

# THE ORGAN ON CAMPUS

HAIG MARDIROSIAN





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ON CAMPUS





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AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS MONOGRAPH SERIES

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**FRONT COVER:** The Craighead-Saunders Organ, Eastman School of Music/Christ Church, Rochester, New York. **PHOTO:** Len Levasseur

**BACK COVER:** 2016 Klais Organ, University of Iowa, Voxman Music Building. **PHOTO:** Tim Schoon

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Haig Mardirosian, GENERAL EDITOR

This series of short books on topics about the organ and the organ-playing community is published by the American Guild of Organists as a service to its members and the general public. New titles will appear electronically approximately twice a year. The monographs will go into depth on a specific subject of interest to the organ community: instruments, personalities, trends, places, and traditions. Information on the series and the titles is available at [www.agohq.org/monographs](http://www.agohq.org/monographs).

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## ABOUT THE EDITOR

HAIG MARDIROSIAN is Dean Emeritus of the College of Arts and Letters at the University of Tampa and Professor Emeritus of Music at American University. An organ recitalist, recording artist, conductor and composer, Mardirosian wrote criticism of recordings, scores, and books for *Fanfare Magazine* and for *The American Organist* and for ten years penned the TAO editorial column *Vox Humana*. His book, *Vox Humana: Essays About the World of the Pipe Organ and Those Who Play It*, was published by Morningstar Music Publishers in 2017.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Compiling a narrative about the many people, instruments, and programs discussed here would have been impossible without the participation of dozens of faculty and students from the nation's most prominent organ programs. Though they were geographically scattered and their schools varied in mission and description, these colleagues and their scholars agreed on some fundamentals: challenges lie ahead for the field; we have means of overcoming them; our responsibility is to design and deliver positive student learning experiences. In all, the many conversations that went into producing this volume affirmed that our profession is more unified than we may have commonly believed.

My sincere thanks go to this roll of colleagues and students, most but not all of whom are quoted and identified in the text:

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Special thanks also go to designer and photographer Len Levasseur. Len makes the organs look as beautiful as they sound.

— HM

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## PREFACE

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The date is about 1960. A youngster sits at the dinner table on a Sunday afternoon with parents and a friend of the family, a single mom who has brought along her son, a student at Princeton who is home on break. This fellow — his name is long forgotten — epitomizes the contemporary ideal and image of an elite Ivy Leaguer: He wears a somewhat ill-fitting tweed jacket, sees through horn-rimmed circular glasses, puffs on an aromatic tobacco blend in the bowl of a shiny pipe, and studies the liberal arts, whatever those may have been at the time. His erudite opinions come across as impressive and welcome to the adults in the room. One of his obsessions is music — more to the point, whatever are the latest trends in classical circles, which at this time is the buzz around the recent rediscovery of music composed before 1750.

He is dismissive of the boy sitting across from him, a precocious musician-to-be who spends his discretionary time at the piano earnestly working through the *Inventions*, the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, the more straightforward of Beethoven's sonatas, the *Lieder ohne Worte*, and, when absolutely required, an occasional page or two of Schumann or Chopin. This preference in repertoire aims at a still-secret and ever so exciting possibility: the hopes of studying the organ and perhaps even of performing at it professionally.

The Princetonian displays little patience for him. If one mentions just having bought a new record by the popular countertenor and Renaissance-Baroque specialist Alfred Deller, he recites with a practiced ennui, "Oh, I have about a half dozen of those."

My Legrenzi, clearly, is bigger than your Vivaldi!

When the boy mentions his recently having seen and heard Virgil Fox in recital for the first time at the Riverside Church, the collegian retorts superciliously, "I walk through the Princeton Chapel late at night on my way back from the library to my dorm. Professor Weinrich likes to practice at night." But soon his tone changes to one of gentle thoughtfulness. "I stop and listen to him play Bach for fifteen or twenty minutes — every night."

Fifty-five years later, that precocious boy would also be practicing late at night on a new instrument in a beautiful new chapel at another university much to the south of Princeton. From time to time, he would pause and glance over his shoulder to find clusters of students walking past the glass

walls at the rear of the room. Like their Princeton counterpart five decades earlier, they, too, would stop and listen.

This book should not be regarded as a definitive guide to studying the organ at the colleges and universities in the United States that offer superb instruction on the instrument. It certainly does not endorse any particular institutions, degree programs, professors, or instruments. Anyone or any place not mentioned should never be assumed to fall short of some imagined standard. Academic program data, unless cited otherwise, is self-reported by the interviewees and has been taken at face value. There are no instrument listings or stoplists, detailed faculty biographies, nor explicit financial aid data to be discovered here.

What you will find is a multilayered examination of the places that teach those students who have moved on to significant careers, facilities that house striking new or historic instruments, institutions that have innovated in learning and teaching about the organ, and importantly, the campuses where the mere presence of the instrument has proven to transform the thinking and the awareness of students, or the community at large.

Rather than a how-to guide, this might be called a why-to guide — an exploration of the motives, instincts, fortunes, and foibles of a community learning and teaching the sometimes-mysterious art of playing this complex and impressive instrument. Such an idiosyncratic narrative aims to assess the influence of the instrument on American college campuses, and in turn, on society and culture.

When that Princeton chap mentioned hearing Carl Weinrich practice Bach late at night, his mood changed from adolescent arrogance to deep-seated reverence and contemplation. Is such change not the goal of a liberal education?







THE ORGAN  
ON CAMPUS



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## THE ORGAN ON CAMPUS

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ON A SUNNY JANUARY MONDAY AFTERNOON in Norman, Oklahoma, Sela Park, an undergraduate viola major, slips onto the bench of Fisk Organs' opus 111, The Mildred Andrews Boggess Memorial Organ installed in the Gothic Hall (essentially the lobby) of the Catlett Music Center in the School of Music at the University of Oklahoma. Damin Spritzer, Assistant Professor of Organ, joins Park for her third lesson as a secondary organ student. The two turn their attention to playing a hymn. Park stumbles over the pedaling of a line, and Spritzer suggests that she slide the right toe from sharp note to sharp note. Park tries. It is awkward. She tries again. She sickles her right ankle strangely. Park makes her third attempt. She negotiates a smooth passage from one note to another. Sela Park has taken a step toward becoming an organist.

Meanwhile, a floor below and through the doors to Sharp Concert Hall, John Schwandt, Professor of Organ and Director of OU's American Organ Institute, leans over the rangy horseshoe console of the instrument that this community affectionately calls the Mini-Mo, an agglomeration of 14 ranks of the M.P. Moller organ formerly installed at the Philadelphia Municipal Auditorium. This crossbreed of a machine serves convincingly as a combination classical and theatre organ. Another 72 or so of its ranks of pipes remain in storage in the AOI's organ shop a few miles away.

Schwandt and his student Luke Staisiunas, a junior, are testing the possibilities of registration for a new work that Staisiunas is about to perform with the OU concert band. As they prepare to go to an upstairs studio for some harpsichord continuo work, Staisiunas entertains the room with a short demonstration of the theatre voices of the Mini-Mo. He whirls from style to style and technique to technique on the way to becoming a versatile working musician.

Contrast that scene to a typical organ lesson of, perhaps, a half-century before. An organ student, one of the thousands nationally, would have sat at the console of an organ that would likely have had an electro-pneumatic playing action and a stop list rendering it both “American” and “Classic.” The student could count on the standardization of his “office,” for decades earlier a committee of the American Guild of Organists promulgated its preferences in console design and dimensions. The teacher might have begun by turning to the Bach and writing in his own fingering throughout. He (for it would have almost certainly been a man) might also have drawn in expressive markings, tempo, and the like. The student may have dreamt of vaulting into an exciting future after graduation — a chance to study on historical instruments in Europe with a legendary pedagogue and return home to locate his own choir loft in which to make a happy living, possibly even playing on a new mechanical action organ based on the principles of the Organ Reform Movement. He would inevitably have returned from that post-graduate adventure only to be employed in a place that offered a standard electric console with exactly the same dimensions on which he had learned and a radiating, concave pedalboard. The room would have been carpeted.

Times have changed.

In June 2008, in the several days prior to the American Guild of Organists Biennial Convention in Minneapolis, Yale University’s Institute of Sacred Music convened a Think Tank on Academic Organ Programs. ISM Director Martin Jean invited sixteen scholars, performers, and public figures to present papers and participate in discussion at a round table dedicated to the red-hot questions of curriculum development, pedagogy, and best practices for college organ programs befitting the 21st century.

By this time the portents of the Great Recession had already made headlines: the subprime mortgage crisis and the bank bailout foreshadowed the bottoming out of not just real estate, the job market, and investment portfolios, but of higher education as well. As the markets declined, so too did philanthropy, and with that, endowments. Those wealthiest colleges and universities where the greatest share of operating budgets and student scholarships came from abundant endowment balances suffered the largest shortfalls.

To illustrate the degree to which the economic slump harmed higher ed, look no further than Harvard University. Its endowment — the largest in this domain — dove from \$36.9 billion in FY 2008 to a scant \$26 billion a year later. That stunning decline of 27.3 percent included the value of the portfolio as well as any new giving for that year. It took seven years for the endowment to regain its 2008 value. As of FY 2017, the endowment distribution was nearly \$2 billion — a third of the university’s operating budget — a further illustration of the bearing of endowments on a university and its students.

Nearly every university in the country witnessed cash shortfalls (with the remarkable exception of those few highly tuition-dependent schools that somehow experienced no enrollment falloffs). Not surprisingly, programs in the arts and humanities became convenient targets for cutbacks or closure, all in the name of financial exigency.

Ten years later, however, after substantial economic recovery, the topic of survival of university arts and humanities programs persists. Today the merit of the arts as a career choice, not money alone, is the key variable. Forces at play include cultural trends, an uncertain job market for musicians in general and, for organists, the relationship of the arts to religious practice. As the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonpartisan Washington, DC research and policy institute dedicated to promoting equity, alleviating poverty, and fostering fiscal responsibility put it, “we have experienced a lost decade in higher education.”

At Yale’s think tank in Minneapolis, Martin Jean charged his dozen and a half leaders to ponder a range of topics: historical perspectives on teaching the organ in higher education; up-to-date theology; surveys of practice in the field; additions such as improvisation to the curriculum; profiles of successful programs in both academia and the church; and the instrument’s public image. While no definitive action came of the event, it did lead those present to a more nuanced and multilayered view of organ studies. How do we teach the organ and its repertoire? Where is the work for graduates? What opportunities exist — or can be created — for partnerships outside the university walls? And still further questions:

- Why is the study of the organ and church music declining?
- Who are the students?
- How and how well do we train them?
- What are best practices?
- How is success defined?
- What factors contribute to success?
- Where do students go after degree completion?
- What do employers expect of students?
- What will the future bring?

A decade or so since the trigger point of the Great Recession, those urgent and useful questions persist. Despite progress throughout these past ten years in defining the questions more sharply, in gathering useful data, and in mapping forward-looking strategies, organ enrollments continue to decline. Faculty positions, consequently, have been lost and programs closed.

All that considered, faculty members and students in those organ programs that thrive report extraordinary optimism and satisfaction. Importantly, institutions such as those profiled here have acquired new pipe organs and, in some few cases, suites of instruments. Most importantly, programs have, in the main, embraced a broad vision of the role of the organ on campus. Whereas a generation ago one would have been confined to a narrow range of repertoire and the corresponding styles of instruments on which to play that repertoire, today's students are more likely to encounter genres such as pop, rock, jazz, gospel, and theatre organ as something more than after-hours guilty pleasures.

So, is the organ world really falling apart?

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## COLLEGE TODAY

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After churches and synagogues, academic institutions accommodate the greatest number of pipe organs. On its own, that is an unexceptional comment. Music has historically been one of the most common college majors. Academia has invested impressively in music faculty, facilities, and equipment for myriad reasons that benefit both music majors and the campus as a whole.

Graduating students can count on some opportunity in certain specific areas. K-12 education, while enduring its own vagaries, still needs a supply of competently trained music teachers that meet state and local standards. Despite declining demand, places of worship also require their trained musicians. A liberal arts education grounded in music makes a trusty preparation for other professions such as the law or medicine.

A robust music department enhances and diversifies the curriculum in the liberal arts and in the professional tracks. It brings vibrancy to the campus community. Music enriches spiritual practice and ritual in chapels and campus ministries, in academic ceremonies, and (none the least) in athletic programs through marching and pep bands' iconic support of the home team. There is surely more.

Given the high cost of education, the pressures young adults regularly feel to enroll in career-oriented majors, and swift and sweeping cultural changes, a student picking music as a major and a career takes a not-insignificant risk. The return on such an investment is iffy at best. Earning potential and the hope of job security hold tremendous leverage that can upheave a young person's passions and idealistic dreams. True, picking a major according to the latest list of "top jobs" to ensure the richest offers upon graduation



is tempting. More multifaceted data, however, dispute the correlations such lists suggest.

The Brookings Institution's Hamilton Project has produced a set of policy proposals and analyses to promote economic growth as a means of increasing personal wealth and wages. *The Wall Street Journal* (September 11, 2016) summarizes findings from the Hamilton Project and refers to "a little-noticed bright spot in the earnings picture for humanities majors." It continues that "it's no secret that liberal arts graduates tend to fare worse than many of their counterparts immediately after college." But the tide turns as graduates reach ages 55 to 60 when they "hit peak earnings [that are] about 3% ahead of the earnings pace for people with degrees in... fields such as nursing and accounting."

As for professional majors, life does not guarantee that the career a student chooses will be relevant ten years later, or that they won't change their mind, or that some other destiny awaits. It would be better, perhaps, to make such decisions from a consistency of inner purpose and interest. Maybe this is why the music major, however diminished, endures.

Even in times of crisis, as administrators seek ways to coerce fixed or shrunken budgets into fulfilling ever-expanding needs and aspirations, music schools and departments often remain cosseted. To be sure, arts programs have endured cuts, but they are frequently spared elimination. They reinvent themselves as needed, donors habitually find them an attractive destination for their openhandedness, and even the hardest-boiled administrators appreciate the overarching allure in keeping them viable.

Upon closer examination, a music school or department budget can even be one of the more generously lopsided on campus. Despite choruses of denial by faculty, teaching small classes, a curriculum often comprising low credit-bearing courses that meet as many hours as the three- and four-credit-hour lectures common to other disciplines, the support of one-on-one studio instruction, the maintenance of a large adjunct and artist faculty roster, the cost of more than a few large ensembles with their abundant productions, concerts, recitals, booking of guest artist teachers and performers, and the inventory of expensive, precious equipment needed to buttress the mission and work of a music unit together bespeak the scale of support that the academy, willingly or not, must put into the art. While it is more-over true that the failures make the better headlines — the tearful hearsays of those programs, for instance, that have been closed — positive examples of support of music, even specifically organ programs, persist. Just as in some research-based sciences, the claim that the arts — and music first among them — demand and sometimes receive extraordinary support must be conceded.

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## BY THE NUMBERS

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According to the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education, the number of Title IV colleges and universities (those eligible to award federal financial aid) peaked at 7,416 nationwide in academic year 2012-13. Since then, the combined pressures of student demographics, the economy, federal regulation, and families' taking on sizable student debt have shrunk that count. The raw numbers look unwelcome, but a more nuanced reflection on the trends may alleviate some concern.

Many institutions that closed in the past decade were *de facto* businesses that intended to turn a profit usually by tendering online courses. Whatever one might think of such organizations in the abstract, for-profit virtual campuses are not those at which students would study the arts (to include, naturally, organ playing). For the same reason that the arts are costly for the conventional not-for-profit academies, they cannot replace the reliably profit-making realms like the vocational, business, and healthcare tracks favored by the for-profit storefront operations.

