



Parent Handbook

*A Resource for Parents of Students
Enrolled in Private Instruction at
Westminster Conservatory*

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*Westminster
Conservatory of Music*

*The community music school of
Westminster College of the Arts of Rider University*

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Welcome to Westminster

Congratulations on your decision to choose Westminster Conservatory as your musical home for private lessons. By now you have completed your registration form and have probably been assigned a private instructor.

You will undoubtedly have questions of various sorts. You might be wondering how to find and acquire the right instrument; how to maintain your instrument; what your role as the parent will be; how you can maximize the music lesson experience for your child; how much your child should practice each week, etc.

We hope that this Parent Handbook will be a valuable resource for you while your child is enrolled at Westminster Conservatory. Please note that if your child registered for Suzuki piano or violin lessons, you should use the Suzuki Program Handbook as a first reference. Copies are available in the Conservatory office.

If you need more information beyond what is listed in this handbook, or if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact our main office. Your department head or a member of our staff will be happy to help you.

Welcome to Westminster Conservatory of Music!

Our Mission

Grounded in the conviction that music has the capacity to affect people and to change lives as well as communities, Westminster Conservatory strives to provide excellent and comprehensive music instruction to a broad constituency of amateurs and professionals of all ages, and to promote the understanding, appreciation, and performance of music within the community at large. Seeking to educate and to inspire, the Conservatory provides a musical home to students and faculty where interaction and exchange are facilitated and where there exists a continuum of learning from early exposure through professional performance.

The Role of the Parent in the Process

As a parent, you want your child to have the best experience possible with music study. As you will soon discover, this can be a life-long journey. There are many things you can do to ensure that music is an exciting and enjoyable part of your child's present and future.

Every child is an individual, and has unique goals and capabilities. Talk with your child. What are his/her goals for music study? Does he/she want to sing at the Metropolitan Opera? Sing in the choir? Or simply match pitch? What kind of commitment (time and practice) will be required to meet those goals? Discussing these things ahead of time can help avoid conflicts and help you proceed with a sense of purpose.

Communication is the key to success in any educational endeavor and lack of communication is the biggest cause of failure. Talk with your child's teacher. Everyone involved should be in agreement as to the goals and expectations of the program. The teacher should be aware of any special circumstances - family issues, a child's learning style and needs, etc.—that will affect the child's progress. Maintain regular communication with the teacher to monitor progress and make changes where necessary.

Children may need guidance and assistance with practice, and parents must be willing to provide this when necessary. Since every child's needs are different, an individual approach to parent involvement, developed in consultation with the teacher, is the best course of action. Don't smother your child, or completely abdicate responsibility. Seek instead to be helpful, encouraging, and nurturing. No matter how "hands on" or "hands off" you ultimately are, your child still needs you to care and be interested, and involved in his/her efforts. Be as committed to your child's music study as you wish them to be to it. The student's progress and enjoyment always reflects that home support.

The Quality of the Instrument Is Important

Trying to learn on an instrument that is not set up well or does not fit the student is like trying to teach a child to ride a bike with flat tires. The importance of having a quality instrument that is regularly maintained for the student to practice on cannot be overstated.

Acquiring Your Instrument – Do's and Don'ts

Often the first rental or purchase of an instrument has been arranged prior to the first lesson. But ideally, if you have not purchased or rented an instrument before your first lesson, the Conservatory recommends that you acquire an instrument and bring it to your first lesson following these guidelines:

- Communicate with your private teacher for their advice prior to the first lesson for their recommendations. Contact information can be accessed through the main office or your extension site office.
- Request a copy of recommended music stores and/or professionals who deal in instrumental rentals and sales. Copies are available in all Conservatory offices.

- Suzuki string students should wait until they have their interview with the program coordinator. At the interview, the student will be measured for the correct size of violin. They will also receive recommendations for acquiring their instrument.
- Piano students should have an appropriate instrument at home to practice on.

Above all, families should avoid internet and warehouse club purchases for any instruments, whether it is the first instrument or a step-up from what they have. And markets for used instruments like eBay and garage sales are strongly discouraged. The majority of these instruments do not play well, and handicap the student.

Other Helpful Recommendations on Instruments by Department

Please refer to your department below for more specific instructions and suggestions in regards to instrument rental, purchase, sizing, and maintenance. You may also contact your private teacher for further recommendations of dealers they prefer to use and to find out what size instrument you need.

