Richard Clary is a Senior Band Conductor and Professor of Wind Ensemble Studies at Florida State University. He visited Ball State to serve as guest clinician for the Conducting Workshop that was hosted earlier this semester.

The first area Clary discusses is intonation. Regardless of the skill level of the ensemble, almost all have to work on intonation and tuning. There are four aspects of tuning that he mentions that can be found in higher-level groups that help them achieve good intonation. The first is using a standard pitch calibrated at A-440. Second, they learn to play in tune by matching pitches in context with other pitches. Third, they tend to blend sounds as a general strategy, which also improves resonance of tone. Finally, they understand the acoustical "fingerprints" of the individual instruments. Clary makes a point to mention brass instruments and the importance of understanding partials, as they are rather negatively affected by the harmonic series.

The second area Clary discusses is dynamics and balance. His overarching point is that most bands play too loudly too much of the time, and that by playing more on the softer end of the dynamic compass, bands can play in their dynamic "sweet spot" where they get the best tone and resonance. He also mentions that the dynamic level of accompaniment is often too much, and that the melody needs to be heard clearly at all times. During tutti sections, balance can be achieved by blending all the sounds in such a way that all instrumentalists are "tucking-in" their sound into the sound of the principal player.

The third thing Clary mentions is his thoughts on musical style and interpretation. Many groups are taught to believe that once they've got the notes and rhythms down, they've got the music. However, Clary believes that not all notes in a melodic or rhythmic phrase are created equal. In fact, he emphasizes that some notes should be stressed more than others, and that performing expressively with energy and emotion needs to be taught in more frequently in ensembles.

The final area Clary discusses is his thoughts on programming. He claims that we should program a variety of music so as to develop a sense of stylistic understanding. Clary goes on to say that "We should all be aware that even the most beautifully played program lacks some impact if all of the music comes 'from the same place' in its sound." Since not all students will go on after high school, we must take great care to choose repertoire that is not only academic, but will make a lasting impact on our students.