

# Football Scholarships

## Preparing for graduate study as a college drum line instructor

By Oliver Molina

This year's football season is coming to an end, but the next step of your musical career is about to start. You can turn all those hours on the practice field and in the football stadium into marketable skills that will help further your education. As an undergraduate, remember that when you strap on your drums for the season, there are opportunities that can help train you for your future.

Pursuing a graduate degree can be costly, but there are ways to minimize your financial debts. Many schools offer fellowships and assistantships for qualified students. If the school you are applying to has a marching band, you may earn a "football scholarship" by teaching the drum line. This article provides information that will help you prepare and compete for a collegiate drum line teaching assistantship.

### WRITING

College marching bands have different approaches regarding show design and production schedule. Many college marching bands change their halftime shows during the course of a football season. Some may change only a couple of times, while others perform a new show for every home game. One responsibility for the drum line graduate assistant is to create custom parts for each new show. Some wind arrangements have no percussion parts, some may have a percussion "sketch," while others may have a complete percussion score. Even in the case of the complete percussion score, the parts usually need to be customized for the current percussion section's strengths and weaknesses. As the drum line instructor, you need to write music that suits and challenges the ensemble, while remaining enjoyable for a football audience.

In preparation to write for the drum line, familiarize yourself with music notation software such as Sibelius or Finale. This allows you to have professional-looking results that the entire line can read. Begin working with a digital notation program as soon as possible (even during

your undergraduate years or earlier), as it takes time to learn all of the program's shortcuts and features. It helps to know the "ins and outs" of the notation program so that your creativity is not limited by your knowledge of the software. Familiarity with the program also aids in finishing the arrangement on time, especially in regard to individual part editing and formatting. Be very detailed in your writing with stickings, dynamics, playing zones on the heads, and stick heights to avoid any issues or confusion.

In addition to digital notation, sound sample libraries have extensive and realistic sounds for the marching battery, front ensemble, and world percussion instruments. The digital notation program works with sample libraries like

change. Some college lines have longstanding traditional music that should remain unchanged, such as a series of cadences or school songs. Other lines encourage the writing of a new cadence for a particular year.

The first thing that may need to be written and implemented is a comprehensive warm-up book that uses various stroke types and techniques. Depending on the program, there may already be exercises in place. If this is the case, you will have to determine how to work with the existing exercises while augmenting or changing them as necessary. It is never too early to start writing and/or collecting exercises that are useful for the way you want to teach.

Basic exercises combined with more intricate ensemble pieces will get the hands moving and the ears listening.

The warm-ups should focus on the technique that will be used in the show music. This includes the traditional music, so get familiar with all the traditional music as soon as possible and be sure the required techniques are represented in the warm-up program. It is important to be respectful and aware of the traditions, while also adding those elements that will assist in the overall goal of providing the best experience for the students.

Be proactive in seeking out information from the director, veteran

drum line members, and the previous instructor, if possible. The more information you have, the better the chances for a smooth transition into the instructor position.

### TIME

Time can be an enemy during a football season. There are many ways to beat the clock before the next football game. Get the scores and recordings of the halftime show early so you can get them written well in advance. Do not be afraid to write repetitive, groove-oriented patterns if musically appropriate. Patterns that at first may seem overly repetitive are perfectly appropriate in the context of making the show easy to learn when you are in a time crunch.



TapSpace's Virtual Drum Line or Row-Loff's Marching Percussion Sounds to create realistic sounding playback. Hearing the arrangement in a realistic manner offers an additional opportunity for editing and altering the parts before they are distributed to the ensemble. This high level of audio playback assists all arrangers, but can prove especially valuable to the new, developing arranger working on a tight production schedule.

### TRADITION

When you are appointed to instruct a college drum line, especially at a school whose traditions are unfamiliar, there can be questions as to what should remain the same and what can



Writing patterns for typical feels like “eighth-note rock,” “sixteenth-note funk,” etc. that can be reused during a season are terrific ways to work within the sometimes tight deadlines before the next new show. Coming up with standard “fill bars” or bringing in phrases from the “already memorized” cadences can help keep the execution standard high when rehearsal time for a new show is lacking. If you are using the previously mentioned sound libraries, realistic mp3s can be created and distributed to the players to help with their part memorization.

