Mead Witter School of Music
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

MEAD WITTER SCHOOL OF MUSIC STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2028

TRADITION AND THE FUTURE



Completed Spring 2025

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Approved unanimously by the Faculty of the Mead Witter School of Music April 10, 2025

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Mead Witter School of Music

The Mead Witter School of Music (MWSoM) is a leading, comprehensive music program housed in the College of Letters & Science at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. UW–Madison is one of the highest-ranked public research universities in the nation. Since its beginning in 1895, the School has lived out its commitment to a student-centered musical education. The School–through its students, faculty, and staff–is a prolific and visible contributor to the ethos of the Wisconsin Idea–the principle that the education, research, creative activity, and more should reach every corner of our state. Through our 300-plus concerts and events per year, our robust and award-winning programs, our innovative faculty, and our talented students, we embody the principle that music is a necessary activity unique to humans, one that helps us understand each other and who we are individually.

As of the Spring 2025 semester, the School has 360 undergraduate and graduate students, and has experienced a significant period of growth in enrollment over the past several years. Acceptance into the programs in the school has become increasingly competitive; in the 2024-25 application and audition cycle, for example, 360 prospective undergraduate students auditioned for approximately 90-100 available spots in the first-year class.

The School has 33 Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty positions, 23 Academic Instructional Staff, and 23 non-instructional Academic and University Staff positions. The School currently operates three facilities–the world-class Hamel Music Center, Music Hall, and a significant portion of the Humanities Building. The Humanities Building is no longer a supportive or efficient space to support the 21st-century instructional needs of the School, and the University has indicated that the Opera program will need to vacate Music Hall by Summer 2026. Addressing these facilities needs in the near future is integral to the success and growth of the School.

In 2023, Director Susan Cook stepped down after a long and successful tenure, including, significantly, the completion of the state-of-the-art Hamel Music Center, and the naming of the Mead Witter School of Music. Dan Cavanagh was hired as Director starting July 1, 2023 and started this strategic planning process with colleagues upon his arrival. This Strategic Plan is the result of significant effort on the part of many faculty, staff, board members, and students, each of whom shaped this path forward to the future.

Now in its 130th year, the School is primed and energized to continue growing as a national leader in university-level undergraduate and graduate music instruction.

Alignment with College of Letters and Science and University Priorities

In February 2025, Chancellor Mnookin announced that the University of Wisconsin–Madison would be undertaking a strategic planning exercise to update the University's strategic plan. That effort will not be complete for some time. As such, the School will ensure we revisit our plan once that is completed, to ensure alignment with College and University priorities.

Timeline, Process, and Outcomes

August 2023	MWSoM Departmental Retreat – brainstorming and initial conversation begun | Review of expiring strategic plan Brainstorming data collected and analyzed
Fall 2023	Continued discussion about possibilities for the future, including faculty hiring and future research and creative needs
January 2024	Formation of Strategic Plan Working Group Members: Dan Cavanagh (Director; chair of group), Martha Fischer (Associate Director), Jess Johnson (Director of Graduate Studies), Wendy Johnson (Assistant Director), Conor Nelson (Associate Professor), Dann Petersen (Music Engagement and Outreach Coordinator), Alicia Lee (Assistant Professor), Mark Hetzler (Professor), Dan Grabois (Professor), Oriol Sans (Assistant Professor), Walter Rich (Faculty Associate, Music Education Teacher Education Program Coordinator), Eric Murtaugh (Music Communications Manager), Susan Stemper (MWSoM Board Member), Mike George (MWSoM Board Member)
January 2024	MWSoM Departmental Retreat – Strategic Planning Data Gathering and Workshop
Spring 2024	Ongoing Strategic Plan Working Group Meetings, collected survey data from all faculty and staff Identified Strategic Pillars and Guiding Theme
May 2024	Presented results of working group at MWSoM Departmental Meeting, and to MWSoM Board of Advisors
Fall 2024	Development of Strategic Plan Document
February 2025	Presentation of Strategic Plan Document to MWSoM; Plan operationalization underway

VISION AND MISSION

Mead Witter School of Music Vision

We will be a globally recognized School of Music so compelling that we attract the most creative and passionate students and faculty from Wisconsin, across the United States, and around the world.

We will be leaders in the musical conversation in this country.

Mead Witter School of Music Mission

As a collective of overlapping musical communities, the Mead Witter School of Music is committed to providing an education that values musical and academic rigor, nurtures innovation, collaboration and creativity, and balances preparation for professional musical careers with personal fulfillment. Curricular offerings instill an active understanding of music as both cultural expression and social practice and cultivate a lifelong active engagement with music.

