



Sacred Heart  
UNIVERSITY

Sacred Heart University  
DigitalCommons@SHU

---

Communication, Media & The Arts Faculty  
Publications

School of Communication, Media & the Arts

---

9-2014

## Choosing a Master's Degree Program in Piano Pedagogy

Angela Meyers

Sacred Heart University, meyersa@sacredheart.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/media\\_fac](https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/media_fac)



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), [Music Education Commons](#), and the [Music Pedagogy Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Meyers, A. (2014). Choosing a master's degree program in piano pedagogy. *Clavier Companion*, 6(5), 52-58.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Communication, Media & the Arts at DigitalCommons@SHU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication, Media & The Arts Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@SHU. For more information, please contact [ferribyp@sacredheart.edu](mailto:ferribyp@sacredheart.edu), [lysobeyb@sacredheart.edu](mailto:lysobeyb@sacredheart.edu).

# Choosing a Master's Degree Program in Piano Pedagogy

Sep 01 Posted by [Angela Meyers](#) in 2014

**Richard Chronister founded the first National Association of Schools of Music approved degree program in piano pedagogy at the University of Tulsa in 1959.**

Since then the number of degree programs in piano pedagogy has grown, with the most growth happening at the master's degree level. As I perused the College Music Society's 2012/2013 Directory, there were thirty-eight master's programs listed directly related to piano pedagogy. When looking back at the 2002/2003 directory, there were only twenty-four master's programs listed, showing a substantial increase in these types of programs during the past ten years. Certainly this directory does not necessarily list all of the existing programs, so there are a myriad of programs from which to choose. With so many programs to choose from, the question, "How do you choose a master's degree program in piano pedagogy?" requires a more thoughtful answer than it did several decades ago.

I recall looking at schools the old-fashioned way - flipping through those large, heavy-to-lift program catalogues.

The categories and questions below are designed to help prospective master's students and their current teachers search intelligently for the master's program with the best fit.

## What's out there?

As with choosing any school, the first step is to see what is out there. Back when I was searching for a master's program in piano pedagogy, I recall looking at schools the old-fashioned way—flipping through those large, heavy-to-lift program catalogues. But, today's students will use a search engine to begin the process. For fun, I typed "master's degree programs in piano pedagogy" into Google, and, sure enough, within .42 seconds, 399,000 results were listed.

In addition to program catalogues and the internet, other resources are also valuable in choosing a school. Talk to faculty members, colleagues, and those in your school and teaching community for recommendations. Do you know other students who have enrolled in a master's program in piano pedagogy? Certainly do not limit yourself to one resource, but rather use each resource as a catalyst to get your search rolling.

## Type of piano pedagogy degree

As you gather your resources and start compiling a list, you may notice there are several different types of master's programs in pedagogy. In the thirty-eight programs listed in the *CMS 2012/2013* directory, I found the following master's degrees listed with the word "pedagogy" in their title:

Master of Music in Piano Pedagogy

Master of Music in Piano Pedagogy and Performance

Master of Music in Piano Performance and Pedagogy

Master of Music in Suzuki Piano Pedagogy

Master of Arts in Piano Pedagogy

Master of Music in Music Education and Piano Pedagogy

Keep in mind that other degree titles may not have "piano" listed in the title, but may be part of a general pedagogy degree program, where you may choose your instrument of interest. The titles from the *CMS 2012/2013* directory that fall into this category are:

Master of Music in Performance Pedagogy

Master of Arts in Pedagogy

Master of Music in Literature and Pedagogy

Master of Music in Instrumental Pedagogy

Master of Music in Keyboard Performance and Pedagogy

Master of Music in Pedagogy

Master of Music in Pedagogy and Performance

Master of Music in Performance and Pedagogy

Master of Music in Performance Pedagogy

Additionally, there are some programs which are listed as Master of Music in Performance, but have the option of an emphasis in Piano Pedagogy.

With so many types of programs, I encourage you to look at the different types of programs carefully, and determine which one best fits your future endeavors.

### **Type of university**

In addition to choosing the type of pedagogy program, do not forget to consider what type of higher education setting you would prefer. First, start by asking yourself a very general question: "Do I want a large



school or a small school?" Often that question will lead you to decide on a state university, smaller private school, or even a conservatory. Since many pedagogy programs require out-of-department credits; it is important to consider the environment and community of the entire school. In considering the size of the school, you may also be able to gauge the amount of teaching space and practice room availability. If it is a large school, can you sign out rooms to ensure scheduled practice time? How many rooms are available for the piano pedagogy courses? Consider your undergraduate setting: Did you feel the size and type was a good fit for your learning? Or, were there qualities of the school you wished had been different?

