

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF COLLEGE MUSIC SCHOOL

Given the following facts:

- There are very few jobs for bassoonists available in this country.
- There are lots of qualified bassoonists applying for these jobs.
- No one music school can provide you with everything you need for success.
- No one teacher can teach you everything you need to know.
- Four years (or less) is not enough time for you to learn everything you need to know.

It is incumbent upon you to use every resource available to you to maximize your skills while you can. The following are thoughts and suggestions on how to make this happen.

1. You alone are responsible for your success or failure – not your teacher, not your orchestra conductor, not your parents.
2. There is no such thing as luck. You make your own luck by making yourself available for opportunities as they appear.
3. Your private teacher is just a coach. Your teacher can explain or demonstrate something for you, but he or she cannot play the bassoon for you.
4. No private teacher can teach you everything you need to know. Use summer festivals and school breaks to get insight from other teachers.
5. If the information you get from other teachers contradicts what your private instructor is saying, file it away for later. It will probably be useful in the future.
6. Without causing conflict with your teacher, try to become your own teacher. Set goals that are manageable and possible to realize in a short period of time. Ask your teacher if these goals are appropriate for you and ask for advice on how to reach these goals.
7. Come to your lessons with lots of questions. Do not ask the questions to avoid playing in the lesson or to change the subject, however.
8. Try not to schedule anything for just before or just after your lesson. Use that time to warm up, collect your thoughts, and take notes on what you learned in the lesson.
9. Keep a practice diary.
10. Practice what is difficult, not what is easy.
11. Be analytical in your practice. Avoid mindless playthroughs.
12. When a breakthrough occurs in practice, try to figure out why it happened and replicate it. Otherwise, it will just be a lucky coincidence.
13. Use your peers and a recording device to get feedback on your playing.
14. Come to your lessons with obvious problems solved. Be responsible for a good reed, accuracy in rhythm, intonation, the notes, etc. and have a musical concept. When the teacher has to spoon feed you, you are wasting everyone's time and valuable tuition dollars.
15. Make your teacher work hard to find something to criticize. This is good practice for working with conductors!

16. Get together with bassoonists more advanced than you to play duets, talk about practicing, etc. Try to understand how they approach problems. Listen to them play to see if you can figure out how they do something that is difficult for you.
17. Use your first year to absorb all you can from your teacher. In the succeeding years, continue to do so, but also try to build independence and show initiative in your progress. Form ideas about music independent from your teacher.
18. Always have something not assigned ready to play in your lessons, but not at the expense of any assigned material.
19. Find areas in your life that you can sacrifice for a while. There is extraordinarily little time to waste. Others are using an approach not unlike an Olympic athlete's training schedule.
20. Study the habits of athletes to put discipline in your musical training.
21. During your study, do not listen to any non-classical music – or seriously reduce your exposure to non-classical music. There is too much repertoire to be learned and not enough time to learn it. As the years progress we get farther and farther away from the age of Mozart. It becomes harder and harder to really understand this music.
22. Cut down on computer usage. Cut down on social networking and cell phone use.
23. When you listen to music, really LISTEN. Don't use classical music as background music. Use headphones and follow a score.
24. Try to simulate the professional experience in your lessons and ensembles.
25. Come to the first rehearsal with your part completely learned. Give a performance in your lessons. Don't rely upon the conductor, your teacher, or your colleagues to teach you the music. Lack of preparation could get you fired in the real world.
26. Treat each rehearsal like a performance, complete with concert etiquette.
27. If your ensemble has 14 rehearsals for each concert and you're getting bored, use a few rehearsals to work on your intonation, tone quality, blend, etc. See how many times you can play a difficult passage perfectly, instead of getting cynical.
28. Talk to as many professional musicians as possible. Try to find out what it's like for them on a day-to-day basis at work.
29. Go to as many concerts as you can. Try to imagine yourself in the orchestra.
30. Learn about great bassoonists and other musicians of the past. What made them great?
31. Study greatness itself. Read the great novels, see great art. What characteristics make someone excellent? We are in the perfection business, after all. There is no room for mediocrity.
32. As you progress through school you should become one of the leaders in the studio and the school. If this is not happening, try to figure out how to rectify the situation. Do not blame others for your lack of progress.
33. If you are one of the strongest players in your school, remember there are many other fine bassoonists out there just as skilled or more skilled than you. Seek them out and learn from them.

34. When planning a recital, try to ask musicians who are more advanced than you are to play with you. Playing with friends is fun, but doesn't always contribute to your progress.
35. The summer festival is an excellent way to sample the competition. Try to learn from other musicians you meet.
36. The summer festival can also be an excellent way to learn more repertoire faster than you would in school. Most professional concerts are done on just a few rehearsals.
37. Remember that the study of music isn't always fun or entertaining. It's very hard work. Enjoyment is often a nice accompaniment to hard work, but achieving greatness only comes through hard work, some sacrifice and suffering.