Nurtured by a great university and recognized globally, our students, faculty, staff, and alumni enrich Wisconsin, the nation, and the world by:

- performing music with artistry and passion
- engaging new generations of musicians and listeners
- challenging musical boundaries
- advancing knowledge and practice in their chosen professions

THE STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2028

Guiding Principle – TRADITION AND THE FUTURE

"We honor the past by building upon it."

-Terrence Blanchard

The Mead Witter School of Music has a 130-year tradition of artistic excellence, now serving as a destination comprehensive music program in higher education, especially in the greater Midwest. Our traditions are strong–the Pro Arte String Quartet was the first string quartet in residence at a University in the United States, Gunnar Johanssen was the first solo artist in residence, the Wisconsin Brass Quintet and Wingra Woodwind Quintet are both celebrating long histories of performance and outreach. We continue to have strong graduate programs and have had many alumni graduate and go on to have successful and prominent careers in higher education, performing, composing, music education, and arts leadership.

The UW Marching Band, boasting a long and storied tradition, is also a part of the Mead Witter School of Music and helps us connect with members of the public in a different way than our other small and large ensembles. These representations of excellence and tradition are a significant part of the perceived brand of the Mead Witter School of Music.

In considering an overarching focus for this strategic plan period, the working group, driven by faculty and staff responses and suggestions, believe that our efforts align with creating the future by building upon the past, as Terrence Blanchard so eloquently put. Through this plan, we aim to ensure that our students, whether undergraduate or graduate, have a 21st-century musical education and graduate with the critical thinking skills, professional artistry, and creative approaches not yet clear to those of us further on in our careers. The faculty of the Mead Witter School of Music believed that approach was necessary, and asked each of the finalists from the national search for a new director to present on a "Vision for an Exemplary School of Music in the 21st Century." These threads have directly informed this strategic plan and our efforts to realize the goals and vision of the Mead Witter School of Music.

Strategic Priority – *Modern Transformation*

> We will prepare students for 21st-century musical careers, not only those of the past, and prepare them to become the leaders of the future. Our curriculum will reflect this principle. We acknowledge that the next 50 years will build and expand upon the past and pledge to position our students for future success.

Led by the Director of Undergraduate Studies of the School, the faculty are undertaking a deep dive into our core undergraduate curricular offerings shared across all music majors.

Principles that were identified through discussion, planning, and data analysis of survey results from faculty include:

- **Curriculum Expansion:** Emphasis on modern musical culture, and inclusive histories.
- **Integration of Technology:** Strong focus on AI, digital music tech, and online degree offerings.
- **Interdisciplinary Approaches:** Encouraging partnerships and synergies between different music areas and other departments.
- **Entrepreneurship and Marketability:** Teaching students how to market themselves and incorporating entrepreneurship into the curriculum.

  Inclusivity and Accessibility: Develop new majors and certificates that don't require auditions and enhancing equity and access.

Strategic Priority – *Music Education*

> We reaffirm the importance of a dynamic music education program. We will strengthen and center music education as a core component of our mission.

The State of Wisconsin, as well as other midwestern states and, more broadly, states throughout the country, needs more qualified and talented music educators to serve our communities. The Mead Witter School of Music is primed to regain our place as a leader in the field of Music Education at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Our Music Education Program, with a reinvigorated faculty, is growing quickly in student numbers and impact. In addition to strengthening the current curriculum, we are proceeding to bolster the program through a variety of strategies and principles that were identified through discussion, planning, landscape analysis, and data analysis of survey results from faculty:

- **Beyond Licensure:** Offering opportunities beyond traditional licensure and integrating music education into all music students' experiences.
- **Community Engagement:** Strengthening connections with public schools and community organizations.
- **Support and Resources:** Increasing scholarship money, TA support, and faculty numbers over time.
- **Inclusive Excellence and Accessibility:** Removing barriers to student success and admittance, as well as serving students who are the first in their family to attend college or hail from those areas that are traditionally underserved by higher education.

Strategic Priority – *New Musics*

> We embrace our commitment to the musics of now and pledge to strengthen that commitment, expertise, and organization around the future of music.

A landscape analysis of the expertise on our music faculty, the current pedagogies of what we are teaching, and the desires of students indicated that the Mead Witter School of Music has long had deep expertise in new musics, broadly defined. However, that expertise was mostly relegated to individual faculty members and their creative and pedagogical practices.