But the trends do affirm the reality that higher education has and will continue to experience a painful shakeout. Closures will persist at robbing the market of institutions invested in the arts and humanities. Small liberal arts colleges face the greatest risk.

Overall, from academic year 2012-13 to 2016-17, the Department of Education charted a decline in post-secondary institutions of 5.6 percent, to 6,760, the smallest number in a decade.

Only a fraction of these 6,760 establishments, if still a healthy fraction, conform to the stereotypical semblance of ivy-covered walls, a liberal arts core curriculum, bad cafeteria food, a gothic chapel at the center of a bucolic campus, Greek life, and the promise of a Saturday afternoon football game. Only some of them even offer music instruction or support campus musical activity.

Approximately 650 American colleges, conservatories, and universities are accredited members of the National Association of Schools of Music, the archetypical professional certifying organization for music. NASM members include degree-granting institutions, community colleges, non-degree-granting schools, and community and precollegiate programs. One should not assume that music schools, departments, and programs outside this circle have pursued or failed to attain NASM accreditation. Some very high-ranking music degree programs stay outside of NASM oversight by choice. No Ivy League schools nor any campuses of the University of California, for instance, hold NASM membership.

Of NASM members, a little more than 12 percent list any degree in organ in their catalogs. Many more schools than those on the NASM roster do offer

non-major instruction in organ or nest organ performance in larger accommodations such the Bachelor of Arts (a degree for which performance on an instrument may or may not be required), degrees in church music, and very importantly, degrees in music education. The touchstone for understanding the economic influence and cost of organ instruction on campus, though, remains the metric of faculty effort (defined here as the number of credit hours taught) and student population (understood as head count) in performance degrees in organ, typically the Bachelor of Music, Master of Music, and Doctor of Musical Arts.

Enrollment numbers are key to grasping the pressures on organ programs to survive and grow. Though these reported data represent only NASM member institutions and only those students in the professional majors, they tell a clear and disquieting story.

ORGAN MAJOR ENROLLMENTS BY ACADEMIC YEAR AND LEVEL  
NASM MEMBER SCHOOLS

| Academic Year | BMus    |          | MM      |          | DMA     |          |
|---------------|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|
|               | Schools | Students | Schools | Students | Schools | Students |
| 2014-15       | 88      | 185      | 46      | 78       | 25      | 115      |
| 2015-16       | 92      | 166      | 40      | 81       | 26      | 103      |
| 2016-17       | 81      | 141      | 41      | 84       | 23      | 93       |

SOURCE: Higher Education Arts Data Services; Music Data Summaries, 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17

In three years then, undergraduate organ enrollments in NASM-member schools dropped 24 percent while doctoral enrollments dipped 19 percent. Master's enrollments, the sole bright spot, climbed 7 percent.

Factoring in typical retention and completion rates implies that these campuses together confer less than 100 organ degrees at all levels per year (approximately 85 in 2016-17). When compared to the overall number of music degrees granted — 14,863 undergraduate degrees, 6,236 master's degrees, and 1,342 doctoral degrees — these organ numbers catch the eye. Even allowing a generous margin for non-NASM participants, likely less than one percent of the 22,441 music degrees conferred in 2017 at all levels were in organ performance. That is a cold reality.

To reemphasize, these data convey only trends, but nonetheless reliable trends. Nearly all the subjects interviewed for this study, while acknowledging these data, were quick to call attention to the story that extends past metrics, which they tend to mistrust, to the quality of learning experience and opportunities after graduation. Interviewees were prone to assail what they

considered an incomplete, if still accurate, data set. Yet, by any statistical arbiter, a sample of so many schools representing as great a ratio of the total numbers would yield a highly valid result.

Successful organ programs today perch on an all-important minimum number of approximately nine to 12 enrolled students (though not necessarily majors) per institution, which number also fills the studio load of a single applied music professor (allowing for a few other instructional and advising duties). The charmed formula heaps no pressure on administrators to pay for additional full-time organ studio faculty. In these findings, the role of adjunct or graduate assistant teaching remains limited principally to secondary organ students.

Most faculty also recognize the crucial importance of organ instruction for minoring students, secondary instrumental students, and music education majors. Both total student head count and faculty instructional effort figure into the programmatic revenue budget, that is, the number of instructional hours a school will expect of its academic units. Most faculty also maintain that such secondary students not only fill out teaching loads and generate income, but also gain training that may well lead them to become working musicians at some level later.

Learning and teaching the organ now remains a small fragment of the whole span of music learning, the arts overall, and the entirety of higher education. More than one organ faculty member referred to the past “golden age” of enrollments. Others used the benchmark era of the 1960s — the day that saw the apex of Fulbright fellowships, the high-water mark of organ major enrollments, the time of rediscovery of older music, the era of the Baby Boomers, and a decade of capacious physical expansion of higher education facilities nationwide — as the basis for comparison. Just as trends suggesting ostensible prosperity in the “golden age” caused administrators to dash after the material needs to support burgeoning programs, so today’s trends also lead administrators to spotlight not only costs but the relationship of quality to cost, program evaluation and assessment, the engagement of older and nontraditional students, public and legislative arts policy, community-based programming, and philanthropy. As numbers of 17- and 18-year-old applicants decline, high quality and effectiveness, it is hoped, will surge as a rationale for ongoing support. With that, candid analysis of the market and of the product itself must also direct campuses to implement effective program assessment.

Academic business managers dislike cubbyholed curricula that set great demands on campus facilities and systems. They are justifiably concerned about the operational stresses and overhead costs of such programs, which also include science labs (especially animal labs), music studios and auditoria.





*Damin Spritzer teaches junior Sela Park at the Fisk organ of Gothic Hall in the Catlett Music Center at the University of Oklahoma.*

*PHOTO: Haig Mardirosian*

Beyond the equipment itself, temperature and humidity must be kept reasonably steady year-round. Facilities departments cannot shut down the HVAC systems during summer or winter breaks. They cannot overlook the requirements to maintain reasonable levels of humidity during the coldest and driest of times.

Designers of such spaces ask clients to invest at a premium. Effective organ spaces inevitably necessitate greater-than-everyday cubic volume, non-standard ceiling heights, sound isolation, silent mechanical systems, and hard acoustical finishes, all of which command an unstinting price tag. So the cost per square foot of these facilities ranks well ahead of the stock-in-trade classrooms and faculty offices of departments that ostensibly yield a much higher return on investment. Put it in a nutshell: The organ technician does not tune for free.

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## WHO ARE THESE 21<sup>ST</sup>-CENTURY ORGAN STUDENTS?

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Anyone who has not visited an American college campus in the past 30 or 40 years might not recognize the place. In a realm where professors were once kings (the unambiguously gendered and regal noun is quite intentional), where lecturers steamrolled students with incontestable knowledge, where lectured, read, and learned information changed little (another way of saying that the veteran and tenured faculty member nattering at the front of the room had no reason to worry about reading off of yellowed, handwritten notes penned during his Paleolithic graduate school days), where assessment meant bartering facts for grades, and where students slept racked up in bunk beds in spartan cells, one had little room for a point of view that intentionally put students first.

Today, college campuses, classrooms, and curricula center on retaining students. This counts heavily on maintaining students' interest and building a desirable learning environment. The new notion that learning leads to personal well-being and success prevails if for no other reason than schools' economic survival. Colleges and universities aim to keep undergraduates tethered for the duration, which today may extend well past the quaint shibboleth of a "four-year degree." The National Center for Education Statistics, tracking all Title IV schools, notes that 59 percent of students complete a bachelor's degree within six years at the same institution at which they have started. No wonder, then, that colleges strive to keep students happy and avoid "washing them out" at all costs.



One of the most acute changes on campuses in the past generation has been the advent of formal and informal schemes encouraging the development of the whole student, seeing to their social adjustment, reconciling their learning and living challenges, and providing comfortable, community-oriented living accommodations in pleasant surroundings. Along with redesigned living quarters, newly fabricated student services proliferate: academic success centers; health and wellness programs; psychological services; team-building exercises and activities; student travel; community outreach and service programs.

Questions of retention, time-to-degree, and satisfaction are not lost on music administrators and faculty.

Iain Quinn is an Assistant Professor of Organ and Coordinator of Sacred Music in the College of Music at Florida State University, a sometime Visiting Fellow at Harvard University and at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, a cathedral musician in both the UK and the US, a musicologist, recitalist, and recording artist. In Florida, graduation rates figure into state mandates for accountability and assessment, and time-to-graduation metrics are among the gauges of quality most important to the overall rankings of a research university.

Quinn accurately describes the priorities of a research university. A 2010 report by Maguire Associates, a Massachusetts educational services consulting firm that helps universities with recruitment and enrollment strategies, market research, and predictive modeling, discloses that high school students and their parents include four-year graduation statistics among their top five indicators of institutional quality. Such focus on graduation rates compels institutions to look carefully at deliberate student planning and advisement. Client-oriented retention plans include degree maps and sample curricula, grade early warning systems, customer-friendly advisement, first-year special interest social groups, experiences, courses, and cohorts, and living and learning communities. Such schemes, while presumably effective in generating an institution's targeted numbers, can also clash with or crowd out students' discovery of new interests or research paths — those serendipitous treasures that tend to come through unprescribed pursuits. This is especially lamentable in the performing arts, where adequate time and freedom is essential to acquiring deep and reliable skills.

The other side of the question of demonstrating standards of excellence hinges on student contentment and awareness of both social and intellectual belonging. Isabelle Demers, Associate Professor of Organ at Baylor University and an artist with an impressive dossier of accomplishments as a recitalist in North America, Europe, and Australia, compares her own experiences as a student at *Le Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal* and at The Juilliard

School with the living and learning milieu today on the campus on which she teaches. She considers the support her students enjoy now a competitive advantage.

Demers has empathy for and desire to contribute to the organ student community, which she refers to as “family.” Students’ interactions embody something more than mere socialization. Demers leads kayaking trips, bowling nights, and other purely recreational activities, and she contrasts her relationship with her students against her own a decade-and-a-half ago in places that sent a rougher message: “Well here you are! Practice and figure it out for yourself,” she recalls. “They throw you in the water and expect you to swim.” Baylor, she says, “is a nurturing environment. When I started here it was a bit of a learning curve for me.”

College campuses not only welcome but increasingly covet students who contribute to the depth and strength of learning from diverse and non-traditional perspectives. Faculty and administrators characteristically support the virtues and benefits of opportunity, access, multiple points of view and identity, but they also recognize the strategic need to widen the funnel and bring more and able students onto the rolls. Credible arguments that one can find an abundance of ability and talent throughout the entire population flourish. New and diverse pools, including nontraditional students, also bring new tuition dollars just as the long-established student pool of 18- to 22-year-olds begins a measurable decline. One can reasonably expect today’s classrooms to be populated by more minority students, older learners, non-native English speakers, and more first-generation attendees than ever before.

The implications for the arts, especially the performing arts, are significant. New viewpoints, identity, and know-how contribute to a fuller vision and a fresher, more widely defined canon. But another side of the issue persists. Studying and playing the organ can be a hide-bound and singularly focused pastime. Notwithstanding the admirable role of women, LGBTQ, and minority performers and composers in expanding the disposition of performance, church music, and repertoire, teaching and learning the organ still involves mostly older archetypes and principles, themselves a creation of specifically Western musical culture. With a few notable examples, hopes of any significant career playing the instrument cannot rest on the few years of college or graduate training alone, but also on the assumption that students have been preened from an early age. While new and nontraditional student populations bring new standpoints and talents, they also oblige expectations, style, standards, and background to be redefined broadly and vividly.

Any institution of higher learning is challenged to develop and stick to a strategy of identifying and working with talent, whether conventional or unconventional. Cultivating abilities broadly and in nontraditional ways as



*Baylor University organ students enjoy a meal with visiting artist Paul Jacobs, Juilliard School of Music. LEFT TO RIGHT: Mitchell Won, Catherine Ledoux, Hannah Scholz, Isabelle Demers, Benji Stegner, Samuel Eatherton, Paul Jacobs, Hank Carrillo.*

*PHOTO: Yinying Luo*

part of a “talent strategy” must also develop alongside of a diversified curriculum. These are conjoined themes.

Adam Pajan values the demand for broadly educated organists. The instructor of organ and shop technician at the American Organ Institute at the University of Oklahoma, where he also earned his DMA, couples studio organ instruction with courses in church music and, in a field somewhat distinctive to OU, organ technology. With earlier schooling at Furman University and Yale University, Pajan has earned enviable credentials as a recitalist throughout Europe and as a winner of prestigious international competitions.

So when Pajan says that a less than successful school is “anyplace that teaches only one idea,” his words carry weight. His philosophy, which is broadly espoused by his colleagues at OU, asserts that “You need to be able to play anything, anywhere, at any time.”

Pajan’s colleague, Damin Spritzer, agrees heartily. Spritzer is the prototypical recitalist and recording artist. She did her degrees at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, the Eastman School of Music, and the University of North Texas. Her recital credits extend to Europe and South America as well as many North American venues. And what does she advise students?

“Whether you are a concert artist or a church musician... you’ve got to be able to embrace flexibility and collegiality.”

Reflecting on the conventional personality of organ instruction in higher education, John Schwandt, Professor of Music and master architect of Oklahoma’s sprawling organ enterprise, takes a pragmatic stance concerning the academy and the market. His breadth of thinking about the organ also attests to his own training and experience. His background includes a hearty portfolio as a theatre organist and improviser as well as a classical player. He is featured on an album by the rock band Shiny Toy Guns. He is in demand as a composer and performer of silent film scores. Schwandt’s aptitudes in assorted genres influence nearly everything about OU’s organ activity. He laces traditional recital programs with what he terms “accessible music.” Those biographical facts contribute to the specific design of the program at Oklahoma and its many elements.

In reflecting on the “schools with a history,” and drawing distinctions with his own program, Schwandt avers that many students in elite environments have been habitually “set up for failure” because of undue reliance on reputation. His understanding of his program’s blueprint is therefore founded on his knowledge of today’s students. They benefit from a panoramic vista of the organ field in an academic program that encourages study of theatre organ and classical organ, puts them to work in a fully functioning, revenue-generating organ building shop, and affords access to an archive of organ-related artifacts, papers, and media. Schwandt recalls a newly admitted student, who, upon his acceptance to OU, exclaimed, “It’s like the Willy Wonka of the organ.”

At first, OU’s talent strategy and its accompanying instructional plan would appear to stand in clear, and perhaps dramatic, distinction to those few and greatly revered places who claim student bodies with talents and interests defining the consecrated and long-established formats of musical learning. The Juilliard School, for instance, may well merit its claim of being the “world’s most famous music conservatory.” Its students do comprise an elite band, fight to be accepted into a competitive setting, and nearly without fail find the best career opportunities upon graduation as front-rank concert performers, church musicians, and academics. If anyone can afford to fuse to a straight and narrow purpose, discipline, and repertoire, it would be a Juilliard organ student.

Any iconic, world-class conservatory — it would only stand to reason — would bring a correspondingly world-class artist to direct the learning of its able students. Paul Jacobs chairs Juilliard’s organ department. His nonstop activities as a concert and recording artist place him at the top rung of organists. As an example, Jacobs presented the complete Bach organ works at the



age of 23 in a single 18-hour marathon performance on the 250th anniversary of Bach's death. With copious credits for premiere performances of new works with orchestra, Jacobs also holds the singular honor of having been the only solo organist to have won a Grammy award, and that no less for a recording of Olivier Messiaen's *Livre du Saint-Sacrement*. (The venerable E. Power Biggs had won a Grammy in 1972 in the Chamber Music category for his landmark Gabrieli recordings made in Venice.) The magnitude of Jacobs' achievements assuredly conforms to the prestige of his academic appointment.

Jacobs drives his eight to ten choice Juilliard organ students to excel (as Jacobs himself is driven) but also to diversify their interests and abilities. Of the selective environment, Jacobs says, "Fortunately, the challenge I face is not being able to take all the students I would like to teach."

