Bachelor of Philosophy Sample Plan of Studies
Majors: Music and Physics

My program of study consists of a double degree in Music with jazz concentration and in Physics and Astronomy. I decided on these seemingly unrelated majors to fulfill my love and passion for music and my need to understand the physical world. In the process, I have discovered that these two majors are not as distant as some might think. Since coming to the University of Pittsburgh, my goal has been to allow my understanding of the world around me to help me develop my knowledge and appreciation of music and, in the process, make me a better musician and person.

I started toward my physics major in the Honors introductory course with Dr. Stewart. He not only stimulated the student’s minds but also had such enthusiasm for the course that, in turn, rubbed off on the students. As I continue to fulfill the degree’s requirements, I notice that the professors from whom I learned the most were equally as enthusiastic. I realized that, to get the most success from my college career, I must be passionate about my academic goals – in this case, to understand the relationship between physics and music. My enthusiasm was realized in this past summer’s Brackenridge Fellowship Program. My project was “The Evolution of Western Tuning Schemes” and it allowed me to read in depth on the subjects of physics and music. From this research, I learned that there is a long history of people with this similar passionate interest – finding the connections in physics, astronomy, and music. These historical crossovers still resonate in the music and science of today, from acoustics to modern composition. My advisor, Dr. Paul Shepard, another enthusiastic professor, guided me throughout showing me the pitfalls of not only the research, but also in conveying this research to other people. Thus, my experience as a Brackenridge Fellow allowed me to learn from my mistakes and better myself as a researcher and thinker, as well as bridging the connection between physics and music, and molding me into a more knowledgeable musician.

Music is my primary major and thus has been the focus of my course work for the past three semesters. I have stuck to the course requirements for classical majors, which includes music theory classes, ear training classes, and history of western music classes. I have studied under some of the finest teachers and musicians including Robert Zahab and Dr. Don Franklin. These professors have exhibited not only the passion for music in the academic sense, but also in the performance and composition sense. Through this course work, I am developing a better understanding of the nature and history of western music. In addition to these classical courses, I take additional jazz courses, which make up my jazz concentration within the major. Such classes include two semesters of jazz improvisation, jazz band, drum lessons, and history of jazz. I have been most fortunate to study closely under Dr. Nathan Davis, a world-renowned musician and educator. He has shown me that a student can be both academic and creative at the same time. I have noticed that too that often performers criticize academics for being too intellectual, while academics criticize performers for not being intellectual enough. Dr. Davis has shown me there is room for both within a person because a student should be knowledgeable in all facts of their desired subject – in this case music. He has kept the passion of academics burning, while forcing me to perform to the highest standards and increasing my musical vocabulary. With his help, I was able to learn another facet of music, digital recording, in my first semester at Pitt. This skill has been very valuable for me in my own musical endeavors and is something not every student has the pleasure of learning.

Outside of the classroom, I have sought out musical situations of every kind. Since my freshman year, I have been playing as a professional musician throughout
the Pittsburgh area, playing all types of music from jazz to rock to theatre dates. All of these experiences have widened my view as a musician and person – interacting with other musicians and learning the business of music. For my work and practice at the art of the drum set, I received the Mellon Jazz Scholarship in 2003. I see this scholarship not as an end, but as a reason for me too keep learning and growing as a student and musician.

Since my majors are rigid in their course requirements and schedules, I have not been able to take many electives. But, those classes that I have taken outside of my majors have helped me gain a better understanding of human beings. Such courses include anthropological course in archeology and the religions of East Asia, psychology courses, and history and philosophy of science courses. All of these classes have expanded my awareness of other cultures and allowed me to become a better writer able to convey abstract ideas. Being able to convey abstract thoughts has been very helpful in both my majors, since both fields can seem pretty abstract to they layman. All of these influences have enhanced my Brackenridge Fellowship Project, and will certainly help with this proposed Bachelors of Philosophy thesis.

My time at Pitt has been well spent towards the goals of understanding the world better, and growing as a musician. I have spent a great deal of time learning music, in both the classical and jazz worlds, not only academically but also as a performer. In physics, I continue to learn about my environment and use this knowledge to help me in my everyday life, musical and otherwise. At Pitt, I have studied a variety of subjects in depth, thus becoming a knowledgeable and well-rounded student. Through this program of study, I continue to grow and mature not only as a musician/student, but also as a person.