

# Rising Voices: Perspectives from Early-Career Choral Directors in Higher Education

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In recent years, we have witnessed several historical and cultural moments that have given us renewed perspectives on the world: the COVID-19 pandemic, a widening political divide, and a growing mental health crisis, among others. While this has certainly made a lasting impression on our communities-at-large, it has also affected the academic and musical experiences of our students, and our roles as educators. In an effort to highlight different (and potentially new) philosophies and resources in choral music, four choral directors within the first five years of their careers in higher education were surveyed on the topics of culture, curriculum, recruitment, and resources. Each director represents a range of past experiences, personal demographics, and geographic locations spanning four ACDA regions.

As we continue to appreciate the work of all collegiate choral professionals, those newest to the field are positioned to develop their own voice in a space that is constantly evolving—from exploring the effects of social norms on choral music and academia, to the importance of balancing “tradition” with “innovation.” The programs and ensembles referenced include a spectrum of enrollments, student populations, institutional leadership, curriculum priorities, and student abilities. While these experiences are not reflective of all early-career collegiate instructors, continuing to share and learn from those at the beginning of their careers in higher education will help to ensure the sustainability of choral singing in these spaces.



**Margaret (Maggie) Burk** is assistant professor of music and director of choral activities at Carthage College in Kenosha, WI, where she directs three of the college’s five choral ensembles and teaches coursework in conducting and music education.



**Matthew Myers** is associate director of choral activities at Washington State University in Pullman, Washington. He conducts the Treble Choir and University Singers, and teaches choral methods, vocal pedagogy, and conducting.



**Dominique Petite** is the assistant professor of choral music education at Kennesaw State University, GA, where she teaches courses in the music education sequence and conducts the KSU Treble Choir.



**Khyle Wooten** is assistant professor of music performance and director of choral activities at Ithaca College (NY). As a composer, Wooten had a piece commissioned for the 2024 Eastern ACDA Region Student & Community Honor Choir.

All of the directors surveyed discuss the continued importance of student-centered learning and administration (choir officers, section leaders), citing positive

correlations with curriculum, recruitment, and community. Another shared perspective is the intentionality of access, diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives (ADEI) as a crucial role in their approach to programming and student engagement. Each participant also acknowledges the work of their own mentors and shares how they continue to be inspired by their master-teachers today.

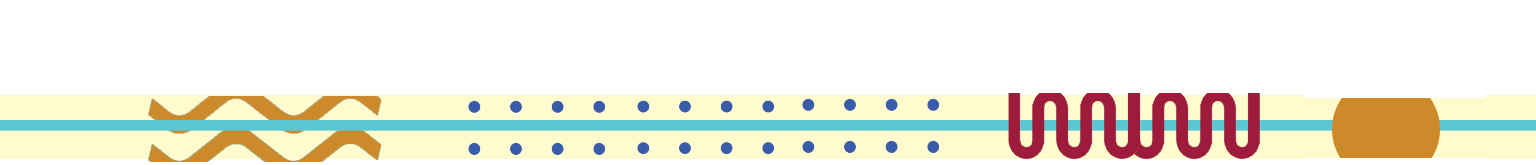
A benefit of surveying directors from across four regions of ACDA is recognizing their various approaches and perspectives based on their lived experiences. Each director has their own personal and professional connection with the ideas of culture, legacy, and the future of our field.

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**Having recently been a student-performer yourself, do you feel the criteria for “good” or “successful” choral performances has shifted over time?**

**Burk:** In the past few years (particularly since the pandemic, but not exclusively), I have reassessed my own criteria for what makes a “successful” performance. I grew up with incredible models for choral tone, expressivity, finesse, and spirit, and while those choirs, conductors, and sound ideals remain guiding lights in my practice, I have sought to reground myself in the humanity of choral singing. Given that many of us are working with reduced numbers of singers and less-experienced students, I have challenged myself to recommit to the individuals in front of me: meeting them where they are, giving them my best effort, and celebrating our collective choral pursuits. Do I still have standards for choral beauty? Absolutely, and those benchmarks are goals we will continually strive toward. Now more than ever, though, I think a truly successful choral performance is one where people are transformed by their efforts to listen and communicate, and I think that kind of success is measured by relationships rather than standards of beauty.