Piano Department

What the student should be practicing on at home

It is very important that a piano student has an appropriate instrument at home to develop their playing skills. Students are required to have access to an acoustic piano during the week or their technical and musical development will be jeopardized. Moreover, the height of the piano bench on which the student sits during their practice time greatly affects their technique and reading ability. Please discuss with your child's teacher the appropriate height of the piano bench.

Maintaining your piano

In the New Jersey climate, we recommend tuning your piano twice a year. Your child's teacher will be glad to share their advice on piano tuners and technicians, and will be able to direct you to other information sources. You can contact your child's teacher through their Westminster Conservatory voicemail or their email address which will be provided on their bio page.

String Department

Violin, Viola, Cello, Upright Bass

Renting versus purchasing an instrument and determining the correct size for the instrument are two very important issues that need to be addressed. More often than not, families will need assistance and advice. It is important for families to use reputable dealers to rent or purchase their violin, viola or cello. Most of the time, instruments purchased on the internet that look like "a good deal" become a stumbling block for your child as they try to learn to play.

Harp

Once a student is registered for harp, the harp instructor will contact the student or family with information about procuring an instrument.

Guitar and Electric Bass

Classical guitar students need a classical nylon-stringed guitar. Acoustic steel-stringed or electric guitars are traditionally used for folk and rock music. When a student chooses a guitar “off the wall” at a music store, they should find a certified technician to set-up the instrument (new strings, action adjusted, intonated, fret work, etc.).

Wind Department - Woodwinds, Brass, Percussion & Indian Tabla

Instrument Repair (Winds and Brass)

Students can develop harmful technique in a hurry from trying to compensate for instruments that are damaged or out of adjustment. It is the responsibility of the family to see that instruments are properly maintained and to make prompt arrangements for repairs. The Conservatory cannot be blamed or held responsible for injuries resulting from playing poorly working instruments.

A needed repair should be addressed before the next lesson. If the instrument won't be back on time and no loaner is available, the family should let the teacher know ahead of time so that they can prepare an alternate topic for the day (i.e. theory, history, rhythm exercises, etc.)

Percussion

Students should have a drum pad with a stand and sticks at home. They will also need a music stand and metronome. Eventually, if they prove that they are practicing and putting the time in, a drum set is a good investment. Further on down the line, a glockenspiel to learn notes will be needed at home.

Indian Tabla

Students will need to have a usable set of tabla to practice on and to bring to the lesson. Families can check in any Conservatory office for a list of recommended places to go for the tabla. In addition, the student should own a tuning hammer which usually comes with the instrument, a blanket mat to sit on, and baby powder for their hands.

Voice Department

Teachers in the Voice Department are concerned with the vocal health of their students, as well as their musical development. While our students choose to sing many styles of music, healthy technique is our primary concern. Care is taken to ensure that appropriate repertoire is assigned to suit the age and technical ability of the student.

Voice students may participate in the Teen Voice competition and the Scholarship competition, as well as student and studio recitals throughout the year. Adults and High School Seniors may also participate in the Concert Competition.

Music reading skills are essential for all musicians, including singers. If your child cannot read music, Westminster Conservatory offers Music Theory classes at all levels.

Keyboard skills are also helpful for singers, and having a keyboard instrument (piano or electric piano) at home can greatly facilitate home practice. If your child has no keyboard skills, Westminster Conservatory offers a Piano for Singers class, geared specifically to the needs of the singer.

Theory Department

Keeping with Conservatory philosophy, the Theory Department encourages students to develop to the best of their abilities in written theory and aural skills. We offer an array of classes that cover the fundamentals of music theory, tonal harmony and forms, ear training and composition. We encourage and prepare interested students to take prestigious exams like the American “Advanced Placement Music Theory Exam” and the internationally acclaimed British Associated Board of Royal Music Schools (ABRSM) exams.

Whenever appropriate, we provide opportunities for accelerated study.

The faculty here at Westminster Conservatory are all dedicated musicians who love and respect this great art of music and want to hand down not only the basic skills, but also a deeper practical and passionate understanding of it to our students. This is why our department does not encourage students to quickly “gallop through” successive levels of theory without allowing time to enjoy, consolidate, and apply them in practice.

Fundamentals of Music Theory and the ABRSM exams

Presently, the fundamental concepts of Western art music are taught in five levels. These follow closely the ABRSM theory syllabus.

