

NAVIGATING A FLAT WORLD: THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF ONLINE GRADUATE MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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In his book, *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman identifies ten forces that have “flattened” the world. Among these forces are the World Wide Web and wireless communication technologies. Web-based and wireless technologies are changing fundamental concepts about education – more specifically, the role of teachers and students in learning. Online courses have given way to completely online degree programs and virtual universities. Several universities now offer online masters degree programs in music education (e.g., Auburn University, Boston University, Duquesne University, East Carolina University, Ohio University, Stephen F. Austin University, University of Hawaii – Hilo, University of Hawaii – Manoa, University of South Florida, University of Southern Mississippi). Recently, Boston University initiated the first online doctoral program in music education. In a matter of months, this program has gone from inception to an enrollment of over 200 students.

Completely online graduate programs in music education attract students primarily because of their asynchronous nature – students are able to engage in educational activity at a time and in a location that is convenient to them, rather than the same-time, same-place format that characterizes traditional graduate study. Arguably, online programs also allow for greater customization and acceleration of learning at lower cost to students and the institution. Critics of completely online degree programs, however, contend that the advantages associated with distance learning are offset by serious questions about quality of student learning, lack of residential experiences, and inadequate mentoring. There are also ethical considerations pertaining to methods used to market such programs, admissions standards, program expectations and degree oversight, integrity of online assessments, and qualifications of program graduates.

In this position paper, which is geared toward the preparation of music teacher educators, I will examine the historical origins and philosophical/pedagogical bases for online graduate education in the U.S., overview online graduate programs in music education, and explore the implications of online doctoral programs, such as the program at Boston University, for the future of music teacher education and music education scholarship.