

James Nixon Curry

STATEMENT OF TEACHING

INTRODUCTION

Since coming to UNF in 2007, my main focus has been to ensure that our students can and will attain employment after graduation. To give them the best chance to be successful, I realized that I needed to create new classes and experiences that would reveal the world of elite musicians making music and making a living doing so. This is supplemented by assisting my students in grant writing, helping them create excellent recordings and admission materials, writing recommendation letters, and, perhaps most importantly, speaking to my esteemed colleagues in the field on their behalf. In the last six years, my students have received over \$20,000 in University aid to support summer festival attendance. They have attended elite music festivals all over the world including one of the premiere festivals for string players in the world, the Meadowmount School of Music, where numerous students were granted full tuition scholarships. This is the same summer program attended by Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman, and Yo-Yo Ma as young artists.

To continue increasing their skill set and their incentive to practice, I have brought countless elite level performers and teachers onto campus for masterclasses with the students, some through partnerships with local fine arts organizations and others through fundraising. My college students have been featured in articles and on television for their accomplishments. I was honored that the quality of my teaching was recognized by the invitation to serve as an artist in residence at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music this year, and also by my receipt of UNF's Presidential Leadership Award in 2018.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

My chief responsibility as the cello professor at UNF is making sure I am always dedicated to my students and putting them in the best place to succeed at UNF and beyond. I think my attention and full dedication, combined with providing my students with goals, challenges, and opportunities, has led to excellent results and I am very pleased with what they have achieved. In the last six years, I have had five different students win the competitive Outstanding Musician Award at UNF, including one who also won the prestigious Presser Scholar award. I have had six students win the Concerto Competition, with one winning twice. My high school cello students have won competitions, performed as soloists with the Jacksonville Symphony and their local high schools, won a cello on loan, made the All-State orchestra, and have gained admission to fine undergraduate universities. Upon completion of their degrees at UNF, our cello students have been admitted to prestigious graduate schools with varying amounts of scholarship and assistantships. Several others are teaching in the public schools, and one has

even received a doctoral degree from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

One of the most important things for young musicians to do is to attend high level summer music festivals to continue their momentum. These festivals keep the students improving during the summer, allow them to meet other musicians from around the world, and help build potential contacts with professors for graduate school. I have had five students admitted to the prestigious Meadowmount School of Music. Three students (Andre Washington, Alex Downs, and Franklin Sandoval) attended this festival on full tuition scholarships. This summer, three of my students were admitted to the highly prestigious Cincinnati Young Artists Summer Cello Academy. Thirty-two students nationally (16 high school and 16 college) were admitted to this festival and three of them were my students (UNF cellists Franklin Sandoval and Hannah Shute and pre-college student Noah Hays). Also, this summer, the Cleveland Institute of Music held a highly competitive intensive virtual cello seminar and Noah Hays, Franklin Sandoval, and Hannah Shute were three of the 16 cellists in the country to be admitted. The Sitka International Cello Seminar only allows ten students to participate each summer, where they work with renowned teachers Zuill Bailey and Melissa Kraut. I have had students invited to this festival on five different occasions. My students have also been admitted to other festivals such as Bowdoin, the Aria International Summer Music Academy, the Green Mountain Chamber Music Festival, the Domain Forget International Music Academy in Canada, The Great Wall Festival in Beijing, The Wintergreen Summer Music Festival, the Sewanee Summer Music Festival, and the Brevard Music Center Summer Institute.

In many cases, I have had students who would not have been able to attend these prestigious festivals without financial support. Each year, I am active in helping my students apply for grants and in seeking funding for them so that they can have meaningful and productive summer experiences. This year, two of my freshmen (Joseph Hamlet and Alejandro Ledesma) applied for an undergraduate research grant involving the use of technology in summer music festival study and were each awarded \$2,500.00 for 2020 summer study. I have had three students (Bery Filsaime, Hannah Hoffman, and Claudia Beshears) selected for Dean's Leadership Council awards that were \$3,000.00 each. In 2017, both Claudia Beshears and Alex Downs were awarded \$1,500.00 Transformational Learning Opportunity awards. I have also had students awarded an Office of Undergraduate Study award (Alex Downs) and a SAILS scholarship (Hannah Hoffman) from the International Center. With some of these awards, my students have participated in study abroad trips that took them to Beijing, France, Italy, and Taiwan.

Another barometer for student success is their record in competitions, recognition, and awards. In my time at UNF, I have had six students win the UNF concerto competition (Hannah Hoffman, Andre Washington, Ariadna Perez, Alex Downs, Paul Lee, and Franklin Sandoval twice). I have had two pre-college students (Hannah Hoffman and Noah Hays) win competitions that allowed them to perform as soloists with the Jacksonville Symphony. Pre-college student Noah Hays won the district MTNA competition and won a \$40,000.00 cello on loan with the Virtu Foundation. Other musicians who have won an instrument on loan with the Virtu Foundation come from schools such as Julliard, Eastman, Vanderbilt, Interlochen, the