Students are encouraged to take the international ABRSM examination after completing a certain level/grade. Children are signed up for the exam by their theory teacher, who collects the registration fee. Exams are administered three times a year: end of October, beginning of March and mid-June. The British program does not offer make-ups and does not refund the students who do not attend an exam they are registered for. Exams are mailed to England, graded there, and a certificate accompanied by a grade sheet is returned to each candidate, also by mail. Generally, results arrive within seven weeks from the date of the exam. As a courtesy to our students, the Westminster Conservatory Theory Department administers one exam a year – in either March or July, following the rules and regulations set by the ABRSM. The school does not charge any additional fee for this service.

High school students cover these fundamentals in two years: Fundamentals I covers levels/ABRSM grades 1-3 and Fundamentals II covers levels/ABRSM grades 4 and 5.

The Tonal Harmony & Ear Training Pair of Courses & the Advanced Placement Music Theory Exam

Upon completing level 5 or passing a placement test, a student may take Tonal Harmony I and Ear Training I followed by Tonal Harmony II and Ear Training II, two sets of pair courses that together cover the entire subject matter of the Advanced Placement Music Theory Exam. Pending the recommendation of the teacher, a student may sign up for the exam with their school district. In the event their high school does not offer an AP exam in music theory, parents should contact the “AP Central” and obtain information on how to find a different exam center. WESTMINSTER CONSERVATORY **DOES NOT** ADMINISTER THE AP MUSIC THEORY EXAM.

Important: if fewer than four students sign up for a course, that course is either cancelled, or, -(if those concerned agree), each class will run for a shorter time.

Classes missed by the teacher will be rescheduled. Classes missed by a student cannot be made up.

Additional Materials

In addition to the instrument, parents will need to purchase sheet music and other materials as needed. Each teacher has their own practices when it comes to choosing appropriate music and repertoire for the student. The instructor will provide information at the first lesson on materials that the student will need for their lesson and for their home practicing (i.e. music books, music stands, instrument supplies, metronomes, reeds, foot stools, etc.). Suzuki teachers mostly use the Suzuki books, and add scale and technique books as needed.

What to Expect at the Lesson

Students are expected to bring their music and assignment book to every lesson. During each lesson students will be working on developing good musicianship skills including note reading, rhythm, ear training, analysis, technique, understanding of phrasing and dynamics, and broadening their musicality. Weekly assignments will be listed in the student’s notebook, which a parent should check regularly. Students are required to practice regularly to prepare for each lesson following up on the instructions received from their teacher.

Students should feel that they can ask questions at the lesson. The teacher is the expert but the student should engage and take pride in the process too.

During the lesson, students should completely silence their cell phones (not just vibrate) or otherwise turn off their cellphones. Knowledge that a message is waiting is a potentially lengthy distraction.

Suggestions for the Parent during the Lesson

Every Conservatory teacher has their own policy or preferences about whether or not the parent should sit in on the lesson, and families are welcome to check with their teacher regarding this issue. Most

teachers would agree though that in the case of young beginners, it is fine for a parent to sit in on the first lessons so that they can oversee the practicing at home. Normally it is best (except for Suzuki lessons) for the parent to allow the student to work one-on-one with the teacher. Many parents sit outside the studio or in the waiting area while the lesson is going on, and stop back in for the final few minutes of the lesson for any particular instructions from the teacher.

If there are questions, the parent is welcome to ask them during the first or last 5 minutes of a lesson (being careful not to stay past the end of lesson time). The parent can also request that the teacher email or contact them at another time outside the lesson.

If a parent or family waits in the hall, it should be quietly. Long conversations or talking on cell phones should be done in the waiting room or outside rather than in the hall so as not to distract the students and teachers. Parents with younger siblings are expected to keep them controlled and away from other teacher's studio doors. There is absolutely no running permitted in the halls.

Practicing at Home

The weekly lesson alone is not adequate for developing proficiency on an instrument. Young students are greatly helped by some parent supervision. Most often practice time is directly related to the difficulty of the student's repertoire and the number of pieces assigned. Practice time should be discussed with the teacher at the beginning of the year to allow for good progress. It is important for parents to help the student follow through with practice, aiming for more or less the same time of day, each day, and practicing the length of their lesson each day.

Practice Space

It is important to provide your child with a home environment that facilitates his/her progress. Students should have a quiet, private area to practice, free of interruptions by other family members or electronic devices. By providing a quiet environment to practice their instrument the student can develop their listening and concentration skills, and prepare well for their lessons.

