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University of Dayton music education graduates continue teaching careers in international schools amid global pandemic

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Tuesday March 16, 2021

By Sharon Davis Gratto

Despite international travel restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic, two University of Dayton music education graduates have found new international school teaching positions abroad.

Robyn Kammer '12 began teaching elementary music in fall 2020 at her fourth overseas school, the American International School of Riyadh in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Connor McMonagle '15 was hired to begin his first full-time overseas post in 2020 at the Modern English School of Cairo in Egypt. Both began their overseas teaching experiences with internships — Kammer at the American School of Bombay in Mumbai, India, and McMonagle at the International School of Manila in the Philippines.

Family members and friends encouraged McMonagle to explore overseas teaching opportunities because of his love for travel. During his senior year, he attended a weekend international school job fair in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that led to his year-long internship in the Philippines. He enjoyed spending free time in the tropical parts of the islands, where he once went swimming with whale sharks.

After his internship, McMonagle returned to Columbus, Ohio, to teach music to elementary and middle school children at Saint Joseph Montessori School. While there, he led the modernization of the school's music education and performance programs before starting his search for another international teaching opportunity. In February 2020 he attended an employment fair in New York City, where he obtained a position at a school in New Cairo, Egypt, teaching music in grades 1 through 6.

Despite the challenges of COVID, McMonagle relocated to Egypt in August. He traveled with all he was permitted to bring: three guitars, two suitcases and a duffle bag. He purchased additional clothing after he arrived in the country. His cell phone, apartment, internet service and other essentials were taken care of before he arrived. Each morning he takes the school bus for the 20-minute ride to school, where in-person teaching has resumed.

"Even though COVID-19 caused 2020 to occur as a weird year, the Modern English School of Cairo has facilitated its faculty to get in the classroom," McMonagle said. "I am still able to connect with my students in-person to ignite a passion for music and fun."

Kammer wanted to teach music to "foster a love and enjoyment in others." On the recommendation from a faculty mentor, she pursued a teaching internship at the American School of Bombay in Mumbai, India. She taught beginning band and interned in the other music classes for grades 3 through 12. That position led her to explore additional international teaching opportunities.

Kammer's next stop was at the Cayman International School in the Cayman Islands. In Cayman, she met her future husband, Nathan, who was a classroom teacher. The couple remained on the islands for three years before moving to Quito, Ecuador, for positions at the Academia Cotopaxi American International School. They remained in Ecuador for three years before beginning a search for joint positions in another part of the world. In October 2019, they interviewed and were both offered jobs at the American International School of Riyadh in Saudi Arabia.

Making the transition to Saudi Arabia during the global pandemic presented several challenges. Kammer and her husband were required to be in the United States to move through the visa process. At the time, Saudi Arabia's borders were closed. During the fall of their first academic year, they lived with Nathan's parents in Texas and taught classes remotely from midnight to 8 a.m. Texas time.

The school in Riyadh assisted with the visa process and their move was permitted once the borders reopened. Upon arrival at their new home, which had been set up with food and internet service, they were required to remain there in quarantine and teach classes remotely. A phone app served as a monitor to guarantee they would not leave their home. A final negative COVID-19 test ended their quarantine.

Kammer describes her life in Riyadh as similar to being in an American suburban community. The couple has adopted a Golden Retriever and have taken some exciting day trips around the beautiful countryside.

“Teaching at the American School of Bombay definitely opened my eyes to international education because I had no idea that was a possibility,” Kammer said. “I have chosen to stay international because many of the schools value their arts programs, and the connections I have built with colleagues and students are inspiring.”

Teaching internationally has many benefits, including free housing or a housing allowance; health benefits and other standard insurance; small classes and good teaching facilities; roundtrip U.S. travel expenses at the start and conclusion of an assignment; and travel opportunities in each host country.

International schools typically look for faculty with U.S. teacher certification, overseas travel or living experience, and two or three years of full-time stateside teaching. International school internships can provide less-experienced applicants with advantages for seeking permanent positions.

For more information, visit the [UD Department of Music website](#).

Shown above: Robyn Kammer '12, with her husband Nathan in Saudi Arabia. **Below:** images from Kammer and Connor McMonagle highlighting their international teaching experiences.

Sharon Davis Gratto is professor of music and the Graul Endowed Chair in Arts and Languages. She taught music for nine years in Department of Defense and international schools in Germany, Spain and Nigeria.



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