### EXPERIENCE

There is no better way to learn a trade than by actually doing it. Before you pursue the position of a college drum line instructor, try getting your feet wet by working in a high school setting. Many local high schools would welcome assistance in teaching their percussion sections. The ability level of the students may be

lower, but they need attention and can benefit from your expertise. As a college instructor you will inherit students at various levels. The high school environment serves as an excellent training ground for dealing with all levels of student in preparation for working with the college line. If you work on a teaching “team” with a high school line, try working with different instruments in sectionals to help broaden your knowledge.

As you work with the high school line there may be opportunities to write music. There are varying degrees of writing freedom while working with high schools. You can write warm-up/technique exercises, cadences, stand tunes, and halftime music. In the college program, you may be called upon to write all of the music for the percussion section, so the high school writing experience is invaluable. Jobs are earned

by having experience, and experience is earned by having jobs.

Expand your percussion knowledge and vocabulary by experiencing different sections of the drum line. Try playing different instruments in your college line. This will not only assist you in working through the performance tendencies of that particular instrument, but will also aid in learning to write idiomatically for the instrument. Performing on an instrument helps you potentially teach better because you have worked through the technique yourself. Performing on different instruments exposes you to different listening perspectives and sound possibilities from the different instruments and sections. The variety of experiences will prove extremely valuable to a college instructor who is in charge of the entire percussion section.

### GETTING THE GIG

When you audition for graduate study, try to

schedule a meeting with the college marching band director. Bring examples of your marching music writing. This may be music you have used with your high school or any other creative venue you have found. If at all possible, try to include audio and/or video recordings of your music. Live recordings show your writing ability and can be a good indicator of your teaching. If live recordings are not available, you can record your scores electronically utilizing one of the previously mentioned sound libraries.

Another factor that should be considered is participation in drum corps. Having experience in the drum corps activity can have a profound impact when applying for jobs within the marching activity. Stay involved within the marching percussion world as much as you can. Indoor drum lines are an excellent way to keep your hand and ears working in the spring season and may provide additional writing and teaching opportunities. As with any art form, things are evolving and it is crucial to stay current if you want to stay competitive.

### CONCLUSION

Remember to keep your options open and be as versatile and well-rounded as you can be. Working with marching bands open many options as a percussionist. In addition to helping pay for your graduate study, you may earn extra income working with high school lines, writing for halftime shows, and judging marching competitions. The more you do now to prepare yourself, the easier it will make the job when the pressure is on.

**Oliver Molina** is pursuing his DMA at the University of Iowa, where he teaches the Hawkeye Drum Line. He received his BME from the University of Central Florida and MIM from the University of Arkansas, where he also taught the drum line. PN

No one is old until regrets take the place of **DREAMS**.

At Dream we do things differently. 🌟 We strive to make the best cymbals and gongs in the world. No entry level sheet metal low-budget stamped knockoffs. All our products are carefully hand-crafted to sound and behave like a high quality musical instrument. 🌟 We believe everyone deserves to play the best instruments available, so we price them fairly. The gong smiths of China are the world's best because they have been making gongs and cymbals for centuries longer than anyone. (They probably taught the Turks.) 🌟 We don't believe in telling musicians how, or what, they should play. You'll find *Bliss* cymbals in metal and Jazz bands, *Contact* players in hip hop and orchestras, *Energy* players in rock and country & western, and M-Bao tuned gongs in studios and opera pits. 🌟 We do believe every musician has an individual voice. So get down to your favourite music store and give a listen. *Tam tams, cymbals, tuned M-Bao gongs*. They are all great instruments; one of them will have your sound. 🌟 Come find your Dream.

 **dream**  
Cymbals and Gongs

For a free brochure, visit [dreamcymbals.com](http://dreamcymbals.com)