

# A Realistic View of Studying to become a Flute Performer

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Here is a quote from Trevor Wye's "Proper Flute Playing".  
(some UK concepts have been morphed to suit North American wordings).

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Pg. 24 Case Histories: Mr. A and Miss. B

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Mr. A auditions for four music universities and is offered a place at only one of them. In the national batting order for that year, out of all the flute players who auditioned, his playing level places him at hypothetical number 46. He is the 46<sup>th</sup> best flute audition candidate out of all those who auditioned.

Mr. A even though he has gained a place as a performer in a university program, is unlikely to succeed in his aim of becoming a professional performer because, in his particular year, there are 45 people who, in the opinion of the various audition panels, are potentially better than he.

Those 45 won't sit around during their first year waiting for Mr. A to catch up to their level of flute playing. They will be adding to their expertise every day of their enrolment. As he is already far behind those 45 students, Mr. A is unlikely to catch up.

*The better equipped the student is on arrival, the more likely he is to progress at a faster rate than the less well equipped. (See articles below about "enter college as an expert")*

Four years later, as he is soon to graduate from college, Mr. A is assessing his chances of employment (unless he, like so many others, puts off the evil day by taking post-graduate courses).

He \*may\* have climbed up the ladder a little, or slipped back down. He will never know unless he has the chance to compare his own performing skills with those of his contemporaries (ex: In Flute Summer Schools, Masterclasses, Youth Orchestras etc.)

Generally though, Mr. A thinks he is quite a good player and believes his chances of gaining work in an orchestra are quite high.

What Mr. A hasn't considered is that when 65 players go to colleges of music, 65 players have also left, not to mention the many others who've graduated from Universities, Conservatories, polytechnics and less prestigious community colleges, perhaps hoping too, to perform professionally. Add those 65 new graduates to the 60 that graduated the year before, the 71 that graduated the year before that, and so on, all the way back twenty years, and you will have an idea of the number of flute players there are who are out in the market competing for jobs (unless they all switched to other types of employment, which is certainly true for a large proportion of the graduates from the top performing schools in the world.)

In the United Kingdom, for example, the performing branch of music can absorb no more than about 10 players a year. Mr. A isn't going to be one of them unless he has some unusual skill, For many young applicants, the fact that a college of music has offered them a place appears to rubber stamp their future as a performer. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Musicianship combined with Proper Flute Playing isn't a matter of learning and memorizing facts. Neither, one supposes, are most other professions, though many, like medicine, rely on the ability to remember and recall a vast amount of information at any given moment.

Music needs a special kind of ability and talent, a good instinct, intelligence combined with personal warmth and, above all, the desire, the need, the \*want\* to communicate those feelings through the medium of the flute.

To fool most of the people most of the time is not difficult. The music profession contains many who make a good living at it.

Mr. A, when he first expressed a desire to go to a music college, may have felt a subconscious instinct NOT to find out what the opposition was like. It might have put him off. He is happier with his dreams.

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Miss B feels strongly about music, and flute playing as a profession. She applies for an "advice audition" at a college of music. She is told that she has a chance but only a slim one, unless she starts practising three or more hours a day, and obtains lessons with a Proper flute teacher who is aware of current standards.

Miss B feels alarmed but determined. How does she increase her practice time from a previous 30 minutes to at least three hours?

Her schoolteachers insist that success in life is measured in terms of academic achievement.

She has been told at her "advice audition", that the music profession isn't interested in academic grades; she only needs the basic educational requirement in order to get a grant.

What will get her into a music college isn't being a good girl at school and completing all her homework and projects on time (although straight "A"s can help in your transcripts). IT IS BEING FLUTISTICALLY HEAD AND SHOULDERS ABOVE THE COMPETITION.

Not interpretation, or the choice of pieces; purely and simply, a good standard of playing and a high musical potential. A Proper Flute Player. (with a background in basic flute fundamentals and techniques that has been honed over the five years prior to college entrance.)

Miss B attends a summer school for flute where she hears, and talks to, many players about her own age. Some are better flute players, some not so good. She finds out which colleges have reputations for flute playing, and the best teachers to ask for.

She goes home, puts away her Bach Sonatas and starts practising technical exercises and studies.

