

## **Students' Registration in Collegiate Choral Ensembles: Factors That Influence Continued Participation**

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### **Abstract**

This investigation sought to obtain responses from a heterogeneous sampling of students in choirs at 63 colleges and universities across the United States to a series of statements that reflected three categories of possible reasons for enrolling in a college–university choir regardless of any degree requirement. For this purpose, the present study adapted a choir participation survey designed for an investigation by Sichivista (2003) with a homogenous sample of college–university choral singers from the same institution, which found that social integration within a choir and experienced musical value best predicted college students' intentions to continue participation in the future.

In addition to considering social aspects of choir membership (Social) and musical and aesthetic satisfaction (Musical/Aesthetic), a third category of statements reflecting behaviors and attitudes of choir conductors (Conductor) was incorporated for the present study. Results indicated significant differences both within and between these categorical variables. Respondents ( $N = 201$ ) expressed higher degrees of agreement with statements about choir conductor attributes (Conductor) than Musical/Aesthetic or Social elements as factors that would contribute to their decisions to re-enroll in a college–university choir. No significant differences were found by gender, degree plan, or the interaction of those variables with the categories of Conductor, Social, and Aesthetic/Musical. These findings were discussed in terms of the limitations of this study and directions for subsequent research.

### **Keywords**

college choirs, choir participation, singing motivation

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Research that assesses college-university students' decisions to continue their involvement with school ensembles can inform conductors who seek to retain singers or increase student enrollment. In addition to broader educational considerations, this issue is relevant because some institutions allot resources to particular departments or activities based on the number of student participants. While researchers have examined reasons why singers of all ages participate in a variety of choirs, there has been scant research to date that specifically focuses on college students' reasons for participating in university choral ensembles irrespective of any degree requirements.

Previous research has considered music ensemble participation in terms of factors that conductors can control, such as social climate, musical mission, or conductor personality, and in terms of factors beyond the control of conductors, such as students' previous musical experiences and current degree requirements. In this latter category, several studies focused on factors associated with participation in high school choral ensembles, which, potentially, have bearing on enrollment decisions by college freshmen and others who may help replace college singers lost because of graduation or attrition. Poulter (1997), for instance, examined reasons of undergraduate non-music majors at six state-supported universities in Illinois who enrolled in a university choral ensemble. Findings suggested that these students' previous experiences in high school choir most contributed to their decisions to enroll.

Adderley, Kennedy, and Benz (2003) investigated reasons high school students were drawn to the "world of the high school music classroom" (p. 190). They suggested social climate was a pervasive factor for students' continued music participation. Hylton (1981) studied high school students' perceptions of their choral experiences and identified six interpretable dimensions for such participation: achievement, spiritualistic, musical-artistic, communicative, psychological, and integrative.

Ayling and Johnston (2005) found that college-bound high school singers might not enroll in college or university choral ensembles because of

a preconceived notion of potential schedule conflicts. Their findings also indicated that 61.52% of the college bound students surveyed planned to enroll in collegiate choirs in order to fulfill a degree requirement.

Several investigations explored relationships among student motivation, attitude toward music, and other variables that led to continued musical involvement by persons in a variety of age groups and contexts, from children to college students (Asmus, 1986; Asmus & Harrison, 1990; Correnblum & Marshall, 1998; Klinedinst, 1991; Mizener, 1993; Schmidt, 2005). Although these studies were not choir-specific, intrinsic musical motivation emerged in each of these investigations as an important reason for participation.

Gates (1991) developed a Music Participation Theory in which he identified six types of musicians: professionals, apprentices, amateurs, hobbyists, recreationalists, and dabblers. He suggested that people participate in music making activities for different reasons based on their proficiency level. Professionals and apprentices viewed music as work, amateurs and hobbyists viewed it as serious leisure, and recreationalists and dabblers viewed it as play. According to Gates, individuals seek reinforcement in the musical and nonmusical elements of their performance and practice. Such reinforcement has an impact on their desires to remain in music. Although the way in which an individual identifies as a type of musician within the framework of this theory is out of an ensemble leader's control, the instructor can influence the reinforcement of the reasons for membership.

