Bridging the Divide Between Upper and Lower Classmen: Resources for Mentors and Freshmen in the Choral Education Program

Tanner Hancock Pruett

Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/honors

Recommended Citation
Pruett, Tanner Hancock, "Bridging the Divide Between Upper and Lower Classmen: Resources for Mentors and Freshmen in the Choral Education Program" (2022). Undergraduate Honors Capstone Projects. 921. https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/honors/921

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Program at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.
BRIDGING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN UPPER AND LOWER CLASSMEN: RESOURCES FOR MENTORS AND FRESHMEN IN THE CHORAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

by

Tanner Hancock Pruett

Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with

University Honors

with a major in Choral Education in the Department of Music

Approved:

______________________________
Capstone Mentor
Dr. Craig Jessop

______________________________
Departmental Honors Advisor
Dr. Sara Bakker

______________________________
University Honors Program Executive Director
Dr. Kristine Miller

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, UT

Spring 2022
Abstract

The recent decline in student retention in the choral education program at Utah State University should be cause for concern. Students who are excited and passionate about choir are leaving choral education and/or dropping out of college entirely. However, research into college retention rates and the experiences of choral education students at USU has helped explain this decline in student retention.

My review of research about college retention rates indicates that some of the biggest reasons that students drop out of college are academic difficulty, interpersonal difficulties, and mental health. It also indicates students with a strong sense of support from teachers and friends at their college have a greater likelihood of graduating. The research also indicates that identifying “at-risk” students and directing university resources towards those students has a high chance of increasing student retention between their freshmen and sophomore year.

My research also included interviewing previous and current choral education students from USU about their experience in the program. After carefully reviewing their answers and suggestions, it is clear that this choral education program is missing key aspects of student support that promote retention. At the end of this academic review, I have outlined three major changes to the program that will likely increase student retention by providing new resources to students through USU’s chapter of The American Choral Directors Association (ACDA).
Acknowledgements

I have received so much support and guidance throughout the course of this capstone project. I would first like to thank Dr. Craig Jessop for his continued enthusiasm and insight into this project. His continued commitment to the well-being of the choral education students at USU helped make this project a reality. I would also like to thank my departmental advisor, Dr. Bakker, who was always so kind to me and excited about his project. Her help with the research and organization of this project were extremely helpful in its successful completion. A special thanks to the honors program for giving me the space and resources to complete this project. I would also like to enormously thank the interviewees that agreed to be a part of this project. Your input and experiences were essential for this project, and I could not have done it without you.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ....................................................................................................................................................... i
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................................... ii
Table of Contents ......................................................................................................................................... iii
Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 1
Findings ......................................................................................................................................................... 3
Discussion ...................................................................................................................................................... 18
Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................................... 24
Reflective Writing .......................................................................................................................................... 25
Bibliography .................................................................................................................................................. 29
Appendix A ..................................................................................................................................................... 30
Appendix B ..................................................................................................................................................... 36
Appendix C ..................................................................................................................................................... 43
Appendix D ..................................................................................................................................................... 52
Appendix E ..................................................................................................................................................... 59
Appendix F ..................................................................................................................................................... 60
Author Bio ..................................................................................................................................................... 66
Introduction

When I started at USU University as a choral education major in the Fall of 2018, there were twelve freshmen in the program. Over the course of our first year together, I came to know these freshmen as my classmates, colleagues, and friends. However, the graduating class of choral education majors in 2022 has dropped to four people, including myself. In the last four years, more than half of the freshmen who started in the program with me have either switched majors or have dropped out of college entirely. Although USU has a higher rate of student retention between freshman and sophomore year than the national average\textsuperscript{1}, many of the students in the choral education program seem to burn out and lose their “drive” before they are able to make it to graduation.

Maintaining a high retention rate is important for any institution of higher education because, “it is a crucial sign of educational success, and a key indicator of institutional quality and effectiveness in educational research. Not only does retention maintain revenue, but it also costs less than recruiting new students.”\textsuperscript{2} In other words, the choral education program at USU will quickly lose prestige, quality, and funding if its student retention rate continues to decline. Therefore, the problem of student retention is an issue that affects everyone who has been and is currently involved in the choral education program. The purpose of this academic review is to change the trajectory of student retention in the choral education program at USU by identifying why college dropout rates are so high at the national level, identifying the needs of past and


current choral education students from USU, and by forming a plan to provide current and future choral education students the tools, resources, and support necessary to succeed in this program.
Findings

National Dropout Rates

According to Melanie Hansen of the Education Data Initiative, the overall dropout rate for undergraduate college students in the United States is 40%, and 30% of that dropout rate comes from college freshmen dropping out before their sophomore year. Her report also found that 40% of college dropouts have parents who did not finish college and that students who are 19 years of age or younger are among the group least likely to drop out of college.  

According to the same report, Hansen found that undergraduate students primarily drop out of college for the following reasons: 38% Financial pressure, 28% Academic disqualification, 13%, Poor social fit, 9% Family support, 5% Health problems, 4% Distance from home, and 3% Mental/emotional issues. This data is supported by a journal article by Steven Robbins, who confirms that the transition to college life can be difficult because of academic difficulty, career indecision, family concerns, interpersonal difficulties in living arrangements or other social contexts, and stress that leads to a variety of psychosocial and physical symptoms.

According to the college enrollment website, college factual, USU has a freshman retention rate of 73%, but a four-year graduation rate of only 18%. However, the number jumps to 47.2% when including USU undergraduate students who graduated in six years. This is an

---

4Hanson, “College Dropout Rates.”
important distinction when considering the academic challenges of different degrees and the benefits of extending difficult degree requirements over multiple semesters.

Findings from Other Universities

Low college retention rates have been an issue in the United States for decades, and proposed solutions for increasing student retention have varied over the years. Based on the research reviewed in this study, there are three types of solutions that could be successful in improving retention rates in USU’s choral education program: Surveys of student demographics, improving student “self-concept” and goal setting, and increased university funding.