She needs to because all the serious opposition is doing likewise, and Miss B is determined to be better than them all. Miss B is realistic.

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From "Proper Flute Playing" by Trevor Wye--Pub: Novello.

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See also:

A survey of skills that incoming flute majors should have in the U.S. college system:

<http://www.larrykrantz.com/entrance.htm>

Advice on Choosing a Major" & "Non-performing Careers" by John Wion at:

<http://www.larrykrantz.com/wion003.htm>

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Q: I really want to go to Juilliard one day and major in Flute performance and music education, and play in the New York Philharmonic and eventually be in the Hollywood film symphony. Music is my life.....

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HELLO young flute person Welcome to the group!

It's usually quite a fun and informative group here on Flutenet, but also full of flutists who are actually in the very competitive business of flute playing. Some of us are still dreaming about how music will set us free, while the more experienced of us have already spent 30 years practising and getting our hopes either re-routed or temporarily dashed. Eeek! (( :>o :>)

So, I can understand the warning sounding remarks of those teachers who are giving you a reality check. A reality check at the very beginning of your flute career may be a welcome thing, or perhaps not. But research is really your best tool.

Many students have this dream of "Juilliard, NY Phil, film music" (so did I (!)), but young folk perhaps don't yet know what the reality actually is. Think: Can you research who it is who actually HAS your dream job right now?

For example, who is the current 2008 Principal flutist of The New York Philharmonic? Read their biography; go to youtube and hear them play. Buy a CD of their playing and play it over and over again.

Or for another research project, find out who is most-recorded film music flutist in L.A. ?? Can you google that and find online articles or published articles in flute magazines? Does that person give summer classes, or take students? Have they given interviews on how to do what they are doing?

These research projects that deal directly with the field of work that interests you will tell you so much more than an email group can. Email groups such as Flutenet are much more diverse in their musician population, levels of career advice and style of question/answer interaction.

On email groups it's simpler to ask one question at a time, such as: "How do I work on etude no. 875?" or "What's going wrong with my G# trill?"

But back to our topic: your career. :>)

As far as the fine art of flute playing goes, you'll want to get lots of up-to-date information about how to make your dreams a reality and even more importantly, how to find your own musical niche if it turns out that you don't go the career route that you picture now.

In my opinion after 36 years of being in this field, the most important things you can do for yourself as a flute player are:

**1. Take lessons from the top flute teacher you can find** even if it means travelling lengthy distances and devoting a great deal of energy to audio recording and/or taking copious notes at your lessons.

Then.... practise exactly what your flute teacher prescribes exactly in the way they show you. Follow up on all their study suggestions, and record your efforts and listen back discriminately, taking notes on what to improve.

For help in finding a teacher: <http://www.jennifercluff.com/finding.htm>

**2. Find out about flute playing standards** and start working your way up to the higher levels of flute technique and repertoire.

(Note: Most highschool flutists think they are at a level 8 out of 10 when in fact they are at a level of 2 out of 10.)

**Find out what the flute skill levels really are!**

Standard pre-University flute levels: <http://www.jennifercluff.com/chart.htm>

Advanced flute skill levels: <http://www.jennifercluff.com/skillsourceflute.pdf>

**3. Enroll in music programs that prepare you for University study.**

See this article in how to prepare for college music courses: <http://www.elisioninstitute.org/youth-expert.html>

**4. Keep abreast of flute information from flute publications and associations.** Get a reality check on what is happening in the flute world, and who the flutists are who are employed and the route they took to get where they are.

Here's a sample: <http://test.nfaonline.org/pdfs/flutistquarterly/issues/Fall2006.pdf>

See article on page 22 of the above PDF on "Music - Profession or Hobby?"

Other quality flute publications include:

U.S.: Flutetalk, Flutist's Quarterly

U.K. Pan Magazine

Australia: Flute Focus

University libraries may have back issues of some of the above for you to read.

Flute Associations with flute masterclasses, courses, choirs and other flute-related events for your area can be found using google or from this list: <http://www.larrykrantz.com/fltassoc.htm>

**5. Read about other flutist's career paths** and how they coped with setbacks (for often there are multiple set-backs for most instrumentalists entering a highly competitive field.)

