

**The Power of Group Dynamics in Musical Ensembles**

by

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## **Abstract**

There is a lack of current and relevant academic literature focused on the importance of group dynamics to the success of a musical ensemble. Therefore, directors of musical ensembles may not fully understand the importance of this connection, particularly as it pertains to the learning and musical growth of those individuals within the ensemble. Greater knowledge about this phenomenon could be of great use to directors and performers alike in order to create a more successful rehearsal environment. This research seeks to study and demonstrate how the group dynamics of a musical ensemble may affect the quality of student learning and overall student experiences.

Students of various ages in several collegiate choral ensembles were observed and surveyed about their experiences in each ensemble setting. This survey focused on student interactions within the ensemble, student enjoyment and perceptions of learning, and rehearsal climate. Rehearsals were observed with primary focus placed on observations of student interactions before, during, and after rehearsal, the leadership style of the director, and overall rehearsal climate. The results of this research were then compiled in order to find relationships between the above listed qualities, as well as associations between the various ensembles.

Results have shown it to be difficult to make generalizations applicable to all choral ensembles. Nonetheless, a number of recurring correlations have been demonstrated in this study that indicate the importance of these relationships when considering student learning and musical growth. The results of this study may allow directors to gain a better understanding of the importance of group dynamics in their musical ensembles, thus

allowing directors to tailor their rehearsal and leadership styles so as to maximize student learning, enjoyment, and the quality of musical performance.

## Literature Review

### Group Singing as a Human Activity

Singing can be found in virtually all human cultures and times. In *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice*, Colin Durrant states that “singing or vocal activity appears to be a common phenomenon across cultures of the world, suggesting that singing is a visceral human need” (Durrant 2003, 40). The practices and traditions of communal singing vary widely across cultures, and it is often used as a method of expressing emotions at a level at which normal speech would feel unsatisfactory (40-1). In many cultures, singing can be used to bring people together and bond a group or solidify social ties. Perhaps the human need for communal singing is related to a herd instinct, and helps reinforce social unity (47). In fact, music is “often connected with the maintenance of cultural and social boundaries,” and many cultures use communal music to reinforce values and beliefs, such as the patriotic or religious (47). Durrant and Himonides also observe that in many cultures, music generally fulfills a social function, and choirs are deeply social groups (50-1).

In “What makes people sing together?: Socio-Psychological and Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the Choral Phenomenon,” Durrant and Himonides reinforce many of the arguments found in *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice*. The article states that group singing is found in many human cultures and is a “basic human need”, and that differences in practice show that group singing is “strongly related to the culture itself” (Durrant and Himonides 1998, 61-70). Durrant and Himonides pursue the question of why this occurs throughout human history, but conclude that there is no clear answer and inadequate convincing evidence to support any one opinion.

## **Choral Singing as Community**

In “Shaping Identity Through Choral Activity: Singers’ and Conductors’ Perceptions,” Colin Durrant argues that choral singing holds a very important social function in addition to the obvious musical experience provided in an ensemble. For many singers, singing in a particular choir is part of their social identity (Durrant 2005, 88). Singers are generally aware of this, and they consider spending time with people of a common interest (and for students groups, similar ages) to be important (93). The opportunity to work toward common goals is important, as well as the opportunity to relate to people of different backgrounds through a common activity. For many people, choirs serve to provide “satisfaction from social approval and acceptance... [members] can feel socially safe” (92). Durrant even goes so far as to say that “the social dimension of singing in choirs is as important as the musical” (92). In this article, findings are based on qualitative research done with choirs in Finland and Sweden.

In “‘A Home Away from Home’: The World of the High School Music Classroom,” Cecil Adderley, Mary Kennedy, and William Berz discuss a case study conducted with choral and instrumental ensembles at a large high school in an upper-middle-class area of a major city. In this case study, social impact emerged as a huge part of students’ experiences in ensembles. Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz state that students consider the social aspects of ensemble participation to be an important part of their experience (Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz 2003, 204). Many students identified the social side of being in an ensemble as part of their rationale for joining, often to make friends or be a part of group (195). Many students considered these friendships to be key for their well-being and growth (190), indicating that they valued the social aspect of their choral experience for their own personal development.

The experience of being part of a group was also indicated to be important, particularly through “the sense of community engendered in the ensembles... [and] the opportunity to participate in something musical as a group” (199). In this case study, many of the teenage musicians spent time with other ensemble members outside of rehearsal or school time (201). Within the larger school environment, ensembles functioned as subcultures, and thus provided avenues for personal growth and social support (191). Overall, this case study is a clear example of the importance of the social aspect of the ensemble experience.

It is also interesting to note the rise of choirs for specific community groups, such as gender-specific choirs, choirs for minority ethnic groups, and LGBTQ choirs. In “The Evolution of GLBT Choruses,” Don Lee discusses the growth of gay- and lesbian-focused choirs over the last few decades. For many members of these choruses, their musical ensemble serves as a safe place and welcoming community, adding another poignant layer of meaning to the musical experience (Lee 2013, 10-19)

### **Social Challenges**

Just as singers can gain important and positive social experiences through musical ensembles, that social experience can be a challenge as well. In “The Invisible Student: Understanding Social Identity Construction within Performing Ensembles,” Ryan Hourigan discusses students who are likely to not “fit in” in a musical ensemble, here called “invisible students.” Examples include new students, students with special needs, or shy students. Hourigan states that “how a person feels about his or her value to a group can directly affect his or her self-worth and self-identity” (Hourigan 2009, 35). That is, when an ensemble has a group culture and certain singers do not feel that they belong to that group identity, it can



affect both their feelings of personal worth and musical ability. In the case study, Hourigan discusses one particular special-needs band student who did not consider himself to be valuable within the group and had a resulting negative self-worth in relation to his ensemble. Despite the fact that this student could play well, because he did not feel connected to the group or the other students, he did not believe he was a good musician (36). The presence of cliques can also play an important role in this dynamic, as students “demonstrate power over those who do not belong within a self-identified group” (35). The likelihood of this type of social hierarchy forming can be influenced by directors, as “the longer a teacher waits to provide information and model appropriate social behavior, the more vulnerable the group is to form a social hierarchy” (35). Hourigan thus suggests a number of strategies for directors to employ to improve the social life of ensembles, including activities to forge connections (icebreakers and social activities), formal partnerships between more and less experienced singers, and peer teaching.

The presence of students who do not participate in the social life of their ensemble is also indicated in the case study presented in “‘A Home Away from Home’: The World of the High School Music Classroom.” Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz relay comments from various students indicating the presence of certain students who simply aren’t involved in the social lives of the ensembles, either because they choose not to be (are loners) or don’t fit in with the group (202-3).

### **Director Impact**

Directors of choral ensembles can and do have a direct impact on singers and the social functioning of choirs. In *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice*, Durrant argues

that “the conductor should know what makes people tick: what makes them learn, what motivates and sustains them” (5). Directors play a crucial role in establishing the ensemble’s environment, which then directly impacts the social interactions within that ensemble. Because of this, it is important that directors strive to “provide an encouraging, positive, and constructive atmosphere rather than a critical, negative, and destructive one” (20). However, conductors can sometimes be very hesitant to take responsibility for the challenges and difficulties that a choir encounters, choosing instead to blame singers for problems. A more helpful approach occurs if the conductor shares both responsibilities and solution-creation with the singers (31-2). Unfortunately, the culture of education today (which directly affects choirs in schools) does not stress this interpersonal importance. Durrant states that “educational goals and standards may prescribe what is to be learned, but they do not necessarily consider the quality of the learning experience and how the interaction between learner and teacher affects learning for good or ill” (27). Similarly, educational culture today does not place a strong focus on how interpersonal relationships within classrooms and rehearsal rooms can impact the learning that takes place there.