The following strategies and principles were identified through discussion, planning, landscape analysis, and data analysis of survey results from faculty:

- **Diverse Genres and Pedagogies:** Inclusion of pop music, extra-Western music, and non-traditional music students.
- **Faculty and Student Engagement:** Highlighting compositions by current composers and creating ensembles dedicated to new works.
- **Technological Integration:** Embracing music tech and production, updating library resources, ensuring a heads-up approach to artificial intelligence and its effect on music, and enhancing and adding facilities to support such activity.
- **Community and Collaboration:** Building relationships with local music scenes and collaborating with other arts and academic disciplines.

Strategic Priority – Support and Enhance Core Strengths

> We will build upon the things we already do well to ensure our students graduate primed to chart the future of music.

The Mead Witter School of Music has exceptional faculty, dedicated and gifted staff, and brilliant students. Through our transformational efforts, we will proceed by adding to and enhancing our core strengths. Our efforts to grow into a 21st-century exemplary School of Music will incorporate those items that have defined our excellence to this day. Through discussion, planning, landscape analysis, and data analysis of survey results from faculty, we will keep the following priorities front and center:

- **Faculty and Student Support:** Supporting faculty research, maintaining high standards for playing and teaching, and enhancing faculty-student relationships.
- **Community and Outreach:** Promoting partnerships with the community, music festivals, and professional development with schools.
- **Resource Allocation:** Ensuring capital investment for strategic priorities and fairly compensating faculty and staff.
- **Communication and Marketing:** Continuing to improve how the school communicates its strengths and recruits innovative students.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND GROWTH

Effective resource management and strategic growth are essential to achieving the goals outlined in this strategic plan for 2025-2028. This section proposes an approach to prioritizing and managing financial, human, and capital resources while fostering growth in our student population. While many exceptional ideas have come from the strategic planning process, we will ensure our efforts are first put toward efforts that most closely align with one or more of our four strategic priorities.

Priorities for Development and Outside Support

- **Scholarships:** Scholarship support for both undergraduate and graduate students remains a primary goal of increasing philanthropy. A globally recognized school of music with world-class faculty will attract top students regionally, nationally, and internationally. However, we find ourselves in the current position of getting top students to apply and audition, but lose a significant amount of top students to other top institutions that can offer more scholarship funding. We will continue an emphasis on raising support for scholarship funding. A longer-term goal is to have enough endowments to fully fund all doctoral students, which would take an additional $50M in endowed support at current funding levels.
- **Facilities: Music Addition (Stage II) to Hamel Music Center:** When the Hamel Music Center was built, it was envisioned as stage I of the strategic UW-Madison initiative to relocate the performance facilities in the School of Music from the outdated Humanities Building. Stage II is to relocate the academic, office, and rehearsal space out of the building. There has been pre-design and programming work on the new addition. By 2028, the School plans to identify a lead donor to support the construction of the new addition, in partnership with the UW Foundation.
- **Center for Music and Society:** In order to be a globally recognized School of Music, we need to be leaders in both creative excellence and the study and understanding of music. No later than 2028 (ideally earlier) we plan to identify lead donors to help jump start a new Center for Music and Society, which will serve as a focal point for the study of music and humanity on campus, as well as serve as an interdisciplinary hub for colleagues in other disciplines on campus to interact with the School of Music.
- **Programmatic Support:** While some of our areas within the School of Music have robust funding support from endowed funds, others have not benefitted from the same level of outside support. We have a goal of having programmatic support endowments or significant current-use gifts for each area in the School by 2028.

KEY INITIATIVES TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS

The following initiatives, identified through the working group, strategic retreats, survey analysis, and planning efforts, will be key to achieving success in our strategic plan.

Undergraduate Core Music Curriculum Modernization and Transformation

New Degree Pathways and Certificates
Examples: Global Music Certificate, CS+ Music Degree, Music Technology Certificate, shared Music Education Master's degree

Enhanced Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration
Center for Music and Society
More music faculty members and doctoral students participating on grants as co-investigators

Continued Audience Development
In line with the Wisconsin Idea, continue to expand the numbers of audience members coming to campus to attend performances of faculty, students, and guest artists.
Continue to evolve the Live from Mead Witter School of Music Chamber Music Series, and move to a more national profile with more faculty artists and national chamber groups. Enhance the marketing and advertising around this series.

Create more focus and formal organization around New Musics
Allocate part of a faculty position to oversee and organize this aspect of our plan. Support recordings by faculty soloists and faculty chamber groups that document new music.
Enhance curricular offerings around non-western musics and music outside the jazz or classical genres.
Quantify and set general principles for how much our students and faculty perform music from living composers.

Grow the Music Education Program
A key to achieving success in music education is to grow the number of graduates, both at the undergraduate level and graduate level, in music education.

