

Application Summary

Competition Details

Competition Title:	2020 Undergraduate Educator Award
Category:	Institutional Awards - CTL
Award Cycle:	2020
Submission Deadline:	03/02/2020 at 11:59 PM

Application Information

Submitted By:	Benjamin Diden
Application ID:	4366
Application Title:	Benjamin J. Diden
Date Submitted:	03/02/2020 at 12:50 PM

Personal Details

Applicant First Name:	Benjamin
Applicant Last Name:	Diden
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Primary School or Department

Music

Primary Appointment Title:	Lecturer in Music
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Application Details

Proposal Title

Benjamin J. Diden

February 28, 2020

Dr. Joyce Weinsheimer
Center for Teaching and Learning

Dear Joyce and members of the selection committee,

On behalf of the School of Music, it is with great enthusiasm and pride that I nominate my colleague, Lecturer and Associate Director of Athletic Bands Benjamin Diden, for the CETL/BP Undergraduate Educator Award. I have worked with Diden for ~6 years as a colleague and collaborator on numerous projects and events, and witnessed first-hand his dedication to the students' education and well-being. I am thrilled that he will be considered for this award and I like to expound upon a few aspects of what makes Diden so worthy of this award.

Benjamin is extremely devoted and passionate about wind ensemble music and sharing it with our students at Georgia Tech. He teaches an average of ~350 students per semesters through the large band program at Georgia Tech, from the marching band to symphonic and concert bands. His care for his students goes beyond the classrooms and football fields and well into their daily lives and well-beings. Diden is one of the most accessible teachers to all music students, whether they are enrolled in his own ensembles. His programs are quite diverse and he does a remarkable job of combining the education of his students with the education of his audiences. Benjamin regularly collaborates with renowned composers, guest artists, and other campus units to introduce new music while shifting the paradigm of what is possible with music in combination with technology. By taking full advantage of the technological advances available at our fingertips at Georgia Tech and using them in a creative way, he has recreated what is possible within this genre of music. In this aspect, Diden continues to create a unique brand for his program at Georgia Tech.

Benjamin also highly values student development and education and aims to provide unique ways to incorporate this within his own teaching. By presenting wind concerto competitions, unique student directorships and his leadership training, these provide a higher level of integration and interaction with students at all levels. Diden not only oversees band officers, but also serves as advisor for the band service groups. Through his mentorship and teaching, students have the opportunity to develop leadership skills and to learn and work as a team and independently. It is not uncommon for the students in his ensembles to serve as leaders in their fields across campus and this combination of technical training and the creativity his ensembles provide is invaluable to the complete Georgia Tech student experience.

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On the academic teaching, Benjamin also took the leadership role in shaping the core curriculum of the newly established Bachelor of Science in Music Technology program. He led the reformation of Fundamentals of Musicianship sequence, created the new course outline and selected new next book together with other colleagues. Diden is extremely dedicated to the mission of Georgia Tech and serves as one of our greatest examples as a teacher and professional. Understanding what the CETL/BP Undergraduate Educator Award stands for, I think you will find no greater example of its worthiness than Benjamin Diden. At every turn, he exemplifies leadership through his teaching, mentorship and service to the profession. Diden is highly deserving of this award and I hope he will receive your most sincere and serious consideration.

Sincerely,



Chaowen Ting
Director of Orchestral Studies
School of Music
Georgia Institute of Technology

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NOMINATION FOR BENJAMIN DIDEN FOR CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING
UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATOR AWARD

MARCH 2, 2020

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Ms. Kathryn Bruss
(Current Graduate Student/Georgia Tech Alumna-2019)

Mr. Brian Mobley
(Georgia Tech Alumnus-2019)

Mr. Adam Gardner
(Current Georgia Tech Student)

Music plays a unique role at Georgia Tech. The approach to teaching music must take on a different path for our students to achieve their best results. This takes two different paths based on the goals of the courses being taught and the students involved in those courses. For me, the approach is somewhat different for students in our ensembles and students in our Bachelor of Science in Music Technology program.

For our ensembles, the vast majority of students participate in these classes as a way to express themselves in a unique way and to escape the rigors of their more traditional course work. It is the goal of these ensembles to present polished and professional performances two times a semester. The approach to these rehearsals and performances is similar to the same types of ensembles at any other major university. The students are provided with unique opportunities to perform the highest quality music for wind bands as well as the interaction with composers and performers of the highest caliber.