Another important part of this reassessment has been reckoning with my own privilege and upbringing. I was raised (even if tacitly) to value choral singing marked by certain aesthetic principles: *Tenebrae*, the



Cambridge/Oxford collegiate choirs, VOCES8, Bach Collegium Japan, and the St. Olaf Choir were definitely some of the top models. Why did I value *those* particular standards of choral beauty? How might a commitment to those types of sounds have limited me from valuing sounds that are, perhaps, unfamiliar to me or different from those “ideals”?

While I do love the sounds of those groups and deeply value their work, I now value more flexible criteria for successful choral performances: telling holistic and meaningful stories about the types of music we program, the ways we research and teach that music, and the lessons we learn in the process. Perhaps most importantly, those criteria need to center the *people* offering the music, rather than some ideal I have built up for what they “should” sound like. I am, more than ever, committed to this work of investigating and deconstructing those “sound hegemonies” I was both raised in and built for myself.

**Myers:** The biggest change I have noticed is that the modern concert takes the singers and audience on a journey in a different way. A decade ago, a great concert featured beautiful literature sung with note-perfect preparation, exquisite tone, and visible engagement. Now that most choral musicians have easy access to nearly perfect recordings, a concert is much more stirring when it can weave narrative elements between the pieces. Each piece is strategically placed within a larger program, almost curating how an audience should experience the concert as a whole. Contemporary audiences are also much more aware of social issues than they were even a few years ago, so choirs now have the ability to evoke even deeper visceral responses from listeners when they perform works that address our modern society.

**Petite:** The demand for technical mastery is still present. I think, however, there is more emphasis now on singers “performing” the repertoire. By this, I mean, we expect to see the meaning of the text on the faces of the performers. We want to see the passion and buy-in of the singers, rather than merely focusing on how closely the singers follow the conductor’s interpretation. The singers’ connection to the text and musicality

directly affects the connection the audience feels.

**Wooten:** As a student-performer during my undergraduate and MM experience, I put all my faith in the ensemble conductors for a successful conducting experience. I had far less faith in my musicality, as I considered myself to be an insignificant part of the experience. As a burgeoning conductor during this period, I would stay the same. I trusted the choral concepts I learned and the information my hands would show, but I did not trust *myself*. It was not until doctoral study that I saw myself as an essential part of the whole—the choir as an instrument. Similarly, I underwent a personal renaissance of artistry. I trusted myself as an ensemble leader and learned holistic connection to the music. I count good, successful performances by the connective energy that permeates it... knowledge of score and skills intersecting with trust of self and all other performing forces.

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**What do you value as curriculum priorities among your ensembles, and how does your philosophy of instruction reflect current trends in student engagement?**

**Burk:** I try to keep my priorities fairly simple. First, I think about an entire year of choral programming: What skills do we need to build in the first quarter? What kinds of repertoire should we use to build those skills? Then, how do we use those skills as a foundation and build from there? Second, I think about a musical “diet” through a series of questions: How am I balancing styles and genres? How am I teaching vocal technique? How am I including or excluding people based upon my repertoire choices? Whose stories are we telling, and how? How am I meeting my students where they are, and where will I push them out of their comfort zones? How am I balancing the emotional and physical demands of each piece?

Finally, I try to establish a narrative that connects each piece together (sometimes this is the first step, depending on the kind of concert). Whether it is a textual theme, stories of composers or poets, or a musical connection between pieces, I find these bridges of knowl-

edge give meaning and depth to the musical collages we present.

