

From the studio of Richard Polonchak . . .

Thank you for your interest in our music program at Shepherd University and, in particular, the bassoon studio here. Every college and university has parts of their programs that are similar and parts that are different. With this link, I'd like to look at what I believe are some differences ... some areas that I believe are uniquely "ours".

First, some things about me. I've been teaching the bassoon for over 46 years. I've been associated with eight colleges and universities and have taught exclusively at Shepherd since 2005. So far, there has not been one problem that any of my students have had that "I first haven't had myself". I think that my overcoming them has enabled me to be able to help students solve problems. I love teaching because it makes me happy to see people (including myself) grow!

Both of my primary bassoon teachers were students of Simon Kovar (New York Philharmonic), regarded as one of the greatest bassoon teachers of the 20th century. Mr. Kovar's methods and techniques have "come down" to me from my teachers and I've passed them down (along with my own ideas) to my students. Keeping the past alive in the present is something that I value in music and in life. I have professional experience performing in both band and orchestra as well as chamber music ensembles. I've performed as a soloist many times with both the Marine Band and Orchestra and I love teaching the solo repertoire to students. All Shepherd students are required to play a piece (or part of one) each semester as part of our student recital series. I often accompany my students on piano and incorporate the solo/accompanist team as part of our study.

Richard Polonchak, and his twin sons Matthew and Michael, The Two Rivers Trio



I have worked extensively in Germany with bassoon and contrabassoon acoustic and functional design at Josef Püchner (Nauheim) and Oscar Adler (Markneukirchen,) in production models for the American bassoonist. I have done some work at Gustav Mollenhauer (Kassel), Wenzel Schreiber (Nauheim), Vincenz Kohlert (Winndenden), Gebrüder Mönning (Markneukirchen), G. Hüller (Schoneck). I now share my gained expertise with students. As part of our Applied Bassoon

Curriculum, Shepherd students can sign up for Reed Making Seminar every semester. We learn the art of reedmaking and, as part of that class, we also learn to do basic bassoon maintenance and repairs. Upon graduation, Shepherd bassoon students have the potential to be very competent both as reedmakers and as bassoon technicians. Not only can they be more independent players but now they can help their own students with maintaining instruments in good working order. Those majoring in Music Education will find that many of the repair techniques are transferrable to the other woodwind instruments. Advanced students in my studio have the opportunity to teach high school students through our Preparatory Department.

We have “professional” large-bore instruments for Shepherd students to use while they are here. Most student instruments are small-bore bassoons (patterned after Heckel bassoons made before the 1930’s) and are not used in the modern orchestra. In the course of study here, many students will purchase a bassoon for themselves and, by playing on a good one, they will know what to look for. Two of our students have recently purchased great used Püchner bassoons and we were able to service them as part of their own bassoon study.

Depending on enrollment, we have had bassoon chamber music (quartets and trios) on recitals. I have also coached woodwind trios for advanced students who want more chamber music experience.

Good news – we have scholarship money available for bassoon students who meet our audition requirements. We have scheduled “audition days” and arrangements can be made with me for other times.

I could spend many hours telling you what “broccoli” tastes like – but the only way you will know what broccoli tastes like is to taste it. Likewise, the only way you’ll know what I’m about is to come and meet with me. I’m at Shepherd on Wednesday mornings and other times can be arranged. Our department offers prospective students a free half-hour lesson and I’m happy to talk with you and your parents in addition to the lesson.

Best way to contact me is by email: rpolonch@shepherd.edu

Best wishes,

Richard Polonchak, Applied Professor of Bassoon
Formerly, Principal Bassoon, “The President’s Own” United States Marine Band