



TOUCHPOINT

The Division of Education Newsletter

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A Note from Dr. Tim

Greetings. In this edition of *Touchpoint* **John Villella, Associate Dean of Visual and Performing Arts at West Chester University in West Chester, Pennsylvania, gives great advice for educators to share with students preparing for their college experience.**



College— Finding the Right Fit

By John Villella

When finding a college that is the right fit for you there are many factors to be considered. Varying institutions may have more or less of what you are looking for depending on if you want to be a music educator, performer, or otherwise. The structure of the program, ensemble and performance experience, faculty, job placement, facilities, audition expectations and cost all play a great part in considering the fit of the program for your desired goal.

Ultimately you go to college to prepare for a better future and employment. Ask what placement rates have been for your chosen profession. Does the institution assist in the placement process and how is advising handled? Who are the mentors you will be relying on to help build your future?

Detailed research about the programs offered and the faculty is the most important first step. Does the institution offer the degree(s) you are seeking? Is a dual degree possible and what does that mean in terms of the time for degree completion? Music education requirements vary by state, so you will need to know how the requirements vary and if the program will take longer than four years. Consider institutional size; will you be comfortable in a large institution or is a smaller student body more to your liking? How big is the music department? The number of music students will impact the number and kinds of ensembles that will be offered.

Calculate costs including all expenses, tuition, fees (many music programs have additional fees for private lessons, accompanists, etc.), room and board, books and transportation. Additionally, some geographic areas will be more expensive for food and entertainment. Are scholarships available and typically what are these award amounts?

You should research each program's ensemble and that ensemble's performance opportunities. What ensemble experiences are required by the curriculum? Look beyond the orchestra, wind ensemble, jazz band, marching band and concert choir; are small ensemble experiences required and offered? Small ensemble experiences have proven to greatly enhance musicianship. Do any of these ensembles participate in special performance opportunities, such as performance tours, state, regional or national music conventions, recordings sessions or special concerts?

If possible a tour of the campus and music facilities will help you get a feel for how students navigate classes and daily life on campus. Schedule a tour while classes are in session so you have an opportunity to see the facilities, engage with current students, meet faculty and staff and look at the other amenities that are important to you.

One of the most telling aspects in selecting a college is your audition. Much can be learned about an institution during this process. First and foremost your job is to be over-prepared for the audition. Know exactly what is expected in the audition process including picking the right music to showcase your musicianship. Will sight-singing, music theory and piano skills be assessed? If so prepare those aspects to the best of your ability. These audition expectations will provide an indication of the institution's musical emphasis and standards. The audition process is usually the assessment utilized to make scholarship offers.

The faculty with whom you study will greatly impact your experience. Are the faculty actively engaged in the profession? Are they current performers, conductors and/or educators? Active faculty will be more connected to people you should know about and meet. They are more likely to have colleagues visit for master classes, know trends in performance practices, and be better mentors for you through degree completion.

College and college life are truly some of the most memorable times we have. Finding an institution that is a great fit for you and your goals is an important first step in that journey. Researching each factor that plays a part in your collegiate experience can help you to outline your goals and help you find the right fit.

Join **Mary Luehrson, Gary Markham, Johanna Siebert, Beth Sokolowski** and **Jim Frankel** at the NAMM Conference in Anaheim, California.

January 24th and 25th, 2014

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Embracing Your Community by Jerry Hoover

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