

1. What exactly does your position entail (teaching duties, committee involvement, etc.)?

I definitely am required the normal load of 18 students. I have always had an overload. And we are required to go to faculty meetings, and we are expected to go to auditions (student, cattle calls). And if we are asked to be on committees, we are required to do that (unless you had an excuse or aren't well). I have never made an excuse so I don't know what would happen!

We have to turn in a faculty summary report every year (now it's online) – some of the things don't apply to my field.

We're not required to do masterclass (but I do conduct one).

We do grading – midterm for freshmen, term for all else. We have to go to recitals – and the dress rehearsals, and hearings.

2. How long have you taught college music? Has your teaching career been mostly at (X)U, or did you teach elsewhere beforehand? (How many years at other schools?)

I taught people of college age for almost 40 years – I had my masters around 1972/3 – and have taught since. That's how I was making most of my money (while also performing). When I was in Europe, I didn't teach for a few years, but then did after that.

When I first got out of college, I taught public school.

I worked adjunct at Prince George's Community College and I drove down to Richmond (U of) – but it wasn't worth the trouble. I did other things in the D.C. area for a while afterward.

I taught at the University of Osnabruck during my EU career.

I started at (X)U in 1998.

3. Approximately how many undergraduate/graduate/doctoral students do you teach?

I don't know. . . I have a few doctoral students, always some of each group. Generally more masters students than undergrad. I took two new freshmen this year. One of my long-time DM students is about to do his oral exams, and I'll be there.

4. When and why did you decide to teach college music?

Well, I think I always thought that I was meant to be a teacher, and then I tried when I got out – I tried secondary school and I hated it, it wasn't right for me. Because of the discipline problems, I tried elementary – but the planning (I wasn't such a great planner- the lesson plans!) But I thought I was called to teach. And I had a crisis in my life, and thought “what the heck am I going to do” and I knew all I wanted to study as a masters student was music after many years out – and that's what I did! One thing led to another, and I went to Europe and sang and taught!

And here I am!

5. What do you think are characteristics of an excellent college music teacher?

Great imagination. And a great sense of humor. Be able to take things seriously, but not – you know – rigid. One really strong characteristic- to tune into your student and to take in what THEY are saying , to be able to give them things that will help them. You need to be ethical, you need to be open to working with colleagues with other ideas, and you need to be able to take students where they are – and be able to encourage them wherever they start. You need to really like your work, find fulfillment in helping other people and experiencing life with them. You need to be really intelligent – and know how to think. You need to be a sieve – to distill what works for you AND to know what will work for other people as well. When you see others teach, you need to NOT plagiarize, but find what works for you. I like to teach by discovery – instead of prescribing things. When I first went and sang my grad school audition (Maryland) - I had a lot of problems, but someone said “What do you want to do with your life?” and I knew I wanted to teach.

6. What is the most enjoyable part of your job?

Seeing people learn, experience something through this discovery – discovering a new skill or idea that lights up their eyes – the “Aha” moments! And to see after years of working how people have grown – and know that I’ve been at least a small part of it. Having people who trust you, building relationships.

7. What is the most challenging (or, least enjoyable) part of your job?

The paperwork. There’s the copious emails. The faculty summary reports. . .and now I’m going to try to go up for full professor (the documents and whatnot). That’s what I think. I understand the grades and recommendations and such. . .but the other things are hoops to jump through. I came in at much too low a level – but that was what I was offered. With my experience, I shouldn’t have been hired as I was, but I wanted to be here.

8. What advice would you have for someone who is preparing to teach college music?

I taught song lit for a while – helping students experiencing lots of music – but I was not a popular teacher. I didn’t have bigtime song lit credentials . . .If you’re at a place not like (X)U – you’d be just fine with my credentials! My specialties weren’t open (german diction) at the time, so I had to do what I could! I’m glad it’s over with.

I think the more you can observe people teaching, the better. I didn’t have so much with that from that angle – seeing others teach voice. And I didn’t have a lot of good teachers before Oren Brown (I had rep teachers before that). If you could observe as many people as possible – that would be helpful.

I would have been better off if I'd had a bigger repertoire of helping-solutions.

9. How do you balance your students' needs with your own performing career?

I don't. I had done lots of performing before I got here – so in a way I'm not centered on that. When I do have performing to do, it's hard to balance. I've done recitals and recordings, but I'm unable to balance very well. I have managed some – I wish I could do more, but it's hard. I work way more than 40 hours a week!

10. Do you have any advice for balancing your outside life with your music career?

Well, I think you have to have a very understanding partner – and hopefully they'll have something they're doing and respect you and your career time. And you have to have the ability to negotiate and compromise. Make clear what's important and have an open line of communication – and be willing to “See what works”!

(optional) - Who would you consider your most influential teacher? Why?

Oren Brown. – and my second most – Phyllis Bryn-Julson (She is at Baltimore/Peabody now). She is a great person and an excellent musician. I didn't learn so much about technique- but she encouraged me in the mezzo direction (a good one).

A lot of the information that was shared was not exactly “news” to me. Having worked under this person in a professional context for several years, I was very aware of how busy she always is. However, seeing the full extent of her responsibilities on paper is a good reminder that, though college teaching doesn’t look like the same schedule commitment as secondary teaching in some regards, it most definitely is a life commitment.

Though she presents a rather bleak picture of the possibility of continuing a performing career as a teacher, I have seen other teacher/performers who are able to make it work. This teacher is under the special circumstance of taking on far too many students (at least a half-load extra every semester). Also, the performance of opera requires a special time commitment that recitals and other singing opportunities do not require. This is a consideration for me as I start looking for employment in the professional world. I must consider realistically what I wish to do!

The advice about balancing a home life with professional work was encouraging – having an extremely busy “other” already, it is nice to know that (hopefully) that is a good thing. Granted, this person does not have children, so it’d be interesting to hear from a teacher who has balanced that version of “family life”, but at this point I know it’s rather an impossibility – my bunnies are deprived of attention enough, so I cannot fathom a child faring well with this set of “parents”!

Overall, it was good to have this summary of what I could expect in a college teaching position – it sounds much more like elementary teaching than I had imagined (just with different “students”). Sad to know that we’ll never escape the paperwork – I’m wondering if it would be wise for us all to have a business/paperwork oriented course (and/or a technology class) to help

us learn to cope with this side of the field. Preparing tenure documents, etc . . .It would certainly seem as if that would aid in the preparation for this career.