“Shaping Identity Through Choral Activity: Singers’ and Conductors’ Perceptions” also addresses the role of the conductor in shaping a choir’s culture. Durrant, through qualitative research with choirs in Finland and Sweden, discusses the ways in which directors can impact the rehearsal atmosphere, including environment development and cultivating positive emotions among singers (90). Durrant also states that in this study, “participants had strong views on the role of conductors in creating appropriate conditions for singing, emphasizing the ‘making singers feel good’ factor as being paramount” (93). These atmosphere-related facets of the ensemble, which the director can have such a strong impact

on, can then directly impact the social interactions and relationships that occur within the ensemble.

Even if directors acknowledge the importance of these concerns, it can be difficult to place an intentional focus on these matters in the rehearsal room. In “More Than Performance: Toward Human Interaction,” Meyer M. Cahn discusses how the more human aspects of musical ensembles run the risk of falling to the wayside when excessive focus is put on performance or when directors are overwhelmed with extra-musical duties. Cahn acknowledges that considering the impact of singers’ social interactions can be stressful for directors, who are often challenged to simply coax a high-quality performance out of their choirs (Cahn 1969, 36). Nonetheless, Cahn challenges directors to examine these priorities, asking: “Will music educators fight hardest for a *musical product* or will they fight equally hard for a *human process* that sometimes detours them from the achievement of excellence they so strongly seek to create?” (37). Cahn argues passionately for directors to give greater importance to the relationships within ensembles and to the non-performance-oriented learning that students can engage in, stating that “to pay attention to human process, even at the expense of perfect performance, takes a kind of wisdom that has not yet become the norm of music education” (37).

### **Social Impact on Musical Experiences**

In “The Sociology of the Classroom and Its Influence on Student Learning,” Amy Hirschy and Maureen Wilson examine how social factors can impact learning in academic classrooms on college campuses (Hirschy and Wilson 2002, 85). These authors present education as an innately social experience, and classrooms as groups with social

forces and norms that can influence student behavior and learning for good or ill (86-7). Hirschy and Wilson also maintain that classroom climate and social norms have an important impact on student experiences and learning; instructors play a crucial role in shaping this climate, but student peers within the classroom can influence it as well (88). A collaborative, learner-focused environment of cooperative learning is recommended to maximize student perceptions of the classroom and to improve student learning (94-5). Choirs, particularly choirs that are part of a school, college, or university, function as classrooms as well. It is therefore likely that those social forces at play in the general classroom will also play a part in the choral classroom.

As choirs are communities, the social aspects of choral life can have an important impact on the musical experiences of choir members. In *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice*, Colin Durrant maintains that singers will learn more and sing better if they are in a positive social environment. He states that it is important for singers to be engaging in musical learning in a non-threatening and safe atmosphere (20). If a person is learning while in a situation where they are threatened, whether that threat is real or imaginary, the brain activity that occurs while learning is different from the brain activity that occurs when learning while feeling safe. This means that if someone learns or sings while feeling threatened, they are less likely to pursue the same activity again in the future (14). Consequently, if students feel socially threatened or unwelcome in their choir, that emotional state makes them less likely to want to engage in the activity – singing in a choir – again. This indicates how crucial it is for directors to consider the emotional states of their singers in rehearsal. As Durrant states, “feelings matter when we learn, because we get pleasurable sensations when we enjoy something, stimulating us to seek to repeat those sensations that

are encoded in our memory” (17). This has serious implications for directors hoping to inspire learning and high-quality performance in singers.

### **The Current Study**

As demonstrated here, there is a wealth of academic writing available about the ways in which choirs can function as communities, how general classrooms can function as communities, and how director interactions with singers can influence learning. Case studies are common in these areas of research. However, the field of academic music is noticeably lacking in literature about how relationships among students affect learning and growth within ensembles. There is also a need for quantitative data in this area of research. This thesis is intended to begin addressing these areas of need within the academia of music.

## **Research Methods and Participants**

### **Discussion of Ensembles**

The following ensembles were studied and observed during the duration of this study:

- Spring 2013: Ensembles within the Hayes School of Music at Appalachian State University including Appalachian Chorale, Treble Choir, University Singers, and Chamber Singers (North Carolina)
- June 2013: The Ensemble Vocal of the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella in Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Spring 2014: The College Choir of McDaniel College (Maryland)
- Fall 2014: The Concert Choir of Milligan College (Tennessee)

Appalachian Chorale is a non-auditioned ensemble that includes both students and local community members. Almost all students in this ensemble are music majors, and most specialize in an instrument other than voice. At the time of this research, there were 65 members in this ensemble, 29 of which were students enrolled at the university.

Treble Choir is a non-auditioned, all-female choral ensemble consisting of both music majors and non-music majors. At the time of this research, there were 21 members in this ensemble.

Chamber Singers is an auditioned choral ensemble consisting of all music majors. At the time of this research, there were 22 members in this ensemble.

University Singers is an auditioned choral ensemble consisting of almost all music majors. At the time of this research, there were 55 members in this ensemble.<sup>1</sup>

Ensamble Vocal is an auditioned choral ensemble consisting of all non-music majors (the choir's University does not offer a music major). At the time of this research, there were 24 members in this ensemble.

College Choir is a large, non-auditioned choral ensemble consisting of primarily non-music majors. At the time of this research, there were 40 members in this ensemble.

Concert Choir is an auditioned choral ensemble in which fewer than half of student members are music majors. Milligan College is a religious institution, and the Concert Choir's rehearsals contain elements of religious practice, particularly in the form of a group prayer. At the time of this research, there were 33 members in this ensemble.

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<sup>1</sup> Chamber Singers and University singers are led by the same director.

## Discussion of Research Methods

For each ensemble that I observed, I first contacted the director of the ensemble, explained my research, and requested permission to visit and survey the choir.

For the choirs at Appalachian State University, I observed at least two full rehearsals for each ensemble. For choirs at other schools, due to their locations, I observed one full rehearsal for each ensemble. While observing, I sat to the side of each rehearsal and took notes on social interactions among choir members before, during, and after the rehearsal, interactions between the director and students, and the overall rehearsal climate.<sup>2</sup>

For the majority of ensembles, the survey was administered online through the platform SurveyMonkey; the survey link was sent via email to the director, who then sent it to the students. For the Ensemble Vocal, the survey was instead offered in paper format before and during the rehearsal; this was done at the request of the director.<sup>3</sup> In all cases, the survey was completely optional and students were not penalized or rewarded for non-participation or participation. All students agreed to a consent form prior to taking the survey, and only students 18 years of age or older could participate.<sup>4</sup> There were 88 total participants.

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<sup>2</sup> I was a member of University Singers at Appalachian State University during the time of my research. I was able to observe this ensemble through everyday observations as I participated, as well as being able to take on a role more similar to that of an outside observer for one day when I was ‘sitting out’ of rehearsal to rest my voice.

<sup>3</sup> The members of this ensemble spoke primarily Spanish, which I do not speak. In order to make my survey more accessible for the singers, I had the survey translated into Spanish prior to my arrival. The responses were then translated from Spanish to English.

<sup>4</sup> The Institutional Review Board of Appalachian State University granted IRB Exemption to this project on February 4, 2013 (Study #13-0166).



## Survey

*The survey below contains the questions that all participating students were asked to respond to during the course of the study. For certain questions, potential answers are included in brackets. These questions were devised for the purpose of this study.*

What is your major?

Approximately what percentage of members in your ensemble do you consider to be your personal friends?

[Potential answers: none, 10%, 25%, 50% 75%, 90%, all]

Which of these traits would you say best describes your conductor? Choose all that apply.

[Potential answers: supportive, engaging, strict, relaxed, creative, reserved, enthusiastic, motivational, derogatory, boring]

Have you ever witnessed bullying or harassment within this ensemble? If so, please explain.

Are there any students who are excluded (by their own choice or the collective choice of the group) from the social life of the ensemble? If so, please explain.

What do you most like and dislike about being in this ensemble?

Do you spend time with members of this ensemble outside of official ensemble time? If so, what sort of activities do you engage in?