Davidson, Sloboda, and Howe (1995-1996) found that experienced musicians made distinctions between a teacher's "personal" and "professional" qualities. They concluded that an accomplished music student possessed the ability to accept and perform for an effective teacher, even if the student's relationship with the instructor was emotionally unsatisfying.

Chuang (2005) surveyed 153 chorus ( $n = 117$ ) and orchestra ( $n = 36$ ) members at a major university about their perceptions of various conductor attributes and behaviors. However, when asked specifically about primary

motivations for joining a chorus or orchestra, 50% of respondents cited the music, 25% cited the conductor, and 24% replied that the interactions between ensemble members were most important.

In a study closely related to the present investigation, Sichivitsa (2003) employed a choir participation survey with 154 choir members at one university in the southern United States to examine reasons why these singers might intend to continue participation in music. In examining students' responses, she found that social integration and musical value were predominant factors informing the motivations of music majors and non-music majors alike to continue singing in an ensemble.

There appears to be no study to date that uses a heterogeneous sample of choir students from universities across multiple states to explore matters potentially informing non-degree requirement motivations of college-university singers to register for and continue participation in campus choral ensembles. Moreover, few studies to date consider, specifically, the possible role of college-university ensemble conductors in student choir enrollment decisions.

The purpose of this study was to survey a heterogeneous sampling of students in choirs at 63 colleges and universities across the United States about a series of statements that reflected three categories of possible reasons (Musical/Aesthetic, Social, and Conductor) for enrolling in a college-university choir regardless of any degree requirement.

The following questions guided the study:

1. Is there a significant difference in participant preference within the categories of Conductor, Social, and Musical/Aesthetic?

2. Are there significant differences in participant preference by gender or degree plan?

## Method

An initial cluster-type sample was created using collegiate music programs registered with the

National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). To diversify the geographic representation, I then randomly selected nine schools in each of the seven American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) divisions. Directors of those schools' choral programs were contacted via email and asked to forward the online survey to their ensemble members. I asked directors to limit distribution of the survey to one collegiate ensemble.

### Survey Instrument

Table 1 shows the survey employed for this study. This survey was adapted from Sichivitsa (2003). I asked participants to respond by marking a five point Likert-type scale and I included five statements that specifically related to the ensemble conductor.

The survey contained 15 statements, five each for the categories of Conductor, Social, and Musical/Aesthetic. Social statements solicited perceptions of student friendships and peer interactions in the ensemble. Aesthetic/Musical items invited agreement or disagreement about emotional connection to music making and individual musical satisfaction. Conductor-related statements sought students' perceptions of their director's musicianship and rehearsal techniques.

Research peers ( $N = 2$ ) reviewed the survey's content and suggested word changes before distribution to a 30-member mixed university choir to pilot the survey. No additional changes were made following this piloting process.

### Respondents

Survey responses were received from 201 singers (143 females, 48 males). Respondents' reported degree plans included: (a) non-music majors ( $n=97$ , 48.26%); (b) choral music education majors ( $n=45$ , 22.39%); (c) vocal performance majors ( $n=43$ , 21.39%); and (d) instrumental majors ( $n=16$ , 7.96%).

Table 1. *Survey Instrument*

In order for me to want to register for this collegiate choir, REGARDLESS OF ANY DEGREE REQUIREMENT I MAY HAVE, it would be important that...				
1. The conductor is a good musician.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
2. The conductor values my individual musical contribution.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
3. The conductor is a good vocal instructor.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
4. The conductor asks me to sing with healthy and rich tone.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
5. The conductor leads effective and engaging rehearsals.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
6. I am friends with others in the choir.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
7. People in the ensemble know who I am.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
8. I feel welcomed by my peers in choir.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
9. My peers value my contribution to the group.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
10. My classmates and I share a friendship outside of class.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
11. I am musically satisfied singing in the ensemble.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
12. I feel a sense of accomplishment in the ensemble.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
13. I am emotionally moved during rehearsals and/or performances.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
14. I feel emotionally connected to the music.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
15. I feel challenged by rehearsals.	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Indifferent (3)	Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)

## Results

### Research Question One: Categorical Responses

A three-way measures ANOVA was computed with rating as the dependent variable and categorical preference (within variable), gender, and degree plan (between variables) as the independent variables. A significant difference was found within the variable preference,  $F(2, 394) = 41.09, p < .01$ . The variable preference was comprised of the following: Conductor, Social, and Musical/Aesthetic. From post hoc analysis using the Scheffé Test, a significant difference existed between the scores of Conductor and Social ( $p < .01$ ), Conductor and Musical/Aesthetic ( $p < .01$ ), and Social and Musical/Aesthetic ( $p < .01$ ).