Over the last few years, a number of prominent composers have visited rehearsals and concerts in order to interact with the students in a personal way. The students really appreciate this opportunity because it provides an insight to the process the composers take in the creation of their music. They also have been given the chance to be among the first to perform these new works for band. One unique aspect to many of these works is the inclusion of elements of electronics. This is a new aspect to the world of wind band music. The concert and symphonic bands have performed several other pieces featuring electronics over the past few years.

Another important aspect to my approach to programming for the concert bands is the inclusion of music of underrepresented composers during concerts. Over the last few years, the music of persons of color and female composers has been an important feature of the overall programming philosophy. These include pieces such as *Circuits* by Cindy McTee (Symphonic Band-February 2020), *Ash* by Jennifer Jolley (Concert Band-April 2020), *Ondine's Epilogue* by Andy Akiho (Symphonic Band-February 2018), *Islas y Montanas* by Shelley Hanson (Concert Band- February 2019), *Riften Wed* by Julie Giroux (Concert Band-April 2018), *Amen!* by Carlos Simon (Symphonic Band-October 2018), and *Of Our New Day Begun* by Omar Thomas (Symphonic Band-April 2016). Lastly, a number of performances of the GT Symphonic Band have been featured on WABE, the local radio station, along side other prominent local wind bands from around the state of Georgia.

I am also involved in the athletic band program as Associate Director. From a teaching perspective with the marching band, I am involved in drill writing for the band, running sectionals with the woodwinds, and overseeing and facilitating the leadership program for the band. I also have many administrative duties as well, including the supervision of student leaders, instrument inventory, and assistance with many aspects of band travel, including meal planning and activities.

My main interaction with the BSMT majors is through the Fundamentals of Musicianship sequence, which takes place during the first two years of study. Along with the other instructors in the sequence, I have been able to help guide the students in their study of music theory, music history, and the introduction to music technology. The instructors are constantly adjusting their approach to these courses in order to provide the best experience for our students. I have taken the lead in a

February 25, 2020

Dear Dr. Weinsheimer and the CTL nomination committee:

I am delighted to nominate my colleague, Dr. Mary Hudachek-Buswell, Lecturer for the College of Computing's Division of Computer Instruction, for the CTL Undergraduate Educator Award. Mary is an ideal candidate to receive this award, which recognizes teaching excellence and dedication to student learning.

I previously co-taught two courses with Mary, and was able to see first-hand her organizational skills and strong character. When we were both teaching CS1315, Introduction to Computing with Media Computation, a few years ago, I observed all of her lectures and never saw her give anything less than 100% to her students. When she and I both taught CS1301, I saw how diligent she was about making sure the course was up-to-date and that we were teaching topics that would be valuable to our students in their future courses and in the workplace. Since Spring 2017, she is single-handedly responsible for teaching all sections of CS1332, Data Structures and Algorithms. This course has a typical enrollment of anywhere from 600 to 750 students a semester. Mary deals with these large numbers of students with patience and wisdom. She makes each student feel that they are valued as a student and as a person with unique hopes and dreams.

Mary is very diverse in her teaching skills. She has taught courses that are required for all CS majors, CS1301, CS1331, CS1332 that are taught in Python and Java programming languages. She has also taught courses that are required for engineering majors such as CS2316 and CS1371 that are taught in SQL and Matlab programming languages. Mary also teaches the Junior Design/Implementation course sequence, CS3311/CS3312. From 2017 to present, Mary has helped transform the course from a single semester course into a two semester sequence. The sequence of courses culminates in an expo that Mary helped design and setup in 2018. The expo continues to grow each year. Additionally, there have been many semesters when no one was available to cover a section of a course. Mary has volunteered to teach the extra sections to help the department and, of course, to help the students who need that course.

She is also diverse in the many ways that she structures her course materials to fit each set of students that take her courses. She works individually with students who have special accommodations, going so far as to prepare completely new assessments when necessary, in order to help them succeed. She has attended many training sessions taught by the Center for Teaching and Learning and applied these new ideas to her classes. Two years ago she and I redesigned the Introduction to Computing class to include data science techniques so that it would be more relevant to our students. Last year, working alone, Mary

developed an online version of the CS1332 Data Structures and Algorithms completely from scratch, including all videos, visualization tool, slides, exercises, homework, and online examination format. That course is now an option for Georgia Tech students who have trouble attending in-person lectures.