This book gives a very clear picture: [http://www.windplayer.com/Flute-Stories\\_p\\_0-10.html](http://www.windplayer.com/Flute-Stories_p_0-10.html)

**6. Practise the fundamentals of flute technique** instead of doing the obvious (but less efficient method) of just playing "too hard" repertoire. See James Galway's video on this topic (scales instead of pieces):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCp14GNfB70>

For more info. about flute technique see articles on scales: <http://www.jennifercluff.com/scale.htm>

**7. Be sure and get an annual "Clean, Oil and Adjust" on your flute by a reputable technician.** Many flute students don't realize that this is essential to their development (as the flute is not working at top efficiency but they have become used to that. Then it holds them back in their development and they blame themselves because they simply don't understand how it all works.)

See: <http://www.jennifercluff.com/check.htm>

**8. Look ahead at the skills you will be fitting into your practise schedule:**

<http://www.jennifercluff.com/intermed.htm>

**9. Get advice from experts in the field.**

James Galway's videos and website:

<http://www.jamesgalway.com/>

Some good books to get from the library are:

"The Flute" by James Galway

"The Art of Playing the Flute" by Roger Mather

"The Fluteplayer's Book" by Vernon Hill

More of the above titles are listed with ordering information here: <http://www.jennifercluff.com/reading.htm>

and have a quick read of:

"Proper Flute Playing" by Trevor Wye.

Excerpt from this book is at the top of this page. Additional copies of this collection of articles (these pages) are online here:

<http://www.jennifercluff.com/collegereality.pdf>

**10. Play with a really good chamber group, youth orchestra or flute choir.** You need to play alongside of players better than yourself and learn the fine skills of advanced musicianship.

Best of luck,

Jen Cluff

Free flute articles: <http://www.jennifercluff.com/articles.htm>

List of flute technique and "how to" flute books: <http://www.jennifercluff.com/reading.htm>

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Quoted from The FLUTEList at [www.larrykrantz.com](http://www.larrykrantz.com)

PLEASE use these links to read the article in its original location.

FROM: <http://www.larrykrantz.com/audprep.htm>

Thoughts on Careers for Flutists (and other musicians) by Ed Lacy

QUOTE:

I always recommend that anyone embarking on a career in music, especially those parts of the music profession in which the supply of candidates far outstrips the demand, should have their alternative plans in place. If you have a dream, a burning desire to enter a certain facet of the profession, you should go for it. If you don't you will never know whether you could have accomplished your goal. There are going to be some positions open each year, and someone is going to get them. However, given the realities of the situation, it only makes sense to be prepared for whatever you are going to do if you aren't one of those few people, or if reaching your goal requires much longer than you had planned. <snip>

Some of the most unhappy and frustrated people I have ever met are musicians who thought that all they had to do was get a bachelor's degree in performance, then a master's degree in the same field from a major, prestigious conservatory, then practice their excerpts and take auditions for a short time until they landed that job as principal player in a major symphony orchestra or as a professor of flute. Then, if things don't work out that way, they feel that they have failed at life, and don't know what course of action to pursue at that point.

Unfortunately, there are some universities and conservatories which are so anxious to enroll as many students in performance as they can that they never mention to students or prospective students that limiting oneself exclusively to the study of performance may not be a practical course of action. In some cases, these institutions feel a need to have as many performance students as possible, sometimes to keep their professors supplied with students to teach and satisfied with the quality of their students. Another factor is that of the prestige of the school, or at least the reputation as perceived by the school itself. ("We have X times more performance majors than Y university, so we must be X times better than they are.")

<snip>

The music profession can be a truly satisfying and rewarding one if musicians will take a realistic view of it.

Dr. Edwin Lacy  
University of Evansville  
Professor of Music

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From: <http://nasm.arts-accredit.org/index.jsp?page=FAQ%2017>

### **How should I best prepare to enter a conservatory, college, university as a music major?**

Acceptance to an undergraduate program in music is based on many considerations. These vary widely among institutions. For example, some have stringent audition requirements prior to admission while others have open admission policies followed by thorough examinations at some point in the program to determine whether the student may continue as a music major. For specific application requirements, contact NASM accredited institutions directly. The suggestions below indicate how you can best prepare during the high school years, not what you must achieve to apply or be accepted. The advice provided describes two things: first, an ideal set of knowledge and skills goals for college-level applicants; second, competencies needed by musicians as they practice the various aspects of the profession in college and beyond. In brief, you should learn as much as you can as early as you can.

