Music Education Welcomed Back To Cashion Thanks to UCO Initiative

After a six-year drought, music education has returned to K-12 students in Cashion Public Schools thanks to “The Middle C Project,” an initiative led by students and faculty in the University of Central Oklahoma’s School of Music.

Located about 20 miles north of Edmond, Cashion lost its music program in 2009 due to funding cuts. School officials in the town, whose population hovers near 1,000, reached out to UCO’s School of Music this spring to discuss ways Central might help bring music education back to the community.

“It was really interesting timing,” said Keith White, Ph.D., UCO Music professor.

“I had assigned my graduate students a final project that consisted of developing a five-year strategic plan to design a music program, and not a few weeks later, Cashion called us asking for our help.”

Cashion schools and Central’s School of Music began talks that led to Cashion hiring 13 undergraduate UCO Music majors to teach after-school instrumental classes and three graduate Music students to teach music education curriculum during the school day. The students were selected for their strong musical skills and communication abilities.

The project was funded through UCO’s Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR) program. The university received a $7.7 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to support STLR’s development and implementation. STLR is a first-of-its-kind effort to initiate and track student experiences that develop beyond-disciplinary skills, like problem solving and leadership. The result is an ePortfolio students can offer to potential employers showing they have these desired skills.

“We kept our students in mind going into these talks,” David Hanan, UCO associate director of bands, said. “We wanted to make sure our selected students weren’t overloaded, but we knew the opportunity was unique. The potential for both Cashion and UCO is huge.”

Now, more than 80 percent of the Cashion district is involved in the revitalized music education program.

“Collaboration made this happen, and now a community that was starving for music education is immersed in musical opportunity,” Brian Lamb, D.M.A, director of Central’s School of Music, said.

Nikola Gjorcevski, a graduate student in Central’s School of Music and percussion director for Cashion, called the impact of the program “amazing.”

“The students are absorbing everything we are teaching them. They’re learning quickly. Everyone is talking about this,” Gjorcevski said.

— Ariel West, marketing assistant, UCO School of Music
After a “soft” opening at the first of the year, UCO Downtown had its official grand opening in September, followed by news that classes will begin there in January for UCO’s recently redesigned MBA program.

“It makes sense for us to be in the heart of Oklahoma City’s central business district,” Ethan Waples, Ph.D., director of Graduate Programs for Central’s College of Business, said. “We are excited about the potential collaborations and partnerships we’ll build in downtown OKC.”

The MBA offering is just one of many graduate and undergraduate classes being offered at the satellite campus, in the Carnegie Centre at 131 Dean A. McGee Ave. More than 260 students enrolled in 27 courses for fall 2015. Enrollments have surpassed the university’s expectations.

Classwork is being offered from all six of the university’s colleges.

UCO’s redesigned MBA program is a 22-month, cohort-based program of eight-week classes and 41 credit hours. All classes are in the evenings, and students are placed in cohorts, designed to enhance the learning environment through teamwork and career-building relationships. The program is being offered both in downtown Oklahoma City and on UCO’s main Edmond campus.

“Businesses want people who can make decisions. We have built a program to deliver decision-makers,” Waples said.

For a look at all of the classes being offered at UCO Downtown, visit ucodowntown.uco.edu.

U.S. News & World Report once again has ranked the University of Central Oklahoma as the top public regional university in the state, and for the first time as the top public regional university in the state for veterans. The publication’s recently released 2016 Best Colleges list posted the rankings. Central ranked No. 32 in the list of Tier One institutions in the “Top Public Schools: Regional Universities - West” category, No. 52 in the “Best Colleges for Veterans: Regional Universities - West” category, and No. 81 in the overall list of regional universities in the west.