My other big curricular priority is sight-singing and ear training. In all my choirs, I have a mixture of music majors, minors, and non-majors, many of whom come with minimal music literacy experience. I spend five minutes every day building ears first, then eyes, which has resulted in a more productive rehearsal and a more musical experience for the students.

When we tell stories with integrity, equip students with the tools to tell those stories, and reflect upon how those stories change us, student engagement becomes an organic and integral part of the process. At every stage of their learning, I ask students to take responsibility for their own interpretation including discussing texts, listening and offering feedback, or even inviting them to submit repertoire ideas for consideration.

**Myers:** I think it is vitally important to perform as varied a repertoire as possible. I try to expose my students each semester to music from different time periods, cultural backgrounds, and languages in addition to different voicings, textures, and modes. Since the ensembles I work with change significantly in membership each semester, I make it a priority to explore new themes and styles of music with each group I teach. At my university, all courses that provide a fine arts credit have writing and research components, and I use this requirement to help students explore the background of each piece and share their insight on our online forum.

I am also sensitive to varying the pace of our rehearsals as another way to promote student engagement. I keep the same basic structures in place but will often plan for some pieces to be rehearsed as smaller excerpts while others receive a full run-through. I find that giving all pieces equal time each day makes it difficult to maintain their attention, so some pieces will get fifteen minutes in the lesson while others will receive five. It is also quite helpful to rehearse in different formations as often as possible even within the same class period, as having students move throughout the space helps recharge their bodies and sound more engaged.

**Petite:** I want my ensemble to connect with a variety of repertoire. I want them to tell the story of each piece

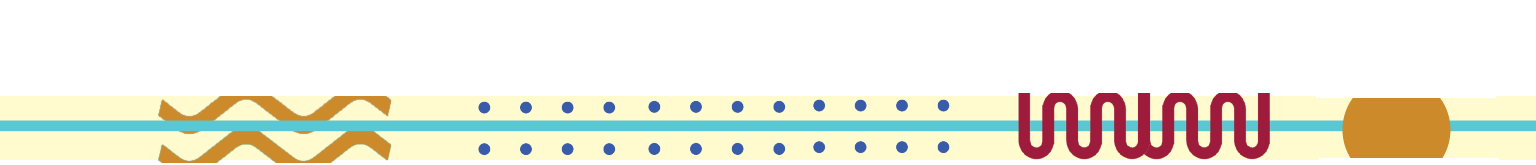
they sing through their vocal timbre, facial expressions, and energy. I want them to tackle concepts they found intimidating, and realize they have the skills and understanding to be successful when encountering challenging repertoire. When teaching context, rather than lecture, I ask students to contribute to class discussions. I help them draw parallels between the repertoire and their prior knowledge and experiences. I post detailed information on our Learning Management System for students interested in deeper explorations. I also post practice tracks after we have a solid foundation in our rehearsals because I do not want to encourage the perception that attendance is not important. COVID “Zoom” classes lulled students into thinking they could work on everything on their own without being present for class. “Zoom engagement” has obvious impacts on ensemble cohesion.

**Wooten:** I value the economy of time and awareness of rehearsal as much as the economy of motion, language, and perception in conducting. Additionally, I value the diversity and accessibility of the choral literature as much as its aesthetic pleasures. My philosophy of instruction requires an intentional knowledge of student background, strengths, areas for improvement, and inclinations to the choral art. Earnest engagement in any dispensation of the art is not possible without this living data.