Do you feel that you have learned and grown as a musician in this ensemble? Please explain.

*Rating questions:*

*Rate the accuracy of these statements, with 1 being 'completely inaccurate' and 10 being 'completely accurate'.*

Q1) I have learned a great deal from being in this ensemble.

Q2) I feel that I have grown as a musician in this ensemble.

Q3) I enjoy being in this ensemble.

Q4) This ensemble is musically talented as a whole.

Q5) I feel personally welcomed and accepted in this ensemble.

Q6) Rules and structures in this ensemble are strict and rehearsals are well organized.

Q7) I respect the majority of the other members of this ensemble.

Q8) I regularly chat with other members of this ensemble before and/or after rehearsal.

Q9) Cliques have a strong presence in this ensemble.

Q10) The director often makes comments intended to make students feel bad about their rehearsal or performance.

Q11) After a concert, I am proud of this ensemble's performance.

## Results and Discussion

### Responses to Survey

Included here is a summary of the results of the survey for each ensemble.

In the following table, responses to certain questions from the survey are organized by ensemble. The questions discussed in this table are:

- “What is your major?”
- “Have you ever witnessed bullying or harassment within this ensemble?”
- “Are there any students who are excluded (by their own choice or the collective choice of the group) from the social life of the ensemble?”
- “Do you spend time with members of this ensemble outside of official ensemble time?”
- “Approximately what percentage of members in your ensemble do you consider to be your personal friends?”

For most questions, the raw number of respondents that chose each potential answer is given, as well as the percentage of total respondents from each ensemble that chose each answer.

For the question about students’ personal friends in their ensemble, the average response for each ensemble (given as a percentage) is shown, as well as the range of responses for each ensemble.

More in-depth discussions of these results follow.

		App. Chorale	Treble Choir	Chamber Singers	University Singers	Ensamble Vocal	College Choir	Concert Choir
Number of respondents		7	9	10	15	13	11	23
Major	Music Major	6 (85.7%)	3 (33.3%)	10 (100%)	15 (100%)			7 (30.4%)
	Non- Music Major	1 (14.3%)	6 (66.7%)			13 (100%)	11 (100%)	15 (65.2%)
	Other							1 (4.3%)
Bullying and harassment	Yes				2 (13.3%)		2 (18.2%)	2 (8.7%)
	No	7 (100%)	9 (100%)	10 (100%)	13 (86.7%)	13 (100%)	8 (72.7%)	18 (78.3%)
	Other						1 (9.1%)	3 (13.0%)
Exclusion from social life	Yes		4 (44.4%)	1 (10.0%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (7.7%)	3 (27.3%)	5 (21.7%)
	No	7 (100%)	5 (55.6%)	9 (90.0%)	13 (86.7%)	12 (92.3%)	5 (45.5%)	14 (60.9%)
	Other						3 (27.3%)	4 (17.4%)
Spending time outside with other members	Yes	2 (28.6%)	5 (55.6%)	8 (80.0%)	12 (80.0%)	10 (76.2%)	10 (90.9%)	21 (91.3%)
	No	7 (77.8%)	4 (44.4%)	1 (10.0%)	3 (20.0%)	2 (15.4%)		1 (4.3%)
	Other			1 (10.0%)		1 (7.7%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (4.3%)
Friends in ensemble	Average	14.3%	23.3%	34.5%	27.0%	48.8%	32.3%	47.0%
	Range	10-25%	0-90%	10-90%	10-75%	10-100%	10-75%	0-90%

## Responses to Survey by Ensemble

Included here is a summary of the results of the survey for each ensemble.

### Appalachian Chorale

Seven students responded to the survey in this ensemble.

*What is your major?*

Six students are music majors and 1 student is a non-music major.<sup>5</sup>

*Approximately what percentage of members in your ensemble do you consider to be your personal friends?*

Average: 14.3%

Responses are all within the range of 10% to 25%.

*Which of these traits would you say best describes your conductor? Choose all that apply.*

*[Potential answers: supportive, engaging, strict, relaxed, creative, reserved, enthusiastic, motivational, derogatory, boring]*

Common answers include supportive, engaging, and enthusiastic.

*Have you ever witnessed bullying or harassment within this ensemble? If so, please explain.*

All students answered no.

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<sup>5</sup> There is only one non-music major respondent, and that student has some of the highest ratings demonstrated for this ensemble. This student was only one to rate Q3 (Enjoyment) as a 10 (only one other student gave Q3 a rating over 5).

*Are there any students who are excluded (by their own choice or the collective choice of the group) from the social life of the ensemble? If so, please explain.*

All students answered no.

*What do you most like and dislike about being in this ensemble?*

Representative responses include:

- “We do challenging material that is fun to learn. The conductor is kind and passionate. I like how there is very little talking in rehearsal.”
- “I like the fact that the conductor is enthusiastic. I dislike it because I am not a singer and I do not find it engaging at all.”
- “The repertoire is not as challenging as I would prefer it to be and the overall makeup of the group is not consistent as far as musical experience. I like that the ensemble meets only once a week.”

*Do you spend time with members of this ensemble outside of official ensemble time? If so, what sort of activities do you engage in?*

Two students answered yes; 7 students answered no.

Those students who answered yes gave the following explanations:

- “Yes. Playing music, hanging out, school work, etc.”
- “Yes. Having lunch.”

*Do you feel that you have learned and grown as a musician in this ensemble? Please explain.*

Responses varied widely. Representative examples include:

- “This ensemble has helped improve my sight reading and musical ability.”
- “Yes, because of the difficult repertoire. And she helps us individually on vocal technique.”
- “Not really”

### **Treble Choir**

Nine students responded to the survey in this ensemble.

*What is your major?*

Three students are music majors and 6 students are non-music majors.<sup>6</sup>

*Approximately what percentage of members in your ensemble do you consider to be your personal friends?*

Average: 23.3%

Responses range widely, from ‘none’ to 90%.

*Which of these traits would you say best describes your conductor? Choose all that apply.*

*[Potential answers: supportive, engaging, strict, relaxed, creative, reserved, enthusiastic, motivational, derogatory, boring]*

Common answers include supportive, engaging, creative, enthusiastic, and motivational.

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<sup>6</sup> Non-music majors have more friends in the ensemble than music majors (average of 30.8% versus 8.3%), enjoy being in the ensemble more (Q3, average of 8.8 versus 7.3), feel more welcomed in the ensemble (Q5, average of 8.0 versus 5.7), and chat more with other members (Q8, average of 8.0 versus 5.0).



*Have you ever witnessed bullying or harassment within this ensemble? If so, please explain.*

All students answered no.

*Are there any students who are excluded (by their own choice or the collective choice of the group) from the social life of the ensemble? If so, please explain.*

Four students responded yes; 5 students responded no.

Representative responses include:

- “Some of the students in the choir are very loud and outgoing, so some of the other students who are more quiet or reserved are often overlooked”
- “Some people just haven't made friends yet with many others.”

*What do you most like and dislike about being in this ensemble?*

Representative responses include:

- “The music is interesting and fun, but the musical difficulty of the music is low, and the ensemble has low musical ability.”
- “I like the music that we sing in this ensemble, and the casual, fun atmosphere. However, I dislike how some of the other students take this casual atmosphere too far and seem to think of it only as social time, and spend the entire time gossiping or playing around with each other. It's distracting and kind of irritating for the rest of us.”
- “I most like the encouraging atmosphere the other members of the group bring to the group.”

*Do you spend time with members of this ensemble outside of official ensemble time? If so, what sort of activities do you engage in?*

Five students responded yes; 4 students responded no.

For those students who responded yes, representative responses include:

- “Eating lunch together or dinner”
- “Yes. We hang out, eat lunch, all kinds of stuff! Several of the girls in Choir I consider to be my absolute closest friends!”

