Purdue All-American Marching Band

The word subculture, as defined by the Webster Dictionary, is “an ethnic, regional, economic, or social group exhibiting characteristic patterns of behavior sufficient to distinguish it from others within an embracing culture or society.” (Webster Dictionary, 2004) This term, which is used more often than some may think fits perfectly as a more complex definition of the Purdue All-American Marching Band. Although some may call the band as “just another group on campus” or an “organization,” what actually defines each of these terms? A group can be something or someone who meets informally on various occasions at different locations while an organization will be more structured, have specific days and times when meeting occur and a detailed agenda to accomplish before the meeting is completed. My field site is the Purdue All-American Marching Band, but this group itself is not just my field site, they also have many other sites that I will be visiting including the Marching Band Practice Field, located on the north corner of Mac Arthur Drive and Third Street, next to the tennis courts and intramural playing fields, Ross-Aid Stadium, home of the Purdue Boilermaker Football Team, located on the far north sides of University Drive, the Marching Band rehearsal room, located in the ground floor of the Elliot Hall of Music, and the Elliot Hall of Music Theater, where the band collectively gathers to watch, review and critique past performances. These specific sites all have different purposes that benefit the quality of the band in different ways from the acoustical paneling in the theater to the outdoor, open atmosphere of the practice field.
Not only is The Purdue All-American Marching Band an interesting field site, it is also one that can be assessed with much precision, because not only are the people there in the specific group, they are the same individuals on a daily basis. They are required to attend rehearsal and for as long as they are members of the Purdue Marching Band, band becomes their life 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This might be a misconception made by some people but it is not necessarily a stretch from the real thing. Band members form core values and a great deal of dedication to what they do on a daily basis, otherwise they wouldn’t have the endurance to be part of the organization. These individuals love music and it is part of their life. This includes not only making music but also listening to it repeatedly; critiquing what is happening and finding room for improvement. At the end of the day, although tired, sweaty and boggled the by the amount of homework that they have ahead of them at 7:00 that night, these individuals know they what they have done will have a huge impact on their life, if not on that particular day but also in days to come.

Once a member of the band, you are automatically entered into the group entitled the ‘Band Geeks.’’ No matter what your status is or what section group you are in, whether that’s the trombones to the piccolos, you are and will always be a geek. There is no escape. This is probably one of the largest misconceptions that is made on a regular basis about band members. Not only do the have to face regular harassment from their peers but also harassment from their own fellow band members, although ‘most’ of that is done in love and good taste. Another misconception is that you are on ‘band time” all the time. This ‘band time” would be concerted as constant practicing, rehearsals, and other band related functions. In a high school, this may be very true but in a college-like setting
is there is a more free-willed spirit because those students in the band want to be there and don’t mind listening to constructive criticism for hours at a time.

Now ready to meet and greet the band, I headed off towards the ground floor of the Elliot Hall of Music where I knew that I could find the “man in charge” also known as the band director. After explaining in some detail the purpose of this project and the papers that I would be compiling based off the information that I would collect and my past experience with a marching band, he more than willingly accepted me as an observer for the rest of the season. We discussed how I would be able to follow the band to various locations around campus and that speaking with many of the member and himself would be a key point in making my paper a success. My first experience came soon after this encounter when the many “band members” began filing into the rehearsal room. Raised eyebrows, peculiar looks and even questions were just some of the reactions that I happened to come across on that first day, and as the rehearsal began, I felt that this would be an excellent choice for the rest of the semester. The members of the band and the many directors, including the drum majors, are perfect individuals for clearly stating just what the Purdue All-American Marching Band is all about. They not only have the dedication of a master in their field but they have their own individual pride to show it on a daily basis. This is what makes the Marching Band so exciting, interesting and fun to be around. The atmosphere itself doesn’t change on a daily basis, but previous events during the day help shape what rehearsal will be like that night and keeps the performers wondering what their practice will entail. During this time there were many questions that came to mind but the most intriguing one was, “Just how does this activity shape your life?” It’s hard for a person on the outside to answer this question and especially for the
freshman members because they are still trying find their place but for the other members of the band, especially the upperclassmen, it is a great one that I will ask as time goes on.

The only thing that I am worried about is how my feelings might interact with how I will write this paper. I think that many people around campus, especially don’t have the respect that the members of the marching band deserve. They work extremely hard and still find time to have a social life and keep adequate grades. Through this paper, I hope to help inform others about one of the many sides of the band and how being part of an organization like this can shape not only the individual but also their life!