

UNDERSTANDING the COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY PERCUSSION PROGRAM

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The purpose of this paper is to help clarify the role of the director of percussion studies and the percussion program within a department of school of music in a college or university. This paper can be used by those in the role of director of percussion studies as "talking points" to administrators, fellow ensemble directors and studio teachers, or other interested parties. It may also serve to help clarify expectations of us by those aforementioned parties.

Brief History of College and University Percussion Programs in the United States

Paul Price (1921-1986) was the percussion teacher at the university of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana from 1949-1956. He is widely credited with establishing the first accredited college percussion ensemble course. He also started at Illinois a degree program for percussion principals. In the 1960s George Gaber followed suit at Indiana University. Both programs set the stage for the development of "artist-percussionists" - players who were true percussionists with proficiency in multiple percussion instruments. The percussion ensemble was a large part of these programs as well.

With the advent of the percussion ensemble and a more "modern" approach to percussion playing came the need for larger percussion inventories that included multiple instruments of all types. In response to these needs, the National Conference on Percussion Pedagogy developed Program Standards for Percussion Equipment and Facilities in 2003. As world music came to the fore in all aspects of the music program, percussion programs began to acquire instruments from all regions of the world, in

addition to the traditional Western instruments. Once marching band and drum corps became a mainstream activity, many percussion programs began to take into account the needs of the contemporary rudimental drummer as well.

As the world of percussion has become more diverse, so have percussion programs. The focus of any particular program can most readily be tied to the expertise and interests of the teacher in charge of the program. As a general rule, most percussion programs tend to agree that students need to achieve a competent level of performance on snare drum, keyboard percussion, timpani and multiple percussion. Programs with particular emphases (Jazz Studies or Commercial Music) might place more emphasis on drum set, jazz vibes, or hand percussion than those without such a focus. Some programs expand to provide a wide array of ensemble experiences (Latin, steel drum, Tabla, gamelan African, etc.), while others focus on traditional percussion ensembles. Some programs have moved toward specialization in a particular instrument, most notably, there are a handful of programs that offer degrees in Marimba Performance. Although the specifics of each program and the approaches to teaching the content of the program are limitless, the purpose of this paper is not to explore the differences among us, but rather to identify the similarities that define us.

Understanding the College/University Percussion Program

Although the volume of some of the issues listed below may be greater in a larger program, there are many common issues present in programs of every size and in

every type of institution. Teachers at smaller institutions are often "one man shows" and will have to address every aspect of curriculum delivery and program administration alone. Larger programs will often have a larger volume of these issues to deal with, but may have the benefit of graduate teaching assistants or even multiple percussion instructors to handle some of these issues.

Regardless of the specifics of the situation (program size, institution size, institution type, etc.) the Director of Percussion Studies will likely spend as much time dealing with administrative aspects of the program as he or she will spend in instructional activities.

These administrative activities may or may not be calculated as part of faculty load but nevertheless are inherent in the position. It should be recognized that all the activities discussed below are necessary to the success of not only the percussion area, but the music department as a whole. Everybody in the department benefits from a well-run, well-organized percussion area, and everyone in the department suffers when this is not the case.

Percussion teachers are a unique blend of instructor, ensemble director, coach, consultant, repair-person, equipment-mover, budget manager, collaborator, performer, and administrator. It is imperative that we understand our role within a department or school of music, and that our colleagues understand the many roles we serve as well.

It is the intention for this document to serve a first step in beginning a dialogue between percussion teachers and administrators that will lead to productive discussions concerning work load, budget, assistantship assignments, etc. that will ultimately result in a better educational experience for the students and a more feasible working environment for the instructor.

Goals for the Program:

Although percussion programs are part of a larger music unit and must function effectively within that unit, they are also unique entities with a life of their own. Percussion programs have their own personnel and staffing issues, budget concerns, and facilities and equipment issues that may or may not have a direct impact on the other areas of the school or department in which they are located. Additionally, many percussion programs have earned recognition on a regional, national or international level. This recognition can serve to build the reputation of a particular program that is somewhat independent from that of its college or university, or in some cases, helps define the identity of its parent institution.

