

Teaching Multiple Instruments

Dr. Bret Pimentel, Delta State University

IDRS Conference 2016, Columbus, Georgia

bretpimentel.com · bpimentel@gmail.com

More and more university music teaching positions require wearing several hats, sometimes including teaching multiple instruments. (Oboe plus bassoon is an especially common combination, even though it's unusual for musicians to play both well.) Teaching multiple instruments is also a potentially valuable skill for instructors at lesson studios in private music schools or in music stores, for instructors in middle or high school band and orchestra programs, and for those establishing private studios from their homes.

Getting hired

- In many multiple-instrument hiring situations, the expectation is proficiency on one instrument and willingness to fake your way teaching the other(s). Any actual training or background on secondary instruments immediately sets you apart. Strongly consider taking at least a few lessons on a secondary instrument—this shows seriousness about the multiple-instrument thing, even if it doesn't make you a virtuoso.
- Having access to books (or websites) isn't a substitute. Neither is "knowing a guy" who you can "ask questions." Though those are usable resources, they aren't convincing to hiring committees because they don't demonstrate any actual effort prior to submitting your application.
- Be honest but positive with yourself and with hiring committees about your ability and/or enthusiasm for teaching multiple instruments. For example:
 - "I play oboe professionally, but I am deeply committed to both instruments and am working to improve my bassoon skills. I have some experience playing bassoon in semi-professional settings."
 - "Bassoon is really my thing, but I took oboe lessons for a couple of summers during graduate school and am enthusiastic about teaching the double reeds."
 - "Teaching bassoon would be a brand new challenge for me, and one that I would take seriously."

Lesson time

- You won't have to fix all of your students' technical issues on day one, but you *will* have to assign repertoire and studies right away. Spend some serious time browsing other teachers' syllabi and "suggested repertoire" lists (many are available online!), and start compiling some lists of your own. Are you ready to recommend, for example:
 - some remedial etudes and an easy solo for an incoming freshman?
 - an hour's worth of varied and challenging-but-doable repertoire for a junior entering a competition?
 - a solid program for a senior recital that can double as serious graduate school audition repertoire?
 - Baroque pieces?
 - pieces with extended techniques?
 - chamber pieces with strings?
 - concerti with concert band?
 - and so on...
- You will, of course, have to address technical issues at some point. Be advised that your students know when you're making things up. But it can be a great experience to spend a few minutes researching a question together, or calling a colleague or mentor on speakerphone for advice.
- Both you and the student can learn a lot when you dare to get an instrument out and try some things together. Your students know it's not your main instrument, and appreciate seeing you step out of your comfort zone. Consider giving them a chance to teach *you* something—teaching is a skill they should be learning anyway.

Managing resources

- Institutional resources like money, time, and space are often allocated per faculty member, not per instrument taught. *As appropriate*, consider making a case for the following (for example):
 - Funding for your oboe studio *plus* funding for your bassoon studio. Per-faculty funding can be unfair to students, who won't benefit from purchases made for the other studio.
 - Additional prep time built into your schedule to accommodate the logistics of multiple studios.
 - Studio space and storage space suitable for several studios' worth of instruments, sheet music, reed desks, etc.
- If you are a single-instrumentalist teaching multiple instruments, consider forming partnerships with others in the same situation. Visit each other's schools once or twice a year, maybe more

often if the travel is short. Be each other's consultants, guest artists, masterclass teachers, reed sources.

- Consider which aspects of running a studio you can streamline to accommodate multiple instruments without multiplying your workload. For example:
 - Use your university's LMS features, perhaps to combine all of your applied students into one "course," instead of having to communicate separately to each instrument group.
 - If permissible and appropriate, rotate or combine things like studio classes and chamber group coachings.
 - Repurpose, say, oboe sight-reading excerpts as saxophone excerpts, or vice-versa. (Doesn't work as well between oboe and bassoon. Clefs, you know.)

Staying sharp (figuratively)

- Join an organization. Attend conferences. Read the journal. Summer camps (that welcome or at least tolerate adults) are great, too.
 - For oboe-plus-bassoon teachers, IDRS is perfect! Be sure to attend recitals and masterclasses for your secondary teaching instrument, and familiarize yourself with equipment and repertoire options in the vendor exhibits.
- Build your library of recordings, pedagogical materials, and experiences related to your secondary teaching instrument(s). If it suits your goals, budget toward buying or upgrading your secondary instruments and investing in your further education.
- Be smart, informed, and conscientious about learning what pedagogical techniques, ideas, etc. you can share between instruments and what you can't.
- If you are at even an intermediate performing level on a secondary instrument, strongly consider playing it on your faculty recitals (one short, easy piece?). Keep yourself challenged to improve.
- Shameless plug: Keep an eye on **bretpimentel.com** for blog posts and other resources related to playing and teaching multiple woodwind instruments, and the fundamental techniques that those instruments share.

Long-term career planning

- Is teaching multiple instruments an end goal for you, or just a way to get that first teaching job that will be a stepping stone to something that fits you better? Hint: either is okay, and it's also okay to change your mind.

- If you need to meet certain expectations for tenure, annual reviews, etc., be smart about how your multiple-instrument duties affect this. For example:
 - If leadership in professional organizations is important, you may need to attend your major instrument's conference every year, instead of bouncing from conference to conference.
 - Understand student recruitment expectations—will you need to keep your studios balanced in a certain way, or is it acceptable if, say, recruiting for your main instrument is more successful?

Dr. Bret Pimentel is an Associate Professor of Music at Delta State University (Mississippi), where he teaches oboe, bassoon, clarinet, and saxophone. He is an active performer on all the major modern woodwind instruments, as well as a number of “world,” historical, and electronic woodwinds. He performs in a variety of musical settings: solo recital, chamber, orchestral, jazz, blues, rock, and more. In 2014 he won the Mississippi Humanities Council Humanities Teacher Award. He has degrees from the University of Georgia (DMA woodwinds), Indiana University (MM woodwinds) and Brigham Young University (BM saxophone). He blogs on woodwind-related topics at <https://bretpimentel.com>.