## **Location**

It is often said that the three most important factors in real estate are "location, location, location." The location of your master's degree in piano pedagogy can also be an important part of your decision. Where the school is located should certainly be a prominent factor to consider, and I see nothing wrong with using the school to place yourself in a setting where you would like to live. This may be the place where you get your first teaching job, make a community of friends and co-workers, and join teacher organizations.

Consider if where you go to graduate school is a place where you could see yourself living upon graduating. If the school's location is a place you might want to live for an extended period of time, then it is important to think long term about your teaching career as well. This area may be a place where you build a private teaching studio or become a part of a community music school. Looking closely at the regional location and environment can help you gauge the types of possible students that are around. Is it a wealthy community? Or, is it a middle and lower class community? Asking such questions can help you get an idea and feel about the needs and pricings of the areas.

## **Number of faculty and students**

As with any program, faculty size will have an impact. Much of this information can be obtained from the school's website. Some of the smaller pedagogy programs may have one or two faculty members, while—if you combine pedagogy and performance professors—other programs could

have close to ten faculty members. Do you prefer working more closely with only one or two faculty members? In that type of setting, it may be easier to build a close relationship, and fully understand their ideas and teaching philosophies. Or, do you prefer to be exposed to several different faculty members? In the teaching field, each individual has his or her own style and teaching philosophies, therefore exposing you to many diverse perspectives. In addition, many programs require observing instructors teaching, so the faculty size may give you an idea of how diverse those options are.

Consider the student body and class size, too. Some prefer it to be smaller in order to more easily build strong connections, while others may view a larger class size as having more peer evaluation opportunities and a larger support community. Lastly, do not forget to consider the faculty-student ratio. If a school offers a program with two pedagogy faculty members and accepts a large number of students, think about the one-to-one involvement versus a program that may have ten faculty members and accepts five or six students for each graduating year.

## **Pedagogy curriculum**

Curriculum should always be a consideration when choosing an academic program. What is unique about a pedagogy program is that you should look both at the pedagogy curriculum and the curriculum used for the student teaching.

First consider the materials used for the pedagogy courses. While this information may not be easily accessible online, take time to contact faculty members about the materials they use for the courses and inquire *why* they choose to incorporate them. Then ask about the course structure and try to gain an idea of teaching styles. With a piano pedagogy program, there are many different types of classes offered. While there are the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) course guidelines for pedagogy programs, each program specifies its unique focus of the class. Some questions to consider are:

- How many different instructional methods (and which ones) do they focus on?
- Is one instructional method weighted more over others?
- What levels of instruction do the courses cover (beginner, intermediate, advanced)?

## **Performance balance**

Although the word performance may not be in the title of the pedagogy degree program that you choose, most of the graduate piano pedagogy degree programs recognize the need to include an emphasis on performance skills in order to become an effective teacher. Either by looking at a program catalogue or asking a faculty member, try to find out what the performance requirements are in comparison to what you hope to achieve in order to enhance your skills as a performer. Think about the following:

- Are you required to give a recital?

- If yes, how many? How long do they need to be? Can one be a lecture recital? What are the repertoire requirements?
- Are juries required each semester?
- If yes, what are the repertoire requirements?
- If you have to give a recital, do you still have to do a jury that same semester?
- Are there weekly studio classes?
- How much involvement will you have with those who are performance majors?
- Are there other performance opportunities?
- Are there chamber music requirements or opportunities?
- How big are the other instrumental/voice departments?



## **Preparatory programs**

Because teaching lessons is an obvious emphasis of the piano pedagogy degree program, be sure to consider the teaching opportunities. Find out whether or not the school is associated with a preparatory music program. Having such close access to a teaching community may provide immediate opportunities to be involved in a teaching community right from the start of your studies. If the school does have such an association, be sure to inquire about the possibilities for your involvement. Will you be able to teach private and/or group piano lessons? If yes, generally how large or small are the teaching loads for graduate students? Will you be given different levels of students?

In addition to teaching, there may be some administrative opportunities for graduate students such as working in the office, helping with scheduling, or simply as a monitor at the desk after regular office hours. Just because the opportunity may not be directly related to teaching, acquiring administrative skills can be highly useful in future teaching jobs. Consider those who are university department heads. Their responsibilities

are not just limited to teaching, as they are very active administrators and program advisors. Also, if you are to start your own private teaching studio, being able to see how a preparatory music school runs and functions will provide an example for building your own teaching career.

Not only will a preparatory program provide beneficial teaching and administrative opportunities, but it also may give you the opportunity to build connections with other music instructors. Many schools require observation hours or have teaching internship requirements as part of the curriculum. Having such close access to a preparatory program gives you many different teachers to observe, in addition to the instructors directly in the program. There may also be diverse types of lessons and classes that may interest you and trigger teaching ideas that you have never thought of before.