This being the case, just as each music unit has goals and student learning outcomes, each percussion unit must have the same.

What do we want our students to know and be able to do when they graduate from this program? What changes do we expect to see in their skills, attitudes, values and behaviors throughout their time in this program? Although desired learning outcomes and overall goals for a percussion program within a given institution will vary from school to school, these goals must meet some basic criteria in order to be successfully met. First, these goals must match the skills, experience and interests of the percussion teacher. Second, these goals must match the goals and interests and abilities of the students attracted to and served by the department; and third, these goals must match the goals of the institution and of the department/school in which one is working.

In formulating goals the Music Unit and the Percussion Program have to be cognizant of environmental factors such as facilities, finances, number and training of personnel, administrative support, and other resources. They also need to know, given the size,

location, cost and type of institution, what type of student will likely be attracted to the institution. Only once these factors are fully understood can a mission and goals for the institution and the percussion program be fully articulated. If the goals of the music unit and that of the percussion program are out of step with one another, neither will be successful.

Questions to ask when formulating goals:

How much autonomy do I have, as the director of percussion studies, in deciding what my final student learning outcomes should be?

What other constituencies' goals do I need to take into consideration (ensemble directors, music unit, institution, etc.)? These goals may inform not only specific objectives for the percussion program, but also the scope and type of goals for the program. For instance, goals may be specific and short term, covering perhaps the repertoire that will be performed by all students. Goals could also be very broad and forward looking, such as the development of critical thinking skills and life-long learning skills. In any case, ideally the music unit/ensemble/percussion program goals should be complementary of one another.

How can I begin discussions among my colleagues concerning goals for our students?

What type of student has historically been attracted to this institution and to this program? What type of student would I like to attract? If these are different, what actions can I take to change the student demographic? How will that change ultimately effect my goals for the percussion area?

In an ideal world, philosophical and practical discussions would take place among faculty members within the music unit and with administrators in the music

unit. Goals for each program within the school or department would be clearly articulated and would be complementary so that each program benefits the largest possible number of students. Most often, however, this is not the case. It is recommended, then, at a minimum, the chief administrator of the music unit should be made aware of the mission and goals of the percussion program and should be presented with an action plan to reach those goals. A reasonable administrator who is confronted with clearly defined goals and an action plan to achieve those will likely be supportive, at least in principle, of providing the means to reach them.

Role of Director of Percussion Studies

We recognize and acknowledge that percussion instructors must be effective teachers as well as effective administrators.

The Director of Percussion Studies has unique administrative concerns that no other applied teacher or ensemble director has.

Perhaps this is why, historically, so many percussion instructors (and Directors of Bands) have been tapped to fill administrative roles within the Music Unit.

At any rate, one challenge all percussion instructors face is how to balance the teaching and administrative responsibilities of their role. Although we initially were attracted to the teaching aspect of our positions, we often find ourselves overwhelmed by the administrative aspects of the position. We need to seek ways to retain a high level of teaching while still maintaining efficacy as administrators and meeting expectations placed on us by our colleagues, administrators and institutions.

A first step may be to simply list and define our duties:

Teaching responsibilities may include:

Design, coordinate and assess all areas of the percussion curriculum, including:

Studio Teaching: Sequencing of technical skills on a number of instruments;

sequencing of etudes and solo repertoire on a number of instruments; tracking each student's development in all areas of percussion performance (snare drum, timpani, mallets, drum set, etc.); organizing periodic studio classes; preparing students for afternoon student recitals or colloquia; preparing students for junior, senior and graduate recitals

Percussion Ensemble: identifying literature that is developmentally appropriate; creating programs that strike a balance between having educational and musical value and being appealing to students and audiences; creating programs that are varied in style, instrumentation; teaching the ensemble in such a way that concepts explored in lessons are reinforced in ensemble, thereby creating an opportunity for transfer of skills

Percussion Methods/Techniques: choosing what aspects of percussion performance and teaching to cover in class; choosing mode of delivery; selecting texts); if not the primary teacher, oversight and guidance for the person teaching the course

Percussion pedagogy: clearly defining and implementing an approach to teaching that effectively deals with musical and developmental tendencies of learners.

