

The Tromboneguide.com guide to SELECTING A COLLEGE FOR UNDERGRAD PERFORMANCE MAJORS

A few guidelines:

1. The single most important thing to realize is that as a performance major, your success is based on one thing: how you play.
2. IF there is a second component to your success, it is how well you can treat/socialize with other people.

Because of this, the single goal of choosing a school for performance study is the following questions:

1. Where can I go that I'll be most supported to practice as hard and constantly as I can?
2. Where can I go where I will continue to be motivated in this endeavor?

Consideration 1: The Teacher

This is, without any dispute, the single most important factor in this decision.

There are VERY FEW reasons that would overrule this factor.

The lesson teacher is the person you will be learning most everything from-

If there is ANY make-or-break factor in your success, it's the person directing your study.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Does s/he teach at the university full time?
Are they ON CAMPUS full time?
- Will ALL of your lessons be taught by a professor? Or are you partially learning from doctoral students?
- Does your professor have a large studio? Or only a few students. (Remember, the more students they have, the less time and energy they'll have to go around.
- Do they belong to organizations that help THEM continue to learn and grow? (ITA, NAfME, etc.)
- Do you get along with them as a person? If not, does their teaching and skill outweigh the possible tension in lessons?

Consideration 2: The Practice Situation

The ability to practice freely and often is really important. Since your hard work in the practice room is what will make or break your success, make sure you are getting into a good practice situation.

- Can you get into the rooms for at least 3 hours per day of guaranteed time?
- Do you feel safe going from your dorm to the practice rooms? Even at late hours?
- Are there music stands in every practice room?
(This is a GREAT indicator of how much the school prioritizes students)

Pro Tip** Look around the music school practice room, and notice how many people are practicing vs how many are sitting in lounges socializing. Spend 20 or so minutes and watch the lounge. Do people leave it, or sit for long periods. This will give you an HONEST view of the culture in the practice rooms at that school.

Consideration 3: The Aural Skills Class (Nope, I'm not kidding)

Aside from your lessons and practice time,
your aural skills classes will shape your success
more than any other class

Aural skills are taught in two basic systems, with most schools
using one of the systems exclusively (The Eastman School uses both, but that's irregular)
Movable Do, and Fixed Do.

- Schools that teach movable do often value the pedagogy side of things, and generally speaking, movable do is more useful in direct terms to your playing than fixed do
- Schools that teach fixed do are often older schools with reputations (fixed do is more traditional)
This often means these schools prioritize performance over pedagogy, which in and of itself is a good sign for your playing improvement.
- Are the aural skills taught by theory professors or doctoral students ? (this is important, you really want good instruction in this)
- how many semesters of aural skills will you receive? Is one of them dedicated to post tonal skills?

Consideration 4: Ensembles

The ensembles you play in will greatly impact your growth. Remember, you're in school to learn to make a living playing the trombone. You may think you only want to play in orchestras, but if you need to pay rent or buy food, and a pit orchestra calls, you'd best believe you'll be playing that gig!

-Do underclassmen get a lot of play time?
(many schools use rotating schedules that can prevent underclassmen from getting lots of ensemble time.)

- Does your school have a marching band?
If so, can you avoid it? (save your face!)

-Does the program divide undergrads and grads into different ensembles?
(you gain a TON of experience from playing in sections with people older than you.)

-What is there to play in?
(you want orchestra, band, jazz band, chamber music, trombone choir, and an orchestral techniques class)

- Are there enough other people that you won't be in EVERYTHING at once?
(remember, you have to be able to get at least 3 hours a day while in school- if you're playing 4 hours of ensembles a day on top of that, you'll hurt yourself)

- Does the school have multiple seating auditions per year? or, how does seating work?

Consideration 5: History/Reputation

Let's be clear- Schools like Juilliard, Yale, Eastman, New England Conservatory- historic bastions of excellence in our field do carry weight in our careers, and this should absolutely play into our decisions

That being said, this is because of the quality of the peers that you will be working with. The other players in your studio, chamber groups, ensembles, and friend circles will make a huge difference in your improvement.

- Try and remember, there are people that have won jobs from no-name schools, and schools with the best reputations also have people that attend and never make it as professional players.

Consideration 6: Money

It's impossible not to talk about finances as a huge factor in people's decisions. Try and remember, however, it can be a somewhat problematic decision to attend a school that is not as good because they're giving you a full scholarship rather than a better program that costs more money in music. This is because our actual degrees are fairly unimportant.

**We are in a profession of DOers,
not KNOWers. Let that sink in.
Your knowledge is FAR less valuable
than your ability to play.**

Hypothetical situation: you're offered a full ride to a good state school, and accepted into a huge name conservatory program for 40K per year.

It may seem crazy to take out a big loan and go to the big name program, but hear me out:

If you graduate the state school without being as good a player as you could have been, the degree isn't worth much, because you aren't playing competitively. Alternatively, if you graduate the conservatory program with a big student loan debt, but are competitive in auditions, you can win employment and begin paying that loan, thereby succeeding because of a chance you took.

I'm not saying it's a sure-fire decision to always take the loan out- Far from it! I made most of my decisions based on finance firstly.

All I'm saying is your job is to find a place where you are motivated to practice and supported to succeed!

Final Thoughts

Tips and Tricks

Do's and Don'ts

-Take a lesson with your desired professors at least a year ahead of your auditions (in a perfect world, take 2 lessons, about 4 months apart- this way, your professor can assign you things to work on to improve and you can show them you are a responsive learner)

- Ask blunt and honest questions of current students when you visit. Don't be shy about asking their honest opinions. Consider the question, "what is your least favorite part of this school?"

- Your high school guidance counselor will have very little idea of how to navigate this whole audition process. Be patient.

-Don't let your parents drive the conversation with professors. Take the initiative. Parents, take a back seat for this one. Don't be overbearing, it doesn't look good for your child.

-Don't try and 'play chess' with your professor over money once you've auditioned and been accepted. They more than likely don't have as much a say in your scholarship as you think. If you want to attend, tell them. If you don't think it's a high choice for you, tell them that too.

-Particularly for your senior year, but also your junior year, if you're serious about performance, don't worry about your grades as much as your practicing. Straight A's mean NOTHING if you can't play well. If you have straight B-'s and practice your instrument for 4 hours every day, you've won.

Don't apply to more than 6 schools. Go for quality over quantity. You don't want to burn out during audition season.

I hope this has been helpful to read. If you are wondering about any more information, or you are looking to learn more about trombone playing, improving, or understanding the process of applying to music school, feel free to contact me.

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