

Nomination Narrative

I am a music educator and researcher deeply committed to the process of learning and helping students reach their full potential as individuals, citizens, and professionals. In my 30-year career, I have taught music to infants through graduate students and beyond, delighting in the challenges and joys of teaching and making music with persons of all ages. In my university teaching I see students striving for a better life through education. Many are first-generation college students, trying to navigate college without the experiential, monetary, or even moral support of their families. Because of challenges I experienced, these issues resonate with me. I want to **support** and **provide opportunities** for students that will help them be successful college students and stretch their minds, abilities, and beliefs about themselves and their roles as music educators. Therefore, I invest deeply in my students—learning about their backgrounds, who they are as persons, and what supports and opportunities they need to experience success. In alignment with Radford’s mission, I seek to “*provide transformative educational experiences...within and beyond the classroom*” through innovative curriculum building and interdisciplinary connections that enhance our students’ knowledge and skills. I seek out all funding possibilities to bring opportunities to our students and to the greater music education community in our local area, the region, state, nationally, and internationally.

Building strong relationships with students is foundational, because it engenders trust and respect and creates learning environments where it is safe to take risks. I hold myself and students to high standards, while showing compassion and care for them as individuals. I consistently model the statement, “*We teach human beings, first and foremost; music is our chosen vehicle*”. Further, I strive to embody the spirit that learning can be fun in a safe environment in which everyone can learn, make mistakes, and develop skills with the support of peers and professors who believe in them. Open communication is emphasized as a hallmark of professionalism; students become motivated to learn to think critically for themselves—questioning prior knowledge and beliefs about music learning and comparing them with new ideas, skills, and experiences. Ultimately, graduates are able to decide about best practices as they enter the profession. Current student Arlo Moody stated: “*Dr. McDonel cares immensely for her students. When schools closed, she set up weekly zoom calls and continued them throughout the summer just to check on how we were doing and see if we were okay through the long quarantine.*”

Music Learning Theory (MLT), a theoretical framework on how we learn music, consistently informs my philosophy of learning and instruction. The theory is grounded in similarities between music and language acquisition. In both, vocabularies of listening, speaking, thinking, reading, and writing are developed. MLT also may be viewed as a “learning trajectory”, similar to mathematics learning trajectories. Although content differs, the idea that children generally develop knowledge and skill along developmental arcs helps us understand how and when they learn and thus, how to structure appropriate learning environments. As students critically reflect on learning theories and best practices, learning becomes more efficient, leading to an increase of personal musicianship and a deep understanding of how to guide others in music learning.

As Director of Music Education at Radford, my work is centered on developing high-impact, theory-to-practice courses and curriculum. Students gain theoretical knowledge and applicable skills in the university classroom. But even more importantly, it is *experiential learning* in real music classrooms that also allows students to discover, integrate knowledge, and refine their teaching abilities. By developing community partnerships, synergistic benefits are blossoming. At the Radford Early Learning Center (RELC), young children now eagerly await Fridays when “music friends” come to sing, move, and play with them! Likewise, caregivers and administrators are thrilled that these children are receiving high-quality music guidance. Moreover, music education students are taken by surprise at how much young children can learn, thus realizing the rewards of early childhood music! Tamara Wallace, Dean of the College of Education and Human Development at Radford affirmed: “*As director, she has developed innovative, sequential instruction that has provided consistency and structure that has led to increased numbers of*

students successfully student teaching and completing the program. The music education program has flourished under Dr. McDonel's leadership!"

My recent work in aligning our music curriculum to the new, REAL general education model at Radford has produced some amazing interdisciplinary connections. With careful planning and communication across disciplines, I have been able to secure access to several courses that will integrate with the music education curriculum. I am very excited that our students will now take "Physics of Sound" as a science course, education courses on human growth and development and diverse learners, and mathematics courses relevant to teaching. This crosses interdisciplinary areas to support depth of student learning, rather than random courses taken simply because they fit into students' schedules. Moreover, as department curriculum committee chair and member of CVPA curriculum committee, I effectively assisted both the department and college in navigating approvals for initial REAL curriculum proposals.

I have a strong commitment to RU's mission of "empowering students", giving opportunity to broaden perspectives, stretching minds and abilities. By utilizing my own scholarship as a tool for student opportunities, students have received travel funds to present sessions with me at the International Conference on Music Learning Theory every biennium since 2015. My research focus, centered on music education in Nepal, also has provided opportunities for undergraduate travel and research. I secured funding in 2016 and 2018 for several undergraduate students (one of whom was a Research Rookie and also received a SURF grant) to assist in research in Nepal, mentoring them through the entire research process. These students also were able to present results of this research with me at regional, national, and international music education research conferences. They gained once-in-a-lifetime experiences, expanding their worldview forever. Tim Channell, Music Department chair wrote: *"I find it extremely impressive that she finds time to mentor research students in this initiative that is beyond her overloaded teaching schedule. She does this because of her truly student-centered philosophy and pedagogy."*

Locally, as National Association for Music Education (NAfME) collegiate chapter advisor, I guided the chapter to win a National Chapter of Excellence award for service (2018) and numerous yearly state awards for service and professional development. Moreover, I serve as Virginia Music Educators Association (VMEA) Collegiate advisor, working with the state collegiate board to facilitate initiatives with college students across the Commonwealth, select state conference sessions, and prepare the collegiate recital and collegiate business meeting for the VMEA conference each year. These myriad avenues of service advance music education from the local community to across the globe, providing opportunities for musical and professional growth for all and placing Radford University in a positive light for its music education program, undergraduate research, and other opportunities for students.

My scholarship on the national and international levels puts Radford University in the national spotlight as a leader in early childhood music education. The music program I co-developed for Primrose Schools® is a multi-level, 12-month music program with support for general preschool teachers' musicianship and skill. Literally hundreds of thousands of young children across the country will develop music skills in playful, developmentally appropriate ways this next decade.

Also, I am a member of Primrose's Early Learning Council, a group of early childhood experts from around the country that advises Primrose Schools' leadership on current research and directions in early childhood education. This connection has further afforded me an opportunity to work on a grant with the ZERO-TO-THREE, a national early learning support agency, composing songs with appropriate music activities for the "Problem Solvers" early mathematics curriculum.

This past year, I was honored to be selected as one of three nominees to represent Radford University for the 2022 SCHEV Outstanding Faculty Award. My life's passion and mission are to propel students to reach their potential through diverse learning and research opportunities. I am grateful for all the support Radford University has given me in that mission thus far, and I look forward to serving students in new ways as Associate Director of OURS this coming year!