Continue supporting and growing chamber music
Continue growing the vocal chamber music offerings, and identify more permanent funding for groups that help connect different genres and musical traditions (such as the Bridge Ensemble).

[Additional Initiatives will be added when identified]

PROGRESS TRACKING AND MONITORING

A key failure of many strategic plans is that they do not provide effective strategy execution. 90% of organizations fail to execute their strategies successfully, according to Robert Kaplan of Harvard Business School.[1] We pledge to review this plan and associated metrics quarterly, and we will adjust our strategies when needed to ensure ongoing progress. We plan to systematically evaluate and measure our effectiveness, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The following key initiatives and commitments will guide our progress tracking and monitoring efforts:

- **Performance Metrics:** We define clear and measurable metrics for each strategic priority listed in our plan, and tie achieving those goals to a timeline.
- **Routine Reporting Out to Stakeholders:** We will report out on progress, challenges, and completions to the School Faculty and Staff, as well as the Board of Advisors, on a bi-annual basis (i.e., once each semester).
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** We will establish feedback mechanisms to gather input and insights from faculty, staff, students, and our Board of Advisors.
- **Regular Review and Realignment:** To ensure we do not continue practices that are ineffective or that become over time misaligned with our strategic priorities, we commit to regular consideration of realignment and a culture of adaptability. We additionally commit to regularly considering realignment of resources (financial, human, and capital) to serve our mission and vision.
- **Responsiveness to New Opportunities:** Our commitment to these four strategic priorities will not preclude us from pursuing new directions or opportunities as they arise.

Each of these sections will be fleshed out with metrics and goals by May 17, 2025 and provided to all stakeholders.

1 Kaplan, Robert, The Balanced Scorecard: Translating Strategy into Action, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996. As cited in Gibson, Kate, "5 Reasons Strategy Execution Fails," https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/why-do-strategic-plans-fail, 12/21/23, accessed 2/27/2025.

PERFORMANCE METRICS AND GOALS

Many of the below initiatives surfaced from a combination of survey analysis, strategic planning retreats and meetings, working group discussion, and individual suggestion. This is a preliminary list and will be added to throughout the remainder of the Spring 2025 semester.

Student Enrollment

In order to more successfully provide the opportunities to enrolled students in areas such as large ensembles and chamber music, and to more effectively the financial sustainability of needing enrollment in small and individual classes (*e.g.,* studio lessons, chamber music, small seminars) with larger-enrollment courses (*e.g.,* general education/service courses), **we aim to grow from our current student numbers of 360 students to between 450 and 500 students, by the Fall 2028 semester.** This stretch goal represents 350-400 undergraduates and 100 graduate students.

Development – Graduate Student Support

The Graduate School is asking all units to move towards full funding for all doctoral students. If Graduate School and College of Letters and Science support is not cut from current levels, by 2028 we will increase the number of full fellowships and teaching assistant/research assistant positions we can offer on a regular basis by 8 positions.

Development – Undergraduate Student Support

The Mead Witter School of Music is fortunate to have a robust base of endowed and current-use funds to support undergraduates. By 2028, we aim to increase the portion of the endowment dedicated to undergraduate scholarship support by 25%.

Development – Programmatic Support

We will identify and track programmatic support for all areas within the school and aim to have each area supported through endowed (non-scholarship) funds no later than 2028.

Curriculum

By 2028, every undergraduate music major will be required to take a course with content introducing them to the basics of music technology, and a course with content introducing them to the basics of music entrepreneurship.

CONCLUSION

The Mead Witter School of Music's strategic plan for 2025-2028 is a comprehensive roadmap designed to guide our 130-year-old School towards a future of excellence, innovation, and global recognition. By building upon our rich tradition and embracing modern transformation, we are committed to providing a world-class music education that prepares our students for successful and fulfilling careers in the 21st-century music landscape. Our strategic priorities–Modern Transformation, Music Education, New Musics, and Maintaining and Enhancing our Core Strengths–are informed by extensive stakeholder feedback and data-driven insights. These initiatives will ensure that we remain at the forefront of music education, fostering a vibrant and dynamic community of musicians, educators, and scholars.

As we move forward, effective resource management and continuous progress tracking will be critical to our success. By leveraging advanced tools and maintaining a culture of adaptability and continuous improvement, we will ensure that our strategic goals are met and that we remain responsive to new opportunities and challenges. The Mead Witter School of Music is poised to continue its legacy of excellence, enriching the lives of our students, faculty, and the broader community. Together, we will create a future where music education thrives, and our contributions to the world of music are recognized and celebrated globally.



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