*Do you feel that you have learned and grown as a musician in this ensemble? Please explain.*

Representative responses include:

- “Yes I do, because piano is my primary instrument so I haven't had much experience in vocal ensembles. I've learned a lot about how all of the different parts come together to make a beautiful sound.”
- “I feel that I have learned to work better in a group setting within this ensemble through building relationships and learning different types of music.”
- “Yes, I have. My vocal range has grown, as well as my ear and ability to listen to others and sing collectively.”

### **Chamber Singers**

Ten students responded to the survey in this ensemble.

*What is your major?*

All respondents are music majors.

*Approximately what percentage of members in your ensemble do you consider to be your personal friends?*

Average: 34.5%

Responses vary widely, from 10% to 90%.

*Which of these traits would you say best describes your conductor? Choose all that apply.*

*[Potential answers: supportive, engaging, strict, relaxed, creative, reserved, enthusiastic, motivational, derogatory, boring]*

Common answers include supportive, engaging, creative, enthusiastic, and motivational.

*Have you ever witnessed bullying or harassment within this ensemble? If so, please explain.*

All students answered no.

*Are there any students who are excluded (by their own choice or the collective choice of the group) from the social life of the ensemble? If so, please explain.*

Nine students responded no. Only 1 student answered yes, saying, "Some people branch out with their social groups rather than be around the same people constantly. It is mostly by their own choice."

*What do you most like and dislike about being in this ensemble?*

Representative responses include:

- "I like the music making process and sense of community. I dislike sometimes the time commitment it requires."

- “I love the level of musicianship and the higher standard for rehearsals.”
- “I like the smaller size of this ensemble... Because of this I feel like I really know the people I am singing with and can trust them.”
- “I like that this is a small ensemble... it is more personal. I feel that I can connect better with the other singers in this group.”
- “I enjoy the independence and responsibility of each singer as well as the group atmosphere. I dislike the meeting time and some of the egos in the group.”

*Do you spend time with members of this ensemble outside of official ensemble time? If so, what sort of activities do you engage in?*

Eight students responded yes, 1 student responded no, and 1 student declined to answer.

For those students who answered yes, representative comments include:

- “Just hang out. My best friends are in this group.”
- “Lunch/dinner. Usually meals.”
- “Sometimes, I eat with them. I often talk with them around the music building. I go to the gym with one of them fairly regularly.”
- “Yes. One member is my roommate; we met in U Singers and became good friends.”

*Do you feel that you have learned and grown as a musician in this ensemble? Please explain.*

Representative responses include:

- “Yes. I learn so much about what it means to be musical. I learn from watching our director how to be an effective and musical teacher myself.”

- “Yes, I have learned to listen to my surroundings to blend better as an ensemble member.”
- “Absolutely. It is harder to hide in small ensemble, so more of the emphasis is on my own contribution to the group and how my voice directly works with the others.”
- “Yes. Because this ensemble is small we each have to pull our own weight all of the time. I have learned to be self-sufficient, but I have also learned to listen to the people around me and to work with them to make music.”

### **University Singers**

Fifteen students responded to the survey in this ensemble.

*What is your major?*

All respondents are music majors.

*Approximately what percentage of members in your ensemble do you consider to be your personal friends?*

Average: 27.0%

Responses are all between 10% and 75%.

*Which of these traits would you say best describes your conductor? Choose all that apply.*

*[Potential answers: supportive, engaging, strict, relaxed, creative, reserved, enthusiastic, motivational, derogatory, boring]*

Common responses include supportive, engaging, strict, creative, enthusiastic, and motivational.

*Have you ever witnessed bullying or harassment within this ensemble? If so, please explain.*

Thirteen students responded no. Two students responded yes, giving explanations such as, “Not straight to that person. But there is a lot of gossip about others.”

*Are there any students who are excluded (by their own choice or the collective choice of the group) from the social life of the ensemble? If so, please explain.*

Thirteen students responded no. Two people answered yes. One expanded by saying “mostly by their own choice. Probably because they are introverts.”

*What do you most like and dislike about being in this ensemble?*

Representative responses include:

- “Like: the musical group dynamic and coming together to be great at something amazing.”
- “I like the comradeship between everyone, it's truly inspiring.”
- “The high level of musicianship which is a constant throughout the group and encouraged as a whole.”
- “I like the fact that mostly everyone gets along with one another, but there are also some big personalities in the class. I dislike this part because it can cause some problems within the ensemble.”

- “I love that everyone seems to be in love with singing and puts forth the best of their efforts to make the group all that it can be.”

*Do you spend time with members of this ensemble outside of official ensemble time? If so, what sort of activities do you engage in?*

Twelve students responded yes; 3 students responded no.

For those students that answered yes, representative responses include:

- “Yes. Lunch, other classes, just hanging out.”
- “Yes. I go eat with some of the members after class. I hang out with them when we're all free. I spend a good amount of time with some of them.”
- “Yes. Studying for other classes and hanging out in other organizations.”
- “Yes. Mostly music rehearsals. I feel like pretty much every one in the choir is my friend, but I don't hang out with them much outside of rehearsals and choir activities unless it's other musical activities.”

*Do you feel that you have learned and grown as a musician in this ensemble? Please explain.*

Representative responses include:

- “Yes! I’ve learned about rehearsal technique and dynamics. Conducting and teaching strategies.”
- “Definitely. The pieces we perform have challenged me rhythmically and musically.”
- “Yes. I am not a voice principle and I have learned a lot about how to improve my singing. I have also learned great techniques for learning ensemble pieces.”

- “Yes, I feel like I have grown because of the opportunity to sing with such fine musicians.”

### **Ensamble Vocal**

Thirteen students responded to the survey in this ensemble.

*What is your major?*

This University does not offer a music major.

*Approximately what percentage of members in your ensemble do you consider to be your personal friends?*

Average: 48.8%

Responses vary widely, from 10% to 100%.

One respondent added, “A lot of new members have entered this year and my old friends have left. With time, almost everyone becomes friends.”

*Which of these traits would you say best describes your conductor? Choose all that apply.*

*[Potential answers: supportive, engaging, strict, relaxed, creative, reserved, enthusiastic, motivational, derogatory, boring]*

Common answers include creative, enthusiastic, and motivational.

*Have you ever witnessed bullying or harassment within this ensemble? If so, please explain.*



All respondents answered no. One expanded by saying, “No, we make jokes but we don’t offend.”

*Are there any students who are excluded (by their own choice or the collective choice of the group) from the social life of the ensemble? If so, please explain.*

Twelve students responded no. Only 1 student answered yes, saying “Everyone has their own interests based on their age and level of commitment.” Another respondent expanded by saying, “At the beginning of the year there are people who aren’t known, but by the end everyone knows each other.”

*What do you most like and dislike about being in this ensemble?*

Representative responses include:

- “How diverse, accepting, and fun it is; to be among friends.”
- “It has a really good atmosphere/vibe.”
- “Much! Spontaneity; camaraderie between members of the chorus.”
- “What I like most: connecting/relaxing to the music, sharing good moments.”
- “Everyone is very talented, friendly, and fun.”

*Do you spend time with members of this ensemble outside of official ensemble time? If so, what sort of activities do you engage in?*

Ten respondents answered yes, 2 answered no, and 1 declined to answer.

For students that answered yes, representative explanations include:

- “Yes, in bars.”

- “At parties, steakhouses, mate houses, and social gatherings.”
- “Yes – going out to eat, concerts, mates, watching movies.”
- “Playing music, going out to drink and dance, getting together for the afternoon.”

*Do you feel that you have learned and grown as a musician in this ensemble? Please explain.*

Representative responses include:

- “Understanding of rhythm and melody, better hearing and auditory memory.”
- “Yes, improvement in my musical knowledge and voice control.”
- “I learned how to adjust myself to the group in order to sing and harmonize.”
- “Yes, it trains your ears to hear or not hear the rest of the voices. It helps you refine/improve listening to the others. You read music.”

### **College Choir**

Eleven students responded to the survey in this ensemble.

*What is your major?*

All respondents are majoring in something other than music.