Percussion literature: demonstrating a working knowledge of percussion literature as well as information pertaining to the development of percussion instruments, performance venues, influential composers/performers, techniques of analysis, and their influence on percussion pedagogy.

Assistance or direct involvement with marching band percussion sections

Coaching chamber music as needed

Administrative responsibilities may include:

Tracking existing percussion equipment:
Distribute percussion equipment for use by departmental ensembles; maintain percussion inventory list; check out equipment needed for off-campus performances as well as on-campus ensembles and other needs

Equipment acquisition: requesting needed equipment (competing for needed instruments with other studios and music unit needs; in smaller schools, competing for needed instruments with other institution-wide needs)

Equipment repair and maintenance

Equipment moving to and from performance spaces

Assistance with ensemble auditions for placement in departmental ensembles; assistance with part assignments for ensembles within the department

Maintain percussion ensemble library; serve as percussion ensemble librarian

Recruitment of students: including scheduling and hearing auditions, contacting prospective students, organizing tours or other outside performances to attract prospective students

Consulting with ensemble directors as needed regarding percussion equipment and personnel needs or other percussion-related issues

Oversee adjunct faculty, coordinating their teaching activities and goals within the overall percussion program, and interfacing between them and other entities within the music unit and the institution

Other responsibilities/expectations include:

Maintain a career as an active performer
Participation in professional development activities within one's field
Produce scholarly research or equivalent

participation in professional activities

Relationship of Director of Percussion Studies to Other Ensemble Directors

The Director of Percussion Studies has to interface with the conductor of every other ensemble in the department where percussion is used. This includes wind ensemble/concert band, jazz ensembles, orchestra and occasionally, choral ensembles. Very specifically, the administrative responsibilities of the Director of Percussion Studies in these interactions will include: 1) Hearing auditions for ensemble placement; 2) Assigning parts (or overseeing part assignments) for each concert for each ensemble, ensuring that the educational and developmental needs of each student are met, and that the musical needs of the ensemble are met; 3) Ensuring that needed equipment is present and in good working order for each ensemble rehearsal; 4) Working with the ensemble directors as a consultant on matters of personnel, equipment, logistics, and other percussion-related issues.

The teaching responsibilities related to other ensembles may include 1) Providing ongoing training to each student as to how to make appropriate choices regarding mallet selection, volume, articulations, etc, based upon what they hear in the ensemble; 2) Working with the ensemble director to assist percussionists in understanding and meeting the musical goals of the ensemble; 3) If requested, coaching a sectional for a particular ensemble.

To the extent possible, it is important that percussion teachers and ensemble directors have an ongoing dialogue about percussion-related issues in the ensemble in order to provide the students the most valuable musical and developmental experience possible. To this end it is important that percussion teachers foster a good working relationship with the other ensemble

directors in the department or school of music. Ways to do this might include: attending concerts of the ensembles in which the percussionists perform; having post-concert debriefing sessions with percussionists to analyze what went well and what needed improvement in their ensemble playing; attending rehearsals of ensembles in which percussionists are performing and offering appropriate feedback to the students regarding their participation, professionalism, musical choices within the ensemble, etc.; when appropriate, soliciting input regarding upcoming equipment purchase requests (if it could be used in a particular ensemble, get that director on board to help you make the case).

Relationship of Director of Percussion Studies to Other Studio Teachers

Percussion is a common collaborative instrument in many chamber works and is found in many works for larger, homogenous ensembles (such a trumpet or trombone ensemble). Directors of those ensembles and studio teachers who utilize contemporary literature often need to collaborate with a percussionist. In this role, the percussion teacher will recommend percussion students as collaborators, and in the case of chamber music, may give coaching or other instruction.

Other Challenges

Logistics: Due largely to the extensive equipment inventory and to the size of our instruments, percussion programs have logistical unique challenges not faced by other programs. In almost every case students exclusively use school-owned instruments for practice and performing. A notable exception is drum set - most serious drum set players own their own sets. The inherent logistical concerns with sharing equipment include 1) providing enough equipment and space for adequate practice by the students; 2) providing adequate and secure storage space for college-owned equipment; 3) determining where student-

owned equipment can be stored and providing additional storage space for such equipment if deemed appropriate.