Glenn Gould School, the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, and Stony Brook. College student Hannah Shute was the recipient of the 2019–2020 Theodore Presser Scholarship which provided \$4,000.00 of funding towards her senior year. I have had five students win outstanding musician awards in the last six years: Hannah Hoffman (multiple times), Andre Washington, Alex Downs (all four years), Hannah Shute, and Franklin Sandoval (all three years). At the naming of the UNF School of Music Concert, Hannah Hoffman was chosen to come back as a guest speaker, and cellist Alex Downs performed three different times. A landmark moment for the UNF Cello Studio was in 2017 when they performed all six Bach Suites in one evening concert. My pre-college students have held principal chairs in the Jacksonville Youth Symphony (Noah Hays, Nathan Ealum, and Claudia Beshears) and at the Douglas Anderson School of the Arts, where three of my students also won their concerto competition. In the news, Hannah Shute was featured on First Coast News and Channel 4 for getting into the Sitka International Cello Seminar. Hannah Hoffman and Andre Washington were featured along with me in an Arbus article about their admission to the prestigious Meadowmount School of Music. Andre Washington was chosen as a soloist for the American Choral Directors Conference and co-presented research with me at FMEA state conference in 2014. Hannah Hoffman was chosen as the Florida American String Teachers Association Young Artist of the Year in 2011.

Two of my first music education graduates (Lisa Coyne and Erick Velasquez) were immediately placed in high schools after graduation in 2018. Lisa Coyne is the orchestra director at University High School, which is a performing arts magnet school. My students have been admitted for undergraduate and graduate study at the following institutions: Hartt Conservatory, Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, the Cleveland Institute of Music, Florida State University, DePaul University, the University of South Carolina, the University of Georgia, Clemson University, the University of Miami, the University of Florida, the University of South Florida, the University of Manitoba, Oklahoma State University, and the University of Tennessee. Finally, I have had four students serve as student board members for the Beaches Fine Arts Series, teaching them valuable business and fundraising skills, as well as how a board of directors functions. These life experiences we provide at UNF help their resumes to stand apart from students graduating from other institutions.

MASTERCLASSES

Masterclasses are a tremendous motivating force for students and create potential connections for graduate or summer study. When students play in public for well-known artists and teachers in an intimate setting, they are encouraged to practice more and produce better results. I have worked extremely hard to maintain community partnerships with the Jacksonville Symphony, Beaches Fine Arts Series (I am a contributing member of the Board of Trustees), and the Riverside Fine Arts Association (now defunct). These organizations, along with generous donations to the cello fund, have allowed for at least 40 masterclasses for cellists and string players at UNF since I received tenure and promotion in 2013. The following artists have presented masterclasses at UNF in the last six years, and I list their affiliations alongside their names.

- David Finckel and Wu-Han (twice) — David Finckel serves on the Juilliard faculty and member of the Emerson Quartet for 30 years; Wu Han has had a distinguished career as a performer, educator, recording artist, and arts administrator
- Natasha Farney — SUNY Fredonia
- Minna Chung — University of Manitoba
- Mihai Tetel (multiple visits) — Hartt Conservatory
- Sybarite 5 — crossover chamber ensemble
- Alan Rafferty (two times) — University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music
- Melissa Kraut (multiple times) — Cleveland Institute of Music
- Johannes Moser — world-renowned cello soloist
- Wesley Baldwin — University of Tennessee
- Andrew Smith — University of Nevada Las Vegas
- Montrose Trio — piano trio comprised of faculty members from Colburn and Rice
- Clive Greensmith (two times) — Colburn cello faculty and former member of the Tokyo String Quartet
- Calidore String Quartet — award winning quartet currently in residence at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center
- Mike Block — Silk Road Project and Berklee College of Music faculty
- Sonja Harasim — Concordia College
- Joshua Roman — world-renowned cello soloist
- Project Trio — chamber ensemble from Brooklyn, NY
- Scott Kluksdahl — University of South Florida
- Vienna Piano Trio — one of the world's leading chamber ensembles
- David Starkweather — University of Georgia
- Hans Jorgen Jensen (multiple times) — Northwestern University
- Rushad Eggleston — touring crossover cellist
- Meredith Blecha Wells — Oklahoma State
- Colin Carr — State University of New York-Stony Brook
- Richard Aaron — University of Michigan and The Juilliard School
- Alisa Weilerstein — world-renowned cello soloist
- Scharoun Ensemble — featuring principal players from the Berlin Philharmonic
- Matt Haimovitz — McGill cello faculty and world-renowned cello soloist
- Dover String Quartet — in residence at Northwestern University
- Hal Grossman — University of Oregon violin faculty
- Tom Landschoot — Arizona State cello faculty
- Infusion Baroque — Canadian Baroque ensemble
- Grace Bahng Gavin — former cello faculty at Vanderbilt University and former cellist in the Blair String Quartet

COURSE DEVELOPMENT

To put my students in the best position to succeed, I made three significant changes to courses over the course of my tenure. The first action was to create a cello studio class. The entire cello studio meets Wednesdays for two hours and to perform and critique one another, adding further incentive to practice and excel. Students make comments regarding one another's performances, and we talk about topics that relate to cello performance and pedagogy. Creating this class provided a necessary opportunity for students to gain performance experience and experience listening to a performance critically while coaching and encouraging one another.