*Approximately what percentage of members in your ensemble do you consider to be your personal friends?*

Average: 32.3%

Responses range from 10% to 75%.

*Which of these traits would you say best describes your conductor? Choose all that apply.*

*[Potential answers: supportive, engaging, strict, relaxed, creative, reserved, enthusiastic, motivational, derogatory, boring]*

Common responses include supportive, engaging, creative, enthusiastic, and motivational.

*Have you ever witnessed bullying or harassment within this ensemble? If so, please explain.*

Two students answered yes, 8 students answered no, and 1 did not respond.

Those students who answered yes expanded by saying:

- “Yes because we have some really overly dramatic people who make a fuss when they have to sit next to someone they do not like but instead of directly bullying someone, they will make snide comments to other people.”
- “One individual would make comments on someone else's voice (in a negative way)”

*Are there any students who are excluded (by their own choice or the collective choice of the group) from the social life of the ensemble? If so, please explain.*

Three students responded yes, 5 students responded no, 2 responses were unclear, and 1 student declined to respond.

Representative responses include:

- “Not really. There are a few students who exclude themselves from time to time, but this is not typical in an everyday basis. Pretty much everyone is involved in the social life of the ensemble.”
- “Yes. They're rude or have really bad/awkward personalities.”

- “There do seem to be people who choose not to interact much with other people in the ensemble; however, I don't see people being actively excluded by the group, any alienation is through someone's own choice.”
- “Yes; there are a few kids who fit into the stereotypical "uncool" category and are not really paid attention to by others.”

*What do you most like and dislike about being in this ensemble?*

Representative responses include:

- “I like the atmosphere of a family in the group. We are all friends. No dislikes.”
- “I like the sense of friendship and support from the group as well as the sentiment of being a family, not just an ensemble. I do not dislike anything about the ensemble.”
- “I like making music as a group but I dislike having to work with unsavory characters.”
- “I like the opportunities for musical growth, the relaxed atmosphere, and the fun I have had. I dislike the size of the choir– I feel like it's a little too big to form close bonds with many fellow choir members.”
- “I most like the opportunity it gives me to engage in music and participate in a fun activity that de-stresses me after a day of classes. I least like the fact that some of the music can be a bit boring, and that a lot of times I feel that our progress is too slow.”

*Do you spend time with members of this ensemble outside of official ensemble time? If so, what sort of activities do you engage in?*

Ten students answered yes; 1 student declined to respond.

Representative responses include:

- “Yes. We eat together.”
- “We go to dinner together after the ensemble and some of us participate in other clubs or activities. Sometimes we also go to parties together or study together.”
- “Sometimes! Some of my friends from choir and I do things like go to meals together, play games like Cards Against Humanity, and hang out; although I do know most of these people also from contexts that are not choir. (it's a small school so people with similar interests tend to gravitate together, and I have things in common with choir friends that are not just choir.)”
- “Yes, but I knew them before I joined choir. We hang out in the dorms and do work together or have conversations during the week.”
- “Yes. Many are my personal friends, and we hang out and eat together outside of choir. Others are in another club that I'm in, and I see those people there.”

*Do you feel that you have learned and grown as a musician in this ensemble? Please explain.*

Representative responses include:

- “Yes. Music is a way that I can express myself, it always has been. I grew up in band and will continue my music education throughout college. Music is a way that you can experience other cultures without leaving the country or getting on the computer.”
- “Definitely! I was an instrumental musician before choir, and I've really learned how to use my own voice as an instrument.”

- “Yes, I’ve improved my ability to read music and breath properly. I’ve been more confident when learning music outside of choir.”
- “I do. I have been challenged in this ensemble in ways that my high school choir never challenged me; our repertoire is more diverse and more difficult, and the pace of learning music is much faster than I had been exposed to before; these all sort of forced musical growth on me.”
- “Yes, though not much. I’ve learned that making music is not always about technical mastery and precision; it’s also about enjoying yourself and being expressive in your own personal and creative way.”

### **Concert Choir**

Twenty-three students responded to the survey in this ensemble.

*What is your major?*

Seven students are music majors, 15 students are non-music majors, and 1 student declined to answer.

*Approximately what percentage of members in your ensemble do you consider to be your personal friends?*

Average: 47.0%

Responses range from ‘none’ to 90%, though 20 of the 23 responses were between 25% and 75%.

*Which of these traits would you say best describes your conductor? Choose all that apply.*

*[Potential answers: supportive, engaging, strict, relaxed, creative, reserved, enthusiastic, motivational, derogatory, boring]*

Common responses include supportive, engaging, creative, enthusiastic, and motivational.

*Have you ever witnessed bullying or harassment within this ensemble? If so, please explain.*

Two students responded yes, 18 responded no, 1 gave an unclear response, and 2 declined to respond.

Explanations include:

- “Like every group of people, there are those who do not get along and there is occasional drama but it is rarely because of the ensemble and rarely affects the ensembles performance or professionalism.”
- “Yes. On choir trips (especially overnight ones) there will typically be someone who is moody and lashes out. This year the group looks like this will be less of an issue than in previous years.”
- “Definitely not. Just the random couple drama once in a while :)”

*Are there any students who are excluded (by their own choice or the collective choice of the group) from the social life of the ensemble? If so, please explain.*

Five students responded yes, 14 responded no, 2 gave unclear responses, and 2 declined to answer. Explanations include:

- “Yes. On tour one year, a brother and sister with difficult personalities were being rather obnoxious, at some point they seemed to strike a nerve with several core

members of the group and were marginalized as a result. Both have since left the choir.”

- “Yes, music majors seem to be a lot closer to each other than the rest of the ensemble just because of the simple fact that they are with each other all the times for classes.”
- “Only those who choose to exclude themselves, and even then it is difficult to remain excluded.”
- “I really don't think the ensemble as a whole has a social life, so does not apply perhaps.”
- “A couple people have come and gone over the years and not stuck with it, and I believe it's because they refused to include themselves in group activities outside of class - or put athletics/other classes before choir all the time.”

*What do you most like and dislike about being in this ensemble?*

Representative responses include:

- “I get to make music with some of my closest friends. Diving into a great piece or work brings you closer whether together, whether it be simply for learning or due to the basis of the piece (text, harmonies, the beauty in it)”
- “The family love that comes from the group. I love the interactions and how playful everyone is, without disrupting the rehearsal.”
- “I like the way we trust and honesty we have for each other with goal setting and prayer requests. The time we have in prayer is very bonding and our conductor is absolutely incredible! The only things I dislike is the work it takes to memorize the music and all the extra rehearsals and events. It is worth it in the end though.”



- “I enjoy the high standard of the group, but consequently we perform quite often. It's hard to juggle giving up whole weekends to performances along with homework, work, leadership positions, and a social life.”
- “I love that I feel welcome and valued. I have great friendships that last outside of the ensemble. The only complaint I've ever had is that there are occasionally pieces outside of my vocal range but that can't be helped.”
- “I like the fact that we are able to have a support group while doing something together that we love. I dislike the number of weekends that are often taken up with performances or rehearsals.”

*Do you spend time with members of this ensemble outside of official ensemble time? If so, what sort of activities do you engage in?*

Twenty-one students responded yes, 1 responded no, and 1 gave an unclear response.

Representative responses include:

- “Of course! We go out to eat, do homework, watch movies, and just about anything. These people are the best.”
- “I have other classes with 8 of the members.”
- “Definitely. The majority of us usually eat at least 2-3 meals together a week and on the weekends we sometimes play cards, hangout, or just watch a movie.”
- “Yes - one on one time and group stuff - eating, coffee, sitting together in other classes, traveling - these are my go-to friends, my best friends.”

