Understanding Student Engagement with Live Music: A Data-Driven Analysis of Concert Attendance at Pomona College's Music Department

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Introduction

For the duration of my Capstone project, I am working with Professor Joti Rockwell and Concert Production Manager Audrey Dunne to explore the multifaceted factors that influence student attendance at concerts hosted by the Pomona College Music Department. This investigation combines rigorous historical data analysis spanning 15 years with active, hands-on collection of contemporary engagement metrics to develop a comprehensive understanding of attendance patterns, their underlying causes, and their implications for strategic programming decisions. The project addresses a central challenge facing arts organizations across higher education: how to cultivate sustained student engagement with live performance amid competing demands, digital entertainment alternatives, and evolving campus cultures.

The music department's concert series represents a significant institutional investment in cultural programming, offering students regular opportunities to experience live music across diverse genres and performance contexts. Yet attendance patterns remain inconsistent and poorly understood, making it difficult for the department to optimize scheduling, allocate promotional resources effectively, or design programming that resonates with student interests and availability. By applying systematic data analysis to this question, this project aims to transform attendance from an unpredictable variable into a measurable, interpretable phenomenon that can inform evidence-based decision-making.

I have structured this investigation into three interconnected temporal phases—Past, Present, and Future—each designed to address distinct research questions while contributing to an integrated understanding of concert attendance dynamics. This tripartite framework allows me to trace how historical events and long-term trends have shaped current patterns, document real-time engagement behaviors and motivations, and project forward to develop sustainable strategies for enhancing participation. The three sections are not merely chronological divisions but represent different methodological approaches and analytical lenses, each offering unique insights that collectively paint a complete picture of the factors influencing student attendance decisions.

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Present

While historical data illuminates long-term trends and structural factors, it cannot reveal the immediate motivations, barriers, and decision-making processes that shape individual students' choices about concert attendance. The second phase of my project addresses this limitation by actively collecting contemporary data through student surveys and social media analytics conducted during Fall 2025. This present-focused investigation captures the current landscape of student engagement, documenting both quantitative metrics of digital and in-person participation and qualitative insights into students' subjective experiences and perspectives.

Survey methodology forms a cornerstone of this phase. In collaboration with Professor Rockwell and Audrey Dunne, I developed a post-concert feedback survey in Qualtrics, distributed via QR codes displayed on concert screens and printed in program materials. The survey includes both quantitative rating scales and multiple-choice questions designed to capture diverse dimensions of the concert experience: whether respondents are first-time or returning attendees; what factors motivated their decision to attend; how they learned about the concert; their institutional affiliation (Pomona student, other 5C student, faculty/staff, community member); their satisfaction level on a 0-100 scale; whether they attended alone or with others; and their likelihood of attending future concerts. Through early data collection spanning four concerts between September and October 2025, I have already gathered 65 responses that reveal surprising patterns—most notably, that the majority of concert attendees (55%) are non-students from the broader Claremont community, while Pomona students represent only 22% of the audience. This finding has profound implications for understanding the "student attendance problem" and designing appropriate interventions.

The survey data reveals additional insights that challenge assumptions and highlight opportunities. An overwhelming 93% of respondents reported attending previous Music Department concerts, indicating strong retention among the existing audience but raising questions about the department's ability to attract newcomers. Satisfaction levels are exceptionally high (mean score of 93.69 out of 100), suggesting that quality and programming are not the primary obstacles to student attendance. When asked what factors influenced their decision to attend, respondents most frequently cited enjoyment of concerts generally (63%), interest in the type of music or performance (43%), and knowing a performer (39%). Importance ratings for various decision factors revealed that genre/type of performance (mean: 71.69), location (mean: 67.40), and timing (mean: 65.42) ranked as most influential, underscoring the significance of programming choices and logistical considerations. Interestingly, traditional printed materials (flyers, posters, programs) proved most effective at reaching this audience (60%), followed by word of mouth (37%) and social media (34%), likely reflecting the

predominance of community members who may be less engaged with digital platforms than student audiences.