The first solution comes from an article published in the *Midwest Quarterly* that examines the variables that researchers use to predict freshmen retention. The authors used data from two consecutive years of freshmen from a medium-sized Midwestern regional university to conduct their study. After their analysis, they found that students with a lower than average high school GPA (lower than 3.0), who enrolled late, enrolled part-time, and that lived off campus were the most likely to end their first semester with a failing GPA (less than 1.4). Based on these findings, the authors recommend that universities develop a rubric to identify students who meet these criteria when they enroll. Then, the school’s administration assigns a “risk status” to these students and directly provide them extra assistance to “reinforce their desire to be academically successful or to help them meet the expectations of higher education.”

The second solution comes from a couple of studies that involve research about how students’ independence and self-confidence affect their retention in college. The first study was

---

completed by Lyn Boulter in 2002, who hypothesized that student self-concept would predict how students academically adjusted to college. For the purpose of Boulter’s study, self-concept is defined as one’s idea of themselves based on their beliefs and the responses of others. Boulter studied 265 first year students enrolled at a small southeastern private liberal arts college by confidentiality surveying them with a student questionnaire during their fourth day of freshman orientation. From this questionnaire, he found that students who have self-confidence in their intellectual ability, set high educational and occupational goals for themselves, and believe that they can meet those goals were able to adequately adjust to the academic demands of college. He also found that students who perceived that their instructors cared about and supported them were more likely to have a positive academic adjustment. Based on these findings, Boulter recommends that programs should help students formulate challenging academic goals and help students pursue these goals throughout the year to help improve their academic self-concept. He also recommends that frequent contacts between freshmen and faculty can have a “powerful positive influence on the student’s academic adjustment.”

The second study that supports this solution is from an article in the *Journal of Counseling and Development*. In the study, the authors sample 198 people from Introduction to College Life seminars who enrolled during the fall of 1988 at a large southeastern university. Based on the data they collected during these seminars, the authors found that students who were not strongly goal-oriented benefited more from having social relationships where they could discuss their problems than people who were strongly goal-oriented. Therefore, for students

---


who are less driven by their goals, it is more important for them to have social relationships to increase the likelihood that they will continue in their college studies. Both of the aforementioned studies help support the claim that student support in the form of faculty and peer relationships can be successful in helping students adjust to college life.

The third solution that I will be discussing comes from a case study of large public colleges about the relationship between retention rates and university spending. Using the data in 1993 from the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard and the National Center for Education Statistics’ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, the authors tested their hypothesis that there is an association between instructional expenditure per student and freshman to sophomore retention rate. Since their study was specifically comparing retention rates in residential schools vs. non-residential schools, the authors’ main finding was that spending more money on instruction in residential colleges had a more positive effect on freshmen retention than it did in non-residential colleges. In reference to general budgeting for residential colleges, the authors say that there might be certain instructional budget lines that “help students to stay engaged, focused, and motivated to continue their academic careers after that first, perhaps very difficult, year.”

Findings from Previous and Current Student Interviews

Since this study primarily focuses on the issue of student retention in USU’s choral education program, one-on-one interviews were conducted with current and previous students

---

from the program. The main purpose of the interviews was to identify how much involvement students have with choral auxiliary groups, advising faculty, and other students in the program and how that affected their adjustment and success in the program. Four people were interviewed for this section of the project: Person A, a graduated transfer student who is currently teaching choir; Person B, a graduated non-transfer student who is currently teaching choir; Person C, a current student who is a sophomore in the program; and Person D, a current student who is a senior in the program. All of the interviews were conducted over the course of one week at the end of October 2021. The interviews with Person A, B, and D were conducted via Zoom, while the interview with Person C was conducted in-person. The interviewees were told that the interview would be recorded and used in a project to make improvements to the choral education program to increase student retention rates.

The first interview that was conducted can be found in Appendix A beginning on page 30. For the sake of privacy, this person will be referred to as “Person A” throughout this study. In this interview, Person A showed lots of enthusiasm and love for the choral education program at USU. Person A shared that much of their interest and desire to become a choral education major at USU came from their positive experiences with the faculty and students at USU, both in and out of the choral education program. Person A’s interest in the program also came from the positive experiences that they had in choir in high school, “[my choir teacher] saw potential in me that I didn’t even see in myself at that time...Not only did she teach me how to be a musician, she taught me how to be a leader.”

When asked about their experience with extracurricular activities and auxiliary groups, Person A talked mainly about their experience as an Ambassador for USU, a program where
USU students are provided a scholarship to serve the community and advocate for USU to nearby high schools. Person A also discussed how they were not very involved in the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), but they did attend the Utah Music Educators Association (UMEA) conference every year. In reference to the UMEA conference, Person A said, “I think what made the experience good for me was going with people in the program and remembering why we do what we do as music educators and why we love it and why we wanted to do it in the first place.” When asked about how they met other choral education students in the program, Person A said that UMEA was a great way to get to know people, but that they mostly became acquainted through the classes that they took with other choral majors.

In the next part of the interview, Person A was asked about their experience with the advising faculty in the Caine College of the Arts. In reference to Dr. Cory Evans (the main advisor for the choral education students), Person A had almost all positive things to say. Dr. Evans was one of the reasons Person A enjoyed the program so much at USU and they said that he was very helpful in planning their path to graduation. Person A said that they mostly met with Dr. Evans after Chamber Singers rehearsals for about a half hour to ask him questions. They said that he was very helpful in these meetings and he helped them figure out issues with their transfer credits. In reference to Cary Youmans (the general music advisor), Person A said that they messaged Cary a few times to discuss Degree Works and certain transfer credits, but they had nothing negative to say about their interactions with Cary.