## **Organization involvement**

There are various music organizations for piano teachers, so consider how active you might want to be in local, regional, and national associations. Many of the piano pedagogy faculty members are very active in organizations such as Music Teachers National Association (MTNA), presenting workshops, masterclasses, lectures, or simply being avid attendees. Many schools offer a collegiate membership to MTNA, allowing you to be active with your colleagues in organization-sponsored activities. Having faculty members that are active may also allow you opportunities to assist them, gaining first-hand access into the pedagogy field.

There is a large community out there, and, as with any field, surrounding yourself with a community of those with the same interests helps you make contacts, generate new ideas, learn about new repertoire, see new teaching techniques, and share what you have to offer with others. Building connections in the piano pedagogy/teaching community will be a great support during your studies and as you begin your career as a professional piano teacher.

## **Technology**

Technology may not be the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about piano pedagogy, but with so many technological advances in the field, consider how these new tools are incorporated into the program. Some questions to consider are:

- Are you interested in learning how to use a piano lab to teach class piano?
- Do you want to use a Disklavier with your students?
- Do you want to record your students and your teaching?
- Do you see yourself ever teaching over long distances?

Many programs provide knowledge on incorporating various technological teaching aids into your career. Perhaps upon graduating, you may find a job listing for a piano instructor who is experienced with using certain technological tools in teaching. Being able to gain experience during schooling could make you stand out among other area piano teachers.

## **Job opportunities**

While it may be difficult to gauge when applying for a program, contemplate what you see yourself doing upon graduation. What are your career goals? In which type of teaching setting do you see yourself? Consider some of your answers to that question as you look over the courses offered, but keep in mind, too, that you might become interested in something that you had never considered before. Again, with so many different types of programs out there, you want to target the one that will provide the most benefit during your time as a student and during your teaching career. And, as mentioned above, where you go to school may be the area where you get your first teaching opportunities.

In the short term you may wish to explore what sort of job opportunities are available during your years as a student. If you do not have a teaching or administrative assistantship, are there ways to earn money? In particular, are there ways to earn money that are directly related to piano pedagogy? After all, this could be a chance to start building your résumé, so having employment within the piano pedagogy field would be the most beneficial for future jobs. Consider the following:

- What sort of teaching opportunities are there?
- Private lessons or group lessons?
- What levels and age groups?
- Are you interested in Dalcroze or Kodaly classes? Or, what about teaching theory classes?
- Does the school allow graduate students to teach undergraduate courses?
- What about tutoring undergraduates?

Consider summer employment as well. Check out if the school and faculty offer summer piano camps on campus. If they do, but you are not able to be on the faculty right away, there may still be opportunities for you to assist, possibly as a teaching assistant, doing small lectures, administrative jobs, or even being a counselor. It is a great way to gain insight into how to design a summer camp and get a closer look in watching your teachers instruct in a different setting. It is also a way to make new connections. Who knows, maybe students at these camps could become future piano students (or lifelong friends!). Never take any new connection for granted, as you never know how it may affect you in the future.

## **See it for yourself!**

Certainly much of what has been discussed is very difficult to gauge without a visit to the campus. If finances and time allow, try to spend a day or two visiting the campus. Looking at promotional materials and perusing a school's website are very beneficial, but there is something to be said for seeing a school yourself. On your visit:

- Try to visit on a weekday during the academic year.
- The summer community at many schools is often sparse, with many faculty members gone and very few students on campus. It is best to see life as you would see it on a daily basis.



- Some schools offer the option to stay overnight with a current student. Although it is only one person's view, it may allow you to see things you would not normally see.
- Meet with as many faculty members as possible in the piano pedagogy department.

Although they are often very busy, faculty are also interested in meeting and getting to know prospective students. Start by suggesting a fifteen-minute meeting. Be organized and have questions well outlined to use the time wisely.

## **Attend classes**

Ask if it would be possible for you to attend a couple of pedagogy classes, preferably taught by different professors, in order to see different perspectives. You will gain a better sense of the classroom vibe through your observations. Doing so, you get an idea of teaching styles, course structure, and the type of content covered, as well as student interaction.

If a school has a preparatory program, ask if you could observe a piano lesson or group piano class.

## **Have a lesson**

Since most pedagogy programs have lesson requirements, think about the type of teacher you would like to work with and your goals as a performer. This teacher may be a prominent person during your schooling, and possibly a long-term mentor for years to come, so take the time to find a good match. See if you can have short lessons with one or two instructors, offering to pay them.

Not only would it be good for you to have a lesson, but see if you could observe a lesson of a current student of that same instructor.

## **Take a walk**

While the school may offer you a guided walking tour through the campus, take a little extra time to explore on your own. Test out the practice rooms, peruse through the piano pedagogy materials, or check out the piano lab equipment. Your own personal tour can be the most insightful.

## **Venture off campus**

**You have to be a member to access this content.**

Please login and subscribe to a plan if you have not done so.

Login if you already have an account

[Login For Access](#)

[PRINT](#)