Mary's impact on students' lives is multifold. She works with dozens of undergraduate teaching assistants each semester, serving as a mentor and role model for them so that each wants to emulate her and be the best teacher they can be. She has taken a groups of them with her to an elementary school so they would learn what service means. Because of them time she spends working with these young people, being hired as an TA for Mary's course is a much sought-after opportunity among our undergraduates because they all want to be the best they can be. Three of her undergraduate TAs were nominated for the Undergraduate Teaching Assistant (UTA) award, and two of them won. Because Mary treats everyone as a unique and special individual, Mary's current group of TAs is fifty percent female and includes many different nationalities and races.

Mary is also a prominent member of the Georgia Tech community in the College of Computing and campus-wide. She has served HackGT as a judge many times. Last year she also served as a mentor to an Idea to Prototype (I2P) team that was a finalist for the Inventure Prize competition. She has served on the Director search committee, and currently serves on two committees, one for the college and one for the institute.

Mary is an advocate for computer science in the wider community too. For the past several years she has been teaching a lego robotics unit at a rural elementary school-- a task including purchasing robotics equipment, taking groups of Georgia Tech students in vans from campus to supervise and inspire the students, and designing engaging curriculum for the program. She organizes GT CS students to travel down to the elementary school, and work with these K-5 children. Last year, Mary held a robotics competition for the elementary students on Georgia Tech's campus. This program has proved to be extremely successful and popular with the elementary school students and also with their teachers. Mary is a representative of the computer science discipline beyond Georgia Tech. She has attended multiple Society of Women Engineer events in Washington D.C. where she lobbied congressional representatives for funding of computer science programs and under-representated groups within computer science. Mary has participated in the Grace Hopper Celebration Conference for many years in both leadership, presenter and participant roles.

Many of Mary's students have shown their own appreciation for Mary by writing her "Thank a Teacher" letters, of which she has received many over her years here at Tech. These letters share a common theme - her ceaseless willingness to give of her time to help her students succeed. The comments she receives on her CIOS evaluations mirror what is stated in her "Thank a Teacher" letters, as well as, what is written in the support letters found in this packet.

Mary has been recognized in by the College of Computing for her superb work in the undergraduate classroom with the “Bill Leahy Outstanding Instructor” award, which she received in 2019. This award recognizes instructors who have uniqueness and enthusiasm in teaching and who are responsive, available and accessible to students. Mary and the elementary teachers who partnered with her in the robotics program, were awarded the Education Partnership Award last year. This was a first for anyone from the College of Computing. Mary has also been recognized by the ACM's special interest group for computer science education (SIGCSE), which has invited her to present a special session at this year's conference in Portland, Oregon to discuss the work she has done teaching robotics, computer science and engineering to elementary school students.

Because of her dedication to teaching and learning, and her focus on student achievement, I am proud to nominate Dr. Mary Hudachek-Buswell for the Undergraduate Educator Award. She is a great role model for me and for many others at Georgia Tech who value excellence in teaching.

Sincerely,

Melinda McDaniel

Melinda McDaniel, PhD
Lecturer
Division of Computing Instruction
Georgia Institute of Technology

complete reorganization of the Fundamentals sequence in order to better serve the goals of the program and our students. This is evident in a number of ways. After the review of a number of resources, we have adopted a new music theory and aural skills textbook for the sequence in order to improve upon concerns of our students and faculty. Another important change has been the approach to music technology throughout the sequence. I am the supervisor of the new teaching assistant for Fundamentals and with her help we have been able to introduce more technology throughout the four semesters. Because of these changes, the students create a number of projects and artifacts that prepare them for their project studio and capstone courses. Lastly, I have organized a number of written resources from articles and textbooks to supplement the sequence, especially in regards to the development of musical instruments throughout history. This is a way to connect the music technology of today to that of the past.

I am currently in the process of developing a new contemporary music ensemble during Spring 2020. This ensemble presents contemporary music performances featuring technology and includes undergraduate and graduate music technology majors, as well as non-music majors. This is an excellent opportunity for the School of Music to enhance our goal of creating more opportunities for our BSMT, MSMT, and PhD students to interact and perform together.

