

**Frances S. Johnson Junior Faculty
Innovative Teaching Award
Application Form**

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Year hired: 2015

In submitting this application, I am verifying that I have not have received tenure at Rowan or any other university by June 29, 2018.

Why this technique is innovative:

Since my first semester at Rowan (Fall 2015), I have instructed the Wind Ensemble (MUS08105) and Concert Band (MUS08122), two of the primary large ensembles in our instrumental music curriculum. For an undergraduate music student, the large ensemble experience should be one of exploration and coalescence. This unique setting allows for the knowledge, techniques, and concepts being developed in other music courses to synthesize in expressive, meaningful musical performances. However, at many institutions, these objectives are sidelined as students become wholly focused on their technical preparation, and each concert cycle becomes indistinguishable from the next.

Most large ensembles, including professional orchestras and wind ensembles at other universities, organize their curriculums into various concert cycles; and often, each concert has a theme. Some common examples from college-level bands at other institutions include: "British Invasion" (the music of Holst, Elgar, and Vaughan Williams), "Sousa Forever" (American patriotic classics), "El Salon Mexico" (pieces with Spanish titles, often by Americans of European descent), or "Band Electric" (pieces that integrate electronic composition). Though these concerts may be full of quality music, there is a lost opportunity for those student musicians to participate in a more substantial rehearsal cycle.

Teaching methodology and implementation:

Thematic programming: I have developed a comprehensive approach to concert program design (the selection of musical repertoire on a given concert cycle) in which each program focuses on a clearly defined extra-musical concept or theme; and throughout each concert cycle, students discover many rich relationships between the music and their lived experiences. This approach builds longer lasting connections between different pieces on a program, leads to greater urgency and purposefulness in rehearsal, creates stronger resonance between musical performance and the real world, and provides more opportunities for students to engage with the artistic intent of composers.

Examples of concert titles, details, and thematic concepts from recent Wind Ensemble and Concert Band cycles:

- "If Music Be The Food Of Love" – Wind Ensemble & Department of Theatre/Dance Actors, 10/25/16

- Interpersonal relationships as represented by performing artists over the centuries; Shakespeare's legacy
- "Nature Music" – Wind Ensemble, 12/8/16
 - How animal sounds create environments; harnessing prerecorded nature sounds (whales, birds, insects) to create naturalistic soundscapes
- "Philadelphia Voices: Women Composers in Concert" – Wind Ensemble & Philadelphia Wind Symphony, 10/28/17
 - Exploring the gender gap in relation to composers and guest artists on concert programs (professional orchestras, public school bands, and our own ensembles)
- "Mr. Tambourine Man: Protest Songs on the Concert Stage" – Wind Ensemble & Elisa Sutherland, 12/6/17
 - History of rock/pop music and lyrics in political protest; how decades-old songs can be redirected at contemporary issues through classical music
- "Coalition of Sound: The Music of Labor Equality" – Concert Band & Percussion Ensemble
 - Journey toward workers' rights for steelworkers, farmers, and coal miners, as well as for modern performing arts professionals
- "El Muro: The Walls That Divide Us, The Music That Brings Us Together" – Wind Ensemble, 5/5/18
 - Immigration and America; cultural tolerance and competence
- "Music of Social Justice - Culminating Concert" – Wind Ensemble & Concert Choir, 4/28/18
 - Gender and racial inequality; civil rights and social activism

A closer look: During the example of "El Muro" listed above, the students interacted with *immigration and cultural competence* in many ways. We researched Emma Lazarus' poem on the Statue of Liberty and made connections between it and current immigration policies. When President Trump announced that the deadline for DACA was March 5 (our concert date!), we discussed what that date might mean for many Americans who would be affected by the law's repeal. The musicians explored Ricardo Lorenz's piece *El Muro* in great detail, tracing the interactions of various folk music idioms from communities throughout Latin America; this piece was a perfect musical/conceptual representation of a "wall," especially in regard to a country's borders. Dr. Lorenz traveled from Michigan and spoke with the ensemble about his piece. During the concert, the ensemble featured three Department of Music students who are from Colombia, China,

and Moldova. Each guest artist spoke briefly about the music of their youth before playing a piece from their native country. We followed those testimonial-performances by presenting the world premiere of “Human Family,” a new piece of music composed by a Rowan University professor that sets a text by Maya Angelou. These are just some of the extra-musical aspects of our “El Muro” rehearsal cycle.