Take responsibility for your own development.

Each musician brings a unique set of talents, aspirations, and abilities to the musical scene. Although you are in school and probably studying with a private teacher, it is important to take increasing responsibility for developing your particular abilities toward your specific goals. Begin by obtaining the admission requirements of schools you may wish to attend, the earlier, the better. Ultimately, you are responsible for choices about how you use your time to prepare for your future. For most musicians, that future involves music at the center supported by many other capabilities.

Practice, practice, practice.

Whatever you do or intend to do in music, try to practice it as much as possible. This applies not only to your instrument and/or voice, but also to other types of musical work. For example, composers should practice composing, prospective teachers should try to observe and gain teaching experiences under appropriate supervision, those interested in music scholarship or criticism should practice writing and speaking on musical topics. No level of knowledge or skill that you can attain will be too high.

Perform alone and with others.

Performance ability is essential for all musicians. You should be a competent performer on at least one instrument or with your voice whether or not you intend to have a performance career. Keyboard ability is important for the life work of most musicians. Students with keyboard skills have a head start as music majors. Ensemble experiences of all kinds should be sought. Work in large and small ensembles develops different kinds of musical skills. Fine ensemble playing comes primarily through practice.

Master the basics.

Be sure that you can read both treble and bass clefs, that you know key signatures, the major and minor scales, and how to write basic notation. Knowledge of musical terms and usage is important, as is the ability to recognize intervals and basic chord types.

Develop your ear.

Take every opportunity to train your ear by taking courses or studies in musicianship that include sight-singing, ear-training, sight-reading, rhythmic and harmonic dictation, and so forth. Developing the ear is a lifetime job. The earlier work is started, the better.

Hear as much music as you can.

You need to be familiar with far more music than that which you perform. Try to hear as much music from as many historical periods and cultural sources as possible. Ask your teachers to recommend a listening list for you that covers the various solo, small, and large ensemble repertory in your performance area. Try to make sure that you have heard the major works of all types in the particular area of music that interests you. Listen more to learn the breadth and depth of the repertory than to enjoy what is already familiar. Whenever possible, follow the score as you listen.

Learn how music works.

Take opportunities to learn the basics of musical structure, including studies in such areas as form, harmony, counterpoint, composition, and improvisation. Like so many other things in music, this knowledge is developed throughout a lifetime. Those who are able to get started early have an advantage. Work with your music teachers, enroll in an AP music course if it is available in your high school, take classes at your community music school, and otherwise explore opportunities to gain initial acquaintance with this material.

Become a fluent, effective English speaker and writer.

As a musician, you will communicate in music, but you will also rely heavily on your ability to communicate in words. Everything from rehearsals to teaching, to writing grant proposals, to negotiating, to promoting your musical interests relies on fluent English skills. Focus attention on learning to speak and write effectively.

Study one or more foreign languages.

Musicians practice their art internationally. You are likely to perform music with texts in foreign languages, and to work with musicians from all over the world. Significant musical scholarship and criticism are in foreign languages. If you seek advanced degrees in music, reading fluency in one or more foreign languages is often required. Since foreign languages are difficult for many people, you should begin acquiring knowledge and skills in at least one foreign language as early as possible. Consult with your music teacher about which languages are best for you.

Get a comprehensive high school education.

Music both influences and is influenced by other fields of study: the humanities, mathematics, the sciences, the social sciences, and the other arts—architecture, dance, film, literature, theatre, and the visual arts. For entrance into college-level study, you are encouraged to gain a basic overview of ancient and modern history, the basic thought processes and procedures of math and science, and familiarity with works in as many of the other arts disciplines as possible. Most professionals who work with music comprehensively develop a particular sensibility about the connections among music, history, and the other arts. Understanding the basics of math and the sciences support future work in music technologies. Social studies are related to understanding the context for various musical endeavors.

