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Statement of Philosophy: Teaching, Creative Activities and Service

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Dr. Oscar Macchioni

Statement of Philosophy: Teaching, Creative Activities and Service.

Teaching

In my five years at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), I have been devoted my time to fulfilling my responsibilities as a teacher, performer and researcher, and to serving this institution with excellence. In 2003, I came to UTEP as a visiting professor of Piano and was immediately challenged by teaching a varied course load which included Theory and Aural Skills III and IV, Piano, Class Piano, and Piano Pedagogy. I embraced the challenge and embarked on a journey that has allowed me to better understand the institution and the student population. UTEP is a unique place: because it is on the border with Mexico, many students commute daily to classes. Most of these students have never played an instrument or studied music before they enroll in the program, and they require structured and disciplined training by flexible, experienced and understanding teachers. Because I am from Argentina and have been educated in Europe and the United States, I felt I could understand those challenges, bridge the cultural gaps, and infuse the program with energy and fresh views I acquired during my studies here and abroad.

Teaching and learning are very rewarding experiences and take a lifetime to perfect; requiring commitment, preparation, and passion, but also patience, flexibility, and honesty with oneself. I see teaching as an infinitely expanding spiral, taking me to a higher level each time, never touching the exact same point. It is through teaching that I learn; through learning, I change.

At UTEP, I am in a very unique position as professor of Piano, Class Piano and Piano Pedagogy. Although this diverse position presents many challenges, it is the perfect combination for today's academic expectations. I believe every professor should have excellent performance skills and every performer should demonstrate strong pedagogical knowledge. I am successful in these areas due to regular national and international performances; presentations at piano pedagogy conventions; favorable press and scholarly reviews about my work in the performance and pedagogy areas; publishing; and judging piano competitions. My recruiting efforts are noticeable in my periodic visits to other universities nationwide and abroad, as well as the local schools.

As part of my teaching activities, I have presented master classes to various universities in the U.S. (Texas Woman's University and San Angelo State University), and locally for the piano teachers organization. I have also visited several local schools and invited them the UTEP campus to experience the university environment as well as the new Piano Lab. Internationally, my teaching activities have included master classes in Argentina, at various conservatories in Buenos Aires and Tucumán; in Taiwan at several cities including Tainan, Kienmen Island and Tayoen. During my month-long trip to Taiwan, in 2006, I served as examiner for the International Piano Examinations Committee of Taiwan, examining approximately 1,200 pianists. I provided information about the UTEP Music Department which was printed in three languages and distributed to about 8,000 individuals, music centers and schools.

My pedagogical work is also evident through my students' accomplishments as competition winners, successful owners of music studios and teachers. For the past three years, my students have won the Concerto and Aria Competition performing with the UTEP Symphony Orchestra. Freshman Paul Sanchez (two times winner) performed Grieg's Piano Concerto and Bach's D minor Concerto, and master candidate, Aaron Williams performed Chopin's Andante Spianato et Grande Polonaise Brillante op. 22. These students were the only piano students at UTEP to win that competition in the past five years since I came to UTEP. Paul Sanchez also received an Honorable Mention in the El Paso Youth Symphony Orchestras' Concerto Competition 2007, being the only piano student from UTEP to reach the finals. I have also kept my studio growing steadily by recruiting an international pool of students from New Zealand, Japan and México, including three master's students. In addition, some of my pre-college students have been accepted to summer programs and have performed at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall and Steinway Hall in New York City during the summer of 2008.

While it is important that students achieve the highest level of performance and musicianship, it is also vital that they develop critical thinking skills and that they be able to function in society as active participants, and as qualified and intelligent musicians. My goal as a professor at UTEP is to guide students down the road to intellectual and musical development, and to inspire them to become musicians who are successful pianists. As a mentor, I must be professional and act accordingly as I will always be a role model for my students. My commitment to the students is evident in that I am a two times recipient of the *Outstanding Service to the Students Award* by UTEP's Student Support and Services Program.

I am not afraid of changes, and since my arrival at UTEP, I have successfully introduced some improvements in the courses I teach. I see music as an integration of all areas – theory, aural skills, history, performance, and Piano Class provides an excellent opportunity for the students to blend and reinforce these concepts and skills. Thus, I have organized Piano Class in a rotation system, correlating the Theory and Aural Skills sequence, which in turn has improved the quality of teaching and attention given to the student. Prior to my reorganization, Piano Class III and IV were offered within the same semester, the same time period, by the same teacher, and even in the same classroom, resulting in a lack of proper attention to the skills and content to be taught and to the students' needs. My conception of music as an amalgam of skills has also allowed me to teach Theory and Aural Skills III and IV with ease, providing UTEP students with the unique view of a performer, how music works aurally and temporally and not just on paper.