In the conclusion of the interview, Person A was asked to share a few things they would tell an incoming freshman in the choral education program from the perspective of a successful graduate from the program. Person A’s answer was the following, “before you start doing this,

---

13Appendix A, pg. 33.
you have to know your ‘why [am I doing this],’ and stick to it. Because if you don’t have a ‘why’ behind what you’re doing when it comes to music, then you’re going to get burnt out so quickly because it’s a lot and [you take] minimal credits with a lot of work involved.”¹⁴ This statement is a good summary of Person A’s experience in the program: Mainly positive, but requiring a great deal of self-confidence and perseverance. The program was not easy for them, but there seemed to be enough resources available to Person A from the choral education program to help them graduate.

In the second interview, Person B seemed to have a much different perspective about the choral education program than Person A. The transcript for this interview can be found in Appendix B beginning on page 36. Person B described themselves as having a strong musical background: Taking piano lessons from a young age, playing violin in an orchestra, and performing in musicals and choirs throughout middle and high school. Person B’s extensive musical experience before college helped get them into the piano and vocal programs at USU, but they described the transition into collegiate music as being a little shocking. In reference to this, Person B said, “So when I got to college and voice became my main instrument, it was a huge learning curve for me...I would ask my voice instructor and other peers [for help], but I mostly felt comfortable asking other peers. There weren’t any resources for me to find those resources.”¹⁵ Person B’s experience shows that there were not ample resources available to help them understand the complexities and requirements of being a voice student at USU.¹⁶

When asked about their experience with meeting the other choral education majors in the program, Person B said that they met most of their colleagues through their experiences in

---

¹⁴Appendix A, pg. 35.
¹⁵Appendix B, pg. 38.
¹⁶See Appendix F, pg. 60-65.
classes, and more specifically, in Chamber Singers. Person B said that events in Chamber Singers helped develop most of their connections with choral education students in the choir, but did not give them opportunities to meet choral education majors in the other two choirs. Person B also discussed at length their experience with another choral education major in Chamber Singers at the time, Brooklyn, who helped Person B figure out the parts of the choral education program that they did not understand. Person B would take all of their questions to Brooklyn before they had Chamber Singers rehearsal and, since Brooklyn was a senior at that time, she was able to give Person B much needed advice. Person B also mentioned that the main reason they knew about NAfME was because Brooklyn was on the NAfME student council. In reference to going to NAfME meetings after meeting Brooklyn, Person B said, “I think that was a big help, knowing that someone who was nice was going to be at the [NAfME] meetings.”

In reference to UMEA, Person B described having a similarly positive experience as Person A at the annual UMEA conference. They enthusiastically said, “Yeah, UMEA was awesome!... For me, it was a bonding experience with my peers...Also, you just get a lot more ideas [from UMEA]. So I walked into my student teaching and my teaching job with ideas...that were from educators who were already teaching in real jobs.”

When asked about the advising faculty available to the choral education students, Person B did not have many positive things to say. Person B shared that none of the advisors that they met with were very helpful in the planning of their degree. They said that during their first semester, the general music advisor told them to take certain classes that were not an efficient use of their time and lead to problems later in their degree. After that semester, Person B decided to mostly advise themselves with their degree. When asked about Dr. Evans, Person B said that

\[\text{17 Appendix B, pg. 39.} \]
\[\text{18 Appendix B, pgs. 40-41.} \]
they almost never spent time in advising appointments with him. This was because Person B heard about Dr. Evans accidentally messing up the class schedule of another student in the program multiple times and Person B feared that Dr. Evans would do the same thing to them. In reference to their experiences with Dr. Evans, Person B said, “...there are lots of reasons for [why I didn’t meet with him]. I think I didn’t feel comfortable. I mean Dr. Evans is awesome, but I don’t think I really felt comfortable asking him questions.”

At the end of the interview, Person B was asked a similar question as Person A, “What would you tell freshmen who are about to start the choral education program at Utah State?” Person B had two main pieces of advice. First, they recommended that freshmen choral education students work as a University Teaching Fellow (UTF) for the Caine College of the Arts as soon as possible. Person B worked as a UTF for two years and they said that it gave them important experience with one-on-one teaching and with Canvas, a learning management system that they use every day in their current teaching job. Person B’s second piece of advice was for freshmen choral education students to find and befriend the upperclassmen in the program so that they have someone to talk to about all of their questions about the program. Person B said the best way to do this is by getting involved in the choirs and groups like the USU Choral Scholars as much as possible. The last thing Person B said in their interview was, “Just find those friends, make connections, and don’t be afraid to ask questions to people, because someone has something to say about it.”

The third interview of this project was with a student whose experiences in the choral education program have all been during the COVID-19 pandemic. This explains many of the extremely poor experiences this person has had in the program this far, but their answers still

---

19 Appendix B, pg. 40.
20 Appendix B, pg. 42.
help identify where the choral education program is lacking in student support. The transcript of this interview is available in Appendix C beginning on page 43.

Person C has had an extremely difficult experience in the choral education program at USU. In the interview, they said that their lack of formal voice and piano training before the program made their transition to collegiate music difficult and that they are still trying to transition. They said, “It’s definitely a struggle with voice lessons and juries...I did not have a lot of experience with singing solos in front of people and with preparing solo music [in high school] ...I don’t know how well I have adjusted. Probably not very well.”21 Although Person C also mentioned that their voice teacher has been understanding of their transition, it seems like they have not been provided the resources to know how to succeed as a voice student.