Table 2 displays grand means and standard deviations for participants' categorical preferences.

Table 2. *Grand Means and Standard Deviations for Participants' Categorical Preferences*

Category	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Conductor	4.43	.80
Musical/Aesthetic	4.08	.91
Social	3.89	.96

*Note:* Participants' responses indicated agreement (strongly agree = 5; agree = 4), no impact (indifferent = 3), or disagreement (disagree = 2; strongly disagree = 1) to questions from the categories.

As indicated by Table 2, respondents overall expressed agreement with each of the three categorical variables, though there was a significant difference in hierarchy with more agreement about statements pointing to the Conductor as a factor in students' decisions to enroll than with Musical/Aesthetic or Social reasons.

### Research Question Two: Demographic Variables

No significant main effect difference existed by gender, degree plan, or the interactions of variables with potential registration determinants.

## Discussion

The major finding of this study is that respondents ( $N = 201$ ) overall report that Conductor behaviors and attributes would inform their decisions to re-enroll in a college-university choir more than Musical/Aesthetic or Social reasons. At the same time, however, respondents agree that Musical/Aesthetic and Social reasons also play a role in such decisions.

Very few studies to date specifically address singers' motivations to continue enrollment in college-university choirs. Such investigations, moreover, have largely been limited to singers from the same institution (e.g., Chuang, 2005; Sichivista 2003) or the same state (Poulter, 1997). Participants in the present study, by contrast, represent a heterogeneous group of singers from various institutions and geographic locations.

Results of this study, however, are confined to its particular participants and procedures. A primary limitation of the study, due to Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and an oversight in survey design, is the inability to determine how closely the respondents represented the geographical distribution of the survey. Another limitation is that students choosing to complete the survey may not have been representative of the overall membership in particular ensembles. Thus, results should not be generalized.

Results from any survey represent a snapshot of participants' perspectives at a particular moment in time. The time of year (late spring) in which this survey was distributed and completed may also impact results. A singer who recently finished an exciting concert and had enthusiasm about singing, for example, may have answered

differently than an ill singer who struggled through a week of dress rehearsals. Future surveys might well include an item about choir activities occurring at the time. Multiple measurements over the course of a year or semester might also yield a more accurate picture of students' perspectives.

Sampling procedures in the present study, although chosen in an effort to include a random selection of schools in each geographic region of the nation according to ACDA divisions, did not consider possible response variations due to size of institution, public vs. private schools, or quantity of graduate vs. undergraduate students. Future studies might consider more stratified random sampling procedures.

Despite these limitations, however, the present study contributes to research in an under-investigated area by suggesting that the categorical variable of Conductor behaviors and attributes may play a role in decisions by college-university singers to participate or not in their schools' choirs. Future investigations might consider this variable more explicitly than has been the case in choir-specific studies to date.

Students elect to participate in college-university choirs for multiple reasons. The findings of the present study, which asked choristers to respond without regard to degree requirements, suggest that participants in this study may gravitate towards choral programs with skilled conductors. This finding may be of interest to teachers and administrators who evaluate factors beyond simple degree requirements that may or may not make a choral program successful. If sustained by subsequent research, this finding may place tremendous responsibility on conductors of college-university choral ensembles, as the success of singer recruitment and retention efforts may depend appreciably on their own skill sets. [IJRCS](#)

#### **Institutional Review Board Approval and Compliance**

The author obtained approval from an appropriate Institutional Review Board to conduct this research in a manner that assured the ethical treatment of participants and the confidentiality of participant information.

#### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

#### **Funding**

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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