



Repertoire & Resources

Two-Year College Choirs



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Supporting Transfer Students Between Two- and Four-Year Institutions

by Carolina Flores and Arlie Langager

Music majors at community colleges nationwide represent an increasingly diverse and nontraditional student population. Stronger collaboration between two- and four-year institutions is vital in order to remove existing barriers toward students completing their education; otherwise, we will continue to overlook talented artists who could enrich undergraduate choral programs and shape the future of the choral community.

This concern was central to a panel discussion titled “Reimagining Transitions between Two-Year and Four-Year Colleges” at the 2025 National Collegiate Choral Organization Conference (NCCO11). As moderator, Dr. Arlie Langager invited panelists Dr. Carolina Flores, Dr. Raymund Campo, and Dr. Anne Lyman to share perspectives and solutions for directors of both four-year and two-year programs. Following the NCCO presentation, Dr. Flores invited Dr. Langager

to coauthor this article to share insights and further examine actionable solutions for change.

Core Challenges

In the article “An Examination of Student and Faculty Perceptions Regarding Music Education Transfer Student Preparedness and Experiences,” Natalie Steele Royston and her coauthors shared that “college music faculty members perceived transfer students as unprepared for the rigors of a four-year institution.”¹ Transfer students often deal with challenges outside the classroom, including limited training opportunities prior to transfer, financial pressures, and family obligations that require them to work twenty to thirty hours per week while managing a full course load. While many students succeed within the resources available on campus at a two-year institution, they frequently encounter barriers when transferring to four-year programs.

Even if they’ve completed similar coursework, students may not be used to being around advanced students or navigating a larger campus. They may also have come from programs with fewer options—such as a limited selection of electives and repertoire—resulting in uneven experience levels. Incoming students may struggle with self-confidence, feel isolated, or even feel like they don’t belong at all in a four-year setting. Several additional challenges include:



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- Frequent turnover of singers in two-year college choirs, which hinders choral experience growth before transfer.
- Inconsistent transfer articulations between institutions.
- Difficulty acclimating to a new cultural environment.

Shifting Perspectives

As our environment in higher education expands, the key to addressing these challenges is the need for conductors and students to shift their mindset. When conductors shift toward asset-based thinking and away from deficit-based thinking, they see their local community colleges as valuable resources that can enrich, expand, and challenge their programs. That perspective also changes traditional recruitment processes. In addition to recruiting traditional voice majors, conductors should include opportunities to discover students who show potential as music educators (not always demonstrated in a sightreading exercise), who bring expertise in other languages and musical genres (not always apparent in an art song performance), and who bring special life skills and experience (not always apparent on a transcript).

As postsecondary enrollment trends continue to evolve, even traditional recruitment models at four-year institutions may inadvertently overlook some community college populations. For example, a traditional audition might only happen on one long, on-campus day, which can be challenging for working students or caregivers to attend. University conductors could recruit a broader cohort of music students by encouraging expanded student chapter activities to include interested community college students and establish a relationship long before a vocal audition.

Some university conductors we spoke with already have fruitful relationships with their community college conducting peers. They collaborate in joint concerts and tours, and invite their colleagues as judges, clinicians, and guest presenters in their classes. Beyond viewing the local community college solely for recruitment, these four-year conductors recognize the wealth of knowledge and experience in their peers. The choral faculty at all institutions must be persistent and intentional in design-

ing and reviewing curriculum to align with the first two years of nearby four-year degrees. Accreditation with the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) can ensure the program meets national standards and facilitates seamless student transfer. The academic and career guidance community college students receive is critical, and conductors at four-year programs who are familiar with curriculum at both institutions, and who establish early recruitment relationships, will ensure future success.

Most significantly, the mindset of the transferring student is one of the most important indicators of future success. Disproportionately impacted students are most successful when instructors use interventions that aid students in developing a “growth mindset.”

Creating Meaningful Change

Making a shift our mindset also means changing how we do things. Below are some ideas university conductors can implement to support transferring students:

- *Structured orientation for transfer students:* Take time to identify what a new student can expect to experience in your ensemble and clearly communicate expectations for upperclassmen.
- *Peer mentoring:* Student leaders in choirs may not always be older than incoming transfer students, so consider matching students with peers who share other demographics or backgrounds.
- *Modification, not remediation:* Isolating transfer students in remedial coursework is usually not as effective as finding ways to support singers within the ensemble through structured or small-group work.
- *Articulation agreements:* Reach out to community college colleagues for specific degree plans, and advocate for articulation between colleges and universities.
- *Collaborative opportunities:* Find ways to work with other institutions and choral organizations such as sharing resources and performances spaces.

Conductors at community colleges can also contribute to the successful preparation for transfer by:

- Offering masterclasses and professional mentorship.
- Expanding performance collaborations within the community at large.
- Seeking partnerships with local professional and semi-professional ensembles. These collaborations can give community college choirs access to annual performances of major orchestral works, an opportunity typically reserved for university programs.
- Create and advise a music club or a two-year ACDA student chapter.
- Pursue grants and other avenues of funding for student travel or community collaborations.

Collaborative Opportunities


Choral singing is all about community—an art form built on working together, including everyone, and sharing a common purpose. That’s why collaboration isn’t just helpful; it’s a game-changer for growing programs. When choirs team up, students get the chance to sing alongside other musicians, expand their networks, and gain confidence. These experiences make singers feel connected and proud, turning the choir into a real community where everyone belongs.

Community college choirs can join forces with university choirs, community groups, or even church choirs for tours and performances. These partnerships create amazing intergenerational ensembles and give students opportunities they might not have otherwise. Collaborations show how powerful community partnerships can be. They bridge the gap between school and the professional arts world, giving students experiences that stay with them, boosting confidence, creating lifelong connections, and inspiring a love for music that lasts and nurtures passionate singers who will keep advocating for choral music for years to come.

Conclusion

To ensure our choral field becomes larger, richer, and more inclusive, we need to create smoother transitions for community college students. To make this happen, we must be willing to reimagine what success looks like, and at the heart of that work is a shift in mindset.

Every student deserves the chance to thrive, and accessibility for all students must be a priority if we truly seek a more equitable world. This means breaking down barriers, rethinking traditional audition processes, engaging with transfer curricula and articulation, committing to student-centered teaching, and collaborating. We can dismantle systemic obstacles and provide transformative experiences that empower students to succeed by working together across institutions. These partnerships strengthen the talent pipeline, enrich educational journeys, and create choral programs that reflect the diversity and richness of our communities.

Our responsibility as educators goes beyond training future professionals. It includes nurturing lifelong advocates for choral music—individuals who will carry the art forward with passion and purpose. Together, we can build a choral landscape where every student feels seen, supported, and inspired. 

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NOTES

¹ Natalie Steele Royston, Philip D. Payne, Adrian D. Barnes, and Kate Bertelli-Wilinski, “An Examination of Student and Faculty Perceptions Regarding Music Education Transfer Student Preparedness and Experiences,” *Research & Issues in Music Education* 16, no. 1 (2021): 22. <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/rime/vol16/iss1/5>