In the designated practice space, students will also need additional tools appropriate to the instrument: music stand, metronome, tuner, pencil, foot stool, piano bench, etc.

Other Suggestions

All students are helped when parents are interested, encouraging, and aware of challenges, achievements, teacher's expectations, and students' feelings about their assignments and progress. It also makes a huge difference when a student is exposed regularly to classical music listening (and of course, to jazz, when studying jazz), through recordings, radio, and live concerts.

Parents can also help by playing classical music on the radio on the way to and from the lesson, at home, or helping their child to follow through by looking up their pieces on YouTube or listening to something the teacher sends them.

Determining the Length of the Lesson

Students can take 30-minute, 45-minute, or 60-minute private lessons through the Conservatory. Various factors are taken into consideration when determining the most appropriate lesson length for the student. These can include the student's age, their level of advancement, the personal goals of the student for the upcoming year (i.e. competitions, exams, and auditions), the instrument they are studying, scheduling availability, and the particular recommendations or preferences of the teacher.

The Conservatory generally recommends the following lesson length for beginning students:

- 30 minutes for piano, voice and winds (4th and 5th grades)
- 45 minutes for strings and winds (6th grade and up)

The ABRSM (Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music) music theory and/or practicum exams are a wonderful opportunity for serious music students to include essential elements of technique and music theory in their education.

Because the ABRSM exams include additional demands in their private lesson, students should register for longer lesson lengths on their instrument:

- 45 minutes for lower levels
- 60 minutes for upper levels

Students can also sign up through the office for additional private lessons with their teacher in preparation for the exam.

Financial Aid

The Conservatory offers financial aid to qualifying families in the form of reduced tuition. It is determined on a sliding scale that considers family financial resources, the number of dependent children, the number of family members studying at the Conservatory, and the programs in which the student(s) are enrolled. The financial aid form can be downloaded off the website (www.rider.edu/conservatory).

Studio Performance Events

A valuable part of the learning process when studying a musical instrument is performance. The Conservatory offers several optional and/or required performance opportunities throughout the academic year for students. These include the monthly student recitals (optional), the spring

evaluations (required), and the faculty studio class or recital (required). The spring evaluation and the studio class recital collectively take the place of one of the student's lessons during the academic year: i.e. if the student is enrolled for the full 34-week academic year of lessons, they will receive 33 lessons plus a studio class and an evaluation.

Monthly Studio Recitals

To perform on a monthly student recital, the teacher must sign the student up. Students who have practiced and are well prepared are considered. If it is the first time the student has performed on a Conservatory student recital, or if the student needs an accompanist (provided by the Conservatory), the student must attend the mandatory dress rehearsal.

Spring Evaluations

The 3rd week of May is designated as Evaluation Week. Instead of attending the weekly lesson, all Conservatory students enrolled in private lessons take an evaluation. The evaluation is scheduled around the same time as the private lesson (some exceptions are made at some extension locations) and lasts approximately 10 minutes. At the evaluation, the student performs a prepared program for a panel of three faculty members from the department. The student might be asked to sight read and/or answer musicianship questions. Each student receives written comments and a certificate for their evaluation.

Studio Class Recital

At least once each academic year, your private teacher will schedule and host a studio recital for all the students in their studio. These recitals are usually held on the main campus of Westminster Choir College unless the teacher decides to conduct the studio recital at an extension site. It is up to the teacher to determine what piece/s their students will perform and how formal or informal the event will be.

Student Competitions

Only the private teacher can nominate a student for a student competition. If a student is nominated for a competition, it is because the teacher recognizes that the student has a proven history of working hard at the lesson and at home, and has demonstrated that they are a strong performer. Sometimes the teacher is limited as to how many students they can nominate from their studio.

The teacher should be given the final say on which competitions, youth orchestras or ensembles the student will be entered, added to the student's schedule, etc. It is inappropriate for a parent to enter a student in a competition without the teacher's approval. This is inconsiderate of the teacher and can be detrimental to the student's' development.

It is important to consult the teacher before entering music exams, auditions, or competitions. If a student wishes to pursue these, the family should expect to increase instruction time, as these projects demand extra time beyond the normal curriculum.

Accompanists (String, Winds, and Voice Students)

The Conservatory provides a professional accompanist to work with voice, string and wind students for certain events at no charge to the family. These include the monthly student recitals, teachers' studio classes, and the Scholarship Awards Competition. Voice students will also perform with an accompanist at their evaluations in the spring. For any of these events, the student is allotted a specific amount of time with the accompanist. If the accompanist or the teacher feels the need for more rehearsal time, the family will be asked to pay the accompanist directly at their personal rate.