Think of everything you study as helping you become a better musician.

As we have already said, the best musicians continue to learn throughout their lives. They are always studying and thinking, always connecting what they know about music with their knowledge of other fields. Since you never know the direction your career will take, it is wise to spend your high school years gaining the basic ability to understand and work in a variety of fields beyond music. Keep music at the center of your efforts, but accept and enjoy the challenge of gaining the kind of knowledge and skills in other areas that will support both formal studies at the college level and your music career beyond.

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From: <http://www.elisioninstitute.org/youth-expert.html>

### **The Young Musician's Challenge: Enter College as an "Expert" By Janis Weller**

Unlike most incoming students, performing arts majors are expected to enter college already somewhat “experts” in their field, with lots of formal training and high skill levels. In music, this often means many years of private instruction in at least one performing medium, acquiring expensive instruments, perhaps traveling to summer festivals, camps and master classes, and regularly attending professional concerts, recitals, operas and other musical events. You may also participate in community music programs like youth orchestras, choruses or preparatory programs (for examples and ideas, see The Prelude Program at MacPhail Center for Music and National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts). You may also study a second instrument, along with music theory or solfege. Considerable resources of time or money may have been invested in your musical training long before you actually enter college.

Think about it: while good grades in the right classes and appropriate scores on standardized tests (SAT or ACT) will basically get you into college as an English, math or psychology major, a strong GPA/SAT alone is not sufficient in the arts. As an incoming freshman musician, you are expected to have a variety of skills already honed to a high level. If you are deficient in one or more areas, you will be expected to take remedial coursework (translation: it'll cost you in time and money) to catch up. Weak skills in some areas might even keep you out of the school you most want to attend.

So here are some of the skills you'll want to develop before you go off to music school—

Major performing area: Your college audition will focus primarily on your skills as a performer even if that's not your intended focus area. To prepare, seek out the best private teachers you can find (look for scholarships and financial aid) as early as you can, then study and practice hard. Look for performing opportunities everywhere—as a soloist, in ensembles, competitions, summer camps and classes. Not every college will require an entrance audition (conservatories definitely will, universities and liberal arts colleges vary in their requirements). Some auditions will also determine scholarships.

Keyboard skills are incredibly useful throughout your life as a musician, so plan to develop expertise beyond what it takes to slip past the piano proficiency exam. Keyboard skills provide harmonic awareness and both an aural and visual understanding of musical architecture that is very helpful in college music theory courses, particularly for musicians who play/sing single line instruments like violin, flute, voice or trumpet. Conductors, voice teachers, choir directors, composers, arrangers, church musicians, classroom music teachers, music therapists, piano tuner/technicians all need and use strong piano skills throughout their musical work on a daily basis. On a practical level, keyboard skills will—

-enhance your harmonic understanding (a huge help on theory, counterpoint and composition assignments – especially if you normally read a single line of music)

-help you read through an accompaniment to a sonata you're working on enable you to harmonize a melody at church or in a teaching situation give you skills to arrange a piece for your chamber ensemble and make it possible for you to play accompaniments for your students

Ideally, start learning piano as early as you can. But if you haven't started yet as you read this, don't panic. It's not too late, just don't delay. Find a teacher who will understand your goals at the piano. A traditional approach to piano lessons may not be the best approach for the student looking for practical piano skills. Tell the instructor that you're preparing to be a college music major, and want to work on functional piano skills like music theory, chord progressions, sight-reading, ear-training, improvisation, transposition and more.

Music theory and Ear-Training are core components of every music curriculum and these are the classes that often cause the most anxiety for students. Each college tends to have their own methods and vocabulary for teaching music theory, so at a minimum in high school, get a solid grounding in music fundamentals and elementary analysis, both on paper and by ear. You will then be well prepared to confidently jump into a fast-paced college theory and ear-training curriculum. Here are some ways to work on these basic skills:

**piano lessons** (see above)

**computer software programs.** Check out MiBac Music Lessons.

**programmed learning texts.** A good basic one is Scales, Intervals, Keys, Triads, Rhythm & Meter by John Clough and Joyce Conley. Norton, N.Y. 1983.