Asked what might constitute a career path and about students' concerns regarding their futures, Jacobs responds, "These are topics that we discuss openly in class. I challenge the students to consider these things: What is the potential for an organist? I believe that the old model of what an organist can expect does not appeal to the younger generation."

Jacobs's students are inclined to agree with him. Daniel Ficarri, a senior from Pittsburgh, could serve as the poster child of a happy music student. "Music has unquestionably enriched the quality of my life, and so I've made it my responsibility to help others discover music's potential to change the mind and heart, not just to entertain. I also strive to give voice to the generations of sentiments that are miraculously preserved in music."

Ficarri holds that Juilliard offered him the "realistic lens with which I see the music world and my place in it. I fear that many music schools invest too much energy in matters that are intellectually interesting but ultimately trivial in preparing young organists to enter into the challenging, competitive music world."

Gregory Zelek, another Jacobs student, completed both his bachelor's and master's degrees at Juilliard and is now pursuing an Artist Diploma. (This rating, once much more prevalent in American conservatories, mimics the classical European certificates and licenses, which focus on the practice of the art.) Zelek already works in the important capacity of Principal Organist and Organ Curator at the Overture Center for the Arts in Madison, Wisconsin.

Zelek also dedicates himself to stretching the organ world. "Since beginning my studies at Juilliard, I have been very interested in broadening the organ profession and moving it away from the bubble in which it currently resides," he says. "The organ world tends to be very insular, and it is important to me to elevate the organ profession to a similar level of respect afforded to other classical musicians. I am cautiously optimistic about the future of the profession. While I do believe that the level of organ playing has never been

higher, I still see some narrow-minded thinking that has prevented the profession from flourishing the way it should. If organists are content to interact solely with other organists, then I'm not sure that the profession will ever be esteemed in the manner it deserves."

Zelek credits Juilliard and his teacher for cultivating this outlook. "Paul Jacobs has always stressed the importance of branching out of the organ profession and performing and working with other instrumentalists. These relationships have broadened my musical perspective and have also given insight into how other musicians perceive organists and the organ world to be. Most of my friends have some first-hand association with music, but many were unfamiliar with the organ. The organ is an instrument that is foreign to most people, but if played with passion and enthusiasm, can excite and move people in an instant!"

Similarly, Florida State's Iain Quinn hopes that for purposes of employment his students will cultivate a range of skills. He embraces the historic role of the organist, which is, he says, "a person of many parts." Quinn suggests that, in this day of fewer full-time positions in church music, many graduates have found contentment linking sacred music with other teaching or administrative pursuits. He also believes that the secret to such diversification comes with superior academic training. The paucity of academic positions in organ necessitates, he says, "an increased need for people to be trained across disciplines and likely holding multiple graduate degrees, whether that means an MM and MA (in theory or musicology) or a DMA and Ph.D."

Madeleine Varda, a first-year graduate student at the Jacobs School of Music at the University of Indiana, the largest music school in the country, studies the organ with Janette Fishell. Varda, who was an accomplished pianist before she changed her major to the organ half way through her undergraduate years, understands fully the benefits of breadth of learning. "I plan to become a balanced musician. I do not want to complete this program just knowing how to play notes," she says. Her relationships with her student colleagues play an important role in her academic and professional development. "They're a dedicated, friendly, and supportive group," she says. "There's no sense of unhealthy competition among us." Yet even this can go to extremes as Varda adds poignantly, "I don't have any friends outside of music."

Efforts at mainstreaming the organ and training students to steer toward the middle are hardly new. They were very much on the mind of Craig Whitney of *The New York Times* in 2003, when he penned his influential book *All the Stops*. Whitney encouraged his readers, especially those within the organ community, to contemplate the instrument in a broader light. "The organ might stand a chance of moving back toward the center of American musical life if more American organists stopped thinking of themselves as members

of a closed elite and started thinking of themselves as artists who can educate audiences if they are also willing to embrace and entertain them.”

How, then, to draw more able and interested musicians to the instrument? The problem affects higher education, but it cannot be said to originate there. Patterns of culture, interest, attention-spans, and means of training of young musicians all erect impediments long before students plan their college tours and auditions.

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## QUALIFICATIONS

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A generation or two ago, students at the typical point of entry to organ study (even lessons prior to college) would have demonstrated their skills by performing the Bach *Inventions*, the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and the more rudimentary Beethoven sonatas on the piano. With some exceptions, the audition for the better post-secondary programs would have also assumed prior organ experience and performance of at least fundamental repertoire — the *Orgelbüchlein*, some movements of Mendelssohn, and a number or two of Brahms’ opus 122. Today, the average student entering a collegiate program may not present comparable levels of proficiency. Pundits of organ pedagogy seriously ponder the possibility of teaching beginning keyboard (that starting point at which a beginner places the right thumb on middle C) on the organ itself, a process thus entirely surpassing the piano. A series of method books (*Discover the Basics*, Wayne Leupold Editions) proceeds on the assumption that the beginning study of notation, fingering, and muscle coordination may happen at the organ or any other keyboard rather than at the time-honored piano.

Today, one is hard-pressed to find a uniform set of expectations for entry into organ study. Policies vary: Some institutions, once steadfast in their insistence on prior organ lessons, have begun to look at keyboard talent more broadly. Some have not.

Of his Juilliard students, Paul Jacobs says with confidence, “All of them do have [prior] training, and we interview them and make sure there is a commitment and passion for organ playing.”

Iain Quinn adopts a similar tone. “The standards don’t change,” he says. Of students with less experience, he observes: “They must simply work very hard to keep up.” Quinn does mention that recently revised Florida State University College of Music entrance requirements now allow advanced pianists to apply for the undergraduate organ major. “Advanced,” in this case, denotes red-blooded repertoire including a prelude and fugue of Bach. But Quinn underscores the high academic and musical standards that prevail

at FSU, asserting, “Only one pianist has begun the [organ] degree program since I have been here.”

Eric Plutz serves as Chapel Organist at Princeton University and teaches for the Department of Music as a performance faculty member. This versatile, talented, and hard-working organist coordinates the weekly After Noon Concert Series at the Chapel, accompanies the Symphonic Choir at Westminster Choir College of Rider University, and plays for the Princeton Pro Musica.

Plutz’s standards for beginning organ students do not demand organ experience or lessons. He does, however, expect keyboard ability. “I don’t think I have ever worked with a student who has not played either piano or organ,” he says. As for the possibility of a student first acquiring rudimentary keyboard skills at the organ, he cautions, “I think people who start on the organ have a really steep hill to climb.”

Any pedagogical and philosophical argument over piano preparation for organ study aside, the market speaks to the topic as well. Music publishers, retailers, and instrument manufacturers and vendors have experienced tectonic shifts in their industries and so have honed a finely tuned nose for customer demands and how to cater to them. The National Association of Music Merchants has tracked a decline of 60 percent in the sales of acoustic pianos from 2004 to 2014. Meanwhile, sales of digital keyboards have hovered at about 120,000 units per year, four times the number of strung pianos sold in 2014 — a metric that ties directly to any suggestions that fewer young musicians play the piano at the level of ability that would qualify them for undergraduate organ study.

Faythe Freese has served as the enthusiastic linchpin of the University of Alabama’s organ studio for 15 years. Before that, she taught at Indiana University, Concordia University in Austin, Texas, the University of North Dakota-Williston, and Andrew College in Cuthbert, Georgia. Her extensive portfolio includes a Fulbright Fellowship, and her busy recital career takes in frequent appearances at European concert venues. By any measure, she is a thoughtful and effective teacher.

While the organ community does its share of hand-wringing over the sobering enrollment numbers in formal academic programs and the qualifications of incoming students, Freese looks at student demographics with a degree of dispassion if not outright optimism. She shrugs off the suggestion that organ-studying student populations may be dwindling. Though she notes a slight uptick in the number of organ students at Alabama to a current population of nine, her overall outlook still skirts any generalizations.

“I never really count on anything until they actually sit on the bench,” Freese concludes with a laugh. “I’m not morose about the future of the organ.” She flips the question back to the correlation with employment prospects,



particularly in churches. She also tempers her optimism by acknowledging candidly, “It’s not like the golden years.”

Uptick or not, Freese seeks out students and acknowledges a highly conventional recruitment strategy, one shared by nearly all the artist-teachers active on the concert trail. “I play concerts and I try to offer master classes,” she says. She meets prospective students at these events and entices them with what she calls “sufficient scholarships.” Even after awarding what Freese considers generous subsidies, remaining funds will often allow for even more innovative approaches to cultivating the student population, methods such as sponsoring a competition for the graduate assistantships available in her department.

Jeremy Wance, Associate Director of the American Organ Institute at the University of Oklahoma, echoes the awareness of unpredictability in the enrollment game nationally and the likely difficulty of predicting trends. “We notice random spikes and drops, and you never know what it is going to be from year to year,” he says. His colleague Damin Spritzer ripostes, “To that end though, all three of our studios are maxed out right now.”

Today’s students may well experience a path to organ study that resembles nothing heretofore considered conventional. While many programs, like Juilliard’s, hold to the orthodox standards and proceed on the assumption that entering first-year undergraduates have already taken organ lessons, other campuses are willing to ferret out musical talent and let instructors cope with the mechanics of playing the instrument later. Especially for secondary students, entrance standards, at least from the angle of advanced piano or rudimentary organ literature and performance ability, are relaxed — and not always detrimentally.

Qualifications, it seems, are no longer barriers but opportunities. That new emphasis even describes graduate learning.

Faythe Freese remembers that the day before her most recent spring semester at Alabama, two “walk-on” graduate students appeared at her studio looking for organ lessons. The first was a computer science doctoral student who had taken some studio organ as an undergraduate at another state university. The second had been in Alabama’s DMA degree program in piano and sought to bring her sophisticated keyboard skills to the organ for the first time. While such students typically harbor no illusions concerning their ability to complete a degree in organ with ease, they eventually can fill the need for well-trained, if not recitalist, church organists. They also splinter the established shibboleths concerning focus and depth in graduate education. As to the question, “Are the students bringing abilities sufficient to what they are asked to do?” Freese says, “For the most part, yes.”

What is the key to Freese’s success? Recruit and train smart musicians.

Gregory Hand, Associate Professor of Organ at the University of Iowa, takes a different view of students' prior accomplishments and the likelihood of achievement in and after college. The former Chapel Organist of Northwestern University and graduate of the University of Michigan has progressed from competitor in international competitions to the role of judge on such prestigious adjudication panels as the *Internationale Orgelwoche Nürnberg*. But the rarefied air of the international competition and performance circuit has not dissuaded Hand from harboring a firm set of quite pragmatic views of the organ world. His thoughtful market analysis has led him, for instance, to reevaluate the conventions about student expectations. He asserts that few of even the most proficient players will go on to the top positions in churches, academia, or the concert stage.

"My guiding principle for whom I accept at the university is that I am going to be able to look them in the eye and tell them, 'This is a good thing for you, and when you leave here you will be glad you came,'" he says.

Hand admits that he seeks high school students who have not necessarily taken organ lessons. His acid test? "I'm looking for a kid who is a hot shot in his music department. They sing in every choir. They probably play in the orchestra. They play piano. They're in the musical, the show choir, whatever. So when I find these kids, I can tell them, 'When you come to Iowa (and I concentrate on kids who are in Iowa), you will not pay a penny of tuition, you should probably major in choral music education, or you can major in engineering, get a Bachelor of Arts in Organ and a Bachelor of Science in engineering, anything you want, but the organ is a way to transfer your talent from music to a good paying job in your future.'"

Princeton, like most of the Ivy League (with significant exceptions, for instance, from Yale or Cornell Universities) and like most of the elite liberal arts colleges, does not offer a performance major. Princeton and its sister institutions deem music a humanity. Their majoring students latch on to pathways of music theory, literature, music history or composition. Yet, Princeton students are free to take instrumental lessons with expert artist faculty members in all the typical studio areas. One may even concentrate in organ without declaring a major in music. That channels a group of bright and able students to Eric Plutz though not inevitably to pursue the goals of a recital or church music career. In departments with established performance degree tracks, most of these learners would be termed secondary students.

At Baylor, Isabelle Demers is working on various double-major options. One student, for example, combines the organ track with a second major in engineering. "She has a bit of interest in organ building, and I'm thinking of how to set up an internship for her with organ builders," says Demers. Such



*University of Iowa organ students with visiting artist, Olivier Latry, Cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris, at the Klais Organ in Voxman Music Building. BACK ROW: Kevin Edens, Andrew Kreigh, Josh Ring; FRONT ROW: Olivier Latry, Gyehyun Jung, Daniel Laaveg, Brenda Sevcik.*

*PHOTO: Gregory Hand*

innovative programming corroborates Demers's balanced view and Gregory Hand's willingness to deliver candid, useful messages.

The distinctions between majoring and non-majoring students have become unmistakably blurred, a complication for students and faculty alike, but probably a healthy development. Secondary students top up the invisible fraction of the statistics, that liminal area that bridges the chilly reality of the reported numbers of majors and the actual capacity and effort of studio faculty. Put in crass words, student standing is hardly differentiated in counting up full-time faculty loads or determining adjunct pay. As some faculty members are quick to emphasize, advanced students, especially those preparing degree recitals or scholarly papers at the doctoral level, oblige considerably greater investments of faculty time and energy with no workload or pay differential.

While non-majoring student enrollments may lend a great hand in keeping organ programs viable, these students bring even greater benefits to the profession. David Higgs serves as chair of the Department of Organ, Sacred Music, and Historical Keyboards at the Eastman School of Music of the

University of Rochester. His 36 years in Rochester is but part of an enviable career as a leading concert and recording artist.

Higgs acknowledges that the Eastman School teaches few if any secondary organ students. He adds, however, a valuable insight: "I do see smaller liberal arts colleges doing good things with secondary students," he says. He mentions Syracuse University, where Anne Laver, sometime organ instructor at the Eastman School, holds the rank of Assistant Professor of Organ at the university's Setnor School of Music. Higgs stresses her importance to the profession. "She's doing fantastic things, and she has 10 or 12 students. Some have become majors where there were no majors before. It's very dependent on who is at a place." He continues. "Do they really feel it is worth their time to drum up a studio and a little community?"

Douglas Cleveland teaches at the University of Washington in a specially crafted position, the John DeLo Faculty Fellow. Cleveland, a credentialed concert artist, had taught before as a sabbatical replacement for his colleague, Carole Terry, and as an adjunct faculty member. John DeLo, who worked as an engineer with the Microsoft Corporation, created the position to help the organ department of UW just when cutbacks in state funding were threatening it. In his Faculty Fellow role, Cleveland teaches, performs recitals on campus, and oversees the UW Summer Organ Academy.

Cleveland voices heartfelt enthusiasm for students who combine the study of the organ with other fields. He cites his earlier experience in St. Paul, Minnesota, at Luther Seminary, which supports a joint program with St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, that enables seminarians to study the organ. One can imagine the value added to the profession from that one stratagem. Clergy who play the organ will clearly become the leaders who will prize the instrument. Cleveland's zeal for teaching extends to the secondary students he has had over the years. "[They] helped sharpen my teaching skills, as most students never studied the organ," he says. "Northwestern University, where I taught for five years, had a double-degree program in organ for undergraduates that was very successful. Many of my students were math/organ, chemistry/organ, political science/organ."

Somewhere in this pastiche of instructional design, contemporary student experience, expectations, frustrations, recruitment, faculty effort, challenges and opportunities, 141 undergraduate organ majors and slightly fewer graduate students with probably that many more "undocumented" non-majoring students have found themselves an academic cranny. These students will need to cope with the everyday demands of survival in a college environment, the stresses of a demanding performing art, the costs of an education, and perhaps most to the point, the vexing question: "What comes next in my life?"