Concert Etiquette

When attending student performances, "concert etiquette" should be observed. Students should arrive early enough to have instruments ready and tuned well before starting time. Families should also arrive before starting time. It is disruptive, disrespectful of other performers, and extremely distracting to them when latecomers enter. If, in the worst case, a family arrives late, they should never enter while a performer is playing, but wait to enter during the applause. If filming or recording a student's performance, it should be done discreetly from the back of the hall, as this can also be a distraction to performers and audience alike. And it is considered inappropriate and disrespectful to leave before everyone has played—part of the value of studio recitals is hearing others play, and hearing music other than your own.

Other Courses to Enhance the Private Lesson Experience

The importance of our students playing in an ensemble—school band, orchestra, youth orchestra, wind ensemble, choir, chamber music, etc. cannot be overstated. More often than not, students who have not been involved in ensemble music miss out in countless ways—not only in their own musical development, but in experiencing music as an important social activity, and in their understanding of how they can, through their music, make a meaningful contribution to others, as well.

Chamber Music, Orchestra, Band and Choir at Westminster Conservatory

PCS/Westminster Conservatory Youth Orchestra (grades 5-8)

Coached Chamber Ensemble (all ages and levels)

Cello Orchestra (ages 8-17ys)

Cremona Ensemble (for advanced violin students (ages 10-17ys)

The Guitars of Westminster Conservatory (middle school – adult)

Rider University Concert Band (middle school – adult)

Westminster Community Orchestra (adults)

Adult Chamber Reading Ensemble (adults)

Chamber Ensemble Summer Camp (grades 7-12)

Piano Chamber Music Summer Camp (grades 7-12)

Young Artist Honors Program (ages 8-18 by audition only)

Choral Readiness (grades K-1)

Children's Voice Class (grades 2-4)

Schola Choir (grades 2-3)

Concino Choir (grades 4-5)

Cantus Choir ((grades 6-8)

Pre-Teen Voice Class (grades 5-7)

Teen Voice Class (grades 8-12)

Westminster Community Chorus (grade 9-adult)

Additional Classes at Westminster Conservatory to Enhance Private Lessons

Theory and musicianship classes (all ages)

YogaVoice (grades 9-adult)

YogaVoice for Instrumentalists (grades 9-adult)

Piano lessons (for wind, strings, percussion and voice students – all ages)

Piano Performance Classes (adults)

Jazz Explorations (grades 8-adult)

Jazz Theory and Ear Training (ages 13-17)

The History of Jazz (ages 13-17)

Composition (all ages)

Extension Sites

Accessibility and convenience are the key words to describe the extensions of Westminster Conservatory. In order to reach out to the community at large and make conservatory offerings more available, we have four extension sites in the following communities: Lawrenceville, Princeton, South Brunswick, and Yardley, PA.

The convenience of having Westminster Conservatory available at or near the student's school is invaluable. Private lessons and group classes are available immediately following school until 9:00 pm. Saturday lessons are also offered at the Lawrenceville extension. Conservatory extension offerings are for students of the host site as well as family, friends and anyone interested in studying through Westminster Conservatory.

In addition to having access to all Conservatory campus programs, recitals, evaluations, performances, etc. an annual extension recital is held on the campus of Westminster Conservatory for *selected* extension students.

A great bonus for extension registrants is the presence of a Conservatory administrative representative. This extension manager assists with scheduling and billing during the normal operating hours of the extension site. Please note that each extension calendar may differ in number of weeks and/or dates. You may view the extension calendars by selecting the appropriate extension link on the Westminster Conservatory website (www.rider.edu/conservatory). For additional information please contact the extension coordinator directly. You may refer to the website for all contact information.

Make-up Policy

Parents are expected to adhere to Conservatory policies as they relate to lesson cancellation (p.29 in the 2012-13 Catalog). Teachers are not required to make up a lesson missed by the student for any reason. However, teachers are obligated to make up lessons that they cancel or that the school cancels. If a teacher decides to make a lesson up which the student cancelled, they may only do so after they have made up any lessons that they cancelled.

Changes in Scheduling

All requests for changes in schedule must be put in writing and submitted to the Conservatory office. Parents should refer to p.29 in the 2012-13 Catalog for details regarding possible charges depending on when the change is requested.