Complementing these survey findings, I am conducting a systematic analysis of social media analytics to understand how digital engagement relates to physical attendance. By downloading .csv files from Facebook, Instagram, Google Dashboard, and Bitly—platforms the department uses to promote concerts—I am tracking metrics such as post reach, impressions, likes, comments, shares, story views, link clicks, and profile visits. Visualizing these data streams alongside attendance figures allows me to assess which content types generate the most meaningful engagement, whether increased digital visibility translates into higher turnout, and how different platforms vary in their effectiveness. For example, does behind-the-scenes rehearsal footage generate more interest than formal promotional posters? Do posts featuring student performers receive higher engagement from the student demographic? Is there an optimal timing and frequency for concert promotion posts, or does excessive posting lead to diminishing returns? These questions will guide the department's social media strategy and help allocate limited promotional resources more effectively.

The present phase also involves ongoing refinement of data collection instruments based on early feedback. As I continue surveying audiences at subsequent concerts, I am incorporating suggestions from respondents and stakeholders to improve question clarity, expand demographic categories, and better capture the student experience specifically. This iterative approach ensures that the data I collect remains relevant, actionable, and responsive to the project's evolving understanding of attendance dynamics.

Breakdown of Survey Responses

First-Time vs. Returning Attendees

The overwhelming majority of respondents were not first-time attendees. This distribution indicates that the Music Department successfully retains an engaged core audience who attend concerts repeatedly. 93 percent of attendees had attended a Music Department concert before. However, the very low proportion of first-timers (only 7%) raises questions about whether the department is effectively reaching new audiences or whether concerts primarily serve an established, loyal base.

Institutional Affiliation

- Non-5C community members (parents, community members, employees): 55%
- Pomona College students: 22%
- Other 5C students (parents, employees, CMC, Scripps, Harvey Mudd, Pitzer): Combined ~23%

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Rather than being primarily a student-oriented activity, Music Department concerts draw a majority of their audience from the broader Claremont community. Parents, local residents, and college employees make up over half the audience, with Pomona students representing less than a quarter of attendees. This has significant implications for promotional strategy, programming decisions, and assessment of "student attendance" as a metric.

Music Major Status

- Music majors: Approximately 4%
- Non-music majors: Approximately 30%
- Undecided majors: Approximately 1%
- Non-students: Approximately 64%

Even among student respondents, the overwhelming majority are not music majors, indicating that concerts successfully attract beyond the department for those students who do attend.

How Attendees Heard About Concerts

- Flyers/Printed Materials: 60%
- Word-of-Mouth: 37%
- Social Media: 34%

Traditional printed materials prove most effective for reaching this audience, which makes sense given the 55% community (non-student) demographic. These community members may be less engaged with social media platforms and more responsive to physical signage and printed programs.

However, this also reveals a potential disconnect: if outreach efforts focus heavily on digital platforms popular with students (Instagram, Facebook), they may be optimized for the wrong primary audience.

What Brought Returning Attendees Back

- "I just enjoy concerts!": 63%
- Interest in type of music/performance: 43%
- Knowing a performer: 39%

This suggests that the established audience attends consistently but still responds to programming choices. For this loyal base, variety and interesting repertoire selections help maintain engagement even when they don't know performers personally.

Importance of Decision Factors

Respondents rated various factors on a 0-100 scale for how important each was in their decision to attend. The top factors were:

1. Genre of Music/Type of Performance: Mean = 71.69
2. Location: Mean = 67.40

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3. Timing: Mean = 65.42
4. General Curiosity: Mean = 52.52

Programming decisions emerge as the most consistently important factor. Combined with Q2 data showing 43% motivated by "interest in type of music/performance," this suggests repertoire selection is a powerful lever for both attracting and retaining audiences.

Attending Alone vs. With Others

- Attending with others: 66%
- Attending alone: 34%

Here, we see the role that relationships could play in concert attendance. This distribution likely reflects the mixed audience: students may be more likely to attend in groups, while community members might attend independently or with one other person, or vice versa.