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**What strategies are you implementing to recruit and retain singers?**

**Burk:** When I think about recruitment and retention, I think about how choral singing makes people *feel*. In this era of disconnection (or connection mediated by screens), choral singing is one of the best ways for people to feel connected to their peers. My first strategy is to join together with my students to build a culture that honors people in every sense: positive and supportive rehearsals, thoughtful music choices, clear expectations, student-generated constitutions, and purposeful communication (for me, this means starting the year with every choir reading Mary Oliver’s poem “Wild Geese” together and reflecting on it). Once those



goals are outlined, I work with our admissions office to send emails early to any incoming students who have expressed interest in music with an invitation to audition (which I call “vocal handshakes”), videos of the various choirs, and quotes from current students. We have Facebook and Instagram accounts for our choirs as well. We have merchandise like stickers, shirts, and bags, which my current students love showcasing all over campus and beyond. Finally, I make myself a fixture on campus as much as I can so people know me (e.g., concerts, games, ADEI events).

As far as retention goes, focusing on the student experience is everything. How am I making students feel seen on any given day? How are they experiencing musical success? How are they getting to know other students in the choir? We build time for inside jokes, moments to reflect in rehearsal, and the chance for students to hear their own voice in the room (if they so desire). Those are the magic moments that keep students coming back. A goal of mine for next year is to plan more outside-of-class activities, often assisted by my choir officers.

Finally, people love being a part of organizations or groups where they experience excellence. When people love what they do and are good at it, they become your best recruitment and retention allies. Having excellent choirs that sing their hearts out is still, perhaps, the most powerful way to both get new people in the door and keep them there.

**Myers:** My strategies for recruiting new music majors all boil down to the same concept: I try to be as present as possible for middle school and high school students in my region. This includes visits to area schools, contest adjudications, leadership retreats, and camps. I try to ensure that three things happen each time I interact with a choir: they can hear a noticeable improvement in their sound, they learn how to replicate that change later on, and they have a good time doing so! To recruit students already on campus, I try to encourage a more visible presence in our choral program, which may include participating in activity fairs, singing outside during class time or caroling throughout academic buildings, and maintaining an active social media presence.

Retention comes from a positive classroom culture. Students need to know that they are important members of the group who contribute both vocally and personally, and they also need to know that they are part of something larger than themselves. If they feel respected, if they know their performances are high quality, and if they know you want them to be successful in other aspects of their life, they will likely come back to choir.

**Petite:** I ask my singers to help me recruit by inviting their friends to join the ensemble and to come to our performances. We sang the National Anthem at basketball games to increase our exposure. I visit area high schools and work with their ensembles. I do this to give back because we ask local teachers to host our interns and student observers. I also do this to recruit potential future students. My hope is that high school students will be less intimidated to join a collegiate ensemble if they see that I am approachable and encouraging. I point out that many of our ensembles are non-auditioned, and we welcome all students regardless of major.

As far as retaining singers, I want students to feel a sense of belonging, where we enjoy each other's company. We do activities outside of class, such as cookie decorating for Halloween and Valentine's Day, hiking, movie nights, etc. I also set aside rehearsal time throughout the semester for students to get to know each other. Students share exciting news in class and on our GroupMe. I also want students to have a sense of ownership. I have a student assistant who helps with clerical duties and gets to teach and conduct repertoire. Other advanced students lead sectionals. I solicit class input about certain interpretive decisions (breaths, tempo, etc.), and I choose spring concert repertoire from student suggestions.

**Wooten:** In addition to planning tours for our flagship ensemble, I create conversations with teachers and program leaders from where our student populus is sourced. These conversations yield opportunities for visits and shared information with interested prospective students. Retention requires a great deal of investment. My choral students' lives comprise several components



of the campus experience. They are enthusiastic about coming to and staying in choir because I show up to their opera performances and non-music related campus-based events, I select repertoire that speaks to a diversity of human experience, and I check in with them regularly on their academic progress. The fruit of this investment often prompts students to spread the word about joining our upcoming choral activities.

