

# Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's school of music nationally recognized

BY ASHLEY ALLEN

*The School of Church Music and Worship (SCMW) at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS) in Fort Worth, Texas, recently received affirmation and commendation from the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM).*

"We congratulate Professor Ben Caston and Dean Joe Crider on this good report and commendation from the National Association of Schools of Music," said SWBTS President David S. Dockery. "The commitment to Christ-centered excellence that is evident among the faculty, staff, and students of the School of Church Music and Worship serves as a great blessing for the entire Southwestern community."

The SCMW offers degree programs at the certificate, undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels. A wide range of choirs, ensembles, and bands allow students to implement classroom instruction in real-time ministry as they serve the seminary campus and the larger Fort Worth community.

NASM provides national standards for undergraduate and graduate degrees for its 628 accredited institutional members, including schools, conservatories, colleges, and universities. The organization was founded in 1924 and Southwestern Seminary has been an accredited member since 1964 "when Dean James McKinney petitioned the



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association to create a category for the SBC seminaries," explained Caston, professor of voice in the SCMW and faculty liaison between the SCMW and NASM. McKinney is the long-time, late dean of the SCMW.

Southwestern Seminary was the first school of any denomination admitted to NASM.

In her congratulatory letter to Southwestern Seminary, NASM Executive Director Karen P. Moynahan noted the organization's Commission on Accreditation and how the Association "appreciates the institution's efforts with regard to its application, and its careful consideration of and attention to NASM accreditation standards and guidelines." She added that both the "Commission and Association appreciate the work accomplished by the institution on behalf of music and higher education."

The action of the Commission on Accreditation "commends the institution for its complete and thorough applications for Final Approval for listing."



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"The commendation is important to our SCMW because it affirms that we are delivering an education that is not simply conceptual on paper or in a catalog, but that our training programs are actually realized for our students through rigorous courses of study, performance ensembles, and direct application for their future ministries—for all our students in both the worship degrees and performance degrees," said Joseph R. Crider, dean of the SCMW.

Caston said institutions must submit plan approval documents to NASM before enrolling students in new degree programs. In November 2019, the SCMW submitted the paperwork for the Master of Music in Worship Leadership curriculum. A year later, the documents for the revised Master of Music in Church Music with concentrations in performance and pedagogy, including guitar, piano, and voice, were submitted.

Caston added that when the SCMW had "two graduate transcripts from each degree, we submitted a final approval for listing application with the NASM Commission on Accreditation." He said both degrees were granted final approval for listing in December 2023.

"The Commission on Accreditation recognized our diligence in accreditation matters that demonstrate the effectiveness of our degree programs that prepare men and women for service in our constituent churches and institutions of higher learning," Caston observed.

Noting that the NASM is the "most respected and most sought-after accrediting agency for institutions with music degrees," Crider said it is "important for students to know that their programs of study have been scrutinized by an accreditation agency beyond the SCMW."

"Students can have confidence coming to TBC or Southwestern knowing we've been approved and commended by such a prestigious accreditation agency like NASM," Crider added.



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Before beginning his service at Southwestern in 2015, Caston had been involved "in the work of accreditation" since 2010. His experience included plan approval documents, two self-study documents at two different institutions, and serving as a visiting evaluator for NASM.

"The peer review aspect of accreditation is an invaluable part of higher education that helps us continue to review, evaluate, and rethink education in an ever-changing world," Caston concluded. "It all points back to the student and how to teach and train them effectively."

Established as a department in 1915 and elevated to a school in 1921, the SCMW is the last free-standing music school for any Southern Baptist seminary. [Learn more](#) about the degree programs it offers.



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