In most institutions, rehearsal and performance equipment is one and the same.

This presents the challenge of moving equipment from practice and rehearsal spaces to performance spaces safely and efficiently. Almost any moving of equipment is detrimental to the instruments over time, so limiting such moves is of paramount importance. Too, moving equipment takes a tremendous amount of time from our schedules and the students' schedules. Any steps taken to limit the number of percussion moves per semester is beneficial.

Course Rotation/Sequence: In an area with its own curricular needs, how does the percussion instructor decide when to offer certain course, such as pedagogy or literature? Who decides this? The answer will be unique in every situation, but anyone new to this question will benefit from having a conversation with the chief music administrator to balance student needs with timing and budget implications over a number of semesters.

Budget Management: This is an area that many other applied studio teachers don't have to be concerned with to the extent that percussion program heads are. We have extensive needs for equipment maintenance, repair and acquisition, and we have music purchasing for our ensembles. We may need money for a tour in a particular year, and we will almost always have lists of capital purchases that need to be made.

Questions to answer include: Does the percussion area have its own budget, or is it shared? If it is shared, how is the budget administered: with whom and how are purchasing decisions made by the group and who ultimately controls the spending decisions? When and how are allocation decisions made and who makes them? What

is considered a capital request? Regardless of the answer to those questions, it is beneficial to have budget amounts in mind for each of these items. To, it is advisable to have ready a list of capital purchase requests and a rationale for each item on the list.

Graduate student issues: Assignment of work loads to graduate students, mentoring and guidance of graduate students in their teaching of private lessons, ensemble, methods/techniques classes, marching band percussion, etc., determining and requesting the appropriate number of graduate assistant positions for the percussion area. These students can also help reduce some of the administrative burden felt by the director of percussion studies at schools with graduate programs. At institutions with only undergraduate students, a capable work-study student or two may serve the same purpose.

Administrative Support Needed/Desired
Administrators need to be aware of the challenges faced by the Director of Percussion Studies. To this end, it is imperative that we strive for a clear and open dialogue with our administrators about our particular needs, and it is important that we work within the system of the music unit to help make every area strong. Every situation has its unique challenges, but most situations have solutions that can either alleviate or mitigate the particular circumstances. Administrators can be very helpful in a number of ways.

1) Becoming aware of our budget needs.

Encouraging the formulation of a five-year budget plan for percussion that includes yearly maintenance (items that need to be replaced every year, such as drum heads); depreciation repair (periodic repairs, such as tuning of keyboard instruments); replacement (equipment that we own but that is no longer usable); and new purchases (equipment we don't have and need).

2) Monitoring the master calendar carefully and including the percussion instructor and other ensemble directors in the formulation of such a calendar. Remaining cognizant of logistical issues with any group that uses percussion equipment vis a vis moving the equipment, and realizing that moves result in wear-and-tear on the equipment and ultimately will cost money.

3) Examine available facilities and space closely, looking for ways to position the percussion equipment relative to practice facilities, rehearsal rooms, storage space and performance venues.

4) Consider administrative duties of the Director of Percussion Studies when making decisions regarding numbers of graduate teaching assistant positions or assignment of work-study positions.

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***Chalon Ragsdale** came to the University of Arkansas in 1975 as Percussion Instructor and Assistant Band Director. He currently serves as Director of Percussion Studies, and Director of the UA Summer Music Camps. From 1990-1998, he was Chair of the UA Department of Music. Mr. Ragsdale has served as Professor of Percussion and as Director of the UA Percussion Ensemble; as Director of the "Razorback" Marching Band; as Director of the UA Concert Band; and from 1989 to 1992 served as Conductor of the UA Symphonic Band and Wind Ensemble. The Percussion Ensemble under his direction has performed for audiences at state, regional and national conventions. His private students have won performing honors at the state, regional and national levels of MTNA. He performs as percussionist frequently, and holds the position of solo timpanist with the North Arkansas Symphony Orchestra.*