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## ORGAN STUDENTS FROM ABROAD

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Over the past 30 years, international students of the organ have found their way to attractive study alternatives in the United States. While no definitive statistics confirm exact numbers, the common misconception holds that between the 1980s and the early 2000s American organ studios were flooded with Asian students, particularly Asian women. Survey data and anecdotes reveal a nakedly different reality.

In 2007, Patrick Hawkins, today a specialist in music for square piano, was a graduate student at Arizona State University. He conducted a study on the demographics of organ performance majors, and the following year, participants in the Yale Think Tank on Academic Organ Programs had the benefit of reviewing the results. While Hawkins focused primarily on gender and racial inequity, he concluded that programs could improve their outlooks by cultivating gender parity and student diversity. Hawkins had initially hypothesized that the plurality of international organ students came from Asia and the Pacific Islands. However, only about 10 percent of Hawkins's data sample was non-US. Within that decile, Asian students accounted for about a third (or 3.5 percent of the overall population). While that left observations about student origins technically true, such numbers hardly represented a "flood" of students from across the Pacific.

According to data from the Department of Homeland Security's Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, since 2010, in all fields of study combined, the number of international students in the US has increased at a rate of about 7 percent per year to its current level of 1.18 million in academic year 2017-18. But organ instructors offer a more finespun story: By their lights, Asian students have decreased and are no longer a certainty in their studios. Who has taken their place?

As immigration debates rage and policy makes it increasingly difficult to obtain student visas here, in China the argument is over the value of an American education. According to the Educational Advisory Board, a Washington-based educational consulting firm, students from the Asian country that sends the most students here continue to express confidence in the quality of learning in the US but are fearful of the political climate. To fathom the impact of this sensitivity, China alone sent 350,755 students to the US in academic year 2016-17 while the UK sent a mere 11,480, and France, 8,814.

Contributing to the riddle are recent projections that the number of 10- to 22-year-olds in China itself is expected to decline from 120 million in 2011 to 80 million by 2024. The Educational Advisory Board has concluded that "China continues to position itself as a competitor destination for

international students—enrolling more Chinese students domestically and attracting 440,000 foreign students to China in 2016” (*Obstacles to International Enrollment beyond the Evening News*, Educational Advisory Board, February 27, 2018).

These changes introduce certain incongruities and challenges to organ programs. David Higgs, for one, notices that the international demographic of his department at the Eastman School of Music has shifted. “It’s about 30 percent international, but they’re not from Asia,” he says. Of the 40 or so total organ students, only two hail from China, and two from Hong Kong. With the chipper cadence calling to mind Leporello’s aria, *Madamina, il catalogo è questo*, Higgs inventories his students’ origins: “We have one from Italy, we have one from Norway, we have one from Georgia, of course, Canada, we have a few from the UK. So, we have Western Europeans. We’ve had Germans, we’ve had Austrians, we’ve had French, a lot of Swedes and Danish.”

Douglas Cleveland has noticed a similar diminishment in Asian students at the University of Washington. He says that the largest group of international students has traditionally been from Korea. “We have found that there are not as many Korean students auditioning,” he says.

So, what explains the shift?

Data from the DHS’s Student and Exchange Visitor Information System turns up some thought-provoking patterns. SEVIS data reveal that more than half of the 1.18 million international students in academic year 2017-18 were pursuing degrees in STEM fields — that is, majors in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Of those, greater than a third were engineering students.

This shunt accentuates another meaningful development: Whereas Asian organ students, in general, represent cultures still in the process of discovering the pipe organ — despite some large and prominent instruments, still relatively few organs have been installed in Asia — European students’ cultural roots portray long and continuous histories of organ performance, repertoire, and instruments, histories measurably older and richer than North America’s. What compels these students to study here? Why would one group of students venture into brand-new territory and another take a seeming step backward? Is it a case of “carrying coals to Newcastle”?

David Higgs remarks that the specific cluster of students at the Eastman School has “been a delightful mix.” Why? “When we do our colloquium and discuss church music and careers for organists, the perspectives are so wonderful,” he says. About this newly found population’s respect for American organs and organists, Higgs adds, “Our best organ [the Craighead-Saunders Organ] is a process recreation from a Lithuanian organ built in the central



German style directed by five American organ builders, but built in Sweden... It might be indicative of the way we live now!"

Iain Quinn also comments on the beguilement of international students for American organs. "Organ building seems to be thriving in the US and indeed far more so than [in] many other countries, and I think the standards have never been higher and in some cases are truly exemplary," he says. "We're seeing an increasing number of new mechanical instruments that have a great deal of individual character, and they make an important artistic contribution to the larger musical world."

Despite shifts in the countries of origins, the willingness of international organ students to study in the US over the past decades confirms the quality of learning experience and the exposure to a high standard of organ building. Looking ahead, the gnawing question of how to stem (or STEM?) the declining numbers remains open.

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## THE ORGAN AS A LIBERAL ART (AND MORE)?

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Over lunch, a group of University of Oklahoma organ students sits talking about their goals, their expectations, their anxieties, and their hopes. Their outlooks, like their backgrounds, vary. They reflect on the sometimes-unlikely paths they have taken to the organ, but they do share a remarkable trait: great curiosity about how their field relates to other realms. These dozen students remain focused on how their present learning and living experiences will groom them for life, for music, and for future careers. They stare stoutheartedly at the realities ahead.

Luke Staisiunas, who studied classical organ in high school, says, "I came in through the theatre organ side of things. The theatre thing sort of went through me here along with the [organ technology and] building program." He says he enjoys the widely flung but cogent experience of his lessons with John Schwandt covering, on that day, a Bach trio sonata, a theatre organ piece, and 20 minutes of continuo playing at the harpsichord. Staisiunas has his sights fixed on a career in organ building, adding, "All of our tech grads get employment right away."

Seated nearby, Cameron Johnson proudly mentions that she majors in voice performance but plays the organ for the OU Catholic Student Campus Ministry. Hearing Damin Spritzer perform inspired her to begin organ lessons. An avatar of the trends toward gender parity and STEM majors, the ambitious undergraduate is also enrolled in OU's premed program. What is the correlation? "When you are doing your med school interviews, they are looking



*John Schwandt finishing a lesson in the Sharp Concert Hall, University of Oklahoma with junior Luke Staisiunas at the “Mini Mo” fabricated from portions of the Moller organ formerly in the Philadelphia Municipal Auditorium.*

*PHOTO: Haig Mardirosian*

for well-rounded people... people with diverse talent,” she says. “A lot of STEM majors have difficulty relating to people, but performance majors don’t have that problem because they are always before people and in the spotlight.”

Is Cameron Johnson’s appraisal simply wishful thinking and a means of nailing a strong medical school interview? No. She has concrete evidence on her side. Bearing in mind that premed is a program and not a major, the acceptance rate to medical schools for students with undergraduate majors in music is, according to NASM, 65 percent as compared to a modest 35 percent for biology/biochemistry majors. Music is the secret weapon and one that Johnson clearly anticipates having in her arsenal.

David Anderson, an OU DMA student who completed his undergraduate degree at St. Olaf College, contributes his perspective on differentiated learning. Anderson had never seen a horseshoe console before the Mini-Mo in Sharp Concert Hall. The console was salvaged and refurbished from another combination theatre/classical instrument, that of New York’s Waldorf-Astoria Hotel ballroom. “You hear ‘theatre organ’ and you don’t know how different



it is from classical organ,” he concedes. John Schwandt tells his future students that OU teaches theatre organ because it is an American artform that has become marginalized. But, Anderson quickly observes, “learning that form helps with church music, helps with your musicianship, helps with your ability to communicate musical ideas to the audience.”

Solena Rizzato, a junior, describes the circuitous road that guided her to the organ. She seems to react to her own words with some amazement. “I actually came here as a meteorology major with a minor in viola performance,” she says. For a time, she even chased tornados! After a single semester, Rizzato realized that atmospheric physics was not her calling; in the process of changing to a viola major, she recalls, “the opportunity came up of taking secondary organ lessons. I had played piano on and off in high school but the [passion for the organ] really came in my senior year, when the Chicago Symphony did a concert with the Saint-Saëns Third [Symphony].” Rizzato describes touring the AOI and toying with the idea of secondary lessons, for which she eventually registered. She was placed in Adam Pajan’s studio.

“To have someone be willing to invest in you when you are just starting was really humbling,” she says. Pajan had set the course and Rizzato now has ambitions for graduate school and an eventual career teaching. She grasps, too, the extreme difficulty of finding academic employment in music.

While such memoirs do shed light on the connection of the organ to other parts of these students’ overall interests, a better understanding of the deliberate and peculiar relationship of the organ to the other arts and humanities deserves more intricate and methodical analysis.

In 2011 in a chapel on campus, Cornell University unveiled a new Baroque organ, the product of a collaboration between the Göteborg Organ Art Center of the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, Cornell University, organ builder Munetaka Yokota, Parsons Pipe Organ Builders, and cabinet maker Christopher Lowe. The researchers and builders intentionally patterned it on a masterpiece of Arp Schnitger, the leading organ builder in northern Germany in the late 17th century. In a video shot and posted online by Cornell’s College of Arts and Sciences titled “Cultural and interdisciplinary studies with Cornell’s new baroque organ,” Anette Schwarz, chair of the Department of German Studies, calls the organ project “a cultural identity” and “the visual representation of the humanities.” Given the centrality of the organ building profession in 17th- and 18th- century life, Schwarz observes, “My students and I could follow a history of science, of a craft, of socioeconomic development, of approaches to aesthetics, just by following the history of this particular piece.”

Schwarz’s notion of the humanities extends to political history. During the 20th century, she says, the Third Reich wanted to appropriate the organ



*The Cornell Baroque Organ, Cornell University. A collaboration of the Göteborg Organ Art Center of the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, Cornell University, organ builder Munetaka Yokota, Parsons Pipe Organ Builders, and cabinet maker Christopher Lowe.*

*PHOTO: Len Levasseur*



to link its own identity to it. Another, perhaps most prominent, example of the politicization of the organ was the state's requirement following the French Revolution that the organists in Paris churches were to compose, improvise, and play appropriate music — airs, marches, and other tributes to the revolutionaries. “You can look at the organ as [a function of] who used it for political efforts, not just aesthetically as a musical instrument,” Schwarz says.

Schwarz calls the Cornell Baroque organ project “a quest into what makes German identity and of course German literature from 1650 to the 20th century. It is so much about music and the poetics of language. So, I often teach literature classes where the protagonists of the texts are master builders of musical instruments.”

How does an instrument such as this assume such deeply rooted meaning? The genesis of the project insinuates an answer. The template for the stylistic replica was an Arp Schnitger organ in the palace of King Frederick I, the Schloss Charlottenburg. It survived into the 20th century and was hailed as a linchpin of the Organ Reform Movement only to be destroyed in the bombardment of World War II. Fortunately, it had also been well-documented with detailed measurements and photographs of its workings. A long process of study of that instrument brought together the team of scholars and artisans whose collaboration led to the specific and particularized choices not to recreate, but to work in the fashion of Schnitger. As Matthew Hall, a graduate musicology student on the project team put it on the Cornell webpage, “Our minds have access in a particular way to knowledge about the past: therefore, if we direct our hands to build and thereafter play an organ in sympathy with what we know about the past, then we are able, at least in part, to translate abstract knowledge into concrete, material experiences.”

Decades earlier, a similar translation of abstract knowledge had unfolded with an organ at Harvard University widely recognized through recordings. At the coaxing of E. Power Biggs who for years originated his weekly CBS Radio broadcasts from the Germanic Museum at Harvard (later dubbed the Busch-Reisinger Museum and now simply Adolphus Busch Hall), a landmark 1958 Flentrop organ became a symbol of the historical and stylistic rediscovery of older music. Biggs and the Flentrop convinced audiences of a new future specifically for Bach's music through the gentle yet distinct pipe voicing made possible by low wind pressures, mechanical playing and stop actions, classic encasement, and the generously reverberant acoustic of the museum (at least when empty). A reminder to him of historic European instruments, Biggs proposed an aesthetic and a design that Harvard University eventually brought to the community, especially generations of record collectors. How remarkable that, 60 years later, these recordings are still available in the catalogs.



*The landmark 1958 Flentrop organ of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University immortalized in recordings by E. Power Biggs.*

*PHOTO: Len Levasseur*

But the Flentrop was simply the continuation of a theme first spun 20 years before. In the 1930s, Biggs had succeeded in getting the Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company to assemble and install an “experimental” Baroque organ, the contrivance of G. Donald Harrison, in the same room. Ironically, it was that antecedent to the Flentrop that served as the voice of the CBS Sunday broadcasts, a series that only endured for a year after the Flentrop’s arrival.

How does a seminal organ on an important university campus advance the liberal arts? Writing in *The Tracker* in Fall 2017, organist and musicologist Agnes Armstrong argues that the pipe organ stands as a metaphor, helping us, she writes, to “understand our surroundings. One thing represents another.” Very importantly, Armstrong asserts that “In our western world, music is a highly textualized culture. Written texts are perceived as archetypes, asserting the correctness of the society in which they are produced.”

While Armstrong’s argument eventually takes aim at the digital replication of “real organs” by cheap “knock-offs” as she zeros in on the threat to organ culture, it is the intermediary step in her reasoning that holds greater significance here (though it would be a foregone conclusion that the disappearance of “real organs” would counteract the very point of studying academic organ programs). Avowing that the organ embodies and gives depth of meaning to other concepts fulfills the promise that organs in academic quarters stand as living laboratories and models of human innovation, engineering, design, acoustics, culture, language, economics, politics, and history.

One of the most diverse suite of organs in any academic collection is at Eastman’s aptly named Department of Organ, Sacred Music, and Historical Keyboards. There, David Higgs presides over a collection of keyboard artifacts that run the gamut from the Craighead-Saunders Casparini (another GOArt collaborative process recreation) to Hammond B-3s, those fabled workhorses of broadcasting, jazz, pop, rock, and Gospel.

Higgs strikes a chord with which many of his colleagues around the country would agree: The organ(s) on campus must be visible. “Where there are good organs in universities, they are going to be used. I don’t think that they will be left to rot, especially when they are visible instruments,” he says. He names the beautiful E.M. Skinner in Kilbourne Hall at the Eastman School, an organ awaiting eventual restoration: “Ninety-two stops and it is silent because no one saw it, no one wanted it at the time, so it was left. But it is on our list of active fundraising to restore.”

As organs on college campuses lend an archaeological glimpse at prevailing cultural influences and customs, concern over their care and preservation should have priority. Within the past 150 years, a span coinciding



with the primary expansion of American colleges and universities and their associated music programs, prevailing organ aesthetics have also progressed from large symphonic instruments in heroic auditoria and mid-century examples combining diverse stylistic traits as a hallmark of the American Classic movement, to the importation and mimicking of Baroque axioms, and most recently, to instruments by both American and overseas builders manifesting newfound inherent beliefs. To the extent that many of these organs have been preserved in their intact state, students have the benefit of the exposure to touch, sound, and mechanical capability as evolved over time. The Eastman School's working collection of keyboards serves as both a repository of historical artifacts and a test center of musical technologies, a laboratory offering students an extraordinary breadth of practical playing experience.

Viewed as an historical marker, the organ may itself contribute to the survival of the humanities and arts. By some measures though, the humanities and arts have already perished in American higher education, at least in their current manifestation.

"To talk about the crisis of the humanities is to consider the survival of the university itself. The heart of the university is the arts, understood broadly. For the first centuries of the institution's existence, every student had to traverse an arts curriculum before going on to achieve an employable degree in law, medicine, or theology" says Justin Stover, fellow of All Souls College, Oxford University in a recent opinion piece in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* ("There Is No Case for the Humanities," March 9, 2018). While some of his takes on the drooped humanities have stirred controversy, this motivating thought comports with the arguments supporting the (seven liberal) arts as basis for the "highers" of theology, law, and medicine.