Though it is traditionally the responsibility of the instructor to select repertoire that an ensemble performs, it is critical for students to understand how and why the works were selected. Many ensemble musicians major in Music Education and are less than two years from leading an ensemble of their own. I often begin a new concert cycle by connecting programming choices to our artistic values. For example, if we purport to value diversity and inclusivity in our art, then how might we express this in our repertoire selection? *Response:* We can purposefully consider the gender, race, and ethnicity of the composers whose music we perform, valuing these qualities alongside their compositional style, period, and influences.

Repertoire also becomes more relevant and powerful when students engage directly with composers. I achieve this in three ways:

- 1) Composer visits the classroom in person (6 composers in 2017-2018)
- 2) Composer interacts with the students via Skype/videoconference. (2 composers in 2017-2018)
- 3) A greater context (historical, political, personal) is provided for a composer who is deceased or unavailable for in-person meeting.

A larger theme: In 2017-2018, I went a step further and curated a “Music of Social Justice” programming series for the Department of Music. Program details can be found at this site: rowan.edu/music [Select “Music of Social Justice” tab in left sidebar.]

A department-wide “theme” strengthened the potency of each concert’s sub-theme, creating even greater resonance for the students as they discussed interrelated ideas for an entire concert season. This also allowed for substantial work to be done with charities and related organizations. For example, we have nurtured a relationship with *Play On, Philly!* (“POP”), an after-school music program for Philadelphia high schools. The Wind Ensemble concluded its 2016-2017 season by performing for POP students at the rehearsal site in West Philadelphia. And during our “Music of Social Justice” culminating concert on

4/28/18, POP musicians were invited to share the stage with us here at Rowan. In fact, the POP instructors had adopted a related social justice theme for their 2017-2018 performance season.

This large-scale programming will continue with next year's exploration of "Truth in Art," and my ensembles are set to examine a number of more focused ideas through musical performance, including: mental health, the music of Holocaust victims, rising sea levels and environmental activism, and Richard Wagner and performing the art of "monstrous men." This is an innovative approach to teaching music performance that I hope will change the culture of our department and – eventually – that of other large ensembles in the region.

Evidence of impact on students:

My students were asked to complete a year-end survey after performing with the Wind Ensemble and/or Concert Band during 2017-2018. Many students described how they have already changed the way that they conceive of constructing programs for individual recitals. And I constantly receive messages with ideas for upcoming events. The students are excited about future programs, energized to perform together in impactful projects. These survey excerpts relate students' experiences with thematic programming:

"We were not performing a piece to honor a composer or because it is standard repertoire; we performed because there was a story that was relevant to today that needed to be told."

"I found [my experience in Wind Ensemble] to be exceptionally powerful and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity. What stood out to me most was meeting the composers and our guest narrator. This not only 'brought the message home' but gave us a sense of being real performers and a newfound sense of pride in our music."

"Even as a non-music major, I felt that this class touched on political and social justice issues more poignantly than did classes that are directly associated with issues of the political environment."

"The fact that every piece we did had so much meaning behind it made each performance and rehearsal more meaningful in general. We spent more energy making music and less worrying about correct notes, rhythms, and

technique... or at least I did, because there was so much more important storytelling information to think about."

"I believe that talking about these issues, using our platform to show that we care, and actually making a difference are extremely important."

"It was much more moving than other programs that I have done in the past. I felt truly connected to the music, which is not something that usually happens to me. While I couldn't relate to the issues personally, I felt as though I was a part of the story."

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"Performing with such talented people about important topics and seeing how engaged every performer was in giving the audience the most powerful concert experience possible... this shows me that I'm in the right place in my life."

"I really enjoy the discussions we had in class regarding the history of the pieces we were performing. It was really helped me to form a personal connection to the music."

"Instead of just allowing students to 'interpret the music how you will,' [the conductor] actually had us discuss why this music was written, and how many are effected by these issues. [The conductor] also made it known that these problems are not of the past, that they are still occurring today. I was particularly moved by the fact that we got to perform alongside an actual survivor of human trafficking."