



Fall 10-30-2015

## Student Research Shows Proximity A Factor in Musical Preferences

Kim Hill  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hill, Kim, "Student Research Shows Proximity A Factor in Musical Preferences" (2015).  
*News and Events*. 2778.

<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/2778>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

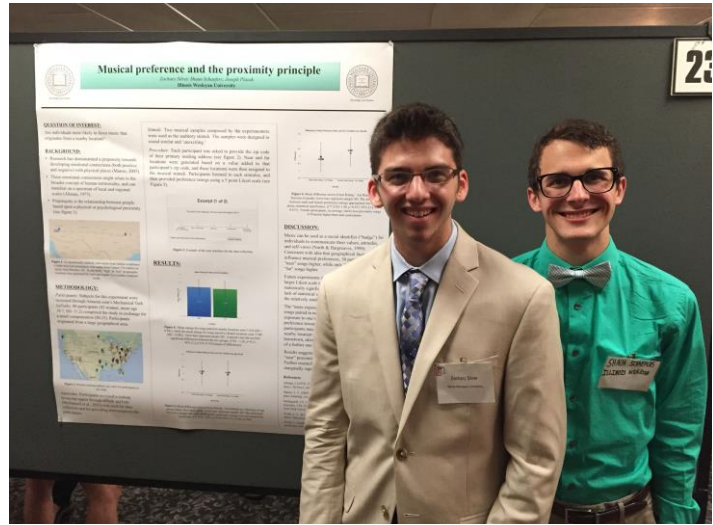
## Student Research Shows Proximity A Factor in Musical Preferences

Oct. 30, 2015

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— A group of twentysomethings are sitting around talking about a new music act or band. When someone in the group says, “that’s a cool band,” the comment is often followed by the question “Where are they from?”

Is the comment just conversational chitchat, or something more important? Are individuals more likely to favor music that originates from a nearby location? Illinois Wesleyan University Assistant Professor of **Music** Joe Plazak and his research students are trying to answer this question.

Plazak, who investigates musical preferences, leads a music cognition group of student researchers. Members Zach Silver '18 and Shaun Schaefer '16 knew that individuals who interact and live close to each other are more likely to develop a relationship, and they wondered if this social psychological phenomenon – the proximity principle – would hold true in music preferences.



Zach Silver '18 (left) and Shaun Schaefer '16 presented at the recent national conference of the Society for Music Perception and Cognition.

“We wondered if individuals were more likely to favor music that originates from a nearby location,” said Silver, a music and **psychology** double major from Vernon Hills, Ill. He said research demonstrates people have a propensity to develop emotional connections, both positive and negative, to physical spaces.

To collect data to help answer the question, Silver and Schaefer developed a custom Javascript applet with Associate Professor of **Computer Science** Mark Liffiton to collect data online. Participants listened to two musical samples and then provided preference ratings using a 5-point Likert scale.

Preliminary results, which the students and Plazak presented at the recent national conference of the Society for Music Perception and Cognition, indicated female participants might value “near” music more than male participants.

The students said more research is needed to substantiate the marginally significant finding. But the findings can be important, the researchers said, so musicians can understand that musical preferences are not only limited to a group’s “sound.” This might also lead to bands and promoters using better marketing strategies based on geographic area, according to Schaefer, a music education major from Aurora, Ill.

“Musical preferences are amazingly dynamic and complex,” said Plazak. “The music we prefer depends on many factors such as the time of day we hear it, our immediate social context, our age and our values.”

Plazak added that the project required Silver and Schaefer to approach the research from an interdisciplinary standpoint. “Zach and Shaun had to transcend their training as musicians and make connections across campus to succeed,” Plazak said. “Their critical thinking skills and creative problem-solving, hallmarks of a liberal arts education, helped them gain meaningful insight into the implications of our research. We were able to find both new answers and new questions.”