

# Courtney Blankenship

DIRECTOR OF MUSIC BUSINESS, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR  
Western Illinois University, School of Music

**W**HEN COURTNEY BLANKENSHIP was growing up, Saturday mornings were about all about piano and ballet lessons. And when she was eight, she vividly remembers her father blasting marching music on the radio every morning; he played the trombone and liked to face the day with a lot of “the March King,” John Phillip Sousa! Her mother played the flute and Courtney’s ballet lessons at Alexandra Ballet Company were regularly accompanied by a variety of pianists. She recalls plenty of Chopin, Verdi and Fauré music. She later added cello to her repertoire, playing that instrument from the 4th to 7th grades, but ultimately, she became more focused on piano.

Blankenship was greatly influenced by her piano teacher Carol Tafoya, faculty at the St. Louis Conservatory and Schools for the Arts. Ms. Tafoya was her teacher for 7 years and though she was small in stature, she was a powerful woman. “She scared me but pushed me in ways that have informed my entire life,” says Blankenship. Regular piano recitals were non-negotiable, and Ms. Tafoya could always tell when Courtney had crammed by only practicing the night before. Blankenship gives full credit to Ms. Tafoya for teaching the importance of discipline and it was she who encouraged the young musician to pursue piano performance in college.

While working toward her undergraduate degree at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, Courtney also studied marketing and arts management in addition to piano performance, however, when working on her Master of Arts degree at Indiana University, she focused on arts administration. She loved the coursework, the campus positions she held in museums, the musical arts center and the office of music publicity. It was here that her desire to always be an advocate for music and arts developed and she expanded her horizons learning about tourism, marketing, grant administration and began serving on arts boards.

As a mother of two, Blankenship has thoroughly enjoyed supporting her children’s participation in band programs. She became a “band mom” and served as president of a band boosters program for several years. It was in this capacity that she truly got to see the amazing impact of school music programs.

Today, Blankenship directs the music business program at Western Illinois University’s School of Music. She is a generalist, teaching a variety of classes such as Introduction to Music Business,



**WHAT COURTNEY DOES:** Helps students to be successful in their future careers and life in general.

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Music Publishing as well as more focused courses on music products, career preparation and entrepreneurship. She spends her days preparing for and teaching classes, reading to stay on top of her constantly changing field, corresponding with current and potential students and building partnerships with other organizations and industry leaders. Since 2009, Blankenship has taken over 115 students to the annual NAMM Show in Anaheim, CA and has been heavily involved with NAMM’s Generation Next Program for college students.

“Studying music can lead to so many paths, and some of the most successful entrepreneurs I know are musicians,” Blankenship emphasizes. She advises students to be open to all opportunities, including ones they don’t anticipate – and that music business is a great option if one wants to continue to play their instrument, but are unsure of a specific path – because the options in music business are ever increasing. For example, Blankenship says, “We’re seeing so many opportunities in music licensing, distribution and audio/video streaming production these days because the ways people consume music have changed dramatically over the last 10 years.” **T**