When asked about their experience making friends and meeting the other choral education majors in the program, Person C said that they were not be able to meet most of the students in the program until this year. They said, “ACDA was the biggest way I actually met people...the ACDA [conference this year] was the first time I actually met and talked to most of the choral ed majors.”22 Although the student has now met most of the other choral education majors in the program, this experience happened over a year after Person C started in the program. This means that Person C spent the entirety of their freshmen year before being able to turn to any of the choral education majors for support and guidance. Person C also mentioned that they were not able to meet many of the other choral education majors during their freshman year because Person C was in the Women’s choir and almost all of the other choral education students were either in Chorale or Chamber Singers. Person C actually mentioned having a very

---

21 Appendix C, pg. 46.
22 Appendix C, pg. 46.
positive experience in the Women's choir and working with Dr. Jessop, but not knowing the older choral education majors made it hard to feel welcomed into the program.

When first asked about their experience with the advising faculty in the choral education program, Person C asked, “How honest do you want this?” They continued by describing their two experiences with the general music advisor, Cary Youmans: One meeting during Person C’s freshman year where Cary shut down their questions by explaining to them where they could have found the answers before calling him, and another, more recent meeting where Cary was unable to answer most of Person C’s questions about extending their degree by one semester. Person C said this in response to these experiences, “Yeah, so I don’t really talk to the advisors because I had the one really bad experience, and maybe [Cary] wasn’t being mean, but he sounded very short with me. And I mean, since I’m able to mostly figure it out on my own, I would prefer to do that rather than go talk to him again...I feel like he’s definitely ill-informed about the choral education major.” Person C did describe having a more positive experience with Dr. Evans, but they said that they have only met with him once and it was to discuss extending their degree by one semester (of which he was very supportive).

At the end of the interview, Person C was asked about what they wanted to see from the choral program going forward. One of the main points Person C made was that the choral education majors in Women’s Choir are very disconnected from the rest of the choral education majors. There are no opportunities to interact with the other choir members until the two concerts each semester. Person C said, “One of the biggest places you connect with people is in choir and I didn’t get that because women’s choir is so separate from everything else and it’s really, really

---

23 Appendix C, pg. 47.
24 Appendix C, pg. 47.
The other main point that Person C made was that the creation of an ACDA student chapter at USU was a step in the right direction for the program, but that they would like the group to meet more often. Person C emphasized that having more opportunities to meet with the choral education majors who are not in their classes could help develop a support system amongst the students in the program. Person C also mentioned that more communication from the faculty in the program would be very helpful because there are so many requirements, and it gets very confusing very quickly. Person C seemed to emphasis the following three improvements to the program in their answer: Better communication with students, a stronger sense of community, and less disconnect between the choirs.

The fourth interview of this project was with a senior choral education major currently on track to graduate in the spring of 2022. The transcript of this interview can be found in Appendix D beginning on page 52. Their experience seemed to involve similar ups and downs to Person B.

Person D learned about the choral education program at USU after meeting some of the members of Chamber Singers during their junior year of high school. They had extensive training and experience with the piano before joining the choral education program and spent time in choir and theater in high school. However, in reference to their first year in the program, Person D said, “So, my first year was awkward because I came [to the program] in the spring semester. I remember having no idea what was going on and having no easy way to find that information.” They also said that the transition to vocal music was difficult for them because they had no experience with solo vocal repertoire before joining the choral education program. Person D said that they, “were completely clueless in understanding the whole process, and the

---

25 Appendix C, pg. 50.  
26 Appendix D, pg. 53.  
27 See Appendix F, pg. 60-65.
syllabus [for voice instruction] wasn’t helpful and it was very scary.”  

Similar to Person B, Person D had a difficult time transitioning into being a vocal student, even though they had extensive music experience and training before joining the program.

Although Person D said it was hard to understand what the expectations for the program were in the first year, they said that they had a friend named Abby who was two and a half years ahead of them in the program who helped them immensely. According to what Person D said in the interview, this relationship was the reason why they were able to understand many of the confusing and frustrating parts of the program in their first year. Person D also said that Abby was the only upperclassmen they knew that first year. They explained that it was not until their second semester, when Person D joined Chamber Singers, that they were able to become acquainted with the other choral education majors. They continued by saying, “And it really wasn’t until we went to Boise [on a choir tour] because we spent a couple of days stuck together. And before that I hadn’t talked to a ton of [the choral ed majors], I just knew of them.”

In the next part of the interview, Person D shared their experience with the advising faculty in the choral education program. They described the first general music advisor they met with as “delightful” and “very helpful,” but described their experience with Cary Youmans as “really not helpful at all.” Person D said that when they asked their questions to Cary, he was not able to answer most of them and Person D ended up going to other students for answers. Person D said that because they had begun to map out their degree with the help of their friend Abby and other students, they were able to figure out most of their path to graduation by themselves. They also described having to do extensive research on the specific requirements to

---

28 Appendix D, pg. 53.
29 Name changed for privacy.
30 Appendix D, pg. 54.
31 Appendix D, pg. 55.
graduate, and that the University’s Degree map for Choral Education and the education college’s STEP website were the most helpful resources. In reference to Dr. Evans, Person D said that they only met with Dr. Evans once to discuss graduating a semester early. In this meeting, Dr. Evans told Person D that he, “could take two credits of voice lessons in one semester, but then I talked to [the voice department head] later about that and she said, ‘No, you can’t do that.’ So I ended up doing a summer semester [of voice lessons] just so I could get that last credit.”

If Person D had not asked the department head about that requirement when they did, Dr. Evans’s advice might have forced them to extended their degree by a semester.

When asked about their experience with NAfME, Person D said that they had not had positive experiences with NAfME throughout their time in the choral education program. Person D said, “My main experience with NAfME is that they don’t think about choral majors at all. They are an afterthought, and I have no idea how they choose the presidency, but that just seems to happen with no input from anyone.” However, when asked about the annual UMEA conference, Person D had much more positive things to say. They said, “I adore UMEA. I think it’s so fun and it’s like the one thing that actually gets me excited about my career...It’s gotten me into the real choral world and taught me things that, especially early on, I felt like I was missing from my classes.” Person D also briefly mentioned that they have enjoyed ACDA, but they have not had many experiences with the group because it was established so recently. They said that it would be a good idea for ACDA meetings to include some of the course content that is covered in upper-division classes, like choral literature and choral methods, to provide

32 Appendix D, pg. 56.
33 Appendix D, pg. 57.
34 Appendix D, pg. 57.
younger choral education majors the opportunity to learn and talk about real choral education content earlier on in their degrees.