Piano Pedagogy has been extended to a three-semester sequence to accommodate a much needed practicum in the third semester, taking full advantage of the new Piano Pedagogy Library and Observation Room that I designed and created. The library contained outdated method books from the music library, but now holds an entirely new collection of methods and scores that I requested as donations from publishers. The result is an impressive source of pedagogical materials which allow students to become knowledgeable of the latest teaching trends.

Since my teaching position requires not only that I serve music majors, but the UTEP community as well, by developing classes that are tailored to the students' needs, I have created a separate section of Piano for Non-Majors. This class has gained in popularity evidenced by an exponential increase during enrollment in the last two years, especially during the summer session which I teach. In these classes I introduce students to music and the piano through reading, playing solo and ensemble music, and the use of technology such as multi-track recording.

Perhaps, my most important project at UTEP has been the undertaking of leadership in the planning, designing, and proposal writing of the new Piano Lab. When I came to UTEP in 2003, the existing piano lab was obsolete; therefore, I decided to design and plan the acquisition of a state-of-the-art piano laboratory for the teaching of Piano Class and Piano Pedagogy. My interest in teaching technology and my commitment to the institution have brought to UTEP a much-needed Digital Keyboard Laboratory (DKL), which is exemplary on both sides of the border. It required a team effort that included colleagues, administrators, architects and audio-visual experts to plan the \$250,000 dollar facility, which I can proudly say, to my knowledge, is unmatched by any other institution in this country. The lab incorporates the latest teaching aid technology such as cameras, a SmartBoard, a Yamaha Disklavier, computers and various software. Teaching in such a complex lab requires knowledge and much creativity. Students are enjoying the fact that I can pair them or group them to work in duos and ensemble playing, and are now much more interested in taking this required class for their degrees. The results can be seen in the students' final projects and the students' teacher evaluation. Each semester I include a "Technology Project" in which students choose a piece from their book, harmonize it and add up to seven parts using improvisation and orchestration skills learned in Piano Class. They must perform and record all the parts using multi-track recording technology. Examples can be heard at: <http://utminers.utep.edu/omacchioni>.

Creative Activities

Due to my dual position as a Piano Pedagogy and Studio Piano professor, my creative activities encompass four areas: 1) solo recitals, 2) collaborative recitals, 3) lecture-recitals and presentations, and 4) scholarly research and publications. Performing has always been an essential part of my career. Preparation for concerts helps me to develop and improve my technique, analytical thinking and my ability to communicate with a live audience, while at the same time, educate the audience. Throughout the years, I have created a niche which distinguishes me from other pianists: an eclectic repertoire that includes standard works from Soler to Prokofiev and continually grows to incorporate new music by composers such as Bolcom, Barber, Ginastera, and Piazzolla. I have received praise from the press in Buenos Aires and El Paso for the uniqueness of my repertoire and the deft, maturity and clarity of my performances.

A university professor should share the art he/she commands with students as well as the academic community; therefore, every year I offer solo and collaborative faculty recitals. At UTEP, I have collaborated with my colleagues and community members in numerous recitals. I have performed with Dr. Jones, Dr. Dousa, Dr. Whalen and Mr. Krouger (two pianos and piano four and eight hands); Prof. Carmen Díaz Walker (soprano), Dr. Wilkinson (sax), Prof. White (percussion ensemble), Dr. Colgin-Abeln (flute), Prof. Siqueiros (guitar), Mrs. Yvonne Marmolejo (mezzo soprano), and trios with Dr. Meyers and Dr. Fountain (violin and cello, respectively). I have also formed the Mesa St Trio with Ms. Lesley Chen (violin) and Dr. Benjamin Vickers (cello), both members of the El Paso Symphony Orchestra.

It is important for every professional to expand his horizons, to take his mastery of an art to other places, and to share that mastery with other cultures. In this regard, I am committed to performing internationally, and have been invited to perform at various venues in the USA, London, Mexico, Serbia, Argentina, Italy and Poland. These performances have brought positive attention to UTEP, most notably, my appearance at the esteemed Myra Hess Concert Series in Chicago in 2005, the invitation to perform at the 2007 Querceto International Piano Festival in Italy, and the invitation by the Iberian and Latin American Music Society of the UK to debut in London at the St Martin-in-the-Fields series in 2010.

I believe every artist has to bring uniqueness to the stage: I have chosen to focus on the tango in art music, a relatively unexplored topic. In this regard, one of my most significant achievements is the publication of my book *The Tango in American Piano Music*, due in June 2009. The book discusses selected tangos by Thomson, Copland, Barber, Jaggard, Biscardi and Bolcom, and is part of a new series, Cultural Expressions in Music, which is being published by the College Music Society, the nation's top source for higher education. My earlier DMA document has become a landmark reference for other scholars currently writing about tango. Also, in the realm of piano pedagogy my article, *Ernest Widmer's Kosmos Lationamericano, A Progressive Piano Method* is pending publication by the American Music Teacher Magazine, a primary source for piano teachers.