Just like Cameron Johnson thought, why not major in organ and get a leg up getting into medical school?

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## WHAT STUDENTS NEED

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Students in research universities, community colleges, art schools, conservatories, walled-in ivy-covered refuges, in vast state universities, and in tiny liberal arts colleges bring a plethora of personal wants and needs to campus. Regardless of the learning environment, students will face some withering pressures to overachieve.

Today's campuses may host undocumented immigrants alongside the children of affluent families who trace their lineage to the Mayflower. Even in



*The 1862 E. & G.G. Hook organ merged with the 1893 Hook & Hastings organ in Christ Church, Rochester, New York, the same room housing the Craighead-Saunders organ in the rear gallery. Both organs are in the instrument inventory of the Eastman School of Music.*

*PHOTO: Len Levasseur*



the most socially conservative settings, all these students will investigate their personal freedoms. They will face social pressures and the perils of alcohol and drug use and abuse. Regrettably, they may face threats to their personal safety, possibly for the first time. And, in the performing arts, they may meet head-on the stresses of performance and grapple with the means of overcoming those.

Students and their families now routinely expect assistance far exceeding academic advising and career mentoring. Wellness, disability support, psychological and learning counseling, the assurance of security, and athletic and recreational opportunities have advanced from campus niceties to necessities. The stakes are not trivial. According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (“An Epidemic of Anguish,” August 31, 2015), “Families often expect campuses to provide immediate, sophisticated, and sustained mental-health care.” Student surveys reveal that nearly two-thirds of college students admit to feeling elevated levels of anxiety (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “High Anxiety: How Can We Save Our Students From Themselves?,” October 20, 2017). Many students let slip they feel depressed and, sadly, campus suicides are not all that uncommon. *The New York Times* (“Suicide on Campus and the Pressure of Perfection,” July 27, 2015) reports that, according to the Centers for Disease Control, the national suicide rates of 15- to 24-year-olds has increased from 9.6 deaths per 100,000 in 2007 to 11.1 in 2013. At the University of Pennsylvania alone, 14 students took their own lives between February 2013 and October 2017.

Some years ago, at a dinner party hosted by administrators for 40 or so first-year students who had achieved GPAs of 4.0 at a major Washington, DC research university, attendees commented that they lived in isolation. A more organized social life, they argued, would make them happier. They found weekend evenings in residence halls especially solitary. They sought informal and fulfilling activities: film screenings, plays, talks, concerts. For some, after more than a semester of college, this was their first time eating a meal in a good restaurant. Almost all were women. All entertained sincere, noble, and prodigious aspirations.

Despite the considerable and growing investment in professional campus student services, the first responder role to students’ personal problems may often fall to their most trusted faculty member. Juilliard’s Paul Jacobs thinks over the extramusical needs of exceptionally talented students. “We quickly become aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each student, and every student is unique.” For instance, he recalls, one student “was somebody who had problems with arrogance. So, some of the challenges are not just at the keyboard. But these are things I take very seriously, and I talk to the students about them.”



The more intense the performing arts experience, the greater the need for specific health and wellness support. The Juilliard Office of Campus Life oversees a Health and Wellness Clinic located in the student residence. With a suite of services dedicated to the individual needs of extraordinarily active performers, students may obtain consultation and treatment from, for instance, an orthopedic surgeon whose specialty is performing arts medicine. Seven medical professionals in service of 900 students staff the clinic, evidence of the seriousness with which Juilliard cares for its cream of the crop. Juilliard also offers on-campus counseling services and, because of concerns over injuries in performance (for its dancers and actors as well as musicians), a Physical and Occupational Therapy clinic on the premises.

Universities also go beyond the commitment to students' day-to-day wellness to create opportunities for research and teaching in the expanding field of performing arts health. At the University of North Texas, an interdisciplinary epicenter coalescing the resources and interests of the College of Music with sister units in Osteopathic Medicine, Public Health, Engineering, and Public Affairs enables one to pursue a Ph.D. in Music with a concentration in Performing Arts Health. All these centers, clinics, and academic departments signal a new-found involvement in the inclusive well-being of musicians, among them organists.

The physicality of organ performance fascinates Carole Terry, Professor of Organ and Harpsichord at the University of Washington. As a recitalist, master teacher, recording artist, and board member of the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies, and with hundreds of concert and publication credits to her name, Terry is one of the most respected organ faculty in the nation.

Explaining that her attentiveness to physiology ripened over many years as an outcome of thinking about her own performance, Terry says, "Years ago, I overdid it at an instrument and had to go to physical therapy. Ever since I have gotten so interested in this subject." She brings specific and well-researched physiological perspectives both into her own performances and those of her students. While helping students to improve their playing technique, Terry links the specifics of how the body produces the very movements that make music to the expressive outcomes. Technique and physiology, for Terry, mirror two sides of the same issue. "There are mistakes," she says, "that don't need to be there because of how [organists] are using their body, so I teach a lot about how [the students] assess themselves while at the instrument." For Carole Terry, better use of the body connotes better musical expression.

She offers an example of the intricacies of hand position. Bending the hand in a certain way toward the outside can lead to ulnar deviation, a condition whereby swelling of the metacarpophalangeal joints, those bumps at the

base of the fingers, forces the fingers themselves to bend toward the pinky. Doctors commonly prescribe a splint to counteract this migration, prompting Terry's students to plead, "You're not going to tape my hands, are you?"

Terry advocates exercise and body practices such as Feldenkrais Movement and Alexander Technique. "They have good things to offer about how to feel where your body is in space and how you can use it," she says. She asks players to direct their attention to moving from the hips and to the workings of the back muscles rather than asking their fingers to do all the work. Flexible and strong muscles facilitate durable performance technique: "If their stomach muscles aren't strong enough, I have them do sit-ups at the organ," she says. And when her own expertise does not suffice, she consults professionals: "I bring my trainer into the studio and have him go around and test them and watch them play. It is very, very informative."

Damin Spritzer at the University of Oklahoma echoes the same theme. In that organ performance relates to athletic performance or dance, she says, "It is highly specialized. I've talked to a lot of people about that — trainers and physical therapists. They've said that we [organists] are elite athletes. If we were basketball players, there would be a team of massage therapists waiting for me after every recital to work over and balance the muscles."

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## ECONOMICS 101

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In the words of Mark Felt, the anonymous Deep Throat who helped Woodward and Bernstein break the Watergate story in the *Washington Post*: "Follow the money."

The cost of learning and living in today's salmagundi of academia heaps complexity and detail on the questions of "who are the students, how many, and why do they study?" These topics invite a variety of reactions and clichés that may not fully reconcile students' concerns, parental demands, affordability, and eventual job prospects. Neither can the fuss over paying for education soothe the burdensome sense of alarm over the dwindling numbers of students in the arts generally, in music, and in the organ studio. A grab bag of variables sways the multipart calculus that explains the world of organ study in college.

*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, in an opinion piece ("The New Performing Arts Curriculum," October 14, 2016) on the problem of declining student populations in the performing arts, quotes jazz bassist John Clayton, who considers merit-based financial aid for talented musicians a trap. The performer, arranger, conductor, producer, and educator can boast of one Grammy award

and eight more nominations. He knows the business. Clayton concludes that, left without employment prospects, students tend to remain in school and advance to the safe haven of graduate study — a well-known effect of the variations in the economy especially on professional and business areas: Lose a job and the knee-jerk reaction leads back to school to earn a higher credential and a dive back into the shark tank when things improve.

Clayton has dubbed such unrelenting arts training “fear-based education.” In an interview for *PullMyDaizy*, a blog written by Linda Rapka, Clayton declares, “It’s really rough out there. There aren’t as many jobs as there used to be for all the people graduating. It’s creating a fear in younger musicians: a fear-based education. I try to help the young people understand, number one, statistics never apply to art. Never in the history of our music have there been ‘enough’ jobs for the people that are graduating. Ever. Number two, the doors of opportunity open for you based on the level of your art. It’s not the networking, it’s not trying to have something to fall back on. In our world, too often I might hear about a student who wants to be a Music Ed major because they’re encouraged to have something to fall back on. Basically, what they’re saying to me is, ‘I really want to play, but if I fail, let me mold your children’s minds...’ I don’t want you near my kids! The teacher says, ‘I’ve got to teach, I must teach.’ That’s the one I want to teach my kids.”

More than at any time, higher education tries to balance its array of available financial aid — stipends, awards, tuition discounts, scholarships, work-study opportunities, paid internships, part-time employment — with need and talent. Leveraging the numbers to students’ advantage may take many forms.

Consider how financial aid offices will enter into cooperative agreements with music teaching units to package financial aid to provide, for instance, adequate ensemble staffing. No principal oboist in the orchestra next year? The answer lies with a custom-crafted financial aid package offered to qualified applicants. Financial aid for organists and basketball power forwards alike arouses the principles of supply and demand. The lower the supply and greater the demand, the higher the price. Though simple at first blush, the game also bears some closer scrutiny.

While the orchestra will always need a core of able first-chair players, the fate of organists is less certain. Other than a possible chapel position or the need for a choral accompanist who can switch-hit as pianist, the demand for whatever skill-set an organist would bring to the institution remains ambiguous (with the notable exception of those places large enough to employ their doctoral cohort as teaching assistants for the instruction of secondary undergraduate students). Purpose-dedicated scholarship funding that may be available to student organists follows the identical principles of supply and

demand. Craig Cramer, Professor of Organ at the University of Notre Dame, unflinchingly asserts, “There is a certain buying of positions.”

It stands to reason that those institutions that have endowments tied to organ programs or access to a share of endowed scholarships that can be steered toward music enjoy a substantial advantage in luring able students. Cramer verifies that, on his campus, high-dollar student support fills any deficit in bringing in the cream of the student population. Regarding Notre Dame’s graduate assistants, he declares, “Other than Yale, I think we pay more money to the students than any other place.” To back up his claim, he itemizes dollar figures for stipends and cost of full tuition that rival a starting salary in the business world. His colleagues on other campuses admit that Notre Dame offers rich burses to graduate students. As FSU’s Iain Quinn sees it, “Students may apply here but often attend Notre Dame since they are all fully funded.”

The modest numbers of organ applicants as factored against the established kitties of student support pose a variation of the supply and demand principle. Several institutions mentioned here report sufficient — even ample — scholarship funding for their organ classes. Faythe Freese, at the University of Alabama, maintains that, when meeting an interested student while on the road playing recitals, she can make offers that will “rarely be matched” by comparable institutions. For her, supply meets demand and then some. Her prospective students’ needs can be fully covered by her existing scholarship pool. To boot, she says she often has dollars left over.

Iowa’s Gregory Hand adds, “The only reason there is an organ department at the University of Iowa is that we have a huge endowment. I am totally self-sustaining and put way more into the scholarship coffers than I take out... I honestly think I have the best job in the country!”

Even in unpredictable financial times, philanthropy and endowments still matter. Isabelle Demers remembers a generous gift in her first year at Baylor University, cash sufficient to give every one of her nine students a full scholarship with money left over. Surpluses enable Demers to organize organ study tours, something not at all unusual, but distinctive in this case because all expenses including a *per diem* were paid. As a result, the organ class at Baylor has been able to spend two weeks in destinations such as the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and France. Demers also notices that she has clever students, some of whom, she says, “actually made money on the trip: They were quite frugal and didn’t eat much!”

John Schwandt recounts another recruitment tale. Like others, he offers generous stipends for graduate assistants but explicitly mentions the added benefits including health insurance. David Wurst, a first-year doctoral student, calls OU “an attractive option.” He considers the terms and compensation of

his assistantship “a big part of the decision to attend OU.” As for his work obligation, Wurst can be found in the AOI organ shop for 20 hours per week. In a world where graduate assistants may be underutilized answering phones or sitting at reception desks, the school’s commitment to work that obliges students to produce a tangible product for authentic customers is attention-grabbing. Wurst says that of the schools he researched, he found that this was “by far the most generous financial aid package.”

At the University of Alabama, Chris Henley, a senior from Talladega, looks forward to a career in church music while acknowledging, “With the changing tide of church music in America, it’s a foggy future.” For the moment, as he contemplates continuing into a graduate program, he appreciates the support that he has already enjoyed. He makes ends meet by combining resources. “I received the full-tuition organ scholarship from the University of Alabama. In addition, I received the Knabe Scholarship from the United Methodist Children’s Home, which provided housing for the entirety of my college career. Even though I have held a church job during my time at UA, I never felt financially pressured to take on additional jobs to make ends meet.”

The UMCH scholarship, a resource intended to provide housing for foster and adopted children, is not a tuition discount or a grant coming directly from the university. Students from any major may apply for it (or be invited to it as Henley was). So, while not dedicated specifically to organ playing or to the arts in general, the scholarship still underscores the all-important principle of fastening together a suite of income possibilities. Henley gratefully calls the UMCH Scholarship an “incredible opportunity.” His situation, he says, “was much better than most of the students I lived with. There are plenty of students in similar or worse situations than I that need the assistance.”

In circumstances where organ students are left on their own to find third-party funding, those organizations most concerned with the future of the profession offer some worthwhile alternatives. Many such bodies have started directing their energies to cultivating scholarship donors and awarding the prizes to worthy candidates.

The American Guild of Organists, the largest advocacy and membership organization dedicated to the instrument, proposes in its mission and vision statements to “foster a thriving community of musicians who share their knowledge and inspire passion for the organ.” It intends to do so “by engaging, supporting, and uplifting every organist.” The AGO’s suite of programs intended to assist able young performers comprises scholarships, competitions, and grants. Generous awards from the AGO’s Pogorzelski-Yankee Memorial Scholarships usually enable several annual winners to underwrite a goodly portion of a semester’s tuition bill. The Pogorzelski-Yankee

Scholarship distributes \$60,000 annually among undergraduates receiving \$7,500 and graduate students, \$15,000.

Other professional organizations and foundations also offer specific if tidily idiosyncratic scholarships. The American Theatre Organ Society lists a small award dedicated to studying with a professional theatre organ instructor. The Rhode Island Foundation, among its hundreds of different scholarship accounts, offers the Bach Organ Scholarship, a fund for Rhode Island residents intending to major in organ — proof that everyone can find their niche.

The denominational musical organizations also promote those who are most likely to enter the field and, with that, become members of their group. The National Association of Pastoral Musicians defines itself as a body that “fosters the art of musical liturgy. The members of NPM serve the Catholic Church in the United States as musicians, clergy, liturgists, and other leaders of prayer.” While its interests extend past the *métier* of organ performance or choral music, NPM nevertheless puts considerable effort into making scholarships available to qualified applicants “to assist with the cost of educational formation for pastoral musicians in formal academic settings.” Stipulations include demonstrated need, membership in the organization, enrollment in an academic program “related to the field of pastoral music,” and the intent to “work at least two years in the field of pastoral music following graduation/program completion.” Nothing in the scholarship rules suggest that the \$21,000 of annually available funds would not be awarded to organists.

Given the number of organ students nationwide, prospects of financial assistance for a university degree in organ are substantial: Funding is probably obtainable. But is the free flow of support an unqualifiedly good thing? Does the ease of paying for an organ degree assist students in gaining a healthy range of skills and interests?

Iowa’s Gregory Hand has contemplated that question through his forthright analysis of the general student population’s hunger for scholarships as plotted against the surge of financial aid to student organists. He has landed on a vivid conclusion: Because so many organ students benefit from generous talent-based awards, he reckons, “there is just not the competition that there used to be. So if you’re a student, you’re really in the driver’s seat. And [students] can get caught up in being offered these big scholarships and not realize what’s going to happen after this.” Hand admits to assuaging his own guilt by lamenting that students may be given “just enough rope to hang themselves.”

