

The Big Idea



How can band students sharpen their marching formations outside of practice?

There's an app for that.

BY SUSAN GROSSMAN

Like most polished professionals, they make it look easy.

But it is only after many hours of practice and repetition that the 285 members of the Pride of Oklahoma Marching Band step onto Owen Field to create the moving formations Sooners fans enjoy. While those carefully choreographed designs are no less formidable each football season, the time it takes to learn them has been drastically reduced thanks to the One University Digital Initiative.

Each band member is now equipped with an iPad that holds animated drill charts, mp3 recordings of musical parts, a calendar of football season events, a roster of the Pride, and many other applications to assist them in performing at their best. The iPads are provided at no charge to band students. Pride alum Kristopher Davis and David Goodspeed – vice president and director of One University Digital Initiative, respectively – were instrumental in the iPad rollout.

Hugh Scott



With new iPads and an app designed specifically for marching bands, members of the Pride can practice their routines anywhere at any time. Set to the band's music, the app shows individual musicians their position on the field for each specific beat.

"The iPad initiative has really upped the learning curve for our students," says Brian Britt, director of the Pride of Oklahoma. "We are able to make the limited amount of time we have together meaningful and productive."

The Pride stages six new halftime shows every fall. Perfecting each marching drill is perhaps the single most time-consuming aspect of game-day preparation. Because the iPad allows for drill charts to be animated, members can zoom in on their spot on the field, see where they are in the formation and watch exactly how to move into position.

"I was really excited when I first heard about using iPads," says Lauren Chapin, a junior elementary education major from Flower Mound, Texas, who learned about the iPad initiative last spring. As the flute section leader,

Chapin says the elimination of paper has been great and listening to her halftime music is extremely beneficial.

"As soon as we saw the apps and how we could search for ourselves to find our spots on the field, we knew it was going to be better. The iPad shows you exactly where to go. You just hit 'play' and it zooms in so you can watch your moves to see where you are going. It is so much easier than using paper drill charts."



The Pride was pitch perfect and razor sharp during its halftime performance featuring the music of Bruno Mars for Sooner football's 2015 opener against the University of Akron at Owen Field. Not only did the marching band look and sound great, the Sooners beat the Zips 41-3.

Previously, reams of paper with a static formation of the drills outlined page by page were required for each member. With 285 students requiring 25 pages of drill instruction for every halftime show and another 45 pages each for pregame, Britt estimates that OU will save nearly 65,000 pieces of paper annually.

The iPad helps directors as well. The former paper drill charts were composed of dots and coordinates, and students were known by numbers and letters. Now students and their names are associated with their spots on the field.

"We no longer have to say, 'T1! Who is T1?'" as we learn drill," Britt says. "As directors we can quickly identify our students without having to refer to them as numbers."

By making drill learning easier, the band can focus more time on how it sounds and memorizing new music – which, in turn, translates into confidence and a better halftime show.

"A confident band sounds better and a band that sounds better looks better," Britt says. "I am really pleased with the work that our students have done to learn how to implement this technology."

Pride leadership got the iPad initiative rolling as soon as school was out last spring, says Graham Delafield, a senior biochemistry major from Oklahoma City and mellophone section leader.

"Mr. Britt and Associate Director Dr. Brian Wolfe took time last summer, held classes and trained section leaders first," Delafield says. "They kept in touch with us regarding what apps we might need, what to use them for and let us see how those apps might work. When it came time for auditions we had the iPads out and incorporated them into that process. Our directors really helped us introduce this initiative to the full band."

It has been an ongoing learning curve as the Pride adapts to technology. Soon it became apparent that it would be difficult to carry an instrument and the iPad at the same time. Handles

and straps quickly became part of the hardware. Students and staff also were tuned in to the changing seasons with temperatures falling, addressing the effect of cold on the iPads.

"There is a threshold with technology," Delafield says. "In concept it is great, but as early adopters there are things we have to iron out. Overall, the iPads have been a fantastic addition to our band. And they are certainly better than all that paper we have used up in the past."

The iPad initiative has also had a significant impact on the concert wind ensembles.

"Students who are involved in both the Pride and our concert ensembles use their iPad in a multitude of ways," says Dr. Michael Hancock, assistant director of bands and conductor of the OU Wind Symphony. "They have instant access to the Desire 2 Learn website, which contains content specific to our concert preparations in many ways: access to multiple mp3 files of each piece of music in the concert cycle; scores so that they can examine their part and how it fits into the context of the work; and detailed writings from the composer, or the conductors of these works, and how it may apply to their part."

Perhaps most important to Britt is the fact that the iPads alleviate student anxiety. As the semester progresses and class workload increases, students can streamline time spent on the field with the demands of college life.

"My goal is to eliminate anything that could create additional stress in the lives of our students," Britt says. "There is unavoidable angst and avoidable angst. So we are going to get rid of that last one. And then they can focus on the unavoidable stuff."

In short, the Pride iPad initiative is helping OU's storied marching band put its best foot forward, one position at a time.

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