According to information provided on the publication’s website, rankings are developed using a combination of the institution’s own responses to the U.S. News & World Report statistical survey, information from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics and information gathered in assessments from administrators at peer institutions. Factors that go into the ranking include retention of students, faculty resources, student selectivity, financial resources and alumni giving.
‘Operation Degree Completion’ Receives National Recognition

The national Ruffalo Noel Levitz Retention Award, now in its 26th year, recognizes innovative campus retention programs. So, it was a great honor when UCO’s Operation Degree Completion received the 2015 award during the National Conference on Student Recruitment, Marketing and Retention in July in Boston.

“Operation Degree Completion connects us with former students who have completed most — if not all — of the requirements for a degree,” Glenda Todd, the UCO academic adviser who started the program, said. “Students are sometimes surprised to learn they have enough credits for a more general degree or only need to take one or two more courses to complete their original degree.”

In other cases, the program identifies students who have transferred to Central from community college partner institutions — like Rose State, Oklahoma City Community and Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City — and have enough credits for an associate degree.

Since the inception of Operation Degree Completion, Central has awarded 1,261 bachelor’s degrees and is on track to facilitate more than 2,000 associate degrees. The program is part of a national strategy to increase the number of adults with postsecondary education degrees and in meeting the goals of Complete College America.

Students Fill Rooms in ‘The Quad,’ UCO’s New Campus Residence Hall

The day after the Aug. 7 ribbon-cutting, students began moving into the new 440-bed residence hall on the UCO campus, filling every room and partaking in a new style of campus living.

Called the Transformative Learning Quadrangle — or just the Quad — the 120,000-square-foot living-learning center includes a 3,000-square-foot lobby, 22 study rooms, 12 social lounges, a community kitchen, a movie screening room, an exercise room, a “Creative Suite” for creative and artistic projects, plus free laundry facilities and an academic wing.

All are intended to draw students out of their rooms — deliberately designed to be small with no private baths — and into the Central community.

The building was designed to encourage student interaction and community building, two elements key to student success and retention.

“We are here to educate the whole person,” UCO President Don Betz told those gathered for the opening ceremony. “And so far as we are concerned, learning goes on everywhere at every time. We translated that notion, that idea and ideal, into this structure, which says beyond the classroom, beyond the performing areas, beyond the outside areas where we’re able to hold classes, that where you live is also where you learn.”

The Quad is the single largest construction project ever undertaken by UCO. The $28 million project was built with a bond issue with rents paying the debt.
UCO's CHK|Central Boathouse has officially established itself as the place “where art meets the river,” assuming its title in the Oklahoma River’s boathouse district.

While UCO Women’s Rowing and head coach Andy Derrick are happily settled into a new home base in the C. Hubert Gragg Shell Gallery of the boathouse, more guests are finding their way to the Martha Burger Art Gallery and the MidFirst Bank Performance Hall, both located in the newest addition to the river’s Boathouse Row.

Officially opened in April, the 18,000-square-foot structure already has hosted events for organizations such as the Greater Oklahoma City and the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic chambers of commerce, the Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice, Allied Arts and OK Foster Wishes.

The boathouse includes office space, reception areas, concessions, a green room, a conference space, as well as an indoor rowing space.

Georgia Fiering, director of the CHK|Central Boathouse, said the boathouse is available for small or large events and retreats, ranging from weddings and receptions to sit-down dinners and luncheons.

The CHK|Central Boathouse is located at 732 Riversport Drive, next to the Devon Boathouse. For more information about the facility or to book an event, contact Fiering at 405-974-2628 or email gfiering@uco.edu.

UCO Only University in Nation To Receive All Six Federal Grants

The UCO Student Support Services has received an additional U.S. Department of Education Federal TRIO Program grant, making UCO the only institution of higher education in the nation to receive funding for each of the six Federal Student Support Services programs giving awards.

The sixth grant brings to UCO an additional $1.1 million for a total of $6.6 million over five years.

“The U.S. Department of Education has made clear its recognition of UCO’s deep commitment to educational equity, diversity and student success,” UCO President Don Betz said.

The Federal TRIO Programs are designed to identify and provide services to students from underrepresented backgrounds in higher education, students who are first-generation students, from low-income households or students with disabilities.