At the end of the interview, Person D was asked, “What advice would you give to an incoming freshman about being in [the choral education] program?” Their answer, which was very similar to Person B’s answer, was, “...if you have questions, ask me or ask any of us because those of us who are experiencing the program currently will have better answers than anyone else...We can help you, but also, do what you can to be a lover of choir on your own because you really don’t get [choir classes] until your third year of school, and you need that independently earlier on.” Person D seemed to have a positive experience in many aspects of the choral education program here at USU, but it seems that many of those experiences were a direct result of help from their friend Abby and other majors in the program.

35 Appendix D, pg. 58.
Discussion

After studying this body of research on retention rates and the experiences of choral education majors at USU, major changes need to be made to the program in order to promote higher student retention. Changing the curriculum of the program could be a solution, but it would be an extremely long process that could threaten USU’s national and state recognition as an institution for teaching and certifying choral educators. Instead, the easiest and most effective solution for improving retention in the choral education program at USU would be to positively change the student experience through extracurricular choral groups and activities. Based on my findings, I believe that there are three problems with the program this solution must address. First, I will briefly summarize these problems and then I will present three sketches of possible solutions for addressing them.

The first problem is an unorganized advising system that does not properly guide students towards a path to graduation that works for them. Almost all the interviewees complained about Cary Youmans and/or Dr. Evans regarding their advising and many ended up “advising themselves” on their degree plan. There is also the issue of organization between the three advisors that meet with choral education students: The general music advisor, the choral education advisor, and the Student Teacher Education Program (STEP) advisor. Students are required to meet with each of these advisors at least once during the course of the degree, but a lack of communication between the advisors often leads to confusion and frustration for the students. The advising system needs to be organized in a way where young choral education students get help from someone who understands all aspects of the requirements for the degree.

The second major problem with the choral education program is the lack of communication between the faculty and the students. Considering the findings from Boulter’s
research, a significant factor in high freshman student retention is frequent contacts and communication between faculty and students. Based on my interviews, it seems that many of the students do not understand the requirements for their degree and are too afraid to frequently ask the faculty for help. Although ACDA is helping bridge this gap by providing a space for choral students and faculty to communicate, there is more that this group can be doing to help guide freshmen students throughout their first year in the program.

The third major problem with the choral education program is the lack of opportunities for lower- and upper-class choral education students to communicate and connect with each other. Many of the lowerclassmen in the program become acquainted with other lowerclassmen in their shared classes and choirs, but have no opportunities to meet and interact with the upper-class students. This is partially due to the structure of the program, but it is also due to a problem with the choral auxiliary groups that do not make building a choral community a priority. This is a problem considering lowerclassmen need the upperclassmen to help provide guidance when the advising offices are unable to help them.

Solution #1: Choral Education Peer Advisor

In order to address the issue of unorganized and ill-informed advisors, I recommend creating a position of a Choral Education Peer Advisor. This position would preferably be held by a senior in the choral education program who has completed almost all of the course requirements for the degree and is planning to student teach in their next semester. With their years of experience in the program, the student choral education advisor would be able to take on the burden of answering basic questions about the program and designing degree plans for

lowerclassmen from Dr. Evans. This will allow Dr. Evans to focus more of his time advising the upperclassmen.

The student choral education advisor will be a paid position. One possibility to get funding for this job would be to hire the peer advisor as a UTF for one of the choir classes. Instead of attending that choir class, the peer advisor would hold appointments with the lowerclassmen in the program, and the freshmen would be required to meet with the peer advisor at least once before the end of their first semester. The peer advisor would be trained by Dr. Evans and by students who have held the position in the past. If the class sizes are small enough, there would only need to be one choral education peer advisor for the whole school year. To help the training process, there could be two peer advisors in the fall, one senior and one junior, and the more experienced advisor would spend the semester helping the less experienced advisor understand the complexities of the job. Then in the spring, when the senior advisor leaves to complete their student teaching, the junior advisor would be able to take over the job and begin to train the next peer advisor. The addition of this job to the choral education program would allow lowerclassmen to get the advising help they need from upperclassmen who have experience in the program without changing the structure of the advising resources currently in place for choral education students.

Solution #2: ACDA

In order to create a more organized choral education program with collaboration between students and faculty, the USU student chapter of ACDA needs to be much more involved in the program. The first step in increasing ACDA involvement is to communicate with choral education students about the importance of ACDA from their first day in the program. Ideas for
this are explored in solution #3, but choral education students need to know that ACDA exists and that it is an important organization to be actively involved in.

The next step in improving and expanding ACDA would be to expand the size of the presidency. The USU student chapter of ACDA currently only has a president and a vice president, but their roles should be more defined. The president should be in charge of leading ACDA meetings, coordinating mentoring efforts (more on this in solution #3), and communicating with faculty about the needs of the organization. The vice president should be in charge of sending a weekly/biweekly email out to all of the students about important choral events and deadlines, organizing events with guest speakers, and leading ACDA meetings when the president is not available. Other responsibilities for these positions should be added as the presidency deems appropriate. The ACDA presidency should also include a position for a treasurer/financial officer and a social media officer. The treasurer would be in charge of funding for ACDA and applying for grants to help students attend the Western Region’s ACDA conference each spring. It will also be important for the treasurer to coordinate funding for the Utah ACDA conference each fall, but minimal funding should be required for students to attend that conference. A budgeting meeting at the beginning of year each with the presidency and faculty of ACDA will help determine what activities and events are possible within the organization’s resources.

