students in any other major. If a creative student is suffering from a mental illness and can not perform his or her best on stage, in the classroom, or behind a canvas, it will shift his or her confidence which could lead to making huge life changing decisions. Although there were several articles that touched on the same subject, Fradera's was one of the few that provided information by studying real people and their experiences, rather than just discussing facts and opinions.

Marcus, Jon. "*Changing Majors is Adding Time and Tuition to the Already High Cost of College.*"

The Hechinger Report, 2018,

<https://hechingerreport.org/switching-majors-is-adding-time-and-tuition-to-the-already-high-cost-of-college/> Accessed Sept 29, 2019.

Jon Marcus plays every college student's advocate by addressing the frustration of picking a major and sticking with it. For every student, going into college is terrifying but how can one be

expected to go in knowing from the start what they want to do for the rest of his or her life? The answer is that most can not and do not. By using examples of real students that went through several major changes while in college, Marcus respectfully describes the unforeseen consequences of just changing your major. Whether it is having to stay longer, pay more for more classes/years, or just the uncertainty through the process of finding the right career path. Although this article only applies to a very particular part of my paper, it overcomes the biggest argument against this paper's thesis "why don't you just change your major?" So, including an example from Marcus's article about the issues with just simply changing your major, it becomes more clear why the situation is more complicated and can not be fixed that easily.

BRIEF REFLEXIVE ESSAY

Fun fact about me: before attending the University of Georgia, I attended the New England Conservatory of Music as a French horn performance major. Long story short, I ended up dropping out after my first year there, took a gap year, and decided to transfer my talents to the theatre program behind the arch in Athens, Georgia. Why is this relevant, you ask? Because during this gap year I felt less than everyone else my age and like a failure. But, to my surprise, I found out that fine arts majors frequently dropout! With this new knowledge, I started wondering if this was due to majoring in the arts or if a student dropping out just had to do with the student themselves. So, the question becomes: do students majoring in an area of fine arts

(theatre, music, dance, etc.) have a higher rate of dropping out than students in any other major? When I was searching for any articles that may touch up on this subject I, unfortunately, was unsuccessful. I was unable to find any opinions on the dropout rate of fine arts majors. The only reason I can think of, after finding nothing on the subject, is that it's because people don't think it's a question to be answered because they can just change their major, right? That may be true but that's also an incredibly shallow way of thinking about it because there's a lot more factors that go into this, which brings me to what I want to find from my source: the psychology behind people in the fine arts (what makes them more vulnerable to mental disorders like depression) and also how mental disorders contribute to a student's decision to dropout of school.

As far as looking for sources went, I knew going into the assignment that I wouldn't find anything that had to do with the dropout rate of fine arts majors, so instead I had to be a bit more creative. My idea was to find articles that weren't similar to each other but would rather compliment each other. I started my search by looking for the psychology behind people involved in the arts. Low and behold, there were several articles that had to do with the mentality of creative people and how they're more susceptible to depression and anxiety. I chose one for each category (the mindset, depression, and anxiety) because, although there were articles that talked about all three in the span of one paper, it seemed important to dive into each one individually and how all of them play a separate role. From there, my next objective was to find articles that confirmed students with depression and anxiety were the most likely to dropout from school. To my surprise, this was more challenging than finding articles that discussed the mentality of creative people. A good amount of the articles that popped up were blogs about personal experiences but there weren't a whole lot that established that it was a real problem. Thankfully, I was able to find one published by the University of Michigan that was

exactly on how depression doubles the chances of a student deciding to dropout. The last article I wanted to include was one that stated the negative side of just changing majors. This was relatively easy to find and, although not super beneficial towards my overall thesis, it felt nice having an article that fought against my biggest opposing argument.

Finally, by the end of my paper, I came to realize that my prediction was, in fact, correct. My assumption was that students majoring in any form of fine arts tend to have a higher dropout rate because of their anxiety and depression. I know I said this already but the whole process was just connecting the dots. If a student that suffers from intense anxiety and depression has a higher rate of dropping out than others and a person in the arts typically has intense anxiety and depression... Doesn't it make sense that a student in the arts would be more likely to drop out? Yes. Another realization I made though is that this isn't something the education system can fix or have any power over. Being in the arts means you have to hold yourself up to really high standards given the competitiveness of the craft. When holding yourself to those standards all the time and constantly critiquing your own work, low self-esteem, anxiety, and forcing comparison are just part of the journey. It's an unfortunate realization but that's why the quitting rate and dropout rate are so high. It takes a specific type of person to be able to put a picture they painted on the wall and take every comment to heart, the positive and the negative. But they're the reason we have so much beauty in this world and you best believe they know it and that's why they do it.