

Personal Statement

Daniel Johnson, DMA, 7-5-2025

Teaching Philosophy: Student Success

In the private studio, my teaching technique and philosophy center around the truism that the process of singing itself is, when enacted without inhibition, an ultimate expression of one's very being, even our deepest fears and dreams. Therefore, in teaching students to sing, my main objective is to "strip away" the mystery and give them the tools to express whatever *they* desire to express.

I begin by helping students gain a thorough understanding of the instrument itself. This provides confidence and a measure of "control," an especially important reassurance for pubescent and post-pubescent boys. Once a basic understanding of anatomy has developed, we embark the study of musicality. This focus plays a more prominent role in my private studio, since in a collegiate-level music program, these elements are usually discussed in theory and aural skills classes. However, in both my private and college studios, I spend time with students in most lessons providing applications for the fundamentals of music theory and sight-singing to improve their understanding of musical nuance.

Study of the repertoire is an essential element in developing musicality. Depending on whether the student is matriculating or simply singing for fun, I choose repertoire that is challenging and engaging and that fits the student's personality. Even within the strictures of the collegiate system, the wide array of different possibilities guarantees that everyone can find repertoire that breeds comfort, confidence, and accomplishment.

My philosophy on the success of the student is focused on individuals: Every individual has different *goals* to accomplish with his or her singing or academic career; my job as a teacher is to determine what those goals are already (*not* cultivate them myself) and create a path for the student to realize them within a reasonable timeframe.

Establishing Expectations

Working at a community college like Blinn for the last six years has presented some unique challenges to the above-outlined philosophy. A large portion of our students lack many basic college-level academic qualifications and skills. Unfortunately, as a result of this reality, expectations prior to my hire were quite low for vocal students, so when I started here I realized that I could either continue in that vein or choose to set high standards and challenge the students to meet them. Remembering how my professors required me to stretch in my own studies—and how I excelled as a result—I drew upon my experiences as a student and as a graduate TA to set difficult but reachable standards for my students at Blinn.

Opera & Stage Direction

One of my largest successes has occurred in the area of opera performances. I first developed experience directing operas in my doctoral studies, when, as the TA for the Opera Workshop, I directed our reprise of Michael Leavitt's *A Christmas Carol* for the 2017-2018 season. This experience gave me the confidence to try something that had not existed at Blinn for many years.

For the 2021-2022 academic year, I successfully lobbied the college administration to begin offering Opera Workshop again after a ten-year hiatus. The class did not immediately run because of low student enrollment. However, instead of giving up after this setback, I ran two successful extracurricular projects that year involving several students: a production of Menotti's *The Telephone* and a night of oratorio excerpts and laughs on April Fool's Day (see my CV for further details). In both shows I stage-directed, conducted, and sang where necessary to prove to the institution that the student commitment and skill existed to run the class successfully. The Menotti production served as the soprano student's official audition for her baccalaureate institution, and she received an excellent scholarship offer as a result of her work.

We followed that up with two fully-staged shows in academic year 2022-2023 (Barab's *Little Red Riding Hood* and Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*) and the inception of a successful opera outreach program, featuring student singers, myself, and even a guest artist brought in to play Dinah. In the Fall 2023 semester, the Blinn College Opera Workshop made its triumphant return after my years of tireless lobbying. My students prepared and presented a scenes program in November 2023, and they presented a second program the next year in November 2024. In Spring 2025 two students reprised the Menotti opera as another iteration of Blinn Opera Outreach.

Student/Faculty Collaboration

Furthermore, I have made collaborating with students and fellow faculty members to expand student experiences a high priority; my goal is to make their time with me as close to that of a four-year school as I can so that they will be prepared after they transfer. The following are just some of my successes:

- In May 2019 (my first semester at Blinn), I helped chaperone the first-ever international tour from any Blinn College music ensemble when our Chamber Choir traveled to Spain and sang at concerts in Granada, Montefeltro, and Seville over the course of two weeks.
- In Fall 2019 (my second semester at Blinn), I led the first-ever contingent of Blinn students to the NATS Texoma regional conference and auditions, whereat one of my students placed fifth in the Hall Johnson Memorial Song Competition, making him eligible to participate in the national round. We repeated every Fall from 2022 through 2024.
- I successfully lobbied our music department to start offering a four-semester Diction for Singers sequence beginning in the Fall 2019 semester (English, Italian, German, and French). After doing so, I have created

semesterly recitals that have aligned (when possible) with their linguistic studies to demonstrate mastery of the content to them. Furthermore, I have supplemented those classroom courses with Russian, Spanish, and Latin repertoire and coaching in my students' private lessons.

- Beginning in Fall 2019, I began requiring my private voice students' participation in semesterly themed studio recitals and including duets and occasionally scenes or arias with chorus.
- In Fall 2021, I arranged for a visiting artist, baritone Dr. Anton Belov, to complete a residency at our school and perform a recital of Russian art song. He was the first visiting vocal artist of his caliber ever to come to Blinn.
- I followed that up with three more visiting artist residencies: soprano Dr. Diane Burt (Spring 2022); tenor Dr. Christopher Pfund (Fall 2022), and mezzo-soprano Mandi Barrus (Spring 2023).
- In the Spring 2022 semester, I assisted two of my sophomore students to prepare and present a shared hour-long song recital not required for their degree. Two more students followed their example in Spring 2023 with individual hour-long sophomore recitals, and three more presented recitals in Spring 2024.
- I perform an encore number or two every semester in my students' voice recitals, and I include as many varied instruments (both faculty and student players) in my personal recitals and in student recitals (see my CV for details).

I have received grateful feedback from many of my previous students about how their time studying with me helped them prepare successfully for their baccalaureate programs. Here are a couple of their statements (shared with their permission):

- "Thank you...for your time and all your help during my time at Blinn. Thanks to the standards you set for us, this year should quite literally be a breeze in terms of work expectations.... And please, by all means, use this email as student proof for your studio that the work has a purpose!"
- "The time I had with Dr. Johnson as a voice teacher was wonderful! He not only taught me so much about the technical and acting side of performing, but he also taught me what it means to really be a performer. The confidence that Dr. Johnson had in me was very evident by the challenging repertoire he assigned me and by the continued performance opportunities he encouraged me to go for. He pushed me and taught me about how important it is to be an authentic artist. I felt 150% confident transferring from Blinn College to finish my bachelors after working with Dr. Johnson."

I believe that to allow students to achieve, I as a teacher should understand what their self-driven goals are, set standards that require them to stretch, and encourage them to reach their full potential. I look forward to sharing this philosophy of student success, as well as my demonstrable skills as a classroom and studio teacher, with the students at Houston-Tillotson this coming Fall semester.