

Student Activities



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Student Chapter Development: Conversations with ACDA Student Chapters

by Ryan Beeken and Elizabeth Swanson

We are eager to support student members and faculty advisors of your institution's ACDA student chapter. With a forthcoming manual on how to start a student chapter, we offer this article with compelling ideas for how to build and sustain your chapter based on a Q&A from some of our nation's leading student leaders and faculty advisors. These student chapters fall under the auspices of Crane School of Music, Indiana University, and Ithaca College. Each has won the "ACDA Student Chapter of the Year" award or were the runner-up for this honor. We are grateful for their contributions to this collaborative article. Below are the individual contributors for each student chapter.

- Elizabeth Powell, Music Education, Voice and Special Education Major, at State University of New York (SUNY) Potsdam's Crane School of Music (student of Nils Klykken, Associate Professor of Choral Conducting).
- Chris Albanese (Associate Professor of Choral Conducting at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music).
- Janet Galván (Professor Emerita, Ithaca College) along with three Ithaca College alumni: Juliana Joy Child (Assistant Artistic Director, Pensacola Children's Chorus), Keilah Ussi (Former Secondary Choral Director and Current Graduate Student in Choral Con-

ducting at Michigan State University), and Rebecca Saltzman (Choral Director, Simsbury High School; Eastern ACDA Region Contemporary A Cappella & Vocal Jazz R&R Chair).

Briefly describe your institution and the makeup of your student ACDA Chapter.

SUNY Potsdam is a public liberal arts college with 2,000 undergraduate students, the Crane School of Music making up about 500 of those students. Our ACDA chapter comprises 40+ active members. A majority of our members specialize in voice, with approximately 35 of our members being music education majors on the choral track. Our other members include music business, music history, and music theory majors.

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The Indiana University Jacobs School of Music is a large school of music housed within the flagship campus of an R1 university. We serve over 1,600 music majors along with offering courses, ensembles, and other programming for non-majors. Our student chapter is composed of approximately twenty students, many of whom are undergraduate choral music education majors. We have a few instrumental and general music students as well.

Ithaca College is a comprehensive college of approximately 6,000 students, including a School of Music Theater and Dance with about 450 undergraduate music majors and 50 graduate students. At one time we had a strong master of music in conducting program. The graduate choral students were active in ACDA and

supported the undergraduates as leaders of ACDA.

Please share chapter recruitment ideas and strategies that have worked well for students at your institution.

SUNY Potsdam: We participate in Potsdam's Welcome Weekend Carnival allowing us to "table," meet new students, and add them to our weekly email chain. Additionally, we are very active on social media (@craneacda) posting our monthly calendar of events, weekly lab choirs, and information on guest speaker events. Keeping our social media up to date helps our members plan and attend our events. Another huge



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portion of recruitment for our organization is word of mouth and face-to-face encounters. We encourage our members to talk to first-year students about their own experiences at Crane and within our chapter. Our organization prides itself on being a supportive and uplifting community, and our students are welcoming, kind, and genuine. These warm interactions have been both effective and sustainable for boosting recruitment.

Lastly, we have a mentor/mentee (M&M) program that pairs up first-year students with upperclassmen in order to provide a familiar face in both the club and around campus. We hold specific bonding events and provide opportunities for the M&Ms to attend our events together to foster that feeling of familiarity and belonging. This program helps retain members; upperclassmen actively seek to return to our club to be mentors.

Indiana University: Anything involving food (ice cream socials, pizza nights, etc.)! Joint events with our NAfME student chapter have also been a success, including faculty workshops and roundtables.

Ithaca College: Recruiting began during the summer on social media and continued heavily during audition week; signs about the first meeting were posted at the choral audition site. Leadership also helped coordinate collaborative pianists for students. This was a great service to the school and to those who auditioned. Also, ACDA members were present during auditions to answer questions and be supportive of and friendly to new students.

The first meeting was held during the first week of choral rehearsals. There was a scavenger hunt as well as an introduction of ACDA leaders and choral faculty members. The ICACDA recruited not only those in vocal music education but also instrumentalists, composition majors, and performance majors. By joining ACDA, they had instant community with students from all levels (first-year students through graduate students). There were also leadership opportunities even for first-year students. Students also joined to go to the regional and national conferences. The chapter did a great job

of fundraising, making it possible for students to attend for a small amount of money. The leaders also expressed to the new students how many opportunities were provided by ICACDA to learn things that were not necessarily covered in course work. IC alumna Rebecca Saltzman states:

A big part of our recruitment process was about sheer presence in the school. ACDA was everywhere; we helped with high school visits, sold t-shirts, and had a lot of cool, well-attended events like the music read-throughs and workshops with amazing professionals. It was well-known that we had won outstanding national chapter for several years and, even if we hadn't, our reputation was that of choral excellence. When thinking about all the organizations in the SOM (music frats, etc.), ACDA was the most consistent and active. People want to be a part of something that has a great reputation and demonstrates how amazing it is all the time.