- “Yes. One of them is my room-mate and two more are my suite-mates, so I'm around them all of the time. The others I often go out for coffee with or we talk about life together until 2 am.”
- “Yes. Several members are close personal friends, we eat together, play Frisbee, and just generally hang out. Many are also active in the theatre department and I work with them there as well.”
- “Yes, just hanging out, grab lunch or dinner together, things like that.”
- “Yes. Many of the guys play ultimate Frisbee together on Friday afternoons. Milligan is a small school, so everyone is bound to be at an event with other people from choir at some point.”

*Do you feel that you have learned and grown as a musician in this ensemble? Please explain.*

Representative responses include:

- “My music reading ability has grown and I have overall grown as a musician.”
- “Yes. I have learned to listen to other parts more closely and improve my diction when singing.”
- “Absolutely! My breath support has increased as well as my sight reading and ear training.”
- “Yes. Mr. DeLong is an awesome instructor. His enthusiasm is catching and he knows just how to explain things to help us do them better. He is always encouraging and I think we always feel prepared when we have a performance, which is definitely a big deal. I have learned so much, especially since I really didn't do any singing before I started.”

- “Yes, I feel that my range, music reading abilities, and overall confidence has gotten better since being apart of this group.”
- “Definitely! We truly have to work together to make the music that we do. We combine as one. I have learned many techniques from being in the choir.”
- “Yes, I do. I've grown in my dedication and focus in my singing as well as my leadership within my section. As classes graduate, the mantle of singing out and giving confidence to younger singers is handed down.”

## **Rehearsal Observations**

Between one and four rehearsals were observed for every choir in this study. Included here are summaries of the notes taken during these observations.

### **Appalachian Choir**

- There is a fair amount of talking amongst the members prior to the start of rehearsal, but primarily amongst the adult community members; the students talk much less. When the students do chat, it is often with the community members.
- The director is friendly and personable, and gives a sense of being happy to be there. The director chats a fair amount with the chorus, and shares personal information about herself and her life with the group at large. She is excited and animated throughout the rehearsal.
- There is a sense of community, at least among the adult community members, many of whom are elderly. These non-student members are more engaged in the rehearsal than the students, as a whole.
- Most students appear tired and languid; blank expressions are common, as is fidgeting. Many appear to be distracted or disengaged. Most students rarely speak to or interact with one another. There are, however, a few students who are clearly more engaged in the rehearsal than most, as demonstrated by eye contact with the director, nodding, etc. Regardless of their level of engagement, no students are ever disruptive to the rehearsal.
- Ensemble members are remarkably silent when they are not singing, and virtually no side conversations occur. Every once in a while there is a murmur or a bit of laughter,

but for the vast majority of the time they are silent. An exception to this is that there is quiet talking among some members during transition moments, such as when they are getting out a new piece of music.

- There is a ten-minute break halfway through each two-hour rehearsal. Many people leave the room during this time. Of those students that remain in the rehearsal room, about half are quiet, and about half are involved in conversation. The community members are almost all involved in animated conversations. There is a definite sense of community among the adult members.
- The director appears to be intentionally trying to create community. At one point she speaks to the students, telling them about the value of singing with community members who are there voluntarily.
- The director occasionally gives feedback directly to the students, particularly the male students, many of whom are visibly struggling. She does occasionally chastise the ensemble, particularly the students, on being passive and disengaged, and asks them to put forth more effort.
- As the rehearsal ends, most of the students leave almost immediately. The community members tend to linger and chat more.

### **Treble Choir**

- This group has a friendly, casual atmosphere with a definite sense of camaraderie. The vast majority of singers appear happy to be at the rehearsal and happy to be with the choir. There is a lot of group conversation and laughter among the singers, which is often related to the music in some way.

- The director is very friendly, enthusiastic, encouraging, and cheerful. She appears to have a somewhat friend-like relationship with her singers. She shows a real interest in the lives of her singers and asks about aspects of their lives outside of the choir. The director is clearly in charge, yet the rehearsal is still collaborative. Singers generally speak when they have a question or comment without having to raise their hands.
- Side conversations and chatter do occur among the singers, but they are not very common and are often related to the music. When there is chatting, the director asks them to quiet down. Most singers pay attention through rehearsals and appear very engaged. When they work on more challenging music, there is some squirming and yawning, but never any rude behavior.
- There are visible pairs and trios of very close friends. It appears that there are some core group members that are highly invested and have a lot of fun in the ensemble, but there are also students who are not as involved, do not have good friends in the ensemble, and do not talk very much. There are definitely a few people who are not excited to be there, and are noticeably more bored, tired, or fidgety than the rest of the group. They are not rude or disruptive, but they also are not engaged or excited.
- There is plenty of chatting once the rehearsal ends, but most students do not linger for longer than a minute or two.

## Chamber Singers

- Prior to rehearsal, there is a great deal of talking and laughter. There are many animated, separate discussions happening. There are a few people sitting silently, but almost everyone is talking. Most students appear cheerful.
- The director is energetic and focused. He shares a fair amount of personal information about himself, and the group is receptive and interested. Directions from the director are given concisely, and the rehearsal moves very quickly. He offers little praise, focusing instead on constructive criticism. There is a lot of back-and-forth talking and laughing between the director and singers, so that rehearsals feel like collaborative group meetings with a leader. Singers generally speak when they have a question, rather than raising a hand and waiting to be called upon.
- There is a definite sense of community and camaraderie within the ensemble. Side conversations or chatter are not uncommon, but also not disruptive; they are often about the music, and flow as a part of the rehearsal. It is generally the same pairs or groups of people engaging in side conversations, and there are also a number of students who virtually never talk during rehearsal. The director does occasionally ask the singers to be quiet, but does not appear to consider student talking to be a serious problem. The group is easily distracted, but the director does not seem bothered by it; when he corrects their behavior, it happens very quickly and the rehearsal immediately moves forward.
- Singers generally appear to be enjoying rehearsals and pay close attention to the director and music, although some students may appear to be tired or bored at times.

After the rehearsal, most students leave immediately; a few stay for a minute or two to chat amongst themselves.

### **University Singers**

- There is a great deal of talking and social interactions prior to rehearsal.
- Students are a wide mix of attentive versus fidgety or disengaged; overall, the balance is more attentive than not. The overall atmosphere of the ensemble is positive, upbeat, and encouraging. Nonetheless, there are some students who are visibly not happy to be there, or who never speak to those around them.
- There is often group laughter when someone makes a joke or something humorous happens. Both the director and the singers regularly respond to mistakes with good-natured laughter. Students regularly make comments on the music and ask questions.
- There is a great deal of chattering during rehearsal transitions. There are occasionally a few side conversations while the director is speaking, which the director quickly reprimands, then moves on.
- Many people leave immediately after the rehearsal ends, but there are also plenty of people who hang around for a few minutes engaging in conversations.

### **Ensamble Vocal**

This rehearsal was conducted in Spanish.

- The following information comes from a conversation with the director of the ensemble, prior to the rehearsal observation: The director describes this ensemble as being casual, fun, welcoming, and easygoing. It is the more advanced of the



University's two choirs. The director has a friend-like relationship with the singers. Humor and fun are both very important within the group (and within Argentinian culture). The director uses humor, gentle teasing, and joking in rehearsals. There is a core, or heart, of long-term members who set the rules socially. Each new group of students becomes very close over the course of each season. Singers often do something social as a big group on weekends. New students are welcome; whether or not they participate is up to them.

- This ensemble has an extremely casual atmosphere, with an innately positive, fun, and happy sense amongst the singers. There are easy, joking relationships both among students and between the director and students. The ensemble, as well as Argentinian culture in general, is very casual about time, and the rehearsal begins long after the official start time.
- There is a great deal of talking and laughing amongst the students prior to the start of the rehearsal; this quiets once they begin warming up.
- Interestingly, there is no piano in the room – they use a tuning fork to get their starting pitches. There is, however, a drum box on which the director sometimes plays simple rhythms as they rehearse, as well as a guitar.
- Chatter among students is common, especially during transitions (such as switching pieces), but it is not disruptive. The singers and director seem to be in one big, rehearsal-long conversation. Although there is a lot of talking and laughing, the students quiet immediately when the director indicates for them to do so. They clearly have a great deal of respect for their director, and they are attentive when he speaks. The ensemble resembles a large group of friends, but with a clear leader.