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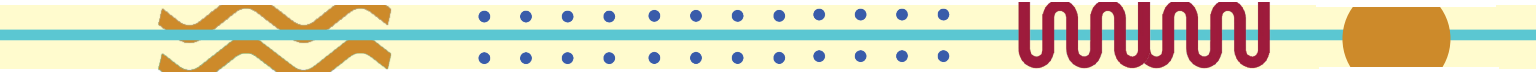
### **How has the cultural landscape shaped your coursework, including (but not limited to) ensembles, methods, conducting, literature, music education, etc.?**

**Burk:** The single most prominent element of the cultural landscape for me has been my journey with access, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI). Understanding the legacies of race and racism, and how I am a part of those legacies, has led me to reshape my teaching across all my academic disciplines. On a fundamental level, I have interrogated my own upbringing and classroom experiences and have tried to better meet the needs of my students as a result. Among my coursework, I teach four ensembles, conducting, and choral literature. These interrogations have led to a research-based pedagogy that supports more inclusive, thoughtful programming, and a broader perspective that I often discuss with students.

Additionally, this ADEI work has enabled me to better prepare my music education students for the classrooms they will lead. Last year, I spent more time rote teaching in my Vocal Methods class. By affirming the rote traditions practiced by so many cultural and ethnic groups in this country, I worked to embrace other modes of learning that will better meet the needs of my preservice teachers, most of whom will not begin their careers in a thriving tradition of music literacy. However, if they can be efficient, effective, and engaging rote teachers, they can build the rapport and respect necessary to introduce those literacy systems. And I'm still learning myself: all of my ADEI work has led me to realize how much I still have to learn as a conductor and a teacher.

**Myers:** The cultural landscape looks so much different than just a few years ago, and this inspires me to stay fresh and never rest on my laurels. I am always seeking for more ways to let students share their thoughts and have more ownership of the choral experience, as the top-down conductor-knows-all model no longer seems relevant. I often delegate in-class ensemble experiences to choir officers and schedule sectionals to further provide leadership opportunities to students. I am continually educating myself on choral literature by composers who were historically excluded from the choral canon, and I make sure that the music we sing is representative of a wide variety of backgrounds. I am very specific about repertoire, and I try to ensure that the themes of each piece feel current to students. For example, social justice music feels relevant and important from the very beginning, and is very easy to connect to students' lives. For works that may not immediately seem relevant, I try to conceptualize as much as possible to help students connect academically. In music education courses, we frequently discuss equity and access so students are better prepared to experience real-world classrooms and meet the needs of every student.

**Petite:** I no longer assume that my *belief* in inclusivity results in all my students feeling welcome. I now realize that *overt actions* on my part are the only way to show my students I value each of them. I include pictures and biographies of the composers and poets of our repertoire, so my students see aspects of their identities in the music we are singing—and so they also see that people who are different from them can create art that resonates with them. I start my Choral Methods class with the second edition of *Teaching with Respect* by Stephen Sieck, hoping his message will influence our future discussions and their future decisions. We discuss marginalized voices in music education classes and seek out literature from under-represented populations. Throughout our discussions and assignments, however, I reiterate that I am not advocating for members of “privileged” demographics to feel a sense of guilt, nor am I suggesting that works from the European canon be “canceled.” Since I teach in one of the many states with Divisive Concepts Laws, I make sure



my students are aware of the legal landscape. I would be negligent if I did not warn them about the statewide political environment.

**Wooten:** I am a Black conductor showing up in a predominantly white space for work every day. Unfortunately, whiteness often dares me to leave my authentic ways of knowing and being at the door. Such manifestations include, but are not limited to, the following: overt opposition to charged textual themes found in repertoire, blissful ignorance to composers of my race, daily confrontation of the reality that I am one of few Black people in my workspace, students and faculty limiting my knowledge and skills to Black idiomatic music, and navigating a pervasive institutional entitlement that demands ongoing partiality to Western-derived methods of learning, engaging, and creating. As a critical act of resistance and liberation, I insist upon drawing from the well of my musical experiences from the Black church to assist in my continued proficiency of music theory, using critical thinking skills in my teaching of score study and rehearsal analysis, programming and studying a diversity of repertoire that encompasses multiple abilities and stories of choristers, and centering voices of marginalized people in the promotion of our choral activities.