The social media officer will oversee establishing and maintaining ACDA’s presence online. They will make announcements about the choral events during the school year, post highlights about different choral education students in the program, and share resources that choral education students might find useful during their time in the program. Maintaining a
social media presence will help get the word out about ACDA and increase enthusiasm and participation from students in the organization.

Solution #3: A Mentoring Program for Lowerclassmen

In order to address the issue of disconnect between lowerclassmen and upperclassmen in the choral education program at USU, I propose that we develop a mentoring program for freshmen choral education students. The program would be monitored and administered by ACDA, who would oversee all choral events and business outside of the choir classes.

The mentoring program would begin over the summer, where the upperclassmen choral education students would already be communicating about the freshmen entering the program in the fall. The ACDA student presidency would work together with faculty to identify each of the incoming freshmen and assign them to an upperclassman in the program. Sometime over the summer, the upperclassmen mentors and ACDA presidency will meet to discuss mentor assignments and expectations for mentoring.

During the week before class starts, all the choral education students will participate in an introductory ACDA meeting where they welcome the freshmen and give them an overview of the program. During this meeting, upperclassmen mentors will introduce themselves to their assigned lowerclassmen and exchange contact information to provide the upperclassmen a way to check up on their students throughout the semester. This will also be a perfect time to officially register students for ACDA online. The meeting should also include games where students get to know each other, food, and should be a positive welcoming experience for freshmen in the program. The meeting will most likely be held on the Saturday before classes begin so that it does not conflict with the activities that occur for freshmen in USU Connections.
classes. Ideally, the ACDA vice president and social media officer will get the word out about this meeting via email and various social media platforms many weeks in advance.

Once the school year has begun, the job of the upperclassmen mentors is to regularly check in with their students. The checkup should happen at least twice a month, preferably during the weeks that there are no ACDA meetings or events. This checkup can be via text, email, or any other means that the lowerclassmen and upperclassmen mentor deem appropriate. The upperclassmen mentor should be prepared to answer questions about voice lessons, music classes, homework, and basic first year problems. The mentors should be willing to listen to their students and be able to direct their students to different University resources when appropriate. It will also be the job of the mentors to report to the ACDA presidency about any significant issues that their freshmen are having so that the presidency can mobilize resources and support for that student as soon as possible. If implemented correctly, this mentoring program will help build a supportive community in the choral education program where all students know each other before day one of the program.

---

37USU connections is an orientation course for all freshmen at the University that has events during Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday before the fall semester starts.
Conclusion

The goal of this project was to use academic research and student experiences to help design ideas for improving student retention in the choral education program at USU. Although there is much room for improvement in the program, the goal of this project was never to use its findings to place blame on any of the faculty. As a student in the program, it could be very easy to use my own frustrations to justify blame, but this would not lead to change in the program. It would only lead to further tension, more problems for students, and a maintained low student retention rate in the program. The goal of this project has always been to change the culture of program by providing solutions to low student retention that involves the faculty and the students working together.

It is also important to consider the other side of low retention in programs like choral education at USU. Although the graduating class of students is small each year, the graduating choral education students almost always have a teaching job immediately after college. Having a more difficult program helps develop stronger graduates from the program, but the interviews from this project proved that some of the most successful choral education students from USU have complaints about parts of the program that deterred their learning. The solutions of this project are designed to increase student retention by removing unacademic challenges from the program to help passionate and intelligent students in the program focus on the work of their degree. By providing the support and resources that students need through ACDA, we can show our students that the choral education program at USU is demanding, but also dedicated to its students’ success.

Word count: 7193
Reflective Writing

Pursuing this project as a capstone has not been an easy experience. Although many students and faculty in the choral education program agree that there is a major problem with student retention, it sometimes feels that I am the only one interested in making a serious change to the program. It has been difficult to stand by and do nothing as many of my colleagues have left choral education because they have felt unsupported and neglected by their program. It was tempting to cope with my negative experience in the program by powering through to graduation without thinking about it, but I knew I would regret subjecting future choral education students to the same negative experience. This project is the capstone of my education because I designed it to use everything I have learned about choral education to make this program better for future students. I hope this project helps drastically change the nature of the program to be more inclusive, supportive, and invested in student success.

Although it has been hard to be so critical of the choral education program through this project, it has taught me about the significance of mentoring and supporting students. As a teacher in training, I am always looking for ways to create a safe and supportive environment for students in my future classroom. This project helped me learn to show students that they are important by listening to their needs and making an attempt to meet those needs. Although the needs of a high school choir greatly differ from a college music education student, the idea of providing learning resources, engaging with students on a personal level, and regularly finding ways to improve will be essential in my future classroom.

When I was deciding who I wanted to be mentor for this project, I encountered a major dilemma. I wanted to work with someone who understood the structure of the choral education program first-hand, but would not be offended by my notion that the choral education program
had serious issues. However, when I approached my mentor Dr. Jessop with this idea, he was surprisingly enthusiastic and was very supportive. We met weekly throughout the semester and Dr. Jessop continually helped me understand the issue of student retention from the perspective of the choral faculty. Originally, I thought the faculty was uninterested in student problems with the program, but Dr. Jessop helped me learn that the faculty had no idea that many of the students were struggling so much. I realized that this is one of the main reasons why there is a disconnect between students and faculty in the choral program. Having Dr. Jessop’s support and perspective on my capstone has restored my faith in the program and allowed me to structure the project in a way that focuses on positive change, rather than blaming the program. My experience with Dr. Jessop has taught me so much about the essence of choral education, and I hope to work with him much more in the future in my career as a music educator.

As a choral education student, I am not provided many normal opportunities for research throughout the course of my degree. I have completed a variety of small research projects in my general education classes, but many of the courses in the choral education program do not require me to complete research. This capstone project created a unique opportunity for me to research a topic related to choral education in depth and use it to make a positive change. Throughout this project, I was able to use what I have learned about academic resources, writing, and professional formatting in my general education classes to create a final product that demonstrates my ability to do research. These skills will be extremely helpful to me in the future when I go back to school to complete a master’s degree.

