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Key Ingredients. New equipment puts UTEP Music Lab in the forefront

Oscar E Macchioni, *University of Texas at El Paso*

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New equipment puts UTEP music lab in forefront

When Oscar Macchioni joined the faculty of the University of Texas at El Paso music department, he immediately knew he wanted to change one thing: the outdated musical equipment.

Macchioni estimates the keyboards he had to teach his students were more than 30 years old.

"It was very frustrating. Sometimes the keys wouldn't work on some of the keyboards," Macchioni said. "When I first got here, the lab I encountered was from the '70s. I used to tell the students it was 'vintage.' I'm sure it was great at that time, but with technology changing every three years, it was just old. The equipment was malfunctioning."

Macchioni, an assistant professor of piano and piano pedagogy at UTEP, set out to do what he could. The first thing he did was put together a wish list of state-of-art-equipment and with the help of fellow piano instructor Dena Kay Jones and department chairman Lowell Graham, he drafted a proposal.

That proposal went to the UTEP Development Office which, in turn, secured a \$250,000 grant from the Brown Foundation Inc. of Houston for a new music lab.

Because of the quarter-of-a-million-dollar grant, Macchioni said, the UTEP lab is now considered one of the best music labs in universities around the country.



Adrian Lozano, center, a music student at UTEP, arranged music on a new electronic keyboard during his keyboard class last semester. The new keyboards, which arrived in August, allow students to take basic melodies and arrange them with various instrument sounds available on the computerized keyboards.

The department now has 28 new Roland keyboards and a smart board — the newest answer to a chalk board that uses a giant touch screen. The music lab is also equipped with cameras so Macchioni can teach the students how he works his hands on the keyboard and his

feet on the pedals.

"The students can all see what I'm doing at the same time on the screen," he said.

An architect and audiovisual specialists also were employed to create the new space.

The lab was unveiled during the fall semester, and already

more than 200 students have taken classes in the new setting. The keyboard class is a requirement for all music majors, Macchioni said.

The whole process took more than three years, but Macchioni said it was well worth the wait.



Marilyn Castillo arranges a song as fellow student Juan Lucero watches.



Daniel Natividad, a sophomore music student at UTEP, gets help on a new Roland computerized keyboard from music assistant professor Oscar Macchioni.

"It is really a pleasure to teach now. It's a dream to be in that lab, not only because I like using all of the technology, but because I can get the students engaged," he said.

Macchioni said it might be 30 more years before UTEP can secure a similar grant for another music lab, but he said he would do his part to keep the lab from becoming "vintage" again.

"The idea is to keep it as current as we can through the years," he said, adding that he's already getting comments from his colleagues at other universities.

"They're really envious of what we have here."

— Maribel Villalva

Photos by Rudy Gutierrez / El Paso Times