Choral performance and study have also welcomed an increased use of technology to facilitate learning and interaction. It is encouraging to know that choral students are welcoming worldwide connection via virtual symposia, composer/conductor mentorship programs, and virtual choral exchanges in the hopes of sharing culture, awareness, and joy. As a professor, the use of technology remains a foundational element to my commitment to cultural competency and innovative music education methods.

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### **What, do you believe, is the future of choral music in higher education?**

**Burk:** I hope collegiate choral groups continue to be organizations where students can connect with each other, driven by the purpose of creating beautiful, meaningful music together and being transformed by

that process. In order for that hope to be made manifest, we need to keep placing our students at the center of the narrative. If we build cultures and craft musical experiences that leave students feeling successful and connected, choirs will thrive. However, no matter how amazing our choirs are, significant forces continue to stand in our way with programs being deflated as we enter the demographic slope. We need to keep thinking about ways to help administrators, boards, and other power players understand the impact of what we do with quantitative data for qualitative work. Keeping track of recruitment and retention numbers is only the beginning. How can we use data creatively to tell the stories of the lives we change?

**If we build cultures and craft musical experiences that leave students feeling successful and connected, choirs will thrive.**

**Myers:** In a time of budget cuts and STEM-focused education, it would be easy to worry that choirs may be at risk. However, the choral art form is alive, thriving, and adapting to societal needs faster than I have ever seen. When we share this vibrancy with our campuses, we can show that we are among the classes most readily adopting universal design for learning, project-based instruction, and a commitment to ADEI. Anyone reading the *Choral Journal* knows the power of choral music to stir the soul, to bring people together, and to inspire social change, but those making institutional decisions for our programs do not. It is our duty to advocate for our art, and with time, we will find that choirs are more relevant than ever. I believe that more community-focused, non-auditioned choirs will thrive on college campuses, as they provide the best opportunity for more vibrant and more comprehensive program growth.

**Petite:** I teach a non-auditioned choir where most of the singers are non-music majors. These students love to sing choral music. I am hoping this indicates the rel-



evance of choral music in higher education. I know of multiple programs, however, that are seeing a drop in music education majors. I can only speculate that the reduced numbers are due to negative perceptions of life as a K-12 music educator, or reluctance to incur student debt for a career that many see as having low salary and job security. My fear is the trend will result in cuts to collegiate music departments or pressure to boost numbers by accepting students who are not likely to be successful in the program.

**Wooten:** Our future relies on the formation and furtherance of spaces that provide safety for all choristers to imagine and embody a future for the art and the world that houses it. A futurism (embodied, actionable hope) that breaks the stronghold of white supremacy, white privilege, Western-art centrism, and hatred on human imagination. An art that values the inherent, often frowned-upon technologies of the artists. Curriculum that urges faculty and students to get real about the array of avenues available to twenty-first-century musicians so to avoid career regret, burnout, and disillusionment.

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### **How are your mentors continuing to inspire your work today, and how do you see their guidance reflected in your approach?**

**Burk:** It is amazing to think about the ways my mentors show up in my classroom every day, like a cloud of witnesses sharing wisdom. Janeal Krehbiel's one-liners ("Change your vowel, change your life!"), Hilary Morton's fully embodied warmups, the voice of Eugene Rogers on my shoulder saying, "Taller, Maggie, trust it." My dad, reminding me to be a minister to those in my care. There is basically nothing that I do that was not inspired or influenced by my mentors, and they are present in a spiritual sense in just about every rehearsal or class I lead.