Overall Satisfaction Level

Respondents rated their concert experience on a 0-100 slider scale:

- Mean: 93.69
- Standard Deviation: 7.01
- Range: 73-100
- Total Responses: 65

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Bibliography

This article examines the concert attendance behaviors of undergraduate non-music majors, focusing on how preferences, convenience, and course requirements influence participation. Through three studies, Flowers analyzes correlations between students' stated musical preferences and actual attendance, the timing of attendance in relation to assignment deadlines, and the vocabulary students use in describing concerts. The findings highlight discrepancies between intention and behavior, and show that convenience often outweighs preference in determining attendance choices. This source will provide valuable context for understanding how student motivations and institutional factors shape attendance patterns. It will help me interpret Pomona's historical attendance logs and survey results, and extrapolate deliverable suggestions from my analysis.

Flowers, Patricia J. "ASPECTS OF CONCERT ATTENDANCE BEHAVIOR OF UNDERGRADUATE NONMUSIC MAJORS." *Contributions to Music Education*, no. 10, 1983, pp. 19–26. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24127374. Accessed 10 Sept. 2025.

This case study examines how the Emily Carr University Library utilized Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to engage students and community members, assessing effectiveness through analytics and surveys. The authors discuss strategies for increasing visibility, the importance of goal setting, and the challenges of measuring success beyond simple metrics, such as follower counts. A key finding is that Instagram provided the highest engagement due to its visual nature, with social media activity influencing not only awareness but also physical attendance at library events. This article will support the "Present" phase of my capstone project by offering concrete examples of how social media platforms can drive participation in arts-related events. It will also help guide my analysis of Instagram and Bitly data, particularly in connecting online engagement with concert attendance outcomes.

Kulczynski, Alicia, et al. "Measuring Motivations for Popular Music Concert Attendance." *Event Management*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2016, pp. 239–54, https://doi.org/10.3727/152599516X14643674421816.

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This dataset documents attendance at music department concerts over a 15-year period, including student, faculty, and guest performances. It will serve as the foundation for the "Past" phase of my capstone project, allowing me to identify long-term patterns and the effects of major events such as COVID-19 on participation. By combining these logs with demographic and campus activity data, I will analyze how concert type, timing, and student body changes influence attendance trends.

Pomona College Music Department. (2008–2023). Concert attendance logs [Unpublished internal dataset]. Pomona College.

This case study evaluates how the Emily Carr University Library used Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to engage students and community members, measuring effectiveness through analytics and surveys. The authors discuss strategies for increasing visibility, the importance of goal-setting, and the challenges of measuring success beyond simple metrics like follower counts. A key finding is that Instagram provided the highest engagement due to its visual nature, with social media activity influencing not only awareness but also physical attendance at library events. This article will support the "Present" phase of my capstone project by offering concrete examples of how social media platforms can drive participation in arts-related events. It will also help guide my analysis of Instagram and Bitly data, particularly in connecting online engagement with concert attendance outcomes.

Solomon, Mary, "Market Research on Student Concert Attendance at BGSU's College of Musical Arts" (2019). Honors Projects. 440.
https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/honorsprojects/440

This study develops and validates the Concert Attendance Motivation Scale (CAMS), designed to measure the diverse motivations that influence popular music concert attendance. Using focus groups, exploratory factor analysis, and survey data from over 500 participants, the authors identify ten key motivational dimensions, including nostalgia, aesthetics, escape, social interaction, hero worship, and uninhibited behavior. Three motivations—nostalgia, status enhancement, and the opportunity to experience new or concert-specific music—are highlighted as unique to popular music contexts. The paper demonstrates how these motivational categories

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can inform marketing and event management strategies. For my capstone project, this source provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the psychological and social drivers of concert attendance, which I can apply when analyzing survey results and considering long-term strategies to encourage student participation in Pomona's music events.

Webb, Hillary, and Ken Laing. "Engaging with Social Media: The Emily Carr University of Art and Design Library Experience." *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2015, pp. 137–51. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.1086/680570. Accessed 10 Sept. 2025.

Outline #1