

MUSICAL CHAIR

By [Ben Block](#)

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As a 14-year-old in a rough and tumble Texas town, university professor William Montgomery passed on the opportunity to play offensive lineman and left home to wander the Midwest, beginning the life of a globe-trotting flutist.

As the senator elected to replace current Chairman James Gates, Montgomery hopes to use his unique life experiences to best serve the student body. The first chair-elect from the School of Music, Montgomery will lead the university's most powerful policy-making body beginning in May.

But Montgomery first began at this university as an adjunct professor. He soon became a full-time professor, teaching his life's passions - flute performance, chamber music and wind pedagogy with the music school.

"This is one of the most outstanding music schools in the U.S., even though it's by far one of the youngest," Montgomery said. "It's been very exciting watching it [grow]."

Montgomery, 72, began his musical journeys at about age 9 in his home of Waco, Texas, when his father agreed to purchase him a flute. He performed in church along with the hymns and studied with a flute instructor at Baylor University. But the town's assets were more geared toward football players than budding flute performers.

So, at age 14, Montgomery decided against playing as a guard for his high school football team and followed his Baylor instructor when he went to teach at Southern Illinois University.

"For a kid of that age in Texas, that's a tough decision to make," Montgomery said. "The arts in this little town of Waco weren't a very strong thing, so most of the people in the town knew very little about it ... As far as knowing what was necessary, [my parents] had no idea, but they wanted me to do what was important for me."

Montgomery roomed with college students, grabbed meals with railroad workers at a nearby boarding house and played football and track for his high school. At 16, he enrolled at Cornell College in Iowa after his flute instructor moved there to teach.

During the summer following his freshman year, Montgomery attended the renowned Marlboro Music Festival in Vermont - where most students were in their mid-20s or early 30s - and studied with famed French flutist Marcel Moyse. The next summer he studied with American flutist William Kincaid in Maine,



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living in a tent, brushing his teeth with sand from the lake and practicing in the woods.

To pay for college, Montgomery toured the Midwest in his blue 1939 Dodge, stopping at cattle feed stores and teaching children how to play their instruments. He graduated from college at 19 and turned down an offer to teach high school music for fear that he would be younger than some of his pupils, he said.

Following the Korean War, the U.S. Army increased its recruitment and began drafting more citizens. To avoid the draft, Montgomery left his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia to join the Marine Band.

"All the really top, young players in the country [joined a military band] because of the war," Montgomery said. "So many thought it would be better to be playing than be shot at. It was a great environment here in Washington, great for music-making."

While he was with the Marines, Montgomery performed solo in concert halls across Europe to help prove that Americans were "cultured people and not just oafs and killers," he said. After nine years with the Marines, Montgomery made a career performing with orchestras such as the Kennedy Center Opera House, the National Gallery Orchestra and the Washington Opera. He has produced the weekly Friday Concert Series at the Arts Club of Washington since 1990, which prompted the U.S. Senate to wave a flag over the Capitol in 2004 in his honor.

Montgomery received his doctorate in music history from Catholic University, became chairman of the music department's musical instruments division in 1972 and climbed to the school's director of graduate studies position in 1991, he said.

He served on the senate for four years, most recently as chairman of the CORE Committee. Gates recommended him for chairman following their work together on the Programs, Curricula and Courses Committee.

"He seemed to me a natural," Gates said. "He is going to be a spectacular chair, I can say that with complete certainty."

During Montgomery's term as chairman, the debate about a student health insurance plan will likely be decided. He plans to continue Gates' current initiatives, which have designated the decision to student senators.

"We have to be so aware about what's best for students. Students have to have a voice," Montgomery said.

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