**Northern Illinois University School of Music Educates the Next Generation of Audio Engineers with Flock Audio PATCH XT**

*Passion-driven program at Illinois state school explores hybrid recording models and collaborative education*

**DEKALB, ILLINOIS, April 29, 2024 —** [**Northern Illinois University**](https://www.niu.edu/) **(NIU) has distinguished itself in music education circles for its diverse program offerings that go beyond what is typically offered at a state institution in terms of instrumentation and ensemble types.** [**NIU’s Recording Arts and Media Technologies**](https://www.niu.edu/music/programs/areas/recording-arts/index.shtml) **concentration has rapidly evolved over the past two decades to meet the needs of these programs as well as facilitate the high degree of collaboration that takes place between the school’s instrumentalists and audio engineering students. As part of an ongoing effort to upgrade the school’s recording facilities for these purposes, NIU’s faculty has made the** [**Flock Audio PATCH XT**](https://www.flockaudio.com/patchxt) **digitally-controlled, all analog patchbay the centerpiece of its hybrid recording setup.**

**Bringing together the tools and the talent**

NIU’s Recording Arts and Media Technologies concentration initially began in the late 1960s as an informal offshoot of its existing music education and performance majors. Since that time, the core thread of the program has been the active spirit of collaboration between its student and educator populations and the desire to see the program expand and offer something that rivals programs many times its size and budget. “The program has always been a passion project from its inception,” said NIU Professor Kerri Chandler. “It’s very self-driven in the sense that everyone who has come into it has brought their own energy and drive to help it evolve. At the same time, it’s equally very community-driven because we’re constantly contributing to each other's projects and learning together.”

“That’s what’s special about us. It’s always about chasing that next project or that next goal, and finding the tools and talent to make it happen.

Over the last four years, the department has heavily overhauled its recording studio, consisting of a main control room, a live room, a dry room, and a smaller isolation booth, as well as the audio systems connecting the studio to the school’s Concert and Recital Halls for recording and live streaming purposes. The collaborative effort to upgrade the studio spaces – which included design work by NIU instructor Dr. Mark Snyder and installation by Recording Services Manager Kyle Strain and Graduate Assistants Ethan Patterson and Christian Baugher – was as much of a practical consideration as it was an educational one. “We had some older gear that was starting to become outdated with newer applications,” explained Chandler. “Upgrading our facilities was timely, and it also provided our students with that learning situation of understanding how all of this equipment works together. They also could play a role in seeing what the right mix of tried-and-true and newer technology could be that would work for our purposes.”

“Since we intended to push towards a hybrid mentality between analog and digital gear, the Flock Audio PATCH series was something we knew we wanted to have.”

**Old-school technology, new-school methodology**

NIU’s faculty saw major advantages in maintaining as much of the existing analog infrastructure of their recording studios as possible. In addition to preserving sonic integrity, there were practical and budgetary considerations that factored into the decision. “Given that we’re a state school, we couldn’t change everything all at once, but there were some serious educational considerations in how we went about it as well,” Chandler said. “We want our students to understand how analog signal flow works just as much as how to operate a DAW. In my experience, there are just as many things in audio engineering that have stayed the same as there have been things that have changed. It’s finding that hybrid approach because you want to make sure people are learning things that are valid and applicable in both their immediate situation and their future careers.”

“What’s powerful about The PATCH Series is that these younger students who are digital natives can learn these analog signal flows in a drag-and-drop way that feels seamless to their workflows and is less intimidating.”

In addition to aiding the overall learning process, the accessibility of the PATCH interface and the added organizational features of PATCH APP DX encouraged NIU’s students to experiment and make the hybrid setup their own. For Chandler, this gives them the opportunity to develop as independent artists as well as collaborators. “PATCH XT has helped us find different ways to integrate our workflows for a wider range of projects than was possible before,” she said. “We encourage students to create their own recording assignments and really make the studio their own. Feeling like they have that ownership helps them to build confidence and independence as well as foster that life-long love of learning about what they do.”

“Whether it’s recording the school ensembles or bringing in outside artists, it’s training them to think both as creators and as engineers which we believe is very important.”

As an ever-evolving project, the Recording Arts and Media Technologies concentration at NIU continues to attract passionate minds looking to make the program their own. For Chandler and her faculty colleagues, this potent mix of independent artistry and community is their core achievement. “We’re all developing together and constantly learning,” she said. “Being around such a diverse group of people who have the same goals makes for a vibrant community with a lot of energy and ideas.”

“Having the tools like PATCH XT helps bring those ideas to life, and keeps us pushing towards creating the unique experiences that make audio engineering so special.”

For more information about Flock Audio, please visit: <http://www.flockaudio.com/>

**About Flock Audio**

Flock Audio Inc. is a pro audio manufacturer based in Kelowna, Canada, founded in 2017. The company is best known for its PATCH System Series, which is a Digitally controlled, 100% Analog Patch bay routing solution for professional audio environments.

For more information on Flock Audio and its products, please visit the company website at <http://www.flockaudio.com>.

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