

SECOND YEAR TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCE PROGRAM
SIGNATURE PROJECT PROPOSAL

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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Throughout the following year, my project will fulfill the Artistic and Creative Endeavors category by learning the basics of the piano and music theory through piano textbooks, online videos, and community feedback. Using this knowledge, I will master the piece the “Opened Way” from the Shadow of Colossus.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT:

I plan to use the funding that STEP provides to teach myself how to play the piano, an experience which will allow me to express myself and focus my creative energy in a way that my rigid career path otherwise does not allow. Learning the foundation of the piano is something that I have always wanted to do throughout my life, but never really had the chance. This specific goal is encompassed in an overall theme to enhance my appreciation for music and to challenge myself to step outside my comfort zone and learn something new.

This project will transform me in many ways. Outside of the class it will challenge me to push myself to become a life long learner, and desensitize me to attempting things that I have had little to no experience in the past. This project will also allow me to develop a deeper understanding of music by learning about chords, notes, harmonies, many things that are present in our every day lives. Lastly, it will expose me to the musical community, allowing me to make connections and meet others that I would not normally meet. This project has the potential to push me mentally, intellectually, and socially into a new and fascinating realm of self-expression.

While the co-curriculars that I have participated in this semester did not heavily drive the choice of my project, the experiences I have gained will greatly shape my mindset both during and after the project. During one of my STEP co-curriculars a faculty member came in from Honors and Scholars to discuss our online portfolio through u.osu.edu—discussing all of its different options, features, and general expectations. I thought it would be a fantastic idea to take what I have learned from creating my H&S portfolio and incorporate those skills into an u.osu.edu blog that tracks my progress throughout my experience (and beyond!).

In order to learn the foundations to complete my goal, I have outlined a very specific plan to follow. While I will not initially be taking any classes at Ohio State regarding the subject, I plan to push myself academically on a self-written track. My main ways of learning will be from a mixture of published piano books, online videos, and the Internet piano community.

Every day I plan on practicing an hour with a relative breakdown of:

- 20% Piano technique
- 20% Scales
- 40% Learning from books
- 10% Extra music theory

- 10% Replaying my repertoire of pieces

Alfred's All-in-One Piano books are highly recommended by the piano community to understand the basics of the piano and theory. Every two months I will try to make my way through one book. At the same time, I plan on practicing other key elements that I will need to be successful down the road, such as finger independence, pedaling, and scales.

I also am currently learning from a YouTube channel online that has over 40 introductory lessons to the piano and 25 regarding sheet music that I reference to further my development. For all other questions, I will go to online forms such as reddit where there are small niche communities that can answer any specific questions I have. I feel that combined, these three resources will be able to generate a solid *basic* foundation in piano and music theory. The downside of not having a teacher is that I must push myself to stay on track and maintain a steady practice pattern. Eventually I do plan on getting a teacher, because otherwise my skill will stagnate. But I believe that will occur later down the road outside the scope set for this project.

Given the money I am allotted through STEP, a little may come out of pocket in order for me to reach my goal. The main expense will be buying a nice digital piano that can mimic an acoustic piano. Otherwise, I believe reaching this goal is completely feasible. I have been dabbling on my father's keyboard for a while now, but never had the opportunity to invest in the big leap that I need to take the piano seriously.

The current keyboard that I practice on has 29 keys, is not touch sensitive, and the keys are not weighted. In contrast, a real piano has 88 weighted keys with touch sensitivity. Playing too long on this cheaper keyboard has developed some bad habits when switching to a piano. Often times I am not used to the force required to depress the piano keys in order to trigger the sound because my keyboard has very little resistance—this makes it much harder to play faster pieces. Also, with a generic keyboard without touch sensitivity, all notes have the same intensity no matter how hard I press the keys.

This means I am missing out on a large dynamic within music itself—being able to express loudness or softness within my music. Thus I have been hesitant to practice on anything but a real piano. However, this is the one thing STEP has the power to change. I plan to practice an hour a day, based on a recommended break down of scales, technique, recap songs, and making progress in the books. By the end of November I hope to start practicing “the Opened Way.”

I have been the sole force in developing this proposal—however my parents have always been supportive of what I do. I hope that their appreciation and feedback will help drive me to practice—and that they will give me feedback along the way. Both used to play piano during their young adult life but have since given it up. I have also used various Internet boards to decide what the best method of attack would be, and which accessories suit my needs. I would

love to potentially talk to a musically inclined staff member at Ohio State and get their thoughts on my strategy for a second opinion.

PERSONAL STATEMENT:

Throughout my life, I have always found the arts to be an outlet. When I was young I loved creating art using an open source software called GIMP. I first started using it to make online banners for an online video game I played in the fourth through fifth grade. Then, my love for making art took over. I expanded to another Internet forum called GIMPTalk—which at its height was one of the largest boards for GIMP tutorials. There I became a moderator, and have been broadening my knowledge of the software ever since. What has kept me learning has been my appreciation for art. Often times, I will get an idea of what I want to make in my head. Sometimes, in order to execute these ideas I have to learn new techniques within GIMP. It is these small moments that have complied attributing to my knowledge of the software today.

I plan to parallel this learning experience to the piano. As I have aged, music has also played a huge role in my life. Wherever I go, whatever I do, I am constantly listening to music. What I hope that this project will initiate is my switch from appreciating music to making music. Ultimately, what will keep me going is my drive to want to play new songs, which will require me to learn new techniques and focus my learning of music theory. Learning the basics of piano will continue to open new forms of self-expression as well as allow me to learn something that is universal that all can enjoy.