Throughout my time in the honors program, I have been encouraged to pursue knowledge that challenges my assumptions and to use that knowledge to positively change the world around me. I have not had many opportunities to do this throughout my coursework, but this capstone
has become the greatest opportunity I have had in my degree to give back to my academic community. I have had to review the structure of my program with extreme attention to detail, and things I learned in my honors classes and activities have helped me to challenge that structure so I can change it. Learning to not accept things at “face value” has helped me to identify the parts of the choral education program that can be changed to better support its students.

As a music major, completing a research project allows me to engage with academia in a more traditional way. The nature of a music degree involves much more practice and performance than any other degree, which does not leave much time for research and traditional course work. Completing a capstone project that is so focused on research has allowed me to practice my ability to find academic resources, synthesize research, analyze statistics, and engage in the discourse of an academic issue. This capstone has also given me new insight into the reasons that students struggle in college and the best ways to help these students. It is important for all university programs to understand the reasons that students drop out of college and to create programs and resources that address those reasons. If people from other disciplines happen to read through this capstone, I hope they use the research about identifying at-risk students to better utilize their resources on the students who need them.

The purpose of this capstone is to improve the choral education program for future students interested in becoming choir teachers. Choir teachers are a part of a community of musicians who are invested in changing the world through sharing and creating choral music. Choral education students need to feel included in that community to help them endure the most difficult parts of their education and training. If the solutions from the project are successfully implemented in the program in the next year, then hopefully USU will develop a vast community
of choral education majors who communicate and support each other throughout their whole careers.

Word Count: 1042
Bibliography


Tanner (Interviewer): Okay, great. Just start by stating your name and where you are from.

Person A (Interviewee): Where I grew up?

T: Yes! Maybe your name and what you're currently doing and where, how about that?

P: My name is [redacted]. I'm currently teaching choir at [redacted], and I live in [redacted] right now.

T: Awesome. And when did you graduate from USU?

P: I graduated from Utah State in December of 2020, fall semester.

T: Awesome. And why did you decide to go into choral education at USU?

P: The college specifically, or choral ed as a whole?

T: Let's start with why you decided to transfer to USU and then why you decided to go into choral ed.

P: So I always knew from when I was in high school that I always wanted to go to Utah State University. It was just my dream school. I applied for a scholarship my senior year of high school, didn't get it, and so that put me onto a different track so I could afford school because I couldn't afford out-of-state USU tuition at the time. And so I went to a junior college and built up my resume as much as I could, and I applied for that same scholarship again and ended up getting it as a transfer student, which was really nice. So, it was my dream school. I loved, you know, thinking of saying, “I graduated from Utah State. I was an Aggie,” and also the fact that I'd heard such great things about Dr. Evans as a music educator and just as a musician in general. And not only as a great musician and somebody who knows what he's doing with his choirs and can make awesome music, but he's such a great guy, too. Also, when I toured campus and met some of the people in the Voice Department; I actually met Megan Warburton my very first day, which was awesome, and I didn't realize that we would be as close friends as we ended up being. But it was just people like that, just wonderful people that are at the college and in the program.

T: Awesome. Was the thing you said about Dr. Evans the reason you went into Choral Ed, or do you have a little bit more on that?

P: So I decided to go into Choral Ed because my choir teacher in high school totally changed my life. When I was a freshman, I was a little stinker who loved sports. And so, my choir teacher pulled me aside one day, because I was being that little turd in high school that didn't participate,
wouldn't sing, and just kind of had a bad attitude. And when she pulled me aside, she was like, “What's up, like why aren't you singing; what's going on?” Because I was totally affecting the whole group. Once you get a bad attitude in a group, it spreads.

And I said, “I just want to focus more on Sports. So I'm waiting out the semester and then I'm going to not be in choir anymore and I'm just going to focus on sports.” And she didn't get mad at me. She didn't, you know, get after me for not participating in class and saying, “I have a bad attitude.” She just looked at me, and she said, “You know, I really want you to consider what you said. You have so much potential and I think you could really do something with the voice that you have and the things, musically, that you're able to do. And I would hate to see you throw that away.” And that was it; she just let me go. And I was like, “holy cow,” and I never forgot that situation because I thought she saw potential in me that I didn't even see in myself at that time, and as my senior year rolled around, I was like, “What am I going to do with my life? I just, I don't know.” And I realized that my choir director, she just changed my whole perspective. Not only did she teach me how to be a musician, she taught me how to be a leader. And she taught me how to, you know, be a part of something that was greater than myself and I love that! And it changed my life, and I was like, “I want to do that for somebody. I want to do that and music is a great way to do that.” And so, that was it. Here I am.

T: Wow. That's so cool. It's hard for me to think of you as a rebellious, annoying ninth grade athlete!

P: I totally was! I would just sit there [in choir class] and I was straight faced the whole time.

T: That is so interesting because you were an ambassador at USU. So what a flip!

P: Right? It really was. And it was really pivotal for me when she was like, “Hey, I would hate to see you throw away this potential” and I was like, “I should stop being a turd and start doing good stuff in this class.”

T: I love that for you! So, what kind of experience with music did you have before you entered the program here?

P: It is really interesting because I came from a really strong program in high school. I was part of a really good choir, Syncopation, which was very sought-after. Kids liked it and it was the fun thing to do; if you were any type of choir kid, you wanted to be in this choir. And so, it was great because I went from this program where I thought that I had really built up [my abilities] and done a lot of really good things. And then I went to this junior college and the music program there is...very sad. The professors there really try. They really try to make it awesome and I learned a lot, which I was grateful for. But I went from this experience of a really great and solid high school experience to a really hard junior college experience, where I felt that it just wasn't there. My high school choirs were doing more advanced music than we were doing it at the junior college level at that time. And so, I remember sitting in my first rehearsal in chamber singers the first day of class, my first year up at Utah State, and I was seriously just like,
“Holy crap, we just sight-read this piece in another language and it was awesome! And I can't even believe that, like, this is what it should be like.” I don't know if this is answering your question. Am I totally off base?

