This is my first time attending a conference, so I did not know what to expect. I attended the Western Region Chapter of American Music Therapy in Portland Oregon for four days. I understood the importance of attending this conference in order to further develop networking within the music therapy field and continue learning and developing my skills and understanding of the work being done through this profession. However, I did not fully understand the extent of the value of attending this conference until being there and seeing the community of music therapists and music therapy students around me. It helped me develop a larger understanding of my vocational calling and affirmed my discernment in choosing to study music therapy through Seattle Pacific University.

The conference began with an opening session that was designed to empower us in the profession of music therapy, and also empower those we work with through the profession. To sit in a room full of people who understood music therapy was unbelievable. Usually, in a room full of people, over half of them would look confused if I told them that I was studying music therapy, and I would have to go on and explain what the profession is and explain how it is an extremely affective therapeutic device and method. However, here at this conference, no explanation was needed, and communicating with individuals about the music therapy career and method was so much easier, and the conversation could develop so much further, because of that initial understanding.
Coming into this conference, I also realized how little I understood the music therapy profession. By that I mean my understanding was limited as to the extent music therapy can reach to certain populations, and what ways music therapy can be used in various populations. I went to a session on hospice, and was moved by the way the presenter had developed a showcasing of one of her client’s songwriting for her family and the nursing home where she was living in at the time. Such a simple thing to put together, but it made the world of difference to that woman. I also attended a session on Rett Syndrome – something I had never experienced before – and saw how music therapy was very useful in this population through the speaker’s examples and video evidence and data taken.

There were also sessions that were just helpful for me to see how certain strategies of music therapy can be perfected. I went to a session on relaxation and had a twenty-five minute time to relax. It was the most effective relaxation exercise I had ever experienced. The presenter had dedicated time and energy to perfect her relaxation sessions, and it showed when she ran us through it.

One of the most valuable things about the conference was the Connections events – sessions and activities specifically designed for student music therapists. Of these activities, the internship panel stuck out in my mind as the most valuable. A stressor that is often on student music therapist’s minds is the internship that must be taken for graduation with a degree in music therapy. This panel helped clear up anxiety for me, not only for finding an internship, but for my understanding of the internship itself and what it is going to look like.
This conference was extremely beneficial to the development and understanding of my vocational discernment, and I could not have been happier with the learning, networking, and fun that took place for those four days. I was able to meet wonderful people and experience things that affirmed my desire to study music therapy. I now know that there is a strong and talented community of people out there who can further develop me as a music therapist and as an individual. I want to thank you so much for awarding me this grant and giving me the opportunity to attend this conference. The experience was invaluable, and your generous award is what got me there.