As stated above, one of my strengths is the approach to programming for each concert ensemble. Choosing appropriate music is vital to creating strong performances and the achievement of our objectives in the classroom. It is also important to choose music by composers that more accurately reflect the world at large, so the inclusion of underrepresented composers is critical. Areas for growth include providing more opportunities for off campus performances, including music conferences and potential recruitment tours as well as the continued development of the concert bands in regards to quality and recruitment.

My approach to the BSMT courses is to provide the students an understanding of the fundamentals of music theory and music history, along with a love and appreciation for the foundations of music itself. The goal is to allow the students to listen to or look at any music and to be able to discuss it in an intelligent way. No matter their goal in life, this appreciation of music will allow them to achieve great things in the future. Areas for growth in the BSMT courses include the continued development of resources for increased student success and more opportunities for interaction between the graduate and undergraduate population. The new contemporary music ensemble for spring 2020 will be the beginning of this process.

It is my goal in each classroom to create a space where students feel comfortable to express themselves and their musicianship. I do my best to learn the name of every student and interact with them as much as possible. I also want them to learn to make musical decisions on a daily basis, whether during performance or through critical thinking on their assignments.

Georgia Tech is a special place and provides its students with unique experiences everyday. In the School of Music, our goal is to continue these experiences through performance and education in our BSMT courses and our ensembles.

Illustrations of Excellence in Teaching:

Innovations/Curricular Developments

New Music Ensemble-Spring 2020-Undergraduate and Graduate ensemble performance class which combines traditional and music technology elements in performance

Restructure of Fundamentals of Musicianship Course Sequence (4 courses for 1st and 2nd year BSMT majors), including the adoption of new textbooks and the development of a set of articles and texts to serve as a resources for the sequence

Restructure of the Music Minor application process and the curricular sequence of the minor program

Guest Composer Feedback from a recent performance

“Just wanted to say thank you for a great performance of *Echo Chambers* with your group. The whole concert program was really excellent, and it was a real treat to get to visit your students in both the tech class and have the opportunity to give some feedback during rehearsal.

“Please do send my compliments and gratitude on to your students! I hope they gained something from the piece. One of the students said after the performance ‘I really loved the piece. . . wasn’t sure about it at first, but it really grew on me!’ . . . I’ve been getting this kind of feedback that a student needs to take a bit of time to click with the piece which I find very encouraging, because it means that there’s something in the piece aesthetically or technically that’s new and unfamiliar to them. It was also exciting to hear a few of them talk about playing *Hivemind* a few years ago! In any case, I was very happy with the result, and deeply appreciate your diving into the piece and bringing so much energy to it. Bravo!”

“Very much looking forward to the next time I get to visit your ensemble! Congrats again to you and your students.

Best,

Peter Van Zandt Lane”

-Composer-Symphonic Band presented the Southeastern Premiere of his work for band

Collection of Student Feedback from recent semesters:

Comments from CIOS:

“It has been an absolute pleasure being involved in symphonic band these past five years. Not only have I learned a lot, but have really grown in my love for musicianship. Thank you for dedicating so much of your time and energy every day to make the band better and better. Thanks for again for all you’ve done.”

“Wants all of his students to succeed, and he has been a great mentor during my time at Tech. He has taught me a lot about music and performing in large ensembles, and he is a great conductor.”

“The music professors know their subject matter extremely well. On top of that, Professor Diden often would lead us into discussions about theory rather than just giving answers, which made us learn the material better.”

“Musicality and concern for students. He learns all our names and makes personal connections with everyone. He also is incredibly organized in his approach to teaching. He sets the bar high and holds us to it! I love how he plans every rehearsal out. He clearly cares about us and the music!”

“I really enjoyed getting to meet some of the composers of pieces we played. I think it is exciting and challenging for us to play new music.”

“Diden is really knowledgeable and passionate about music. He cares about his students and really tries to pick challenging and enjoyable pieces of music to play.”

“His passion for the music we play, and his commitment to making sure we are all accountable for our parts. He highlights what is most important and what we need to improve both for in class and our own practice time.”

“Diden’s passion for music and regard for his students makes him a joy to be around. One of the best teachers at Tech, hands-down.”