In a June 2017 report on enrollment challenges to small colleges, *The Washington Post* quoted Emily Chase Coleman, Senior Vice President for

Enrollment Management Services at Maguire Associates, the Massachusetts consulting group. Coleman plays down the effectiveness of tuition discounts — the technique of awarding students financial aid taken from the tuition revenue pool itself rather than money generated from endowments or gifts — saying that this time-honored process may not entice the expected applicants. She accentuates instead the essential factor of value received. Tuition discounts and lowered price aside, she asserts that colleges “have to deal with the bigger issue, which is how do we make this a place that people feel [is] worth paying for?”

The several organ programs now admitting to financial aid surpluses may corroborate Coleman’s point. She advises her clients to custom-fit academic programs to individual students. Such a strategy, that of deliberate curricular innovation and real-world experience through internships, generally poses less challenge to organ programs than the other part of her advice: Fit learning to “workplace demands.” The latter may be out of our hands. The former demands some innovation.

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## CURRICULUM

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Little else defines the nature of any academic experience like the curriculum, that roadway to acquiring experience and learning. By conventional measures, curriculum may be reckoned to be a list of hurdles (an unnamed though respected organ professor confessed of knowing little about what students take because “they just check things off and get advice from a counselor”), an attitude that confirms the dated notion that the organ studio remains an island set apart. Better, the curriculum could be twigged as an interactive map that leads to a goal — namely, student achievement and the granting of a degree.

Institutional policy and preference compellingly shape curriculum. One could not, for instance, argue intelligently that studying the organ should bypass the fundament of first-year English. The willingness, moreover, of academic leadership (here meaning the shared role of faculty and administrators) to innovate and leverage curriculum can be edifying. Slogging through academic program reform often makes for back-breaking work. Organ faculty interviewed here are of a single voice in lamenting the cumbersome process of modifying curriculum, a complaint that booms loudest at public institutions.

When the University of Alabama recently redefined its residency and course delivery regulations for graduate students, good fortune landed in Faythe Freese’s lap. Distance education — those many techniques of course



content delivery done electronically and usually across the Internet — can hardly be declared novel any longer. While distance learning in its current form was launched as a tool to deliver graduate professional degree or certificate programs, often in business, remote coursework has become, for good or ill, commonplace in undergraduate education as well. Regardless of what one may think of its pedagogical effectiveness, the day of trombone lessons by Skype has already dawned.

According to Freese, the combination of distance learning and modified graduate residency rules now permits her to bring doctoral students to Alabama virtually. She excitedly cites the case of a new DMA student living in Delaware, a mid-career adult who has employment, family, and community roots in his current location. Until now, his degree program would have required staying in Alabama for some period. The new doctoral regulations allow students to waive this obligation. In addition, 50 percent of doctoral coursework may be taken at another university.

“It’s huge because when you look at our DMA, it’s 48 hours,” Freese says. “Four hours is the document which may be done away from UA. That leaves 44 hours, and 16 of those hours are applied organ.” With the combination of the courses completed elsewhere and distance education techniques, Freese envisions a new and innovative path to an advanced degree. “So, I got my first taker [from Delaware], and he’s going to do it!”

While mulling over location, Freese adds that, were her organ program in a more cosmopolitan location, it would be soaring. Now, technology and generous, astute academic policy, she predicts, can level the playing field.

Curricular reform denotes more than tweaking courses and adopting up-to-the-minute delivery modes. At its truest, curriculum enmeshes the gist and knowhow of learning, qualities reaching well past a layout of courses. Students ought to gain both a general sense of the body of knowledge and, very importantly, of the core beliefs, attitudes, plans, and aspirations of the institution, its faculty, administration, and other students. Curriculum ought not to represent restrictive road maps, but rather landscapes of learning.

Innovations in today’s organ curricula extend beyond ordinarily understood norms of organ study: a set of lockstep necessities that can be recited in one good breath — musicianship, harmony, analysis, counterpoint, music history, conducting, performing ensembles, organ lessons, organ literature, and perhaps a course in church music. Add some general education requirements, a possible secondary instrument or composition, and a few optional electives, and a credentialed organist is born.

The University of Oklahoma boasts of its alternative in promotional materials: “Students from all backgrounds study topics ranging from church music and classical music to theatre organ and organ technology at the American



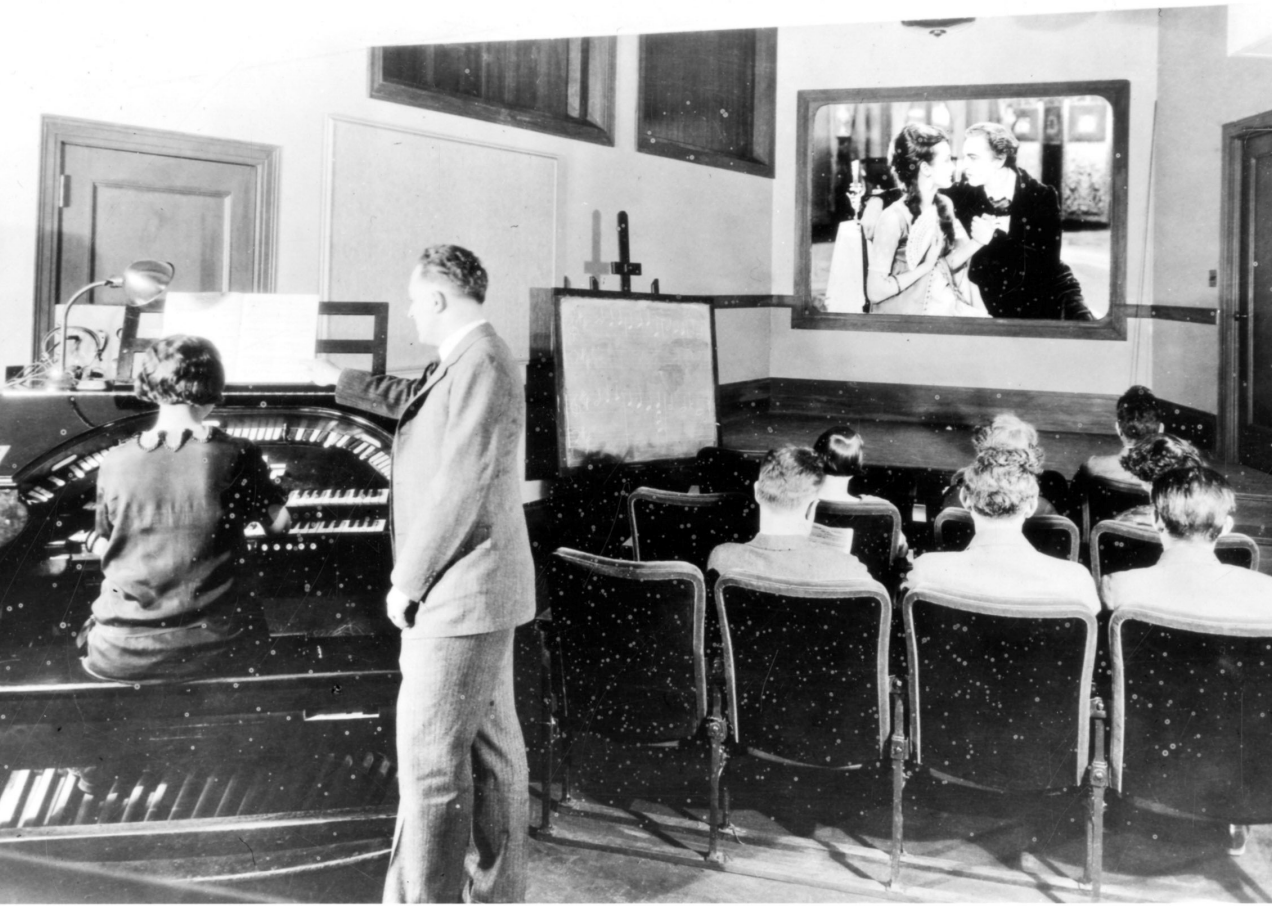
Organ Institute. Courses for each of these topics are included in every degree program, giving each student a well-rounded education in all aspects of American organ music. Undergraduate students are offered a broad range of repertoire and performance experiences to enhance their overall understanding of Western music.”

If the University of Oklahoma’s personality is capable of being apprehended by the rolled-up sleeves of the organ shop and the flying left foot of a pop tune’s bassline, then the Eastman School of Music can claim to pattern itself around its extensive collection of and access to keyboard instruments of some true historical distinction. But the Eastman School’s Department of Organ, Sacred Music, and Historical Keyboards also aspires to turn out students who will be competitive and smart in their post-conservatory professional lives.

David Higgs thinks about intentionality in learning. His faculty discusses and develops ways of dispensing pragmatic career skills. A laboratory for such innovation is the department’s Monday Night Colloquium, a weekly session required of all organ majors. Faculty and students convene either on campus or at one of many local churches. Perhaps more than most schools, Eastman has grown a set of intentional and ongoing relationships with Rochester’s many houses of worship, a scheme that makes available for presentations and recitals by faculty, visitors, and students a broad range of instruments that complement the on-campus keyboards. The colloquium also suffices as a weekly town meeting of the department. Students are thereby exposed to a potpourri of topics that would otherwise be only randomly represented in a more demarcated curriculum: hymn playing; anthem conducting and accompanying; discussions of the state of the profession; audition and interview techniques; role-playing for the job market.

Like Carole Terry’s focused interest at the University of Washington in the physiology of organ performance, Eastman also emphasizes dynamic balance and freedom from tension through a course titled Healthy Keyboard Technique, an inventive approach to the topic in which students perform at the pedal clavichord. Why that quirky machine? The tangents, those wedge-shaped little hammers that strike the strings of the clavichord, make constant contact. Any tension in the body, therefore, immediately changes into variations of finger pressure and deviations in pitch. The ear, therefore, can hear tension, and to play accurately and in tune on this instrument obliges relaxed yet precise muscle control.

The Eastman School of Music also requires its undergraduates to take a course titled Organ Maintenance in which students work with the school’s organ technicians. And Eastman vaunts a tradition of learning theatre organ and cinema accompaniment reaching back to 1922 when it initiated



*An unidentified professor (perhaps Robert Berentsen) teaching a motion picture organ class at the Eastman School of Music in the mid-1920's.*

*PHOTO: Courtesy of the Sibley Music Library, Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester*

a three-year course in silent movie accompaniment. Although that curriculum was terminated with the advent of the talkies, its spirit lives on. Several theatre organs survive in the city and the Eastman School and the Rochester Theatre Organ Society have collaborated such that students have access to a four-manual Wurlitzer organ in one of the downtown theatres.

Programs of study in higher ed spread well past learning plans leading to certificates and degrees. As far back as Benjamin Franklin's day, American society thirsted for opportunities to continue and broaden learning. The Junto, Franklin's club for discussion, debate, and learning, the Lyceum movement in New England, the Chautauqua of the nineteenth century, and other organized efforts all sprang from the inclination to teach non-degree learners. As professional and job standards change and employers expect updated learning, the demand for continuing education continues as part of higher education's portfolio. Nothing, furthermore, suggests that the need for professional and continuing education will wane in future years.

But have such programs touched on the organ?

In one remarkable case, assuredly so.

Brigham Young University, among several educational organizations affiliated with the Church of Latter Day Saints, has originated an exemplary outreach and continuing education organ curriculum. The LDS Church has a constant need for trained players in its stakes and wards and has invested in equipping these meetinghouses with (mostly) digital organs and in educating the volunteer musicians who are called to play them. By any yardstick, moreover, the numbers are staggering.

Don Cook, Associate Professor of Music, who administers the BYU outreach venture, reckons that more than 5,000 students have passed through the continuing education program of study in organ since its inception in the 1990's. Numbers that copious dictate innovative instructional design.

At BYU, non-degree organ students learn in an organ lab, a concept borrowed from the piano labs common to nearly all music units. Twelve Rodgers organs are tied to computer workstations on which students can run Organ Tutor, a software resource developed by Cook and intended for students with some piano abilities. Organ Tutor introduces and drills the core skills of organ playing and, it should be noted, the myriad rudiments of organ construction, workings, and registration. Cook says that this allows instructors to tour the room and selectively listen to individual students. Teachers thus dedicate precious time to musical interpretation while students work at their own pace using earphones.

The organ continuing education syllabus, according to Cook, moves on to six independent study courses that embrace the work-a-day musts such as keyboard harmony, accompanying, and hymn playing. Given the clear success of the program, Cook ponders why others have not embraced such models. "This should be more widely accepted," he reasons, adding that the only other instance of class organ that comes to mind for him is located at the University of Utah where the late Robert Cundick, former Mormon Tabernacle organist, assembled a smaller facsimile of the BYU Organ Lab.

A bequest to BYU also underwrites outreach to the volunteer organists in stakes and wards, enabling Cook and his teaching colleagues to conduct regular workshops throughout the country. He adds, "Each [workshop] attracts between 35 and 312 people. We bring in four to five instructors for a Saturday session with the goal of inspiring [participants] to get further training. We do this on whatever instruments we have at our disposal and play a recital the night before of really good repertoire on sometimes not very good instruments. But we make do!"

Cook stresses that the pioneering Organ Lab has had some bearing on the BYU college music curriculum as well. For instance, BYU requires its





*The twelve workstations in the Organ Lab at Brigham Young University, each comprised of a Rodgers digital organ and a computer. PHOTO: James E. Thomashower*

piano majors to take a two-semester sequence in organ, something that may be satisfied by Organ Tutor or, optionally, by traditional studio instruction. And, he adds that these and other efforts have fostered a deep awareness of the organ in the LDS Church’s everyday cultural life.

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## TOWN AND GOWN

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If the headlines can be trusted, the relationships of colleges and universities to surrounding communities have been traditionally beset with difficulty. Despite the latest round of politically motivated attacks on higher education itself — the unsettling marches of torch-wielding white supremacists, assaults on academic freedom and free speech — the reality is that higher education has been both a powerful civic force and a good neighbor. While the trends now suggest that the public’s low regard for higher education has

made life trying, universities can still make significant positive contributions to the communities around them. College town populations have customarily taken pleasure in the prestige coming from the cultural and intellectual leadership that campuses can offer the locality. Assuredly, big-time college athletics swells local pride and bestows bragging rights. Small cities that spring up around great academic institutions inevitably experience a high standard and quality of living. Good and smart people with cultivated interests associate themselves with universities. Civic and political discourse, if not sullied by special interests intent on disrupting academia, can exemplify the refreshingly calm, wise, and high-toned community engagement outlined in the civics books and lectures of years past. Academia also contributes to the regional economy — student spending on essentials and entertainment for instance. Universities are often large, if not the largest, employers in the locality. They contract for services and goods from local businesses. University health systems and medical schools contribute to the physical wellbeing of the region. Athletic, recreational, and big-arena entertainment draw visitors that additionally enrich the region's economy.

Cities are often defined by the academic institutions within their borders. One need only mention Ann Arbor, Michigan; College Station, Texas; Madison, Wisconsin; Champaign, Illinois; Bloomington, Indiana; Athens, Georgia; Columbia, Missouri; or Gainesville, Florida and the universities in those cities spring to mind instantly. And, how much worse would a crumbling New Haven economy be without Yale University? Directly or indirectly, colleges and universities are good for their locales.

As for community involvement by faculty, academics are unsurprisingly tied to the political, cultural, and recreational life outside campus walls. Musicians are no exception, particularly those employed in the adjunct teaching ranks whose primary work, by definition, happens elsewhere. It is bidirectional: A university affiliation raises the credibility and standing of the musician; the prestige of musical employment and accomplishment elevates the university's reputation and student experience in the studio.

