A LOOK AT MUSIC THERAPY


We have a new undergraduate, Bachelor of Arts degree in Washington State; Seattle Pacific University is now offering the first and only program in Music Therapy. As Director of the MT program, I have had a number of queries from high school students, parents, career counselors, and music educators who are looking for more information on this field. Here are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions:

What is Music Therapy?

The national American Association of Music Therapy (AMTA) defines the profession of Music Therapy as "the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program." A more useful definition in my everyday conversations would be "Music Therapy is the intentional, functional use of music to achieve therapeutic goals." However, what is key in the AMTA definition is the phrase "by a credentialed professional", that being the designation MT-BC, or board certified music therapist. This designation symbolizes the training of a musician that is distinct in many ways from a music education or other professional degree program.

Music therapy is considered an established healthcare profession. Structured music interventions are used to address the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of individuals or groups of individuals. Research supports the effectiveness of music therapy with children, adolescents, adults, and seniors in a wide variety of healthcare and educational settings.

Is the field of Music Therapy new?

In World War II musicians often volunteered in hospital settings and set up music programs in Veterans Administration hospitals and state institutions. In fact, Mu Phi Epsilon and Delta Omicron worked with the American Red Cross to provide musicians who offered music to recovering soldiers in physical and mental rehabilitation (Davis, et.al). In 1950 the National Association for Music Therapy (NAMT) was formed and educational institutions, such as Michigan State University and the University of Kansas, formalized the training for music therapists. Graduates of schools accredited by NAMT earned the designation of registered music therapists (RMT).

A second organization, the American Association for Music Therapy (AAMT), was created in 1971. Its founders offered a different philosophy of training and schools accredited by this organization, mainly on the East Coast, awarded the designation of certified music therapists (CMT). A merger of both organizations was created in 1998 and is now the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA).

Since its formal beginnings in 1950, the profession has grown steadily. Professional publications published by AMTA include the Journal of Music Therapy and Music Therapy Perspectives. The 2010 AMTA Member Sourcebook offers the following data from the membership survey:

- AMTA has a total registered membership of 3,394.
- Music therapists provided services in an estimated 30,600 facilities in 2009.
- An estimated 1.2 million people received music therapy services in 2009.
- AMTA members live in 33 countries and 6 continents, and in every state in the continental U.S.

In addition, the field of Music Therapy is also recognized internationally. The World Federation of Music Therapy is "an international non-profit organization bringing together music therapy associations and individuals interested in developing and promoting music therapy globally through professional exchange. WFMT is an international body, with officers, commissioners, and regional liaisons in Africa, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Finland, India, Norway, Korea, Spain, U.A.E., and the USA. " The 13th World Congress of Music Therapy conference will be held July 5-9, 2011 in Seoul, Korea (www.wfmt.info).
What do music therapists do?

As an allied health professional, music therapists often work as members of an interdisciplinary treatment team, e.g., physicians, nurses, teachers, psychologists, etc. After assessing the therapeutic goals, the MT-BC designs music interventions for individuals and groups such as music improvisation, receptive music listening, song writing, lyric discussion, music and imagery, music performance, and learning through music. “Through musical involvement in the therapeutic context, the client’s abilities are strengthened and transferred to other areas of his or her life. Music Therapy also provides avenues for communication that can be helpful to those who find it difficult to express themselves in words. Research in the music therapy profession supports the effectiveness of music therapy in many areas such as facilitating movement and overall physical rehabilitation, motivating people to cope with treatment, providing emotional support for clients and their families, and providing an outlet for the expression of feelings” (AMTA).

The populations served by music therapists are vast. One of the distinct advantages of this field is one’s ability to take their training to reach a population that they have a passion for. This would include working with the Abused / Sexually Abused; AIDS; Alzheimer’s /Dementia; Cancer; Chronic Pain; Developmentally Disabled; Forensic; Head Injured; Hearing Impaired; Medical/Surgical; Neurologically Impaired; Parkinson’s; Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; Rett Syndrome; Speech Impaired; Stroke; and the Terminally Ill.

What is the training to become a music therapist?

To practice music therapy persons must complete an AMTA approved college music therapy curricula, including a post-graduate, six-month internship, to become eligible to take the national examination offered by the Certification Board for Music Therapists. Upon successful completion, music therapists obtain the credential of MT-BC (Music Therapist-Board Certified).

There are many steps to reach the MT-BC credential. A student interested in becoming a music therapist should consider the following:

a. Finding an approved college music therapy program. The easiest way of finding this information is through the AMTA website: [www.musictherapy.org](http://www.musictherapy.org). AMTA lists approved programs by State, and I encourage the prospective student to do their homework! Although all music therapy programs approved by AMTA must meet the same educational standards, each degree program has discretion in how its program is designed. Prospective students should ask MT Program Directors about the specifics of their program and how it may differ from others.