CIOS results from recent semesters with focus on Teacher Effectiveness

TERM	YEAR	COURSE		CLASS SIZE	INTER-POLATED MEDIAN
Spring	2019	MUSI	2013	16	4.30
		MUSI	3019	127	5.00
		MUSI	3121	63	5.00
		MUSI	3131	51	5.00
Fall	2018	MUSI	2012	20	4.50
		MUSI	3018	322	5.00
		MUSI	3121	60	4.90
		MUSI	3131	48	5.00
		MUSI	3740	1	5.00
Summer	2018	MUSI	2010	24	4.80
Spring	2018	MUSI	2013	10	5.00
		MUSI	3019	135	5.00
		MUSI	3121	60	4.90
		MUSI	3131	49	5.00
Fall	2017	MUSI	3018	320	5.00
		MUSI	3131	49	5.00
Summer	2017	MUSI	2010	23	4.90
Spring	2017	MUSI	2011	33	4.60
		MUSI	3019	94	5.00
		MUSI	3131	57	5.00
Fall	2016	MUSI	2010	30	4.80
		MUSI	3018	344	5.00
		MUSI	3131	53	5.00

March 1, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in strong support of Benjamin Diden's nomination for a 2020 CTL teaching award for an undergraduate educator.

Mr. Diden is a lecturer in the School of Music; he joined our faculty in 2008. His teaching, which is entirely at the undergraduate level, serves two distinct undergraduate student populations: the music technology majors and music minors who take the core Fundamentals of Musicianship sequence; and the students from every major on campus who participate in the marching, pep, concert, and symphonic bands which he leads. (Several of these courses also fulfill a humanities gened requirement.) Across all of these teaching activities, Mr. Diden engages over 500 students each academic year.

The quality of Mr. Diden's teaching is exceptional. Students consistently comment on his class organization as well as his "passion for music" and his "concern for students" in that he has a "commitment to making sure we are all accountable for our parts" and that he "wants all of his students to succeed." Students also note that he routinely encourages them to try difficult repertoire that may be "a little outside their comfort zone."

Mr. Diden's efforts to expose students to contemporary music and living composers is laudable. He has actively commissioned new works for the bands and engaged composers in working directly with his students through in-person and video-based coaching sessions. These activities have given students essential experiences with challenging new music and with the creators of that music, and they have also helped establish the GT band program as a national leader in new wind ensemble repertoire. Most impressive is the musical quality of the ensembles which Mr. Diden directs: they usually sound better than comparable groups at peer institutions, even when Mr. Diden's courses are comprised entirely of non-music majors and the peer groups are comprised entirely of music majors. This commitment to and cultivation of musical growth and excellence is astounding.

Mr. Diden's pedagogical leadership in our Fundamentals of Musicianship sequence has been essential to the success of our new BS degree in music technology. Mr. Diden is the only member of our faculty who has taught all four courses in the sequence. Last year, he took on a new leadership role: closely coordinating the approaches of all faculty instructors for these courses in terms of course materials, synchronization, and assessment. There has been a noticeable improvement in student satisfaction with the courses and with student learning outcomes as a direct result of his leadership.

Mr. Diden is committed to the success and well-being of his students both within and beyond the classroom. As the director of our concert and symphonic bands and the assistant director of our athletic bands, Mr. Diden regularly sees students outside of a

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typical classroom lecture context (e.g. at athletic games and concert performances). He also advises one of the SGA music service clubs, mentors student leaders in our band program, and provides academic advising to our music minors. In these contexts, Mr. Diden is particularly attuned to issues of inclusivity and well-being. He envisions music as a refuge for many of his students: a place with rigorous standards and expectations that are situated within an expressive, creative medium and a nurturing community focused on shared interest. Often, Mr. Diden seems to be the first person to notice a growing issue with a student, whether it be an obvious crisis, a pattern of challenges with class attendance and assignments, or more subtle signs of distress. When he notices such issues, he works diligently to reach out to students and figure out the best way to help them. His commitment to creating a supportive, inclusive learning environment plays out in the actions he takes as an educator and mentor every day.

In summary, Mr. Diden makes exception contributions to undergraduate teaching at Georgia Tech. He reaches a large population of students, both from music technology programs and from all over campus, through a combination of lecture and performance-focused coursework. He has led efforts in our School to improve the quality of lower-division core courses, with demonstrable results. He has cultivated musical growth amongst students that has led to impressive and innovative musicianship, representing Georgia Tech as a national leader through performances in concert and at athletic events. And he has created an inclusive and supportive learning environment for students, encouraging their creative mindset and proactively assisting them in times of need.