Regarding scholarly research, the study of my CD, *American Tangos*, which features the works discussed in my DMA dissertation, is included in the listening requirements of the Erudite Tango course at the National Academy of Tango in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This academy is the only institution that focuses on research and performance of the Argentine Tango. Furthermore, in 2006, I recorded a solo CD, *Mostly Tangos. Piano Music from the Americas* which includes works by Villa-Lobos, Barber, Bolcom, Ponce, Copland, Ginastera, Castro and Piazzolla. This project was funded by the University Research Institute Grant and is pending publication by Centaur Records.

Since I consider research and performance equally important, I have further created unique lecture-recitals combining these two areas and have successfully presented them at various juried national and international conferences such as CMS, SE, ICTM (Brazil) and EPTA (Serbia). My lecture-recital, *Piano Music from the Americas* was selected "the outstanding music presentation, both for its topicality and for its musical excellence," at the Second International Vernacular Conference (2005) in Puebla, Mexico. My pedagogical works have been reviewed in scholarly magazines such as *Piano-La Lettre du Musicien* (France), *Piano Pedagogy Forum* and *Piano Education Page* (US).

Service

Providing service to the institution and the community is important to me. As such, I have been involved in committees and activities of the department, college and the university in general. It is through these “out of classroom” activities that I can comprehend the system to which I belong, by engaging in other cooperative and professional quests. My positive attitude toward leadership, participation, collaboration, as well as team work are evident in the various activities I undertake.

At UTEP, I have procured funds for more than \$250,000 dollars to benefit the Keyboard Area and Music Department. In addition to this amount for the Digital Keyboard Lab, I have organized guest artist concerts with recognized performers such as the George Winston DKL Benefit Concert, which generated more than \$5,800 dollars in ticket and CD sales. Because of El Paso’s geographical location, a 10 hours drive from a major city like Dallas, I have made numerous efforts in bringing national and international guest artists to UTEP and the surroundings areas. I consider it very important for UTEP not only to “reach out” but also to “bring in” and expose our students to recognized artists. In this regard, I was responsible for bringing to UTEP three international artists (Germany, Argentina, and Moldova) and two from the United States. All these artists performed and gave master classes to our students, opening their eyes and ears to new ideas and bringing a more cosmopolitan experience to the borderland. As a Piano Pedagogy professor, I brought recognized pedagogues such as Dr. Martha Hilley from UT Austin, and Dr. Lisa Zdechlik from the University of Arizona, to present workshops for UTEP students, faculty, the local piano teachers and El Paso’s community as well.

Due to my multiple interests and expertise, I have served on the following committees at UTEP: Theory and Composition; the Department Gala, as Stage Manager and Parking Manager; the Voice Search Committee; the State Charitable Campaign; the Student’s Recital Committee; I was elected to represent the College of Liberal Arts at the Graduate Council for 2007-2008; and currently, I am the Chair for the Honors Recital since 2007. I have worked in preparing documents for the SACS accreditation which was posted online for reviewers.

My activities exceed UTEP’s boundaries, consequently, I have been involved with many associations within community. For the El Paso Music Teachers Association (EPMTA), I have provided several free master classes throughout the years, a workshop on Baroque Performance Practices, recitals, and served as a proctor and competition judge. I have also served as a guest speaker and performer for El Paso Pro-Musica, and collaborated with the Mexican Consulate to secure a concert piano for their guest pianist Gustavo Rivero-Weber. Upon invitation by the Chopin International Piano Festival, I worked as a member in the program committee and performed for the inauguration of the 2004 season. Furthermore, in April 2009, I served as an international consultant for the government of Chihuahua, Mexico, which entrusted me and my expertise in selecting two Steinway Concert Grands (D) at the Steinway factory in New York City.

Future activities include a solo recital and master classes for the Tucumán Conservatory in Argentina, in August 2009; master class at the University of Arizona, September 23, 2009; debut in London at the St-Martin-Of-The-Fields in 2010 by invitation of the Iberian and Latin American Music Society of UK; a UTEP faculty recital and the presentation of my book; visits to local schools; hosting clinics at UTEP for local schools; and master classes for the local piano teachers.

Throughout all my national and international activities I have brought much positive attention to UTEP. I believe that my commitment to UTEP and its mission has enabled me to successfully explore and improve all areas of my profession; I can only wonder where this learning experience will take me next. I am always open to new enterprises and challenges, and I will continue to develop my teaching, performing and service.