What does your chapter programming look like? What kinds of sessions and activities do you offer, and how often do they occur?

SUNY Potsdam: Our chapter has over twenty events each semester that include our weekly lab choirs, bonding, and guest speakers. Our lab choir gives students the opportunity to teach a music lesson to their peers. These can include anything the student wants to improve their teaching skills on, ranging from an elementary general music lesson to a high school choral rehearsal. Sign-ups occur at our general interest meeting at the beginning of every semester. We encourage our first-year members to sign up and offer to pair them with upperclassmen if they are not comfortable with teaching by themselves. In addition to our lab choirs, we have one guest speaker and one bonding event per month. Our guest speakers include alumni, professors, and notable choral musicians. Our bonding events in-



clude bingo, picnics, and board game nights; all are a fun way to build a community.

Indiana University: We offer a blend of educational and social activities, including three to four faculty presentations and/or panel discussions per semester. We've also invited faculty from other departments and units on campus to offer perspectives on a host of choral-adjacent topics.

Ithaca College: Generally, the chapter had choral graduate students present a topic of their choice each year. If we had an on-campus guest artist, that person would present. Faculty presented on topics of their expertise. Public school teachers in the area presented sessions on various topics (musicals with middle school, vocal jazz, tenor-bass ensembles, solfège, etc.) There was generally a session after regional or national conferences that allowed the members who went to share information about their favorite sessions and what they learned from the conference. This was fun because they would tell stories of meeting composers or conductors that they had heard about throughout their lives. They also had a Messiah reading in December—open to the community—with student conductors who had been selected through an audition process.

The ACDA chapter assisted with events on campus like our annual Composition Competition Festival Day and Concert and the New York State Area All-State Festival. They served as hosts for attending high schools, oversaw lining up the choir members in the hallway and leading them on stage. These events provided great learning experiences. Conference attendance was a big part of the year's activities. The chapter leaders also promoted community partnerships—many of the students had their first “real-world” choral teaching experience working with a community group called the Dorothy Cotton Jubilee Singers, directed by Baruch Whitehead. ICACDA also worked hand in hand with the Ithaca Children's Choir, now known as ICYC. Many students served as assistant conductors through an internship program or as staff pianists. In the words of a former student (Juliana Joy Child):

ACDA grants access to valuable resources through conferences, publications, and networking opportunities, but I imagine it could be hard for an undergraduate student to fully comprehend the value of those resources if they had no real-world applications for them. My peers and I got to attend conferences every year, mostly paid for by our student chapter. We'd come back feeling rejuvenated and get to jump right in and teach a new canon we'd learned in an interest session to young people at ICYC. We understood firsthand the importance of making personal connections with other choral professionals because we witnessed that good communication, effective collaboration, and a shared passion were crucial for successful choral endeavors. We appreciated things like the *Choral Journal* because we had exposure to so many different music-making settings, and we were figuring out what we were most passionate about.

How did you keep students engaged with your chapter throughout the academic year?

SUNY Potsdam: To ensure our club's success with student engagement, our E-board meets weekly to discuss programming. These meetings are efficient and organized with accurate records reflecting the direction of Crane ACDA. The information discussed is included in our weekly email chain for all members. We rely heavily on our E-board to recruit and excite our members about upcoming events. Seeing peers who provide valuable experiences to one another is vital to our organization's success. Our members stay involved year-round with weekly lab choirs, knowing there is always an ACDA event each week. We plan other events such as guest speakers and club bonding at least a month ahead of time and coordinate them with the school events calendar to ensure our members can attend.

The leadership in our organization is also very receptive to feedback and generally understands the

wants and needs of the Crane student body. One of our strengths lies in connecting students to resources that our curriculum may not supply or does not delve into as far as student interest goes. This puts Crane ACDA at the forefront of the student interest throughout the academic year.

Indiana University: Having events to look forward to (especially ACDA conferences) helps stimulate interest along with engaging students in fundraising efforts. Ten of our students traveled to Louisville for the 2024 Southern ACDA Region Conference. Their enthusiasm upon returning was palpable! This year, the Singing Hoosiers have been invited to perform at ACDA National in Dallas, so I anticipate many of our students attending.