**Myers:** I think of my mentors nearly every day that I work with choral ensembles. I am inspired by how Dr. Craig Arnold built community and led students to feel ownership both of the music-learning process and also

in the group mindset of the ensemble. I think of how Dr. Edith Copley was able to provide specific, succinct feedback to change the sound of a choir drastically within just a few seconds. I think of how Dr. John Dickson built a healthy, supported tone through a relaxed, low gesture with a slightly rounded ictus. Each time I see an excellent teacher work with their students, I am inspired to keep learning and bring back my best work for my students. At this point in my career, I seek out peer mentors who help me learn, grow, and never get too comfortable!

**Petite:** I had the privilege of studying with Judy Bowers, Kevin Fenton, and André Thomas at Florida State University. Their work ethic, passion, and pedagogical knowledge continues to inspire me. They are the reason I chose to pursue a doctorate and teach in higher education. Though he was not a mentor on a personal level, my time singing with Robert Spano in the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus was pivotal. Spano's knowledge of the score, interpretive ideas, and expressive conducting inspired me to pursue a DMA in choral conducting with John Dickson at Louisiana State University.

I see so many reflections of my mentors in my approach. Due to space constraints of this article, I am afraid this description will be reductive. I discovered the importance of research-based practices from Dr. Bowers (rather than relying solely on anecdotal evidence). When I give feedback to my students, I still hear her voice saying: "specific and relevant!" Dr. Fenton's "positive impatience" shapes my pacing. I employ his rehearsal style to keep my students motivated throughout the preparation process. Dr. Thomas provided stylistic context for our repertoire. I am much more vulnerable on the podium now after experiencing Mr. Spano's emotive conducting. His style helped me, as a singer, connect with the repertoire, and I believe my choirs are more expressive now that I am more comfortable conveying emotion. Dr. Dickson's meticulous score study and textual analysis introduced new ways of appreciating compositional genius and making interpretive decisions. I see his gestural influence daily in the shape of my hand, the sweep of my arm, and the articulation my wrist indicates.

**Wooten:** I am grateful for mentors that take my calls, challenge me when I am stuck, and offer correction when I am wrong. To me, the best learning is indirect. Simply watching their impact, field engagement, and the fruits of their ongoing scholarship prompt me to be honest in my work. Their stamp on my approach is community—knowing that there is safety and grace for growth in the abundance of trusted counselors.

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**What advice would you offer directors who may be interested in pursuing a career in higher education?**

**Burk:** The field of higher education is about to undergo (and, in some places, is already undergoing) a somewhat painful metamorphosis as enrollments decline. My advice would be to think as strategically as possible. Even while you are still in a doctoral program, find measurable ways choral music can serve not only current students but institutions as a whole.

**Myers:** My first advice is to learn everything that you can on your own before you pursue graduate degrees. This normally equates to devoting several years to teaching and conducting experiences after receiving a bachelor's degree. Then, you will head into graduate school with much more awareness of your strengths as a conductor and rehearsal technician as well as the areas in which you want to improve. If you approach your graduate studies knowing exactly what you would like to improve upon, you will be able to shape your learning experience and make the degrees more meaningful. Once you land a job in higher education, know that there is much more to the job than teaching. The expectations for scholarly research, creative activity, and institutional service will take up a significant portion of your time. Be careful to manage your time, and avoid allowing work to overtake every aspect of your life!

**Petite:** Do thorough research before choosing a graduate program. Your relationship with your major professor is going to be the key to your success or failure in school. You also want to choose a program based on

the opportunities it will offer you: are you interested in working in opera? Is it more important that you have your own ensemble to conduct? Do you want experience teaching conducting?

Many colleges and universities are looking for instructors who have teaching experience. Conducting school choral ensembles prior to pursuing a terminal degree will increase the odds of getting an interview for a collegiate role. This is because prior teaching experience is invaluable for developing your pedagogy and teaching philosophy.

Finally, do research about what a career in higher education looks like. People do not always have an accurate picture of the job profile. Make sure you are choosing this career based on reality rather than an idealized perception.