With the professoriate also come the keys to the bully pulpit. The academy in the city can (and should) exercise its richness of perspective and thought. Universities can usually deliver an expert on nearly any topic, a resource that businesses, municipalities, and news media commonly exploit.

A full-bodied conversation on organs in concert halls has bubbled in many municipalities. In New York City, proponents have argued in favor of a concert hall organ for any of the city's premier halls — principally Carnegie Hall and Geffen Hall (in former incarnations, Philharmonic or Avery Fisher Hall) — for well over a half-century. And now it is Juilliard's Paul Jacobs's turn. His is the conspicuous platform, after all, and Juilliard itself, sitting just

next door to Geffen Hall, is a Lincoln Center tenant. In October 2016, Jacobs penned an opinion piece for *The Wall Street Journal* in which he questioned the vision and decision making of the leaders who have kept pipe organs out of these rooms, people who have gone so far as to remove existing instruments during renovations. He quotes the dispiriting words of the late violinist Isaac Stern who, as president of Carnegie Hall, was instrumental in saving the structure from the wrecker's ball, all the while reacting to the question of a pipe organ in it as something that would happen "over my dead body." As it turned out, it has not happened.

Jacobs resorts to a well-trod if still salient line of reasoning that goes like this: If an orchestra in these halls needs the organ, it must make do with a digital replica of one so when a pianist needs an instrument for a concerto performance, why not just provide an electronic keyboard? It is a reasonable curl of rhetoric after all (matters of scale aside for even a minimal concert hall organ would cost ten or more times the price of a single concert grand). But the argument also raises a judicious and pragmatic barb that Jacobs, given his many appearances on the symphonic stage, would have experienced hands-on. The horrors of sound when an orchestral score says "organ" in the left margin can be just hellish. And the issue goes far past digital organs to instances of bringing digital keyboards to stage and plugging them into house sound systems. Thus Zarathustra spake quite appallingly from time to time.

Back on campus, obvious outreach to the community includes concerts, recitals, and staged productions. Especially in the case of larger universities, the whole of the musical life of a municipality can revolve around the on-campus activities and guest performances. Facilities such as the Kranert Center at the University of Illinois or Texas Performing Arts at the University of Texas, Austin and many others are *de facto* the regions' performing arts centers. So it is with organ concerts. Organs in campus concert halls may frequently rival the best in the region and become the choicest recital locales.

Best practices in concert sponsorship also include the community. The Rochester, New York AGO Chapter, the Eastman School of Music, public media outlet WXXI, and several local churches pool resources to present the annual Rochester Celebrity Organ Recital Series. In an instance of genuinely productive partnership, touring artists both perform for the community and teach for the music school. The Eastman School's exemplary relationships with the city's houses of worship naturally facilitate the successful operations of the Celebrity Organ Recital Series.

Other campuses blend organ events into a larger performing season. The University of Notre Dame performing arts series incorporates music, dance,

and film events with a chain of organ performances. Craig Cramer remarks on the achievements of that venture. “Until this year [academic year 2017-18] we have given every concert twice just because the organ hall is so small,” he says. Cramer suspected that audience enthusiasm would run out after a year or two, but he delights that, for 14 years, the attendance at organ events has been hardy. However he continues, “The drop-off [in 2017-18] was not caused by lack of enthusiasm for the organ, but rather that they have paved over all the parking lots and built buildings.” Such are the ups and downs of the concert promotion business.

Organ programs frequently serve as a swinging door of town-and-gown rapport. Organ students, for instance, make available a ready pool of talent to staff local organ benches, especially for those places unable to afford established professionals. A student organist benefits from a handy practice instrument and the opportunity of learning the trade in a live working environment. It is an inevitable and useful relationship.

As for collaboration, chapters of the American Guild of Organists have routinely joined in educational ventures with local colleges and universities. The AGO itself was founded in 1896 as a degree-granting academy under charter from the New York State Board of Regents. Its original certificates — the Fellowship and Associateship — addressed a vital need especially in the days prior to the proliferation of graduate degrees in music. The Fellowship was intended as a demonstration of skills that later came to be rivaled by the now regularly awarded Doctor of Musical Arts and the Associate rating mimics many of the standards of a Master of Music. The commonality of educational objectives, though, cannot be denied, and persist.

At the University of Washington, Douglas Cleveland says, “for many years the UW students have participated in masterclasses co-sponsored by the Seattle AGO and UW. This alliance has motivated students themselves to aspire toward leadership positions: As an example, the co-directors for the 2022 AGO National Convention are currently doctoral students in organ at UW.”

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## NELLA CAPPELLA

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Higher education advocates for the community’s well-being, edification, and, from time to time, spirituality. In both religiously-affiliated and secular schools, the tradition of chapels and campus ministry have endured since the outset. The largest college chapels predictably attract local faithful and some places, such as Duke University, sponsor a ministry for a population



that, according to its own online assertion, “draws worshipers from all areas of campus as well as from many of our neighboring communities.”

Especially when chaplaincies are established through the academy itself, where qualified and degreed clergy staff campus chapels (as distinct from local churches that may dispatch ministers to conduct services at the invitation of student faith groups), one might reasonably expect to find sound, intelligent, and compelling preaching and liturgy. With that, the richness of musical life in major college chapels when classes are in session often outflanks the capabilities and resources to be had in local houses of worship. University chapels also draw the public to musical performances — including organ recitals — and make available their great spaces to the community for academic and ecclesiastical special events.

Princeton University organist Eric Plutz views the iconic gothic chapel on his campus as a vital and important musical venue for concerts of the university’s musical groups and of the broader community alike. While much is instigated or planned by the Office of Religious Life or the chapel musicians, Plutz also fast-forwards to outside groups that rent the facility — the habitual tour stop for the St. Olaf Choir, academic convocations and commencements of Westminster Choir College and Princeton Theological Seminary, and others. When asked about Princeton University’s role in these, Plutz quips with a chuckle, “Princeton never invites anyone! They are in the enviable position of saying yes or no.” Referring to the importance and centrality of the Princeton Chapel in the life of the city, region, and minds of the general population, Plutz says, “In some ways [the chapel] fulfills the role of the cathedral at the center square of the town.”

As for organs, where chapel vaults and God prevail, there pipes are ever found.

The exact connotation of the term “chapel” also fluctuates. Secular universities as a matter of course pride themselves on a posture antithetical to any particular practice of religion on campus. To complicate things, religious institutions (including those founded by denominations that now take little or no role in operations and serve as absentee landlords of a sort) typically impose no limits on the practice of religion. Their relationship to other sectors of academic life, though, often operates in a large gray area. Consider the oxymoronic reality that some of the largest church music degree programs are housed in state, and therefore by principle secular, institutions. The University of Oklahoma’s John Schwandt reasons that such a focus presents no difficulties with appearances of state-sanctioned religion. “That’s because we are teaching *about* religion and not indulging in the practice *of* religion,” he explains.

Some universities have avoided any perceived promulgation of religion by branding their chapels simply as places of spiritual renewal, meditation,



*The Princeton University Chapel, E.M. Skinner Organ Company, 1928 and N.P. Mander, Ltd., 1991.*

*PHOTO: Joseph Routon*

refreshment, and community gatherings. Such policy cedes the exercise of the outward signs of the community's beliefs or non-beliefs to individuals or groups. Yet, these "secular chapels," buildings given over for sanctioned use by student faith groups, for meditation, ethical and moral presentations, musical performances — in brief, anything short of an established campus ministry program — hardly preclude the trappings of religion such as soaring architecture, stained glass, and organs.

Pennsylvania State University is a public institution and thus, by definition, secular. Yet, its Pasquerilla Spiritual Center has been erected as a place of hospitality for spiritual life, ceremonies, services representing nearly all the world's major religions as well as atheist and meditative groups, and cultural events. The center houses a two-manual organ by Orgues Létourneau. Similarly, a 55-stop Dobson organ stands front and center at the Sykes Chapel and Center for Faith and Values at the University of Tampa, also a private and secular university. Given its variable acoustics, unimpeded visibility of organ case and console, and its moveable seating, Sykes Chapel affords an attractive setting for featured guest artists in concert, a preferred teaching and practice facility for organ faculty and students, and a performance hall for the music department.





*The 2016 Paul Fritts & Company Organ Builders op. 37, at the Sacred Heart Basilica, University of Notre Dame.*

*PHOTO: Paul Fritts*

Perhaps those universities which are historically affiliated with a religious denomination or directly administered by denominational bodies or religious orders are more likely to have chapels fitted with organs than secular institutions either public or private. In inventorying the 15 pipe organs at the University of Notre Dame, Craig Cramer calls the instruments “stunning... an embarrassment of riches.” Aside from the obvious importance of the new Fritts organ in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart and several smaller organs in other worship places, Cramer credits the organ in the Reyes Organ and Choral Hall of the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center, another Fritts, with raising the awareness of the campus and surrounding community concerning organ music.

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## AN ORGAN BENCH FOR EVERY GRADUATE?

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In 1600, a Franciscan missionary priest, Cristóbal de Quiñones, had an organ installed in the San Felipe mission in a region of North America later to be called New Mexico. In the same year, the global population stood at 560 million, of which 78 million lived in Europe. What percentage of those Europeans would have been within earshot of an organ? Certainly, the great majority if not all. Discounting for the moment the few organs in North America and the fair certainty that no organs had been exported to further reaches, something like 16 percent of the global population in 1600 would have been capable of hearing music performed on an organ.

The estimated global population today numbers about 7.6 billion, of which 54 percent live in cities. Unlike those in 1600, organs today stand on six continents. Any conjecture about the population that is aware of and can potentially hear organ music today is more complex. Our society tends to choose what it does with its time and the options are vast. Leaving out audio or video media, going afield to hear live music, let alone that which is played on the organ, is less and less common. The organ, though, has not disappeared. To the contrary, installations of pipe organs have increased with population and global geographic diversification.

Accounting for population and cultural growth, it is a fair guess that more organs exist today than at any point in the history of humankind. Despite any gloom over the future of the instrument, the numbers of organ students, and the total of new instruments produced per year, surely this existing inventory of instruments must require musicians to play them!

What has become uncertain, though, is the once secure and monolithic relationship of organs to Christianity. While some argue that one can discern an uptick in the number of churches coveting skilled organists, presumably to perform the worthwhile, even sophisticated repertoire traditionally associated with the instrument, others openly question the time-honored association of organ and church.

Since about 1980, the export of organs to new places has not been primarily a function of the spread of Christianity as it was when Father Quiñones put that organ in an American church in 1600. Today's persistent cultural discontinuity may be less a function of the organ disappearing than the church disappearing against the backdrop of contemporary culture, or decaying as it clings to its expressions of archaic European culture. Post-denominational churches, post-evangelical churches, "new paradigm" churches, and "seeker" churches often meet in public auditoriums, parks, and even homes. They picture themselves akin to the first-century Christian congregations. They imagine Jesus as a figure strumming a guitar, not seated at a pipe organ. Their

musicians write and sing songs that reflect their own experience of personal conversion, rebirth, or commitment.

Even those friendly to the organ voice some hardnosed cynicism about its viability as a universal tool of worship. Organist, author, and recitalist Tim Rishton, formerly on the faculty of the University of Wales, argues against pipe organs in various worship settings in his book *Joyful Noise?* (Holy Trinity Press, 2006). After outlining the deficits of pipe organs, the requirement that organists be trained to play a “difficult” instrument, the price of organs, their “cultural irrelevancy,” and the arrogance of some organists, he concludes, “it is therefore important that churches consider carefully and impartially all the available options — and be willing to make changes if this is appropriate. Owning a pipe organ can be a great financial and practical asset, but it can also be a liability if its presence prevents a church from pursuing its spiritual vision.”

Even more pragmatically, as an academic dean of a non-music unit referring to his colleague in the arts said, “I don’t envy his making the decision to repair that pipe organ rather than buy ten new pianos for his studios.”

Despite David Higgs’s observation that, in his travels, he sees “lots of people enthusiastic about the organ but very worried about making a living,” students still live in a hardened husk of fierce optimism. Such is a function of youth — a sense of confident self-assessment, indestructibility, and a future in which all will be well. On the other hand, smart students also perceive the advantages of adaptability and an open mind.

Are the anxieties about the relationship of organ performance to a secure future income overstated? The University of Washington’s Douglas Cleveland asserts that an organ degree can authentically prepare a student for professional endeavors outside of music. “The discipline required to learn such a wide range of literature, from ancient to modern, is applicable to other fields in the liberal arts,” he says.

The soft skills that organists can acquire do stand to take them far in the secular workplace. Employers recite a litany of desirable employee characteristics; always among those are the arguable truisms of collaboration, teamwork, problem-solving, and interpersonal communication. Cleveland continues: “Most undergraduate organ majors have church positions where they are required to collaborate with ministers, music committees, and choir directors. This skill of collaboration can be useful in other fields, as good leaders need skills of good communication and collaboration.” He mentions students who have continued to responsible jobs with the Microsoft Corporation and elsewhere.

Oklahoma University master’s student Alex Armstrong, after sharing his hopes of finding an academic appointment that would leave him time enough for a church music position as well, nimbly adds, “I want to do it all.”



He believes that his broad student experience will prepare him for diversified interests and career possibilities. Armstrong's compatriots affirm the breadth of learning that they have experienced. Doctoral student Steven Wurst says, "I've played as a guest artist with the wind symphony here. Other people play for singers. They play with the choirs. There's a lot of collaboration."

This slight and slapdash sample of buoyant student opinion cannot on its own guarantee a professional life let alone satisfactory financial compensation. The question, therefore, should shift from "Where are the organ majors?" to "Where are the job opportunities?" Those students claiming with any certainty that they will be employed by the church, or worse, the academy, might deserve medals for bravery.

From his vantage point in South Bend, Craig Cramer projects optimism. He sees stable employment prospects at the top end of the market; he radiates confidence that the best students will find their avenue to the choicest jobs in sacred music. But not everything in this vision of the future is halcyon. Cramer laments the lack of talent available to serve in the part-time positions — the small parish churches outside of bigger urban centers where a reasonably well-trained organist might make a considerable difference and an important contribution. He sees fewer students coming up the ranks willing to commit to part-time work.

Perhaps Cramer's outlook has been whittled by the basic facts of Notre Dame's distinctiveness. He admits to Notre Dame's "very interesting history," a chronicle in which the mix of emphases — band instruments and organ that, upon reflection, makes sense at a Catholic university that supports an iconic and competitive football program — "really didn't work," he says. This resulted in a devaluation of the music department to a service role and a unit continuing to offer only an undergraduate BA degree. But that was also the moment, around 2004, that a master's degree in sacred music was instituted not by the musicians, but by a cleric, the Rev. Michael Driscoll, a professor of theology. In consultation with Cramer, Fr. Driscoll maneuvered the program into the Department of Theology. Its growth has been steady and significant, and, in time, the sacred music degree has grown to become a freestanding interdisciplinary object in the College of Arts and Letters. Its students may settle on concentrations in choral conducting, organ, or voice.

Cramer asserts that his university cherishes the program. He submits as evidence that it has become a top priority in Notre Dame's newest capital campaign. With growth and generous funding, the degree has taken on value, something not lost on the students who avail themselves of the specific training that virtually guarantees employment. These Notre Dame students are intent on careers in sacred music and their prospects are good. Cramer dubs his students "hardened realists who [know] that their future is in sacred



*University of Oklahoma students Evan Bellas (LEFT) and Alex Armstrong (RIGHT) washing pipes as part of an organ restoration project in the organ shop of the University of Oklahoma.*

*PHOTO: Haig Mardirosian*

music.... And there are many more jobs than there are qualified people.” He adds, “The students get really impressive parishes, cathedrals, and campus ministry positions.”

Clearly, place, mission, student population, and job market work to mutual advantage at Notre Dame. Cramer optimistically acknowledges this, saying, “I think that the students are really aware that their future is in sacred music... their eyes are wide open on this.”

