

Dr. Terry Beckler

NSU School of Fine Arts

U.S. Army

The percussive sounds coming from a military group based in Mitchell, S.D., have less to do with ordnance and more to do with music led by percussion specialist and Northern State University faculty member Terry Beckler.

Beckler, 46, is commander of the South Dakota Army/National Guard 147th U.S. Army Band. Beckler also is associate professor of music (percussion) and assistant director of bands at Northern State University in Aberdeen. Several NSU faculty members are veterans, but Beckler is likely the only one who remains an active member of the military.

This December, Beckler will have been in the Army for 27 years. He enlisted in 1986 as a percussionist in the Army Band and has achieved the rank of Chief Warrant Officer 4.

At NSU, Beckler teaches percussion methods, lessons, ensembles, drum line, and all second ensembles: concert band, second and third jazz band. He also teaches music appreciation and some of the master's in music education courses.

Beckler said the 43-member military band performs as a concert band or marching band for many military events, balls and funerals. The band presents civilian community relations performances and other performances supporting recruiting efforts in South Dakota and the adjutant general. The band has played at Mount Rushmore and at the dedications of memorials in Pierre, including the Korean War memorial, Beckler said.



He said the band splits into smaller ensembles, including a rock band, country band, brass group, woodwind group and jazz/popular music group. Some of the band's 43 members regularly drive from Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and Nebraska for "drill," Beckler said.

Beckler said the band constantly travels around South Dakota and the U.S. He's especially enjoyed three trips to perform in Central America.

In 2006, the band earned the Howard Citation from the John Philip Sousa Foundation – an international award for military concert bands. Judges represented all the top musical groups in the U.S. military, and entrants represented military bands from around the world, Beckler said.

Beckler was a military student while in college, having joined as a sophomore. He earned his undergraduate degree from South Dakota State University; master's degree from the University of Northern Colorado; and doctorate from the University of Minnesota.

He remains in contact with military students at NSU with student veterans and active military members in his music appreciation class and marching band.

Beckler finds most military students handle school responsibilities well.

"The person who's been through that training is almost like a nontraditional student in the sense that they've had a little life experience," Beckler said. "They're more dependable. They know it's important to show up, to be on time and to finish your work."

"A lot of freshmen are still trying to find their way and figure out what they're supposed to be doing. I don't have that problem with students in the military."

Military students also can bring to campus challenges in the form of ingrained habits and expectations, he added. "They want to have things clearly defined. They want to understand all the parameters."

Also daunting for military students is fulfilling military obligations while maintaining a school schedule, a juggling act Beckler knows well.

"Scheduling was more of an issue for me when I was working on my master's degree and had to get all of my annual training done," said Beckler. "Luckily, my commander was flexible."

Beckler said his soldiers will face scheduling conflicts during an upcoming annual training, during which all the band's small groups will perform throughout the state. Classes won't stop for their travels.

"That's a week of classes the students are going to miss. By federal law, they must be released from school, but not all professors understand that," he said. Military students in similar situations should ensure professors are informed well in advance and that work is made up, he said.

Balancing military and school life may be easier at NSU, where, Beckler said, students will find it easy to approach professors in an informal manner, one-on-one. He encourages all military students and veteran students to keep communication lines open.

“The big thing is, don’t be afraid to ask questions when you get stuck in a problem. All you have to do is ask to find how to resolve an issue.”



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