Dr. Erin Bennett (piano faculty) and I designed a course entitled Sonata Class. This class is for cellists and pianists and allows them to have a truly collaborative experience. They learn sonatas together and are coached by both of us in the recital hall. We have the score posted on a large screen which allows the students in the class to follow along in real time, as the music is being performed. This class meets two times each week for one hour. We have four pairs of students who participate. As a result of their participation in the class, the students get an extra 30 minutes a week of coaching time with UNF music faculty.

The last and perhaps most impactful course change I made was that I reconceived cello pedagogy as Suzuki pedagogy. The Suzuki method is generally considered to be the most effective way of teaching pre-college students how to play a string instrument. I began this journey by becoming registered in the first four books of the Suzuki cello method from 2014–2016 with renowned trainer and Cleveland Institute of Music professor Dr. Melissa Kraut. After completing four books of training, I realized how important it was for my students to gain the same skills and knowledge I had attained from this experience. Together with Dr. Randy Tinnin, the COAS Dean's Office, and the Music Office, we were able to hire the renowned Suzuki trainer Avi Friedlander (Director of the Music Institute of Chicago) to train UNF students to teach the Suzuki method. The course runs over a two-year period and then repeats with the possibility of adding advanced training. Students who sign up for the class and complete the work successfully become registered in Suzuki Books 1–4. This is important in several ways. First, UNF students will have the knowledge of how to teach students from the beginning and understand a proper technical set up so that when they teach, they are better able to help identify problems and solutions. Further, they will be listed on the Suzuki website as registered to teach the books they complete. As people use the Suzuki website to search for teachers, this makes my students much more competitive in the workplace and will likely provide them with instant work upon graduation. Finally, by offering this training through UNF, we save UNF students an extraordinary amount of money. If they had to receive this training elsewhere, students would pay the registration fee, join Suzuki as a member, travel to the training location, and secure housing. Instead they merely need to join Suzuki and register for the class.

Finally, the program is a mark of honor for our university and the School of Music. UNF is the first higher education institution in Florida and only the sixth in the country to offer this training. This program is a major step in giving the UNF cello students the best education

possible and an education they cannot receive at any other Florida school. In 2018–2019, UNF SOM had seven cellists complete Book 1 and Book 2 training. Previously, there had only been two cellists within 100 miles of Jacksonville on the Suzuki website who were trained in Suzuki Book 1 (and one of those two people was me). Now there are nine cellists within 100 miles of Jacksonville who have completed this training, seven of whom are UNF students or alumni. Professor Friedlander has trained UNF students through Book 4 thus far and will recommence with Book 1 this autumn in a virtual space. UNF students with this training have become much more competitive in the workplace and again augmented their resumes to stand out from among others.

TEACHING ACCOLADES

At UNF, I have been fortunate to receive several significant honors recognizing my teaching and am proud to have earned the highest possible ratings in all categories including teaching, research, and service in my annual evaluations each year. Other awards and honors include:

- TLO Remote Instruction Grant in the summer of 2020
- Artist Teacher in Residence at Cincinnati College Conservatory for two days in 2020
- Presidential Leadership award in 2018 (\$5,000.00 over two years)
- Eisen Experiential Learning award in 2018 (\$1,000.00)
- Books 1–4 of Suzuki cello training with Dr. Melissa Kraut from the Cleveland Institute of Music
- Gerson Yessin Professor (\$14,000.00 over two years) from 2016–2018, allowing the creation of the Jacksonville Cello Workshop
- Florida American String Teacher Association’s 2012 Collegiate Leadership Award

ISQ SCORES

Since I primarily teach small numbers of students in applied cello classes and chamber music groups, I do not have very many ISQ scores since the spring of 2015, when the new policy was implemented. Only my Enjoyment of Music class that I teach in the summer has ISQ scores and they are in the mid to high 4’s in every category. Before 2015, my ISQ scores in cello courses and chamber music courses were in the high 4’s or 5 on average.

SUMMARY

Students are my main priority at UNF and I have successfully created a high energy and productive environment where students encourage and each other to excel. I encourage my students to be active in the summers and to put themselves in the best position possible to work upon graduation. I have been highly active in helping them pursue grants that can allow them to study at music festivals in the United States and abroad. I bring leaders in the field to work with them in masterclasses, inspire them, and help them build connections for the future. These classes happen because of valuable community partnerships we maintain, our UNF cello fund, and the Jacksonville Cello Workshop. My students are leaders in the School of

Music and have consistently won awards, competitions, and recognition. They are highly competitive in admission to leading music festivals and graduate programs around the country and they have been recognized by media. Through course modification (most notably Suzuki pedagogy), I am confident that they are getting an education at UNF that makes them extremely competitive in the workplace. In addition, I have been asked to teach at leading festivals, at Cincinnati College Conservatory, and at many other fine institutions, and have won awards that acknowledge my teaching and some of the projects that benefit my students. I am proud of my students and of the program I have built here. Their achievements are my validation that constantly exposing students to excellence produces excellence.