But considering that part-time market that Cramer believes remains unaddressed, many campuses have strategically targeted versatile student musicians who might fill the void. For instance, Princeton’s Eric Plutz sees his students as strong candidates poised to serve “middle of the market” needs. “These are students at an Ivy League school. They have difficult work. They are very smart and working at that, but they can donate a little time to this artful endeavor and perhaps can do enough to satisfy this particular niche,” he says.

Gregory Hand at Iowa would not only echo that message but endorse it. Comparing his students’ aspirations and the careers of church musicians in “middle ground” houses of worship, he says, “That is exactly the population that I am trying to restock.”

Aside from a small number of top-shelf positions, Hand, always the pragmatist, concedes, “This field has become a part-time field, and universities should reflect that.” He heaps the obligation on faculty and advisors to tackle the students’ assumptions about college majors and the possibility of full-time employment based upon that foundation. “The onus is not on them to research a field. It’s the professor who is supposed to prepare them for the real world,” he says. “Because most of my students, whether they want to or not, are going to be part-time organists, their degrees should reflect that,” Hand says. How can he mold his students’ experience? He tells them, “You can make a career in music, but you can’t put all your eggs in one basket.”

Or, as Baylor’s Isabelle Demers puts it, “If you want to have the position at St. Thomas, Fifth Avenue, you’re not being very realistic. But how many such jobs are there in the country? But if you’re OK doing a little bit of everything, it is possible [to work]. All the people who have graduated, who were not necessarily the best students, all have fulltime positions.”

Though the public perception of the value of a college education is diminishing as a function of economic and political factors, the job prospects for graduates in the arts and humanities are shaky, and graduates will be saddled with debt, challenging these organ students to inventory their goals and their professors to cite successful cases seems reasonable. With the prevalence of sizeable scholarships, a pragmatic approach aimed at versatility and breadth, campus instruments that are the *ne plus ultra* of organ building today, and an unflagging sense of optimism, these organ students trust in their futures.



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## CHARACTERISTICS OF EXCELLENCE

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What can we conclude about the state of the organ on America's college and university campuses? Are we coerced into accepting the pessimistic supposition that the declining student numbers over the past several decades have done their wickedness and have left us with a post-organ academic culture? Can one swallow the notion that, as arts and humanities departments close, so the noose draws tighter around the necks of the survivors? These questions are deeply troubling.

Although hardly an across-the-board sample, the cases here hint at a substitute scenario. The dozen or so programs in this profile could be viewed as largely productive, populated with at least a critical mass of students, and effective. In the main, these outcomes are admittedly self-reported but still evident to the naked eye. What traits then depict success? The organ programs and departments charted here share some crucial common attributes.

**A FEELING OF COMMUNITY.** A stereotype of academic music programs, organ departments among them, as bastions of elitism and blinkeredness lives on in the minds of some. Such pigeonholing would mirror the academic self-portrayals of the past and offer aid and comfort to the current anti-intellectual, populist political declarations railing against higher education. The problem is that both the slants and the accusations are, to borrow a familiar term, fake news.

Faculty and students attached to these organ programs have described the experience of family in their day-to-day interactions. While some instructors have made conscious and deliberate efforts to foster unity through sponsored social and learning activities, travel, community meals, and town hall meetings, others simply allow their students to find their own way. Regardless, no one has argued that common purpose, mutual support, and collegiality are anything less than essential to the well-being of students, their intellectual and artistic progress, and a secure future.

**VARIETY OF ORGANS.** With only a few exceptions, the most dynamic programs are those that invite access to relatively large numbers of instruments, and more specifically, a roster of organs more notable for its differences than any single prevailing aesthetic ideology. This also diverges from past practices where faculty preached formulaic dogmas and pinned students to prototypical instruments. Today, organ students may encounter electro-pneumatic or mechanical playing actions (including variations of each), pedalboards of varying dimensions and designs, differing length of manual keys, and encased or chambered placements. They may experience stylistic variations from rigorously faithfully replicated classic instruments of unique historical schools,

Organ Reform style instruments, American Classic instruments, European as well as North American organs, to theatre organs, reed organs, and various electronic and digital apparatuses.

Students' practical experience, therefore, may replicate the unpredictable realities faced by touring recitalists and can thus help them to acquire the versatility to survive in a musically and technically diversified post-graduation workplace. Even more importantly, differences from instrument to instrument dare students to make discerning aesthetic judgments and to devise informed foundations for their musical preferences.

**SUPPORT FROM ADMINISTRATORS.** Although it is a topic that most faculty would probably prefer to tiptoe around, a common theme in a number of these campus narratives spins around the willingness of senior administrators to back organ programs both as curriculum and as outreach. It does not necessarily follow that those programs lacking observable attention from higher-ups suffer, but more than a few faculty acknowledged the solicitude of deans, provosts, and presidents. Clearly, having such support beats coveting it.

Development efforts and major philanthropy also take the attention of senior administrators who must "close the deal" on gifts such as scholarship endowments, purpose-built new facilities, or pricey new pipe organs. It is stating the obvious but worth noting that organs are among the biggest of such tickets.

**SCHOLARSHIPS.** It is the worst-kept secret in academia that institutions can buy whatever profile they desire. A basketball program has a price. An NCAA Final Four team costs more than a Division III squad. An honors program cannot sprout from smart students who have haphazardly chosen the same campus; honors programs must be cultivated and assembled through scholarships. The principal oboist doesn't dream of paying \$35,000 and up per year plus room and board to earn a degree, all the while playing as a volunteer in the orchestra. Niche musicians filling important ensemble seats are *de facto* employees.

A look at the detailed operating budget and other financial documents of any institution exposes its real beliefs. Scholarship money put aside for populations that would never be able to pay for themselves or for which the organization has little hope of turning a profit signifies not just an education for a student with a special interest, such as playing the organ, but a contribution *sui generis* to the whole community. To the extent that nearly all the organ students who contributed their thoughts to this study revealed that they were funded, their schools and benefactors were also contributing to the future of the art.

**DEDICATED AND EXPERT TEACHING.** The likelihood of building and sustaining a front-rank organ program grows exponentially with the abilities



and reputation of instructors. Students forthrightly credit their faculty for their own success and tend not to ascribe their accomplishments to their own effort unaided. The students here all voiced gratitude for inspiration gained from faculty, encouragement that, in turn, swelled personal effort. "Conversion narratives," those instances where secondary students majoring in other fields came to the decision to become organ majors, inevitably included mention of inspiring faculty, even in the face of personal doubt and hesitation.

Faculty, for their part, revealed extraordinary self-awareness. They understood that niche programs, no matter how important to the campus or how excellent, also rely on faculty sweat for their survival and growth. Putting in the requisite hours of teaching simply falls short of the real needs: the essential grind of recruitment, advising, and nurturing of students little of which ever receives load credit or cash compensation. The preferred recruitment tool, which is faculty recital and workshop activity, persists. Faculty, as a result, have additional incentives to remain "research active," that is, to continue to pursue concert bookings and to perform. Such activity may also "double dip" in its worth to the institution and its faculty. Documented recital activity, after all, counts as scholarly productivity. Importantly, it also brings students.

Dedication and assistance to students never end, furthermore, at commencement. In as tightly plaited a world as the organ profession, individuals know each other, communicate regularly, and, in general, willingly buttress each other's efforts. Faculty encouragement of students in the transition to and advancement through the job market often entails regular follow-up and availability. Writing effective recommendations thus becomes a core faculty obligation.

**HOLISTIC LEARNING.** The term was coined and quoted by more than one program spokesperson. Characteristically excellent programs share a longing to broaden learning, teaching, and curriculum in ways that inspire students to engage the entirety of their being in the act of performing.

Concerns about health, injury, mental and physical well-being, and performance anxiety have found their way to the syllabus. Understanding and putting hands on the mechanics and workings of the instrument have brought new technical insights about the most complex of musical machines and have opened alternative paths to a career. Stylistic diversification has fulfilled the dual interests of learning repertoire not necessarily in the footpath of Western Art and of enhancing performers' aptitudes for enticing new audiences. Knowledge of pop styles and theatre organ skills has also provoked a deeper sense of musicianship in any repertoire, this owing to the cross-feeds of lyricism and expression. Collaborations with unlikely partners have opened students' minds to the potential of making music in original ways. Transcriptions, programs with instruments and voices, accompaniment of

film, or dance, or text, and improvisation have rewritten the labels of organ repertoire.

Acknowledging that, alongside jazz and world music, the organ has had an historic and important role in extemporized music making, improvisation has become a deliberate study that profoundly deepens musicianship.

**INNOVATION.** Though we have overworked the term, it still applies. These schools, departments, and programs, and many more that have not been included here have reimagined an old and venerable instrument and put it in the hands and feet of a new generation of bright learners and players. Where that changeover leads remains to be seen, but nearly every educator speaking here speculated unprompted that, within the near future, the number of institutions of higher education offering majors in organ performance will shrivel to, likely, a dozen strong, surviving programs. The same faculty members unequivocally and vigorously asserted that their program will be in that troop.

But for students, matters were more immediate. The debate about the importance of higher education and the usefulness of degrees in the arts rages far from them. They believe that they already have the answers. Gloom may persist elsewhere, but at some point, anyone believing in that dim picture would do well to meet this hopeful, talented, and sharp generation of organ students. Listen to their artful performances, insights, and open-mindedness. Then bask in their penetrating optimism.





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## APPENDIX

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### Academic Institutions Offering Degrees in Organ

Available online at <https://www.agohq.org/academic-degree-programs/>  
including links to program descriptions.

#### BACCALAUREATE

|   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| Andrews University                      | DePauw University                  |
| Ave Maria University                    | Duquesne University                |
| Arizona State University                | East Carolina University           |
| Appalachian State University            | Eastman School of Music            |
| Azusa Pacific University                | Florida State University           |
| Baldwin Wallace University              | Furman State University            |
| Ball State University                   | Georgia Regents University         |
| Baylor University                       | Goshen College                     |
| Bethany College                         | The Hartt School                   |
| Binghamton University, SUNY             | Hastings College                   |
| Biola University                        | Heidelberg University              |
| Brigham Young University                | Henderson State University         |
| Brigham Young University-Idaho          | Houghton College                   |
| California State University, Northridge | Houston Baptist University         |
| Catholic University of America          | Illinois Wesleyan University       |
| Central Michigan University             | Indiana University                 |
| Cleveland Institute of Music            | Indiana University of Pennsylvania |
| Coe College                             | Iowa State University              |
| College of the Holy Cross               | The Juilliard School               |
| Columbus State University               | Kansas State University            |
| Concordia University Irvine             | Lawrence University                |
| Curtis Institute of Music               | Lenoir-Rhyne University            |
|   | Loyola University                  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| McGill University                                    | University of Illinois at<br>Urbana-Champaign       |
| Mercer University                                    | University of Iowa                                  |
| Mississippi College                                  | University of Kansas                                |
| Mississippi University                               | University of Kentucky                              |
| Montclair State University                           | University of Memphis                               |
| Moody Bible Institute                                | University of Michigan                              |
| Nazareth College                                     | University of Minnesota, Twin Cities                |
| Northern Illinois University                         | University of Missouri                              |
| Oberlin College Conservatory                         | University of Montana                               |
| Ohio Wesleyan University                             | University of Nebraska at Omaha                     |
| Pacific Lutheran University                          | University of Nevada, Las Vegas                     |
| Peabody Institute of the<br>Johns Hopkins University | University of Nevada, Reno                          |
| Pittsburgh State University                          | University of North Carolina, Charlotte             |
| Rice University                                      | University of North Carolina, Greensboro            |
| Roberts Wesleyan College                             | University of North Carolina,<br>School of the Arts |
| Rutgers University New Brunswick                     | University of North Texas                           |
| Saint Olaf University                                | University of Notre Dame                            |
| Salem College  | University of Oklahoma                              |
| Samford University                                   | University of Oregon                                |
| Seton Hill University                                | University of Redlands                              |
| Shenandoah University                                | University of South Carolina                        |
| Southeast Missouri State University                  | University of Tennessee                             |
| Southern Methodist University                        | University of Texas at Austin                       |
| Southwestern University                              | University of Texas at San Antonio                  |
| Stetson University                                   | University of Utah                                  |
| Syracuse University                                  | University of Washington                            |
| Texas A&M International University                   | University of West Florida                          |
| Trinity University                                   | Utah State University                               |
| University of Akron                                  | Valparaiso University                               |
| University of Alabama                                | Vanderbilt University                               |
| University of Arizona                                | Walla Walla University                              |
| University of Cincinnati                             | Wartburg College                                    |
| University of Colorado, Boulder                      | Washburn University                                 |
| University of Denver                                 | Washington State University                         |
| University of Evansville                             | Webster University                                  |
| University of Florida                                | West Chester University of Pennsylvania             |
| University of Georgia                                |   |



West Texas A&M University  
 Western Michigan University  
 Westminster Choir College of  
 Rider University  
 Wheaton College  
 Wichita State University  
 William Carey University  
 Yale University  
 Youngstown State University

MASTER'S

Andrews University  
 Appalachian State University  
 Baylor University  
 Binghamton University, SUNY  
 Brigham Young University  
 Boston University  
 California State University  
 California State University, Northridge  
 Catholic University of America  
 Central Michigan University  
 Cleveland Institute of Music  
 Colorado State University  
 Duquesne University  
 East Carolina University  
 Eastman School of Music  
 Florida State University  
 Houghton College  
 Indiana University  
 Ithaca College  
 The Juilliard School  
 Kansas State University  
 Louisiana State University  
 Loyola University  
 Manhattan School of Music  
 McGill University  
 Mercer University  
 Mississippi College

Mississippi University  
 Northern Illinois University  
 Peabody Institute of the  
 Johns Hopkins University  
 Queens College, CUNY  
 Rice University  
 Rutgers University, New Brunswick  
 Salem College  
 Shenandoah Conservatory  
 San Francisco Conservatory of Music  
 Southern Methodist University  
 Syracuse University  
 Texas Christian University  
 University of Alabama  
 University of Cincinnati  
 University of Colorado, Boulder  
 University of Florida  
 University of Houston  
 University of Iowa  
 University of Kansas  
 University of Kentucky  
 University of Memphis  
 University of Michigan  
 University of Minnesota, Twin Cities  
 University of Nevada, Reno  
 University of North Carolina, Greensboro  
 University of North Carolina,  
 School of the Arts  
 University of North Texas  
 University of Notre Dame  
 University of Pittsburgh  
 University of Oklahoma  
 University of South Dakota  
 University of Texas at Austin  
 University of Texas at San Antonio  
 University of Utah  
 University of Washington  
 University of Wisconsin-Madison

Webster University  
 West Chester University of Pennsylvania  
 Westminster Choir College of  
 Rider University  
 Wichita State University  
 Yale Institute of Sacred Music

**DOCTORAL**

Arizona State University  
 Boston University  
 Eastman School of Music  
 Florida State University  
 George Mason University  
 Indiana University  
 The Juilliard School  
 Louisiana State University  
 Manhattan School of Music  
 Peabody Institute of the  
 Johns Hopkins University  
 Rice University  
 Rutgers University, New Brunswick  
 Shenandoah University

University of Alabama  
 University of Arizona  
 University of Cincinnati  
 University of Colorado, Boulder  
 University of Houston  
 University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign  
 University of Iowa  
 University of Kansas  
 University of Kentucky  
 University of Memphis  
 University of Michigan  
 University of Notre Dame  
 University of Minnesota, Twin Cities  
 University of North Carolina, Greensboro  
 University of North Texas  
 University of Oklahoma  
 University of Texas at Austin  
 University of Washington  
 University of Wisconsin, Madison  
 Yale Institute of Sacred Music