If there is any further information I can provide in support of Mr. Diden's nomination, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,



Jason Freeman
Professor & Chair
jason.freeman@gatech.edu
404-385-7257



College of Design
School of Music

February 27, 2020

Dr. Joyce Weinsheimer

Center for Teaching and Learning

Dear Joyce and members of the selection committee,

On behalf of the School of Music, it is with great enthusiasm and pride that I write this letter on behalf of my colleague, Professor Benjamin Diden, for the CETL/BP Undergraduate Teaching Award. I have worked with Prof. Diden for almost 10 years as a colleague and collaborator on numerous projects and events. Since arriving at Georgia Tech in 2008, he has worked tirelessly to reinvigorate the Concert Bands Program that now boasts nearly 250 Georgia Tech students per year in his ensembles. I am thrilled that he is being considered for this award and would like to expound upon a few aspects of what makes him so worthy of this award.

Benjamin (BJ) is extremely dedicated and passionate about wind ensemble literature and sharing it with our students at Georgia Tech. He is a true pedagogue of the art form and lives and breathes the music, whether it's conducting or student education of the craft. If you attend any concert put on by Prof. Diden, his passion and love for music and our students is quite evident by watching him on stage during concerts. The programs his ensembles deliver are quite diverse and in turn, BJ does a marvelous job of marrying student education with the education of his audiences. Diden is a champion of new music and collaborates yearly in joint commissions with other institutions of higher learning. In light of this, Georgia Tech has premiered a number of new works in recent years, thanks in no small part to the efforts of Prof. Diden.

BJ also highly values student education and their experience, aiming to constantly provide unique ways to incorporate this within his teaching. His accessibility to students is extremely high, often serving as a faculty advisor for multiple organizations throughout each year. Having had the opportunity to observe his classes on numerous occasions over the years, I have found his rapport and ability to motivate students quite remarkable. Due to this, it is not uncommon for the students in his ensembles to serve as leaders in their fields across campus and this combination of technical training and the creativity his ensembles provide is invaluable to the complete Georgia Tech student experience.

Benjamin Diden is extremely dedicated to the mission of Georgia Tech and serves as one of its greatest liasons as a teacher and professional. Understanding what the CETL/BP Undergraduate Faculty Teaching Award stands for, I think you will find no greater champion of undergraduate students at the Institute than Prof. Diden. His leadership of the largest student groups on campus has helped shape and mold over 10,000 students during his 12 years at GT! At every turn, he exemplifies leadership through his teaching, mentorship and service to the profession.



College of Design
School of Music

Professor Benjamin Diden is extremely deserving of this award I hope he will receive your most sincere and serious consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chip Crotts".

Dr. Cameron "Chip" Crotts
Professor of the Practice
Director of Jazz Studies
School of Music
Georgia Institute of Technology
840 McMillan St.
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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing on behalf of Professor Benjamin Diden. I have been one of his students for the entirety of my undergraduate and graduate career at Georgia Tech. I have performed in several of the ensembles he works with, including Pep Band, Symphonic Band, and Marching Band. He is also the faculty advisor for Tau Beta Sigma, an honorary band service organization I was a member of during undergrad. Over the past 5 years of college, I have enjoyed having Professor Diden to guide my development as a musician and a student.

Professor Diden is an excellent example of a teacher that has a large impact across student populations. As an Assistant Director of Bands, he reaches students of all majors and levels of education. As a professor, he helps these students succeed by giving a creative outlet through his ensembles. He does an excellent job of ensuring that we perform well while still enjoying our ensemble experience. This positive treatment of students applies to all of the ensembles he teaches at every level, whether a student is an experienced musician or just started learning their instrument. He is always ready to answer any questions a student may have concerning his ensembles, and is willing to work with students to ensure that they can participate to their fullest ability.

Another thing about Professor Diden that stands out to me is how much he cares for his students. During finals each semester, he likes to bake cookies to distribute to students who are studying around campus. This helps keep students positive and motivated, even when other classes become stressful. He also values the opinions of his students. At the start of each season of Marching Band, he and the other directors meet with band leadership to look at changes that can be made to Marching Band operation to make it a better experience for all students. Instead of just listening to what students have to say, he helps us to make changes and improve the groups we participate in. This attitude encourages students to become better leaders in band, academics, and professional life.

