



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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MUSIC ENSEMBLES: MEETING MUSICAL, SOCIAL, AND HEALTH NEEDS

The generation just beginning to reach retirement age, the Baby-Boomer generation, includes 74 million people in the United States. Currently, the number of people over 65 years of age is already greater than the number under 18, and this demographic shift is predicted to be more pronounced in the future. Mohave Community College (MCC) has created a music program over four campus sites to address an intergenerational music program—a new frontier in music education.

In the context of a comprehensive community college that meets the needs of the community it serves, MCC was in an ideal position to utilize the existing community resources to implement a music program with appropriate entry points for adult beginners and for those who wanted to return to musical performance on an amateur level. Until the 2000-2001 academic year, MCC enrolled a small number of students in traditional music courses—e.g., music appreciation and fundamentals of music. Community music ensembles existed outside the college, and with the permission of the conductors of these ensembles, the few MCC students who wanted to participate in a performing ensemble were allowed to perform for credit.

With a restructuring of the college in 2000, four divisions were created, following a university model. This change in structure and the creation of divisions allowed for a shift in thinking from campus management to curricular program-building among the four campus sites. The Division of Arts and Enrichment Studies was one of the new divisions created.

Music in spring semester 2000 at MCC enrolled 95 students; by spring semester 2001, enrollment had increased to more than 600. The music curriculum did not look much different than it did during the 1999-2000 school year; however, a new philosophical perspective had been developed.

At the community college level, performing ensembles (large concert bands, choirs, and orchestras)

are considered the core of the music program. Smaller performing ensembles such as jazz bands, chamber ensembles, and jazz choirs can be formed utilizing some of the musicians from the larger ensembles and attracting other musicians who may not have been attracted initially by the larger ensemble. Then, core music classes such as music appreciation, music fundamentals, music theory, and applied studio are implemented to support the work of the ensembles.

In order to organize the large performing ensembles, a partnership was developed among and with existing community ensembles. The conductors became instructors for the college, and the musicians were given the opportunity to become students. Scholarships were available to help defray tuition costs. Where community college music performing ensembles did not exist, new ones were formed. And a curriculum was developed to allow individuals who never had a musical education in the public schools the opportunity to learn to play a band or orchestra instrument.

Since the performing ensembles consisted of individuals with music backgrounds, the beginning band and orchestra classes were designed for anyone of any age who wanted to learn to play an instrument. The beginning classes were feeders into the performing ensembles. Within the first year of implementation, MCC's large ensembles consisted of four concert choirs, three orchestras, and three concert bands. New ensembles continue to be formed each semester.

Research data about music participation for the adult and elderly indicate that older adults who participate in music-making activities enjoy increased benefits to their health. Gerontologists argue that without group activities—such as the participation in music-making activities in an ensemble provides—social opportunities decrease, people feel more isolated, and health declines. For the middle-aged adult, participation in a performing ensemble provides a good counterbalance to the isolation of the office cubicle and the time spent alone in front of a computer.

Although our performing ensembles are intergenerational and the level of musicianship will not be professional—nor will it, in all probability, be on the level of



the university music program where the top-performing ensembles are comprised of graduate students—the community college ensemble provides students and community with a rich experience. The adult and senior musicians bring a level of maturity and tolerance to the ensemble that is conducive to creating a more congenial social atmosphere. The retired participant, especially, is one who has time to devote to practicing, the money to invest in purchasing instruments, and the tolerance and compassion for “younger” participants who may not take music as seriously. The intrinsic rewards that the musical experience provides are a high priority for the older participants and represent a musical maturity that becomes contagious among participants in the entire ensemble.

For the majority of the U.S. population, the last entry point for music education was in elementary school. Estimates indicate that only 10% of graduating high school students participate in music throughout their public school experience. For the 90% who did not have a substantial music education in public school, the community college can provide a new entry point. For those adults who have had a substantial music education experience in public school or college, the community college can provide an opportunity for reentry into the performing ensemble experience. For those graduating high school students who are interested in making a career in music, the established performing ensemble is a necessity. And for those traditional graduating (non-music major) high school students, a well-established performing ensemble program provides an opportunity for a rich musical experience, and a creative, social, and stimulating activity that makes their college experience a *better* experience.

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Suanne D. Roueche, Editor

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