- The level of group activity and whole-group interaction in this rehearsal is remarkable and very high-energy. It is clear that there are many friendships within the ensemble. Some students are visibly more socially engaged than others, but all students appear to be happy about being in rehearsal.

### **College Choir**

- Students come into the rehearsal room gradually, and there is a lot of chatting. There are plenty of students present well before the rehearsal starts. There are a few students not interacting with others (on their phones or staring into space), but most are talking very animatedly. Friendships between various students are clearly evident.
- The director is very high energy. She is kind, virtually never critical, and friendly, but she also does not appear to have a friend-like relationship with the singers. However, she clearly genuinely cares about the students.
- The rehearsal has a fun, friendly, and relaxed atmosphere. Although the atmosphere is casual, all the students pay attention to the director, though some students do look bored as the rehearsal progresses.
- There are occasional side conversations among the singers during rehearsal, but the choir is generally quiet – the level of talking is quite low. There is some student chatter during transitions (such as switching songs).
- After the rehearsal ends, there is talking and laughter. Most singers leave the room quickly. There are a few pairs and groups of students that stay chatting for a few minutes, then leave the room together. It is interesting to note that there is plenty of talking before and after the rehearsal, but not very much talking during the rehearsal.

## **Concert Choir**

- Long before the rehearsal begins, there are singers in the rehearsal room along with the pianist. They spend a long time practicing a song that they will have singing tests on in rehearsal. Once they finish practicing, they chat as a group. Closer to the start of rehearsal, there are many students milling around the room. Almost every student is involved in a conversation, with a few exceptions. There is a fair amount of laughter in the room. Almost every student is talking to other students, and a number of close friendships are evident. Overall, it appears to be an active social scene.
- At the beginning of rehearsal, one student leads a prayer; prior to praying, he asks the group for prayer requests. Students are remarkably open in these prayer requests, and a few students share fairly personal situations with the group.
- The director is kind and welcoming, and appears to have a positive, friendly relationship with the students. The rehearsal atmosphere is positive, fun, and very enjoyable.
- There are very few side conversations or idle chatter during rehearsal. When the director makes a joke, the group laughs, then returns to attentive silence. However, there is a great deal of chatter during transitions, such as when they first get out music. Some students can be seen very quietly chatting when their part is not rehearsing. There is only one time when students are talking as the director speaks; he stops speaking, and the students immediately fall silent. The students are all visibly engaged throughout the rehearsal. Towards the end of the rehearsal, some students are visibly tired, but the group remains attentive.

## **Discussion of Qualitative Data**

When asked what they like about their ensemble, many students mentioned the social aspect of the choral experience (friendships, the overall social atmosphere, etc.), indicating that students place a high level of importance on that facet of their experience. For many students, it appears that the community aspect of the choral experience is a large part of why they participate.

Most of the ensembles in this study include students who have very close friends in their ensemble. Additionally, in most ensembles in this study, the majority of respondents spend time with other members outside of rehearsal time. It is important to remember that those relationships come into rehearsals and play a part in the life of the ensemble as a whole.

When asked about their learning and musical growth, many students mentioned singing with other musicians as playing a part in their learning experience. This may indicate that student learning is influenced by interactions with other singers.

Survey responses show the variability that can be present in students' experiences within the same ensemble. This wide variety of experiences is also clear through observation: in most ensembles, the presence of strong friendships between certain members is clear, while the presence of students without strong social connections in the ensemble is also clear.

The amount of variability in the number of friends students have in the same ensemble is particularly interesting, and may point to why students can have such different social experiences in the same ensemble.

In some ensembles, side conversations or chatter during the rehearsal are very rare. In other ensembles, side chatter is common but generally does not disrupt the rehearsal. Student talking did not appear to cause serious problems in any of the choirs in this study.

In the responses for certain ensembles, there is evidence of unkindness between members and social hierarchies within the ensemble. These may act to make certain members feel unwelcome or disconnected within the ensemble, which should be of concern to directors.

### Responses for Ratings Items, Sorted by Ensemble

This chart shows the average responses for each item in the Ratings section of the survey. Averages are given for each individual ensemble as well as the entire sample. For these responses, 1 indicates ‘completely inaccurate’ and 10 indicates ‘completely accurate’. The numbered list of questions may be found on pages 17-19.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11
Overall	8.18	8.25	8.99	8.61	9.00	8.16	9.09	8.47	4.23	1.51	8.72
Appalachian Chorale	5.71	5.71	5.71	6.14	8.57	8.57	8.70	5.70	4.00	1.71	7.14
Treble Choir	7.33	7.33	8.33	7.78	7.22	7.44	7.80	7.00	6.20	3.11	8.11
Chamber Singers	9.10	9.30	9.20	9.20	8.80	8.40	9.10	9.10	3.70	1.70	8.80
University Singers	8.40	8.60	9.40	9.13	9.27	9.00	9.70	9.10	4.30	1.40	9.13
Ensemble Vocal	8.25	7.77	9.23	8.92	9.38	6.38	9.20	7.80	5.00	1.00	8.42
College Choir	7.64	7.91	9.55	7.91	9.09	8.27	9.00	9.00	3.50	1.27	7.91
Concert Choir	8.96	9.13	9.48	9.26	9.48	8.61	9.30	9.30	3.60	1.17	9.70

## **Correlations for Ratings Items, Listed by Frequency of Occurrence**

Below, correlations are listed by frequency of occurrence. All correlations listed here appear in the overall data analysis (all seven ensembles analyzed as a whole). For those correlations that also appear in individual ensembles, the ensembles in which the correlation is present are listed. All correlations listed are significant at the 0.05 or 0.01 level. All correlations are positive unless otherwise noted.

*Correlations that appeared in Overall data as well as all seven individual ensembles:*

1-2: Learning and Musical Growth

Appalachian Chorale, Treble Choir, University Singers, Chamber Singers, College Choir, Concert Choir, Ensemble Vocal

*Correlations that appeared in Overall data as well as four individual ensembles:*

1-3: Learning and Enjoyment

Treble Choir, University Singers, College Choir, Ensemble Vocal

2-4: Musical Growth and Group Talent

Appalachian Chorale, Treble Choir, University Singers, College Choir

*Correlations that appeared in Overall data as well as three individual ensembles:*

1-4: Learning and Group Talent

Appalachian Chorale, Treble Choir, College Choir

3-4: Enjoyment and Group Talent

Treble Choir, University Singers, Chamber Singers

4-6: Group Talent and Strict Organization

University Singers, College Choir, Concert Choir

4-11: Group Talent and Pride in Performance

Treble Choir, University Singers, College Choir

5-7: Group Welcome and Respect for Members

Treble Choir, University Singers, College Choir

5-11: Group Welcome and Pride in Performance

Chamber Singers, College Choir, Concert Choir

7-8: Respect for Members and Chatting

Treble Choir, University Singers, College Choir

*Correlations that appeared in Overall data as well as two individual ensembles:*

1-5: Learning and Group Welcome

University Singers, College Choir

1-6: Learning and Strict Organization

University Singers, College Choir

1-7: Learning and Respect for Members

University Singers, Ensemble Vocal

1-8: Learning and Chatting

University Singers, Ensemble Vocal

2-3: Musical Growth and Enjoyment

Treble Choir, University Singers

2-7: Musical Growth and Respect for Members



University Singers, Ensemble Vocal

3-8: Enjoyment and Chatting

University Singers, Ensemble Vocal

3-9: Enjoyment and Cliques (negative correlation)

Appalachian Chorale, Ensemble Vocal

3-11: Enjoyment and Pride in Performance

Treble Choir, Concert Choir

4-5: Group Talent and Group Welcome

College Choir, Concert Choir

5-6: Group Welcome and Strict Organization

Chamber Singers, College Choir

6-7: Strict Organization and Respect for Members

Treble Choir, Concert Choir

7-9: Respect for Members and Cliques (negative correlation)