This project will continue to challenge me as I learn the basic foundation of the piano and music theory. For the scope of this project I aim to get where I need to go without a teacher. This means I will constantly push myself to cover the material at hand. I will need to be forward with my own mistakes while playing and actively looking for ways to correct them (an action that could be applied to other aspects of life as well...). Most importantly, this project will put me outside my comfort zone and challenge me to learn something I have little experience in—normalizing this action if I choose to pick up other hobbies later in life.

Even though the project will constantly challenge me, it will also open me up to a whole new range of possibilities. Music is a universal language that is written and understood by all. It will be great to obtain the ability to express myself to another no matter what nation, background, or history they have. Personally, being involved in music will also help me meet new people on campus and through the web. Whether it be to share my love of music with others and jam out through clubs such as The New Music Collective, or talk to others about fingering positions on online forums—music provides a way to meet others who I would not normally meet and expose me to more well-rounded ideas.

Also, this project will be intellectually developing. By understanding the basics of the music theory I might use this to catalyze more respect for performers, singers, and songwriters. Often it is difficult to appreciate just how hard someone has worked, or just how talented an individual is, if one knows nothing about what they as a person do. Take for example woodcarving. One handcrafted table might look amazing compared to another, but without knowing the process that went into the two pieces, one can hardly tell which took more dedication to create. The same goes with music. After this project is over I will gain a deeper appreciation of the effort, collaboration, and work that goes into composing and playing music.

In sum, this project gives me the opportunity to try something out of my comfort zone, and can teach me lessons for years to come.

BUDGET

This project will require the following (to ensure my success and to benefit my own continuous development beyond this projects end date):

*Note: All prices include estimates of tax

- Yamaha Arius YDP-181 Traditional Console \$1,815.00
- Boss DB-30C Dr. Beat Metronome \$35.00
- Alfred's Adult All-in-One Course Books \$32.00
- Boston Harbor Piano Desk lamp \$34.00
 - Light Bulbs (2) \$8.50
- Various Music Books \$55.50
- Reporting Back \$20.00

Total estimated Fees: \$2,000

Proposed STEP Allowance: \$2,000

The largest expense by far is the Yamaha digital piano, but it is also the most vital to my goal. To practice the piano, one needs a piano! It will give me the ability to practice every day in the comfort of my own home. Currently my father has a very old keyboard, but it is not good to continually develop my skills. My current keyboard is not touch sensitive. The same note intensity comes out regardless of how hard one presses the keys. This means, in transitioning to a real piano, I have no notion of the constancy required to get an even sound, or express soft and louder sounds. Also, it hardly has 4 octaves, making it hard to practice further reaching music. This digital piano suits my needs, has it has all 88 keys, is portable (I will be able to move it to my apartment during school and beyond), and each of the keys is made to simulate real action on a piano (the hammers hitting the strings) making the transition to an acoustic piano much easier. The main benefit of this digital piano over a low-end acoustic piano is that it is portable, and does not require tuning every 6 months. These two factors greatly meet my needs at this point in my life, as I will constantly be on the move and low on money.

The reason I require buying this piano is because it cannot be rented. I have checked with local retailers (Hauer Music, Guitar Center), and have not been able to find a digital piano of this end. In talking to retailers, buying the piano is a much better deal in the long term anyways. Most companies who do rent-to-own programs will charge based on the full retail price of the piano. In this case, assuming that I would be able to rent this model somewhere, it would be based off of the \$2,100 retail price. But, if I buy the piano outright, I can get it at the reduced value of \$1,699 ultimately saving \$400 dollars upfront. At the same time I will have the factory warranty of two years on the digital piano, whereas if I rent it I become liable to any damage occurred over the rental period. Also, many retailers do not rent pianos for 3-month increments. Usually they will be six-month contracts to a year. This already overshoots the selected “range” of the experience in itself.

The argument can always be made to go cheaper, but realistically if I want to get the most out of learning the piano I should do it on an instrument that simulates a real piano. Otherwise, bad habits like those previously mentioned in the budget and project description will develop. At the end of the day playing piano is something that I want to continue pursuing after my experience is over. If I rent a cheaper digital piano, I will be back to square one with the same financial burden as before starting my experience. Buying the piano allows me to develop my skills in the long term, and sets me up for a transformational experience for the rest of my life.

The other accessories are also tools I need to complete my project. The metronome will help me keep time reading and playing the sheet music, and is critical to developing a sense of rhythm. Alfred’s All in One Adult Books will be used to build my foundation in music theory and piano techniques. The piano light and assorting bulbs (sold separately go figure...) will allow me to work on pieces during the night in dimmer conditions. The last \$50 dollars I have set aside for sheet music that may interest me as I develop skills and find pieces of music or books that I would like to read to progress my skill.

REPORTING BACK:

In order to track my progress I will try to record pieces once a week and posting them to my u.osu.edu blog. It would be a fun way to see my skills progress over the lapsed period of time. I will also try to do brief v-logs once a month talking about my experiences over the time frame, discuss any issues I am currently facing, and think of how I can improve. This way, when I finish my project there will be tangible evidence of what I have accomplished. At the same time, this method of reporting will push me to improve from week to week since I know I will have to deliver. However, I have still not figured out how exactly I plan on recording my pieces, whether it is audio only through the USB output on the piano, or video through my phone.

After my project is completed, I will then use my blog as a basis to create my STEP poster for the expo. There I can meet with others, share my progress, and direct individuals to my blog if they would like to see a more in depth experience of my journey. Normally, one might say, why not just perform? Truth is, I would probably not feel comfortable in front of a large audience. This project is personalized for me—I am mainly doing it for my love of music, and do not know how comfortable I will be performing for others at the end of the experience. However, if all goes well, I may be open to a closed performance as well!