

Considerations for Selecting a School of Music

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Spring is the time of year when many high school seniors who plan to pursue a career in music are faced with choosing a path and place to pursue their musical dreams. Often this can feel like an overwhelming task. You want to choose a college or university that best suits the pursuit of your long-term professional goals. By making the following considerations you can feel comfortable making your final decision.

Define your long terms goals. You probably already have a general idea of what you want to do in music. If not, there are many musical careers you can consider such as being an orchestral musician, soloist, private flute instructor, college professor, band director, elementary music teacher, music publisher, music therapist, symphony manager, conductor, music historian, or recording engineer.

Do the degree programs offered match your long-term goals? Many schools promote themselves as producers of performers while others promote themselves as producers of music educators. Some specialize in popular music and music business and still others in music technology or music therapy. If you are considering both music performance and education choose a school that offers strong programs in each. You don't have to make a final career decision at this time because all freshman music majors study primarily the same basic courses.

Which school has the best teachers suited to your individual needs?

Because you will meet one-on-one with your private instructor every week, and with your ensemble directors several times each week, for the next four to five years, their teaching will have an enormous influence over your musical perceptions and progress. For each school you are considering, make sure you take at least one lesson from the flute teacher and sit in on at least one major ensemble rehearsal. This will give you insight into the teaching styles you will encounter. Ask a lot of questions. Does the primary teacher teach all the flute students? At many larger universities the primary teacher teaches only performance majors while a graduate student teaches music education, business, and therapy majors. There are many talented graduate teaching assistants; you just don't want any surprises. Find out how much contact you will have with the primary teacher. How are private lessons structured? Some teachers provide a very detailed course of study

while others leave it up to the student to bring in repertoire or suggest topics for each lesson. What is preferable will depend on your individual learning style. How are playing assignments handled for the major ensembles? In many universities there are auditions each semester for chair placement in the ensembles. Some conservatories rotate the chair placement to provide more equal experience among the students.

What is the level of and atmosphere among the students? An atmosphere of talented, hardworking and ambitious students will help to provide challenging opportunities. You want to surround yourself with supportive people whose energy is inspiring and whose goals you share.

Which school will offer you the best performance opportunities? Many flute studios present annual or biannual recitals, host masterclasses with well-known artists, and hold weekly student performance seminars. You should also ask if the personnel in the major ensembles consist of primarily graduate or undergraduate students and also what types of chamber music possibilities are offered.

Are the facilities adequate? If you plan on living in a university residence hall, you want to make sure the school provides an adequate number of practice rooms, since that is where you will be making a great deal of your progress. It really shouldn't matter what the facilities look like as long as they are completely functional. You are there to practice and develop your musicianship, not admire the decor.

What technologies are available? Video, audio and interactive computer software can greatly enhance your progress in the private studio. Many schools also offer music computer labs with music notation software and computer programs to develop listening skills that can accelerate your progress in those famous theory classes. If you are interested in a career in music technology you will want to make sure the school is committed to staying up-to-date in this ever-changing field.

What is the school's success rate in placing graduates in the job market? And furthermore, how successful are those graduates in their field? The graduates of the school can provide an invaluable network of professionals who can help you secure that first job and jobs thereafter. If the graduates of the program are in successful positions, chances are you will be too.

Is the school in a location that suits your needs? For example, if you plan on pursuing a music education degree and want to teach in Texas, it makes the most sense to attend a school in that state. By the time you graduate, you will be certified to teach in Texas and won't have to worry about obtaining a new certification. The cultural offerings of the area are also an important consideration. Attending professional symphony concerts, operas, chamber music, and other live music offerings can certainly enhance your musical growth.

What do the school's students have to say about the programs offered? Talk to music students at each school you are considering. They can give you the real "scoop" on what the school, teachers, students, and city are like. Ask the applied flute teacher or band director for a list of student contacts.

How much is it going to cost? Be sure to consider scholarship offers in combination with the cost of tuition and living. Generally, schools with high tuition costs offer bigger scholarships. For each school add tuition, fees and housing then subtract any financial awards, including music scholarships, academic scholarships, and grants. This will provide a better assessment of actual costs. Remember the extra expense of a particular school may be offset by how well it meets your individual needs. Cost should be only one of many considerations.

You don't want to make the mistake of majoring in music only because band in high school was fun and you don't know what else to major in. You must possess a real passion for it. Being a music major is incredibly demanding, on both your time and creative energy. However, if you have a passion for it, there will be a place for you in the music world.