

Statement of Intent

Dear Graduate Professional Council:

I am writing this letter to express my sincere interest in the travel award offered to graduate students by the Graduate Professional Council. I have been selected as one member of a 5-person graduate student team to present a cultural and music educational exchange to the Conservatorio di Musica in Avellino, Italy during December 2017. This team consists of five students from the Choral Conducting Department.

The purpose of this presentation is two-fold. Firstly, the team has been asked, because of their level of musical and historical expertise, to give a presentation to the Italian music conservatory students and faculty about the musical, historical, and cultural aspects of Black American choral/vocal music. The musical concepts and performance practices of Jazz, Gospel, and Spirituals are a part of our musical heritage here in America. However, this genre is extremely unfamiliar to conductors, choirs, music educators, and singers in many other countries. This genre of music is rising in global significance due to increasing awareness of issues relating to race, gender equality, and fascism. This is because of the close ties Black American music (specifically choral and vocal spiritual) has with the oppressive experience of slavery. Because of this, many international music educators and choral conductors want to program Black American choral music in their schools and universities. However, there is a huge problem with this. The problem is that choral directors in these international institutions often don't know how to effectively program and interpret choral music of the Black American genre.

This is where the team has been asked to help. We will be presenting a clinic and master class about the proper way to interpret, phrase, and perform choral music from the Black American experience. Much of this music is based from an oral tradition and served specific social as well as musical purposes. The goal of the presentation will be to provide the international music educators with the historical framework of this revolutionary music as well as technical skills (proper diction, phrasing, word stress, dialect, etc.) that are essential to effective expression and interpretation. In essence, we have been asked to help international music educators and conductors "fill their toolbox" in regards to this increasingly international genre of choral music.

Secondly, the team has been asked to present our unique perspective of the music of an indigenous Italian madrigal composer, Carlo Gesualdo (1566-1613). This choral composer was known for his turbulent and disturbing music that reflected themes of female hatred, sexism, and masochism. This music is already familiar to the Italian conservatory we have been invited to. We have been asked to present our perspective in light of the other social issues addressed above.

Our campus is no stranger to issues of hatred and racism. It is only through mutual understanding, acceptance, and continued communication that our campus (and society in general) can hope to overcome these obstacles. The opportunity I have to present these topics internationally in connection to choral music is incredibly impactful not only for me as a music education professional but also as an informal international Mizzou ambassador of peace.

Thank you for considering my application for the travel award.

Sincerely,
[Redacted]