Concert Choir, Ensemble Vocal

*Correlations that appeared in Overall data as well as one individual ensemble:*

1-11: Learning and Pride in Performance

Treble Choir

2-5: Musical Growth and Group Welcome

University Singers

2-6: Musical Growth and Strict Organization

University Singers

2-11: Musical Growth and Pride in Performance

Treble Choir

3-5: Enjoyment and Group Welcome

Treble Choir

4-7: Group Talent and Respect for Members

College Choir

6-9: Strict Organization and Cliques (negative correlation)

Concert Choir

6-11: Strict Organization and Pride in Performance

College Choir

7-11: Respect for Members and Pride in Performance

College Choir

*Correlations that appeared in Overall data:*

2-8: Musical Growth and Chatting

3-7: Enjoyment and Respect for Members

4-8: Group Talent and Chatting

6-8: Strict Organization and Chatting

8-11: Chatting and Pride in Performance

*Correlations that appeared in one individual ensemble, but NOT the Overall data:*

3-6: Enjoyment and Strict Organization

Ensamble Vocal

8-9: Chatting and Cliques

Chamber Singers

4-9: Group Talent and Cliques (negative correlation)

Concert Choir

4-10: Group Talent and Negative Director Comments (negative correlation)

Concert Choir

5-9: Group Welcome and Cliques (negative correlation)

Concert Choir

5-10: Group Welcome and Negative Director Comments (negative correlation)

Concert Choir

6-10: Strict Organization and Negative Director Comments (negative correlation)

Concert Choir

9-10: Cliques and Negative Director Comments

Concert Choir

### **Correlations for Ratings Items**

In the following chart, all significant correlations for this data are shown, for the overall data as well as for each ensemble.

\* Indicates that the correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\* Indicates that the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

	Overall	App. Chorale	Treble Choir	Chamber Singers	University Singers	College Choir	Concert Choir	Ensamble Vocal
Q1-Q2	.931**	.984**	.988**	.949**	.895**	.945**	.967**	.688*
Q1-Q3	.636**		.775*		.596*	.641*		.677*
Q1-Q4	.642**	.774*	.866**			.634*		
Q1-Q5	.359**				.818**	.614*		
Q1-Q6	.257*				.595*	.617*		
Q1-Q7	.301**				.806**			.701*
Q1-Q8	.416**				.705**			.791**
Q1-Q9								
Q1-Q10								
Q1-Q11	.594**		.796*					
Q2-Q3	.633**		.808**		.627*			
Q2-Q4	.674**	.766*	.854**		.544*	.611*		
Q2-Q5	.327**				.647**			
Q2-Q6	.300**				.705**			
Q2-Q7	.280**				.557*			.644*
Q2-Q8	.360**							
Q2-Q9								
Q2-Q10								
Q2-Q11	.565**		.782*					
Q3-Q4	.598**		.856**	.643*	.638*			
Q3-Q5	.426**		.683*					
Q3-Q6								.580*
Q3-Q7	.256*							
Q3-Q8	.427**				.638*			.664*
Q3-Q9	-.259*	-.824*						-.663*
Q3-Q10								
Q3-Q11	.501**		.751*				.738**	
Q4-Q5	.387**					.815**	.621**	
Q4-Q6	.247*				.823**	.618*	.442*	
Q4-Q7	.330**					.812**		
Q4-Q8	.339**							
Q4-Q9							-.461*	
Q4-Q10							-.484*	
Q4-Q11	.661**		.955**		.663**	.679*		
Q5-Q6	.323**			.804**		.776**		
Q5-Q7	.619**		.667*		.598*	.656*		
Q5-Q8	.501**		.943**		.581*			
Q5-Q9							-.419*	



## **Discussion of Correlations**

A large number of items correlate with two key questions: student learning (Q1) and musical growth (Q2). As student learning and growth are key goals of most choir directors, these are important connections to consider. Key items that positively correlated with learning and/or musical growth include enjoyment (Q3), sense of welcome within the group (Q5), respect for other members (Q7), amount of chatting with other members (Q8), and perception of overall group talent (Q4).

As most choir directors would also hope that their members enjoy participating in the ensemble, it is important to consider which items correlate with enjoyment (Q3). These items include the overall talent level of the group (Q4), amount of chatting with other members (Q8), sense of welcome within the group (Q5), pride in ensemble performance (Q11), and respect for other members (Q7).

There are only a few statistically significant negative correlations present in this data, and many of those are related to the concept of cliques (Q9). Within the overall data analysis, the presence of cliques in ensembles is negatively correlated with how much students enjoy being part of the ensemble (Q3), respect for other members (Q7), and the presence of strict structure and well-organized rehearsals (Q6). This speaks against allowing cliques to form within an ensemble.

It is interesting to note that only one correlation is statistically significant for all seven individual ensembles. That correlation is between student learning (Q1) and musical growth

(Q2), which are similar questions. Otherwise, no one correlation is statistically significant for any more than four out of seven individual ensembles. This is an important reminder of the individuality and variability of choral ensembles, and the difficulty of making universally applicable generalizations.

There are certain aspects of these results that are difficult to explain. Concert Choir of Milligan College displays an unusually high number of correlations that do not appear in any other ensemble or the overall data. Additionally, Concert Choir is the only ensemble in which negative director comments (Q10) correlates with any other item; for Concert Choir, it correlates with four items (Q10 negatively correlates to Q4, Q5, and Q6, and positively correlates with Q9). There is no clear explanation within this data for why Concert Choir is different in these ways from the other choirs surveyed.

The high number of statistically significant correlations present in this data, as well as the correlations themselves, indicate that the social aspects of the choral experience are indeed related to students' perceptions of their learning and musical growth. If a director wishes to impact student learning and growth, it may be advisable for him or her to also consider the social aspects of the choir in order to maximize student learning.

## **Limitations**

There are, of course, limitations to this study. The relatively small sample size (88 total responses from 7 ensembles) limits the conclusions drawn from this research. Because all ensembles in this study provided generally positive student responses, there is no opportunity to compare to or study ensembles in which poor experiences are common. The low response rate of some ensembles is a limitation, as is the fact that all data was self-reported. Finally, it should be noted that correlation does not imply causation for any of this data.



## **Conclusions**

It is likely that the connections and relationships demonstrated in this data are widespread and common across choral ensembles. If student learning, growth, and enjoyment are related to singers' social experiences, what does this mean for choral directors? These results suggest that it may be wise for choral directors to consider, care about, and actively work to improve the interpersonal experiences of singers. Many aspects of the atmosphere of a rehearsal, such as how welcomed and accepted students feel and whether there is an atmosphere of respect, can be directly impacted by the words and actions of the director. Additionally, directors are well positioned to observe potentially harmful social behaviors, such as the development of cliques and social hierarchies, and step in to alter such patterns. It is not enough for a director to only consider the musical concerns of leading a choir, and give no thought to the relationships of the singers themselves. In this way, if directors take an active interest in what is happening socially in their choirs, both in and out of the rehearsal room, this research indicates that they can have a positive impact on students' choral experiences overall.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

It may be said that this research raises more questions than it answers. Although it is clear that the social and interpersonal aspects of the choral experience are connected to student enjoyment, learning, and growth, the details of those relationships and how they can be improved remain unclear and outside the scope of this work.

Specific topics of potential interest for further research include:

- How the concepts in this research apply to bands, orchestras, and other ensembles
- The effect of cliques in musical ensembles
- Experiences of music majors versus non-music majors
- The effect of various director personalities and leadership styles
- The effect of gender on interpersonal relationships and experiences
- Specific cause-and-effect relationships between the various items discussed
- Specific techniques directors can use to improve their ensemble's group dynamics

In order for the importance of these relationships to be widely recognized, it is crucial that these topics remain a focus of research and discussion in the future.

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