**Wooten:** Higher education is filled with disaster stories. It is important to stay connected to your purpose for entering this arena. No one hands you your worth. Enter the academy knowing exactly who you are and what you are capable of. Trust that the very best of your training will intersect with your uniqueness as a human and educator. Make necessary pivots and exits that are grounded in wisdom and respect for your needs and well-being.

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**Related Topic from the Archives:**

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by Wendy K. Moy and Bryan E. Nichols  
(August 2023)



## What practical advice or resources have you found helpful at the start of your career in higher education (repertoire, programming considerations, books/podcasts/articles)?

**Burk:** In my methods courses, I have really enjoyed teaching Bridget Sweet's books (*Thinking Outside the Voice Box* and *Growing Musicians* in particular) as well as Sharon Paul's incredible book, *The Art and Science of the Choral Rehearsal*. Those two authors have invited me to think creatively and critically about my own teaching and rehearsing.

In terms of repertoire resources, I first engage with Spotify recordings of choirs I admire: the Philippine Madrigal Singers, Tenebrae, the ORA Singers, etc. I always discover (or re-discover) repertoire in the process. I also spend a lot of time on publisher websites; for example, I have been trying to strengthen my knowledge of Southeast Asian repertoire, which led me to Muzik-sea Publishing. I purchased Ken Steven's amazing *Dendang Alam Khatulistiwa* last year, which quickly became one of my choir's favorite pieces for the year.

Finally, I am grateful for the conductors and scholars creating databases of music by composers underrepresented by the Western classical canon: Marques Garrett's exhaustive database of Non-Idiomatic Music by Black Composers and Erik Peregrine's Trans+ Composers Database ([erikperegrine.com](http://erikperegrine.com)), to name a few. Learning this music is truly a joy and an important act of liberation. In the face of so much hate and oppression, these resources will remain an integral part of my teaching.

**Myers:** I am often inspired by thematic programming, so I will search for keywords that fit my themes on Graphite, MusicSpoke, CPDL, Musica International, the Institute for Composer Diversity, JW Pepper, self-published composer websites, and my university choral library. I also search my graduate school choral literature notes for these keywords and reach out to colleagues who enjoy discussing programming. I can often build a great list of options just by consulting these resources. As a podcaster myself with the *Choir Fam Podcast*, I have loved listening to shows like *Choir Baton*, *Choir Chat*, *Compose Like a Girl*, and *conduct(her)*, as

they offer so many great conversations that inform my philosophy as a teacher and conductor. I have found Dennis Shrock's *Performance Practices in the Baroque* and *Classical Eras* books as well as *Face to Face with Orchestra and Chorus* by Don Moses, Robert Demaree, and Allen Ohmes to be vital resources in my preparation of masterworks.

**Petite:** I transitioned to higher education in the fall of 2020, and my university moved classes online and "reduced density" rehearsals outside. There was not much institutional knowledge for these pedagogical situations. What I leaned heavily on during COVID and the post-COVID rebuilding years was the importance of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and fostering community. While these were not new focuses for me, I really prioritized creating a welcoming environment for my singers. A book that was recommended to me at that time was *Teaching with Respect* by Stephen Sieck. Now in its second edition, Sieck challenges us to consider the lived experiences of all our singers.

Another book I have incorporated in my personal journey is *The Soul of Civility* by Alexandra Hudson. Hudson presents a strong argument for civility over "politeness." I am not much of a podcast listener, but one podcast I enjoy is *Choir Fam* by Dean Luethi and Matthew Myers. They discuss a variety of topics for all choral music educators, including "Growing and Thriving in the First Years of Teaching." Shelby Wahl-Fouts had a blog on ChoralNet called "One From the Folder: Repertoire Thoughts for Women's/Treble Choir" that I still consult for treble repertoire ideas ([choralnet.org/archives/category/one-from-the-folder](http://choralnet.org/archives/category/one-from-the-folder)). Honestly, though, my biggest source of professional development—throughout my career—has been ACDA. 