Outside of the musical ensembles he directs, Professor Diden is a faculty advisor for Tau Beta Sigma. He helps sisters by providing ideas for service projects that the sisters can perform. He has also directed high school level honor bands across the southeast, including the SC Region 2 Honor Band.

In conclusion, Professor Diden is an excellent educator who works hard to ensure students can succeed both musically and professionally. He is passionate about what he does, and he encourages students in all of his ensembles to improve themselves. Overall, he is an excellent candidate for this teaching award.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kathryn Bruss', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kathryn Bruss
Georgia Institute of Technology
M.S. Mechanical Engineering 2020

February 29, 2020

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

I am beyond excited to recommend BJ Diden for the 2020 Undergraduate Educator Award. BJ was absolutely integral to my development as a student and as a leader during my time at Georgia Tech. I can personally speak to his dedication to his students as both a music educator and as a mentor to the student leaders of the Georgia Tech band program.

Although I performed with the Georgia Tech Marching Band during all five of my fall semesters at Tech, I didn't join BJ's symphonic band class until my sophomore spring. My first three semesters at Georgia Tech had not gone well academically, and I was in the midst of changing my major. During one of the most stressful periods of my life, BJ encouraged me to return to playing french horn and to audition for symphonic band. The three hours spent rehearsing in symphonic band class each week quickly became the best three hours of my week. BJ understands that most of his students aren't looking to make music their career. He strikes the perfect balance between fostering musical excellence, and creating a fun, stress-free environment. BJ is constantly searching for ways to help his students better engage with the pieces they're performing. Nearly every semester, he'll have the band participate in the premiere of a brand new work, organize a Skype Q&A session with one of the composers we're playing, or even invite an up-and-coming composer to rehearse a piece with the band. Especially considering the fact that very nearly 100% of his students are taking symphonic or concert band as an elective course, you will be hard-pressed to find a more engaged classroom anywhere else on Georgia Tech's campus.

BJ also serves as associate director of athletic bands, which means instructing the 350-400 member Georgia Tech Marching Band. Perhaps the most astonishing thing I've come to learn about BJ, is that after just 4 days of a pre-semester camp, he's memorized every single member's name, and knows enough about them to ask how their physics final went, or how they enjoyed their summer break trip to Peru. These may seem like simple gestures, but each summer, without fail, nearly every member comes back for another season - not because they need the course credit, but because they share BJ's intense passion for music and a mutual respect that takes years to cultivate.

As Associate Director of Bands, BJ also plays a key role in mentoring the student leadership of the Kappa Kappa Psi and Tau Beta Sigma national honorary music fraternity and sorority. He takes this role very seriously, always standing up for the band's student leaders. I served as President of Kappa Kappa Psi during my final year at Tech, and BJ made himself constantly available whenever I was in need of advice - both for the fraternity and for my professional development.

To conclude, BJ Diden is the most impassioned music educator I have ever encountered and Georgia Tech's STEM-driven campus is far better for his presence. It is my pleasure to give him my highest recommendation for the 2020 Undergraduate Educator Award.

Yours in White & Gold,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Mobley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brian" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Mobley".

Brian Mobley
B.S. Business Administration
Georgia Institute of Technology '19

To whom it may concern:

Over the course of my four years at Tech I've had the pleasure of taking eleven classes with Benjamin Diden at the helm. And I can confidently say that there are very few teachers in my career that have had as positive of an effect on my life as Mr. Diden, who is a constant source of positivity and motivator for growth. And it's the intersection of my twofold praise for Mr. Diden that shows why he is such an excellent teacher. He pushes his students with harder music, but it's tempered with understanding and motivation. It's not a gauntlet to get through and tear you down; it's founded in the belief that his students are great, and he'll do anything to help us be great. He teaches an ensemble of engineers and scientists but performs concerts better than most music schools. More than that, he tricks these people into caring about Charles Ives and Percy Grainger by slipping facts about their lives into rehearsal to place the music in a broader context. In both his ensemble and music history classes, his infectious love of music makes class more engaging and exciting to attend. And all of this is heightened by his genuine care for his students. He's the first to ask me how I'm doing, to crack jokes during rehearsal, and to bring cookies during finals week to pep up his students. To put it plainly, classes are fun. He provides a pleasant and necessary break from the monotony of the rest of Tech, filling peoples' lives with music. I think Benjamin Diden is one of the best professors at Georgia Tech, and deserves every form of recognition possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Gardner', written in a cursive style.

Adam Gardner