

Sample Paths to Music Careers

These are just a very few examples of typical pathways to a few careers in music. There is no “right way” or “wrong way” to go – but these are some of the more typical ways in which people get their music jobs.

1) School Music Educator

Typical degree: Bachelor of Music (all area certification) or Bachelor of Music Education

Often school music educators (band directors/music teachers) also have advanced degrees (Master of Music, Master of Music Education, or sometimes Doctor of Music or Doctor of Musical Arts). To gain a foothold in the field, though, you’ll need at least a bachelor’s degree with teaching certification. By far, most music students at WTAMU are pursuing the “music education” degree, or “Bachelor of Music (all area certification).” Be sure to network, and realize that your fellow students will be your colleagues in a few short years – and the music world is small. Start your reputation as a person who is reliable and capable now, and your future self will thank you!

2) Orchestral Musician

Typical degree: Bachelor of Music or Music Education, Master of Music (performance). Often at least some work on a Doctor of Musical Arts, or other advanced performance certificates (Artist Diploma, Performer Diploma, etc) from conservatories.

Jobs as a full-time orchestral musician are incredibly hard to come by and there is fierce competition at all levels – from jobs paying \$15,000 to jobs paying \$150,000. There is often no stated degree requirement for these jobs – you win them by attending and winning auditions. Larger, higher-paying orchestras will screen your resume more thoroughly, and may not accept you to even play at the audition if you don’t have advanced degrees or a ton of playing experience already. Gain playing experience in school groups, contests on your instrument, substitute playing in local orchestras (get to know the people who have the jobs – they will need subs eventually!) and attending masterclasses/festivals.

3) College Professor

Typical degree: Bachelor of Music or Music Education, Master of Music (often performance), Doctor of Music or Doctor of Musical Arts.

It’s nearly impossible to get a job as a professor these days without a “terminal degree,” or in other words a doctorate. People do, but these are often people with huge amounts of experience in the music world – for example, principal players in the major orchestras. Even with a doctorate, these jobs are very competitive and you must also be an outstanding player and scholar. Plan to invest many years into obtaining these degrees.