Studying trombone and euphonium at Washburn has many advantages. There are numerous performing opportunities: two jazz bands, two concert bands, orchestra, marching band, pep band, and various chamber ensembles. Washburn is strictly an undergraduate institution, which means you won't be competing for the top ensembles against masters or doctoral students. Class sizes are small, which means more one-on-one attention. In my studio, students learn how to approach playing their instruments in a healthy manner, helping to prevent future playing injuries and problems from otherwise improper instruction.

Graduating students have gone on to do graduate work at prestigious schools such as the University of North Texas. Washburn University is also home to Trombonopolis, an all-day event dedicated to trombone players performing, listening, and learning. It premiered this year and had over 60 trombonists in attendance from Topeka and beyond, and featured clinicians from the Kansas City Symphony and the regional jazz circuit.

Karen Ballard has been teaching at Washburn University for the past five years. As well as a freelance trombonist in the Kansas City area, Karen is a current member of the Washburn Faculty Brass Quintet, Kinnor Philharmonic, Athena Brass Band, and the Greater Kansas City Trombone Choir. Karen has played with the Interstate 70 Symphony Orchestra, Ormond Beach Symphony Orchestra, and the Space Coast Pops Symphony Orchestra. She has also performed with the Orlando Opera, Orlando Brass Quintet, Gilbert & Sullivan Players, and various groups at Walt Disney World. She has recorded albums with the Fountain City Brass Band, Don Scaletta's Stan Kenton Tribute Band, and Bobby Watson's UMKC Concert Jazz Band. Karen has toured in Austria, Switzerland, Germany, England, Scotland, and Japan. She currently resides in Overland Park with her husband, Kevin and dog, Sydney.

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Master of Trombone Performance
University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance

Bachelor of Music Education
Stetson University

Karen Ballard
Professor of Trombone and Euphonium

Kyam McCormack, Sophomore, Music Education Major: “My emphasis is euphonium, but when I first started, that was not the case. My first year, I came as a tuba player, but I soon realized that it wasn't going to work out for me. I had taken a few trombone lessons with Mrs. Ballard (for jazz purposes), and I REALLY enjoyed the way she taught. It's frustrating because she makes you think for yourself, and she's like the music department's own personal Yoda. Often times, she'll tell me “think about it, but DON'T think about it”. This has led to several grunts of annoyance and discontentment, but in the end helps me move to the next step in my playing.

As unconventional as Mrs. Ballard's teaching methods are, they really do make sense. Even though I've only studied with her for now close to two semesters, I look forward to every lesson, and excited to see how far I can go.”

Colin Scott, Senior, Music Education Major: “Studying trombone with Mrs. Ballard was one of my main reasons for coming to Washburn. While often very laid back and relaxed, she is always pushing me to be the best that I can be. I think the greatest part of working with Mrs. Ballard is the emphasis on making good music as effortlessly as possible - not on technique or knowledge, even though these things do come up. Some teachers focus on very specific things they want you to do, yet Mrs. Ballard will simply say "try less." She has really encouraged me to think for myself and find the answer, which proves invaluable for any real life situation. Mrs. Ballard has not only helped make me the musician I am today, but also the person I am today, and for that I cannot thank her enough.”