   Prospective students should also be aware that in addition to coursework, undergraduate level training includes a minimum of 180 hours of clinical practicum hours out in the field. Most often, employed MT-BC’s work with University programs to serve as practicum supervisors. Music Therapy students move from observation, to co-leading, to eventually leading client sessions under the supervision of an MT-BC. Students learn the process of music therapy – referral, assessment, treatment planning, musical intervention, evaluation – with each practicum. A minimum of three different client populations (e.g., autistic children, adolescents in drug rehabilitation, wounded veterans in the VA hospital, seniors in an adult care facility) are required before internship.

b. Upon completion of the 4 year degree, the Music Therapy student must apply to a full-time, six-month clinical internship at an approved AMTA site. Often the MT student will apply to a clinical program in another state to work at a desired clinic, hospital, or facility under the supervision of an advanced level Music Therapist to develop their skills as a clinician.

c. Upon completion of the six-month clinical internship, the MT student is now eligible to sit for the national Board Certification exam. A successful pass will earn the student the national designation of board certified music therapist, MT-BC.

Can an undergraduate student earn certifications in music education and music therapy?

Yes, although the student should be prepared for the potential of a five year program. Often the first two years of music education and music therapy undergraduate training are the same, i.e., courses in music theory, ear training, music history, private lessons, participation in ensembles, etc. The music therapy student is first and
foremost a strong musician, who is capable of offering a junior recital on one's primary instrument, in addition to passing proficiency exams on guitar, keyboard, and voice. The second two years for the music therapy student is in core courses such as, *The Psychology of Music, Music with Special Needs Children; Music & Medicine; Anatomy & Physiology*; and several classes in the Psychology department. The required 180 hours of practicum experience is, for example, a schedule of 2 hours per week during the 10 week terms starting in the sophomore year at SPU.

If I already have a B.A. in music or music education, how can I become a board certified music therapist?

There are a number of ways an individual who already holds an undergraduate degree, preferably in music, can earn MT-BC status. AMTA refers to this as the ‘Equivalency Program’ and the AMTA website states: The equivalency program consists of all core music therapy courses at the undergraduate level, all clinical training requirements including the internship, plus any related coursework in science and psychology (e.g., anatomy and physiology, abnormal psychology, and other related courses). Upon successful completion of the music therapy equivalency program an individual is eligible to sit for the national certification exam to obtain the credential Music Therapist-Board Certified (MT-BC) which is comparable to the eligibility of the baccalaureate degree as cited above.

Arizona State University, for example, adds the required course work in music therapy to your existing bachelor’s degree. Their program can be completed in as little as two semesters, plus the six-month internship, to have the student eligible to sit for the board certification exam. The equivalency training must be completed before entering the ASU Master of Music in Music Therapy degree program. However, the University of the Pacific and the University of Miami offer an Equivalency Plus Master’s Degree program, allowing students to work toward the graduate degree while completing the Equivalency requirements. An additional option for the prospective student is offered through the University of Iowa. The equivalency program is not a graduate degree but a professional certification-only option for those who currently have a BA or BM degree.

The directory of approved AMTA schools for undergraduate, graduate degrees and equivalency programs may be found on the national website. For specific information, contact the Director of Music Therapy at the academic institution.

Are there jobs for this career?

I am asked this question often and given the current economic environment I must honestly state that I have no idea what the job market will look like in a year from now for music therapists, or for any other career for that matter! Here are the facts from the 2010 Member Sourcebook:

- In 2009, almost twice as many new full time music therapy jobs were created as there were full time positions lost.
- The most common settings reported by those who began a newly created job in 2009 were School (K-12), Self Employed / Private Practice, Nursing Home, Hospice, and Private Music Therapy Agency areas.
- Music Therapists’ reported full time salaries range from $20,000 to $156,000, depending upon geographic region and population served.

In Washington State, my colleagues have witnessed open positions that were closed due to the lack of trained music therapists in our region. I have received calls, in particular, from family members seeking the services of a music therapist in private practice for their special needs children or home-bound family member. With the start up of the new SPU program I am cautiously optimistic that newly trained music therapists will be able to fill a void in our hospitals, social service agencies, and educational facilities.

How is the Music Therapy program at Seattle Pacific University different from other music therapy programs around the country?

Seattle Pacific University is a liberal arts, Christian University. The academic and clinical requirements and standards of the American Music Therapy Association coupled with the global perspective and strong academic programs and faculty on the SPU campus offer students a rigorous, unique discipline, rooted in the ideals of outreach and service. Currently, SPU is only offering the undergraduate BA degree option; I encourage prospective students to look at the curriculum online at [www.spu.edu/depts/fpa/music/therapy](http://www.spu.edu/depts/fpa/music/therapy) and contact me if they have further questions.
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References
