

Sweet music: Renovated space, new practice booths have the Music Program humming

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The sweet melody of Antonio Caldara’s “Sebben, crudele” wafted down the bright hallways of the Campus Services (CS) building. Piano instructor Margaret “Pej” Reitz led a classroom of piano students in exercises, as an aspiring drummer settled down onto the throne in the band room. Nearby, students chatted with each other in the lounge, sprawled on couches that give CS a homey feel.

For SUNY Broome’s Music Program, Campus Services is home – the first true home they’ve had in years. Prior to the 2014-2015 school year, the Music Program was split, with some courses offered in CS and others in the Arts Annex basement. Yes, a basement – windowless and located in the same secure building that houses Public Safety. That posed problems when it came to access and practice space.

“It’s definitely a vast improvement. Spatially, it offers a lot more than the Annex did. The Annex was dingy and dusty,” said Calya Perricelli, who first began taking courses at SUNY Broome three years ago. Now in her first semester as a full-time music student, she is majoring in sound engineering and looking forward to a career as a working musician. The singer already has regular gigs with two other musicians, performing regional favorites and Motown covers.



Calya Perricelli works with sound engineering software in the Campus Services building’s lab.



Renovations at Campus Services highlight the importance of base aid and state investment on campus. More than just paying the light bills, such funds are critical when it comes to creating program-appropriate classroom space, complete with needed equipment and software. Such investment also keeps programs in line with the latest developments, making them more attractive to the next generation of students.

For SUNY Broome's approximately 90 music students, such amenities include high-tech computer labs for the popular sound engineering program. In the near future, they will also include soundproof practice booths, which will enable students to practice even the loudest instruments without disturbing fellow students.

"So I can play without disturbing teachers," explained Gia Huy Le, a second-year piano major who intends to transfer to SUNY Potsdam's Crane School of Music to major in composition.

**Gia Huy Le is a piano major and plans to transfer
to the Crane School of Music.**

The lack of soundproof booths has proved a significant obstacle to students such as Le, who has had his practice

sessions cut short by classroom instructors. Why? To demonstrate, Music Coordinator Brenda Dawe ducked into Campus Services' band room – a repurposed loading dock with a concrete floor, a piano and stacked chairs where many of the campus' bands and ensembles practice.

In one corner, a drummer enthusiastically jams on an electric drum kit, earphones perched on his head. While the electric kit cut down on the sound, it couldn't eliminate it entirely. The tapping of Alex's sticks against the electronic pads echoed throughout the cavernous band room – and up along the ductwork in the building's high ceilings.

In the classroom next door, the tap-tap-tapping remained surprisingly loud – even with the door firmly closed.

“It's like they're right next to me, even when I'm in my office,” said Dawe. Her office is down the hall.

As a professor, she encourages her students to practice often. As an opera singer, she knows firsthand the importance of constant practice in honing one's art. It always pricks professors' hearts when they have to ask students to stop, so their music doesn't interfere with classes taking place.

“You never want to tell a student not to practice,” Dawe said.

For students such as Perricelli, home isn't always an option when it comes to practice time. With a full-time job, her only opportunity to practice guitar is when she's on campus.

Knowing that fellow students can hear every mistake can also be inhibiting, Perricelli noted. There's a difference between a practice session – one that allows you to try new techniques and build on skills – and a concert.

Students and professors alike are looking forward to their first soundproof practice booths, currently being manufactured and scheduled for installation during winter break. Booths will include a drum kit – a real one – and an upright piano for students to use.

An upright, however, isn't the same as a grand piano, and that's something the department is still lacking. Piano students are currently consigned to practicing on digital keyboards or one of the building's uprights. They're not equivalent instruments, noted Le. The weight of the keys is different, as are the pedals and the sound dynamics – all of which a young performer needs to keep in mind.

"I had a lot of trouble practicing my piano piece last semester because we don't have a grand piano here to practice on," said Le, whose piece was by Russian composer Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninoff and required the use of the sostenuto pedal.

In the future, the Music Program will look at replacing the pianos as well as addressing other equipment needs. In the meantime, faculty and students are both looking forward to the practice booths and grateful for the renovations that have already taken place.

"I think there's no stopping this music program. We're getting talent like this " – Dawe said, nodding to Le and Perricelli – "and we have the professors. We just need the facilities."

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