Ithaca College: Emails were sent to remind people of deadlines and information needed for conference attendance. Signs were posted throughout the building about meetings and presentations. The officers met regularly. The president stayed in close contact with the faculty adviser. The calendar was shared with members at the beginning of the year. We used the Remind101 text system to remind people of meetings. Food was also a huge incentive. If people came to events, they got snacks! We used Facebook and Instagram to reach our community. Instagram takeovers were a great form of engagement. Not only did it appeal to all students (members and non-members), but it provided an informative and practical look into the lives of current students as well as alumni. Following a day in the life of current students attending choral rehearsals/classes at IC, witnessing student teachers in their first full-on teaching experiences, and alumni directing their own choral programs across the country provided an interesting and informative way to see what ICACDA students were doing with all of the tools they'd gathered at Ithaca College.

Describe your process for gaining funding to support chapter activities.

SUNY Potsdam: Our main source of funding comes from our Student Government. Every year we submit a budget request that allows us to pay for conference dues, guest speakers, supplies, and a mixer at the beginning of each semester. We also hold fundraisers throughout the year to support travel expenses for conferences. Popular fundraisers include bake sales, pretzel sales, and tape-a-professor jar wars. Fundraisers help us reach beyond our club through campus tabling and social media promotion, engaging friends, family, and alumni. Our chapter works to supply students with funding to attend the ACDA conferences each year. We strive to spark student interest and advocate for the incredible opportunities attendance at a large conference can provide. This allows us to gain significant traction with dedicated students. Being an active club with consistent and well-attended events shows our student government that we bring value to the SUNY Potsdam campus and deserve the budget that we receive.

Indiana University: As a registered student organization, we receive annual funding from the campus to offset operational costs. Funding for special projects and trips is provided on an as needed basis by the dean's office. We also fundraise.

Ithaca College: One of our most significant projects was to put together a warm-up book, which was sold nationally for \$5. Students reached out to conductors throughout the country to ask for contributions. The students learned a lot and made money to support the chapter. Each year the students also printed and ordered t-shirts to sell to the high schools who attended the choral composition contest. They communicated with the high school teachers who had been invited, sent forms, and collected the money. The students worked closely with the Student Activities Center and applied for funding for activities and for travel each



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year. They had to present a budget early in the year. From Rebecca Saltzman: “One of the most successful things we did was a silent auction with things that students would want to bid on such as ‘Dr. Galvan’s rum cake’ or ‘Lunch with Dr. White’ or ‘A crocheted sweater from Dr. J.’”

Please include any other information you would like to share about your student chapter and its success.

SUNY Potsdam: Our chapter has spent a lot of time reaching out to the choral community for support. Never be afraid to ask a musician or educator to join a zoom call and talk about their work for your chapter. Some of the most valuable lessons we have learned started with a simple ask. Crane ACDA is often the start of our members’ professional journey. Students are given the tools to succeed in academia, build their resume, and create lasting bonds with other future music educators. Our organization is one that uses its influence for unity, acceptance, and kindness. From initiatives that stand against bullying and harassment on campus to small acts of kindness each day, Crane ACDA is where students know they are always safe, valued, and respected.

Indiana University: Our students are instrumental in the chapter’s success! Their hard work and dedication is inspiring!

Ithaca College: The true secret of our success is the fact that the students ran things—they were the leaders. Being part of their professional organization is a behavior and practice they learn in part through their participation in the ICACDA chapter. They create a vision and look at holes in their education and try to find ways to get more information. What could ACDA provide that was not being done? In what areas do they need more information? What service can be provided?

Keila Ussi says:

While Ithaca College’s music education program was always strong in its curriculum, the opportunities for application of content knowledge provided by our chapter of ACDA was extremely helpful as an undergraduate... As an instrumentalist in my undergraduate degree, ACDA was also a huge way for me to step my foot into the choral world, further preparing me for choral as well as instrumental teaching upon graduation. Being a member of IC’s ACDA Executive Board was invaluable to my development. Organizing large-scale events, considering a variety of student wants/needs, coordinating endless moving parts, networking, problem solving with peers, and documenting the process along the way were all skills that have been directly applicable to my life as a choral educator and are the direct result of the experiences I had. Being provided the space to step up as leaders was beneficial, and also allowed us to provide the tools and resources most relevant to our peers.

Visit <https://acda.org/resources-for-student-members> to see a list of current ACDA Student Chapters or connect with someone at the ACDA National Office to learn more about starting a chapter at your institution. 