

To TU Executive Staff:

April 13, 2019

When I first heard rumors of TU's reimagining, I happily anticipated the details. As a TU graduate, I have long held the belief that TU is an excellent university. As a teacher, I have actively encouraged students to attend the university and done my best to support the various activities on campus. I will continue to support my past students that currently attend school there, but I will now find it difficult to encourage any future students to attend. How do I justify to them the enormous financial investment of a TU education? The education they receive at TU under this new reimagining is no longer guaranteed to be of higher quality than what they can receive in neighboring states at an equivalent or, in most cases much lower, cost.

As someone who would have been a member of the "6%" affected by this, I feel it is my right and obligation to enlighten you about what I learned with my TU degree and how I have used it. I received my Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance in 1998. But my degree was about much more than playing the piano. While at TU, I honed my piano skills to a very high level, competing in numerous competitions and giving three solo recitals. I also studied music theory, music analysis, and music history in a very in-depth manner. I completed an elaborate independent music study project about Russian composers. I played violin in the orchestra, took voice lessons, and even learned organ. I attended and analyzed numerous concerts, accompanied all types of instrumentalists and vocalists for their lessons and juries, and played in the pit for the musicals. I learned more about myself at the age of 19 and 20 in late night practice sessions than many people learn by the age of 30. You see, as a performance major I received an extremely well-rounded and high quality music education. I interacted with amazing world-class musicians (many of which were on TU's faculty) and students on a regular basis. I met extremely demanding standards, gave public performances, learned how to fail, and learned how to succeed - all while expressing my innermost emotions and personality through my music. It was this intensity that really trained me for the next step, an intensity matched in other fields yet with unique qualities not found elsewhere. Upon graduation, I immediately began performing, accompanying, and teaching in the private sector. I taught private piano students of all levels, using my TU education to its fullest as I taught special needs students, kids studying just for fun, and students who wanted to pursue music as a career. Differentiating my instruction to fit each individual's needs, I taught my students not only notes, rhythms, and technical dexterity, but also the joy and beauty of music. They grew not just in their skill level, but also in their emotional growth and communication skills. They learned to accept ideas and people different from themselves, embracing both the commonality and the other in society (a duality that is so often represented in music). It was while accompanying in the local schools that I found my next calling. I studied, received my vocal education certification, and began directing choirs. I already had years of experience accompanying for numerous choir directors and voice teachers, along with having studied voice myself, so my knowledge base was considerable. Combine that

with my private teaching experience, and it was an ideal match. I took over the directorship of a school's choirs in 2009. Since that time, I have conducted an average of 140 students each semester in performing all sorts of music, from pop to classical, gospel to musical theater. While many of these students will not pursue music as a career, some do (in fact, one of my students is currently a music major at TU). Regardless, they have all benefited from my TU education. I can teach them Verdi's "Requiem" and songs from "Hamilton" in the same week. I can combine my knowledge of history, philosophy, and religion to help them better understand the meaning behind the notes, while still working on a very demanding level musically. I have introduced them to TU professors, traveling musicians, and Julliard graduates. I have sent kids to Berkeley School of Music and watched some of my high schoolers perform on the Carnegie Hall stage. I could not have done this at my current level without the high level of performance and mastery required of me during my undergraduate work at TU. Yet, music performance degrees, theater, and philosophy are some of the very things being cut in TU's new plan.

In his strategic plan, President Clancy stated "*...among our many duties will be a commitment to prepare our staff, faculty and graduates for high-quality jobs and in doing so help them write great stories of their lives. These stories will inevitably entail jobs that serve the rapidly growing technology and knowledge economy and, just as important, jobs that forge a more just society through enhancing access to high-quality education and health care, protecting our environment and natural resources and celebrating humanity through the arts.*" How can one obtain a high quality education that celebrates humanity and forges a just society if no high-level arts degrees are offered? Performance degrees push musicians to their limits and dictate musical performance and technical standards far above and beyond those required for an education degree. Does TU honestly think they will be able to retain a highly-qualified music faculty without offering such demanding degrees? What about philosophy and religion professors? How will TU attract and keep high quality professors in those areas when only a few general requirement and minor courses are offered? How will deep thought and critical thinking be fostered on a campus that limits such subject matter? Unfortunately, TU obviously doesn't expect to keep these professors because early retirement options were mentioned in the reimagining, so what happens to TU students when those professors are gone?

Contrary to your claim in your reimagining, TU will not stake its identity, it will lose it. Ironically, many of my high school students know what many adults refuse to acknowledge, that societies progress using technology, but they establish their identities through the arts. Studying the arts is not just about improving creativity and problem solving for other jobs, it is about pushing oneself to the limit in order to express a personal identity and emotion that cannot be expressed in any other way. Many subjects teach us about the world; the arts teach us about ourselves. When the oil barons first brought their wives to this forsaken part of the U.S., one of the first things demanded by those wives was music. They were willing to deal with being removed from high society and some modern conveniences, but they wanted the arts because it was through the arts that they could define and establish their identity and culture. As a result,

Tulsa had a professional orchestra before all of our downtown streets were even paved. Your plan will not increase the value of my TU diploma and I will not buy-in to you attempt at a new TU identity. Failure to embrace the arts and develop them to their fullest does not make people “unsung heroes” as you state; rather, it makes them proponents of an autonomic society, the beginnings of a “Brave New World.” The real heroes are those that work towards a world where technology, science, math, humanities, and arts all develop and exist side by side, with no single entity sacrificed to the betterment of another. Those leading our universities should understand that simple existence is not enough. For our citizens to thrive and grow, all of these areas of study are needed. We need to view humanity as individuals, not commodities. Unfortunately, rather than fulfill that vision and embrace the community around it, TU is choosing a specialized direction that will ultimately alienate it from the community in which it resides and make it just one more production-focused institution centered around mediocrity and complacency.

So what does this mean for our Tulsa community? Unfortunately, a slowly developing arts desert and loss of humanity. Many of our music leaders and performers are also adjunct faculty. What will now entice musicians here? Many of our young people, whether studying music at their schools or through private lessons, lean on college professors for masterclasses and overall leadership; who will now set an example for these young developing musicians? What will encourage the students I currently teach to come back to Tulsa to live and work when they have families of their own? One student very pointedly told me Friday, “It’s not just about a job, I don’t want to live in a place where my kids can’t be exposed to the arts.” Yet TU is cutting the very programs that help encourage such enrichment and growth in our city. So, while I understand that your job is difficult, please realize that your decision will ultimately undermine everything I stand for in mine. I stand for creativity, individuality, and arts excellence, yet my own alma mater doesn’t feel that my degree is worth the money or energy required to sustain it. Since graduating from TU, I have obtained my Masters in Education from a different institution. Until now though, I still considered TU my college home - what an unfortunate loss. You inferred that history will look back on this moment; you are correct but don’t expect the judgement to be in your favor. There is a reason that dictators throughout history have made the restriction of the arts one of their prominent policies; they feared the power and communication of disciplines like music in the hands of an oppressed people. How unfortunate that such a powerful discipline is no longer being developed to the fullest by the University of Tulsa. “This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but with a whimper.” - T.S. Eliot

Sincerely,

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