



Customer Story

Challenge

- ▶ Help music technology majors get the real-world skills they need to succeed in the industry and achieve their full creative potential.

Solution

- ▶ Implement an industry-standard Avid workflow for music creation and audio production.

Products used

Pro Tools®
Pro Tools|HD
Sibelius®
S5 Fusion
Media Composer®

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—Dr. Henry Panion,
two-time Grammy® Award
winner and Co-Director
of the Music Technology
Program

University of Alabama at Birmingham Music Technology in the Classroom



From the moment you set foot on campus, it’s obvious that there’s something special going on at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The school is clearly dedicated to providing students with the finest resources for learning—from state-of-the-art classrooms, labs, and studios to the acclaimed Alys Robinson Stephens Performing Arts Center. The faculty consists of many distinguished professional artists, and the school maintains student ratios that ensure plenty of personal, hands-on learning time. Such dedication to the arts has yielded great results, with UAB alumni going on to succeed throughout the media industry.

UAB is one of the few public universities in the United States that offers students degreed programs in music technology, and Avid tools are a central part of their audio and video workflow. “The Avid platform is something that students really need to become familiar with if they’re to be successful in their careers and create the highest-quality art,” says Dr. Robert Palazzo, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. “The hands-on experience students get at UAB is invaluable to their experience.”

A Faculty That’s Second to None

The UAB faculty includes distinguished artists like Dr. Henry Panion, two-time Grammy® Award winner and Co-Director of the Music Technology Program. Panion’s professional credits include composing and arranging scores for Stevie Wonder, Chaka Kahn, Aretha Franklin, and many other artists. Panion joined UAB in 1987 and, although he was hired to teach music theory and orchestration, quickly saw the importance of incorporating music technology into the courses as much as possible. Since then, he’s helped grow the music technology department into one of the leading programs in the country. “We’re not out to replace good musicianship with technology,” he explains. “Rather, it serves to enhance the level of the musicians.”



Whether he's teaching in the classroom or working with A-list artists, Panion relies on Sibelius and Pro Tools as his go-to palette for music creation and composition. "These tools enhance my ability to get work done quickly and efficiently, and be assured that it's correct and accurate," he shares.

When Panion receives a request to compose or arrange, it usually needs to be completed on a short timeline, and Avid tools help him meet those challenging requirements. "With Sibelius, I can write an arrangement for Stevie Wonder overnight and perform the next day without a rehearsal—that's how much confidence I have in the quality of the score output," he shares. "The way I incorporate technology into my work has been the key to many opportunities, and I enjoy helping students get started down a similar path."

The seamless integration of Sibelius and Pro Tools has helped Panion succeed on his professional projects. "I can go from composing my scores in Sibelius to creating arrangements and recordings of those scores in Pro Tools without worrying about any issues," Panion says. "It's a wonderful suite of tools that are part of my workflow every day. For example, I was working on a plane making some last minute score changes for Stevie while in flight. By the time we landed I was ready to go. I'm grateful that Avid has produced products that allow me to be flexible and meet the varied requirements of my professional projects."

Dr. Irving notices that the music technology students are a diverse, varied group. "We're starting to see a type of student come through that we never saw before," he shares. "They are wonderful performers and choose music technology because they know it's a tool they'll need when the time comes."

"The music technology students are invariably the most fun to teach," he continues. "Some are rockers, others are classically trained musicians and vocalists. They ask questions in music history class that reveal their level of interest in music."

Geared Up for Success

One of the key benefits that students enjoy is the high level of facilities at their disposal. UAB recently completed a major upgrade to their recording studio, including the installation of an Avid S5 Fusion console, which gives students the processing power to mix full 7.1 surround sound productions for feature films. Working creatively on the System 5 console helps students develop their skills, and achieve a level of comfort that will help them hit the ground running after graduation.

"It's impossible to visit Hollywood and not see one of these consoles being used," relates Panion. "Our facilities give students real-world experiences using the very same tools used in the industry. It's a worthwhile investment for UAB, and we're proud to be one of the only institutions in this region providing students with such a high level of equipment."



The Importance of Teaching Music Technology

For Panion and his colleagues, music technology is a vital part of every student's development. "We've always seen music technology as a way to make musicians better," states Howard Irving, Chair of the music department at UAB. "Every musician needs to understand technology in order to have a successful career."

UAB also offers a computer music ensemble lab, which serves as a musical playground for students—the ultimate garage for musicians who want to create. "It's critical for students to have access to a lab where they can use professional tools whenever they need to," says Dr. Scott Philips, Co-Director of the Music Technology program and Conductor of the Computer Music Ensemble. "Without that access, it would be difficult for them to improve their skills on the tools they'll need in the industry."



Students can utilize the facility 24/7, and although UAB provides everything students need to create, produce, and mix music, many students decide to purchase their own personal copies of Pro Tools. “I’ve seen a high correlation between the students who purchase their own software, and their success after graduation,” states Philips. “The Avid academic pricing program has been a phenomenal success for our students,” adds Panion. “It allows students to own professional tools for an investment they can afford.”

Avid is Key

Dr. Philips’ personal scholarly research involves following the curriculum development of music technology programs at universities around the United States. His book *Beyond Sound: The College and Career Guide to Music Technology* was recently published by Oxford University press, and shows that music technology programs are growing at a rapid pace, with 7-10 new degreed programs added each year.

“It’s clear that students are asking for this type of training—however schools grapple with choosing the right technology,” states Philips. “In my research, I found that many schools spend money on tools that students won’t end up using once they graduate. However the schools who use industry-standard Pro Tools and Media Composer solutions are the programs that produce the most successful students.”

“We regularly hear from students that when they enter the industry—whether it’s a recording studio, ad agency, or live performance scenario—they are using Avid tools,” says Philips. “These skills are really valuable for them.”

A Unique Certification Program

UAB is currently the only institution in Alabama—and the entire southern United States for that matter—that offers

both music technology degrees and Avid certification programs. The school allows students to acquire Avid certifications in Pro Tools, Media Composer, and Sibelius. “The Avid Learning partnership has been a game changer for us,” says Irving. “It’s really a fabulous opportunity. No other school in the state or region can offer these certifications.”

“The Avid Learning partnership has made us a hub for technology training, and continues to attract students to UAB,” adds Panion. “It’s difficult to find professionals with advanced degrees to teach music technology programs at the university level, so this partnership allows us to train college-level teachers. The Avid certifications make students more marketable.”

UAB’s partnership with Avid allows students to acquire the skills they need, plus certifications that industry employers highly value. The certification program also adds another level of motivation for the students. “They have an added interest in learning these tools because they know there is a valuable certification they can receive at the end,” says Philips.

Partnering with Avid—for the Future

The future certainly looks promising for UAB. The school is currently developing a master of music in technology program—one of the first of its kind—to better prepare students for professional and academic careers. And Avid-based technology solutions and certification programs promise to be an integral component of the school’s offerings in the years to come. “Our partnership with Avid is invaluable,” concludes Dean Palazzo. “It helps us understand the practicality of what’s going on in the real world, and how we can align our students and intellectual capital to take advantage and contribute to that.”

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For more information on Avid’s education solutions visit www.avid.com/education