**private instruction or classes in theory, solfège and ear-training.** Check with local music schools and colleges, your high school teachers and your private teacher for teachers or classes in your area. Here are a couple of links to get you started from Indiana University and Berklee College of Music: Berklee Shares

Advanced Placement Music Theory provides rigorous preparation for college theory/ear-training

If music theory is a strong interest or you want to study conducting or composition, you will want to enter college with a higher level of understanding. In addition to the list above, you might want to look for college level summer school or correspondence theory courses in your area or via the internet. If your state offers Post Secondary Enrollment Options, you may even be able to enroll in college theory while still in high school.

Finally, music theory is particularly useful to performers and teachers when you learn to apply it to your own music making. Ask your teachers, conductors and other musicians you work with to incorporate music theory into lessons, rehearsals and conversations to help you integrate the basic concepts into your practicing and performing.

The human voice was the very first musical 'instrument'; gaining some skill and getting comfortable with your own voice is very useful for every musician. Accurately singing a musical line aids music reading and intonation. You will

need to sing in theory class and later may need to sing to a classroom of students or sing a phrasing to the orchestra you are conducting. Easy ways to start singing in high school include participating in school or church choirs, or taking a solfege class or a group voice class to learn the basics. You don't need to have a great voice, just learn to sing accurately. Plus, it's fun.

Focus areas like composition and conducting will have additional requirements—a portfolio of original works or a video of your conducting may be required, for example. Check the requirements of the schools you are interested in attending, then work with your teachers to prepare appropriately.

As early as possible, review the entrance requirements for schools you have a possible interest in attending. These requirements can be found in their catalogs or websites. Each music school will have their own standards and expectations, but most include:

Proficiency on a primary instrument/voice demonstrated by audition. Committees look first for potential—those students who are highly teachable and musical. They generally are not looking for already fully polished performers. Music theory placement test. Your score will determine whether you are prepared to begin the theory sequence of courses or whether you will need remedial work in music fundamentals. The test is usually for placement only—in general, theory test scores are not used to determine admission to a school.

Satisfactory SAT/ACT scores. The standard for 'satisfactory' varies a great deal between schools—plan ahead. Appropriate high school coursework, grade point average (GPA), and class rank. Again, the variations in expectations are wide between schools. Conservatories will often emphasize your audition over high school grades. Universities and liberal arts schools may emphasize academics.

Check out National Association of Schools of Music for some more great prep guidelines for future music majors. Especially notice their emphasis on the benefits of good communication skills and a broad general education.

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### **Skills for Incoming Flute Majors By Jennifer Cluff**

Although many young band students DREAM of becoming a successful performance major in flute, unfortunately the actual reality is quite different from the dream.

In order to obtain a living wage or any kind of paycheck from performing on the flute, you need to be a spectacular musician with many years of training prior to entering college or university.

You need to practice from 2-4 hours a day around your other university classes. You need to already have some music theory, ear-training/sight-singing, keyboard skills and a basic understanding of the history of music, so that the homework does not cut into your practising time. You need to choose electives that don't have too much homework so that it does not cut into your practising time.

For some high school students living away from home for the first time, you need to do all this as well as: Getting sufficient sleep, staying healthy, studying well for tests, preparing for performances, dealing with a crazy time-table.

You will also have to develop skills in eating properly, exercising to avoid injury, perhaps learning to cook, learning to do laundry. You'll also have to pay rent, pay phone bills, learn to perhaps work a part time job, as well as to learn to get along with or work around crazy roommates.

In addition to all this you must pass all your music courses while practising 2-4 hours a day over four years.

If you do not picture yourself doing all that practising, you must seriously consider entering a non-performing branch of music, which demands only 1 to 1.5 hours of practising a day. But if you are in any kind of University level music, you must practise.

No, you won't have much of a social life, and you won't have time to cook large dinners for all your roommates, or do all of the dishes either. You will have time only for working on your course load while practising literally every spare minute.

So please be realistic.

To read about being realistic while enrolled in a music degree, or to download extra copies to send to your musical grandchildren, kids, friends, relatives, or anyone you know who thinks that taking music at the University level should be “easy like band was in highschool” please download and READ these articles at:  
<http://www.jennifercluff.com/collegereality.pdf>