T: No, this is good! I just want to get an idea of what your musical background was like. So here's a follow-up question. Had you ever taken any kind of instrumental or voice private lesson before you came to college?

P: Yes. I started taking private voice lessons when I was a freshman in high school and I took it on and off my freshman and sophomore year. My sophomore year I didn't really take [lessons] because I was involved in sports. And so, I was gone a lot on the weekends and my weeks were busy, and so I didn't take it as seriously until my senior year. I took some junior year [lessons] more often than I took my sophomore year, but when I figured out like, “Oh, this is what I want to do and I have to go audition and do things;” then that's really when I kind of started taking things seriously and liking it more.

T: All right, cool! But you had taken like, four years of voice lessons before you went to Junior College. And then, did you take lessons through Junior College?

P: I did. Yep. I mean, it was the same as the [Utah State] University program. So it was required that you take, you know, a certain amount of voice lessons and pass, you know, certain barriers, and juries and all that stuff.

T: Okay cool. So when you were a student here, which wow, that's a year ago, that’s crazy. What extracurricular or like auxiliary groups were you in, outside of choir? And they can be like, related to choir and also not related to choir. So, basically, what groups were you involved in at the University?

P: I like to keep balance in my life, I guess as much as I can. I wasn't involved in extracurriculars that were really related to choir or related to music. I felt like that was my education and I was getting enough of that there. I also love leadership, so I was an Ambassador at Utah State and I loved that. We met a couple times a week and we would give campus tours. I would travel a lot to Junior Colleges and other high schools and basically tell other kids why they should come to Utah State, and I loved it. I loved it. I loved it! Being involved is like the best way, and serving is the best way for you to truly love something and love what you're doing.

T: Yeah. Was there anything else similar to that? Or is that like the main one that you participated in?

P: That was the main one. That took up quite a bit of my time between both of the things.

T: Yeah, I'm sure [it took up a lot of your time]. When you were a student, did you ever participate in any auxiliary groups? This isn't a guilt trip or anything. This is just like honestly, what was your experience like? Did you participate in any, like, choral area activities? Like I'm thinking, if NAfME did anything? Or if ACDA did anything? Or like, do you remember participating in anything? And if so, what was most impactful to you?
P: Yes, the conference in St. George. I went to UMEA my second year at Utah State and I loved it. I thought it was awesome. Conferences like that are good because you go and you can take what you like and leave what you don't. And so I loved it because there was lots of stuff and lots of people have really good ideas. And then, this might sound bad. I hope it doesn't come across like I'm being rude, but some people do things and you're like, “Okay, now I know what not to do.”

T: Yes, I know you're talking about.

P: Yeah, and so seeing that was really awesome. And I think what made the experience good for me was going with people in the program and remembering why we do what we do as music educators and why we love it and why we wanted to do it in the first place. Because you could talk about that and bounce ideas off of each other and that's something that I loved about it. And that was the main thing that I did. And then the next year, right after I graduated, I did the online UMEA and that was great; those online sessions were awesome.

T: Great, so a follow-up question to that: When you first transferred to USU and joined the program, how did you meet the [choral ed] majors around? Was it in classes or maybe was your first interaction with some of them at UMEA? What was your experience there?

P: My biggest one was in classes. Yeah, I remember meeting some of my closest friends that I still have now from Utah State in instrumental methods or string techniques or percussion techniques. Those classes, when you are Choral kids, and I feel like band people probably relate to this too, when you have to take a class where it's something that you don't know how to do, and you start fresh and you don't know anything, [struggling through those classes together are] those bonding experiences that bring you together.

T: Yeah, totally. This is really good, thank you. Your answers are great. So, looking back on your experience; your first year when you just transferred here, what were some things you wish you knew? And I guess you weren't a freshman then because you had already been to junior college, but as a first-year student in the USU choral ed program, what are some things you wish you knew? If you need to take a second, that's okay.

P: I guess the first thing that comes to my mind is that I wish I knew that the level is different, when transferring from any Junior College. I know there are junior colleges that have really awesome music programs, which is awesome. The one that I had graduated from wasn't as... awesome as some others that I know of. And so I wish I would have better known the expectations that there were, or the possibilities that there even were beforehand. Like at the University level, instead of a junior college.

Another thing that I wish I would have known was how to get to know some professors better. In the music program at Utah State, it's pretty nice because the class sizes are relatively small. But at the junior college level, we were even smaller. I think my biggest music class for voice stuff was probably like six or eight kids. And so, knowing stuff like, “How do I make sure that I can still make myself heard at the University level,” or “How do I actually get the goals that I want
and not be afraid to go after that?” Even though it was daunting to go to Utah State and to hear these vocal performance majors, (because there was no such thing as a vocal performance major at this junior college that I was at because the music program in general is just very bleak and dwindling), and so just realizing, holy crap, hearing some of those singers [at Utah State] for the first time is totally daunting and just knowing like it's okay. You can still do all this too and you're going to be fine. It'll work out.

T: Yeah, totally. This is really great stuff! Thank you so much. When did you first “really” interact with Dr. Evans? What was your first real interaction with him?

P: My first “real” interaction with him was in high school. He came up to Star Valley High School and I think my choir director put it together. It was like a festival, but just for the students at the high school and I think she probably paid him to come up and do a judge thing, and I performed a song for him that I had been working on when I was a freshman.

And that wasn't the experience that really stuck out to me, but I remember him and I remember him being there and I remember a note that he made on my judge scorecard, and I still think of it to this day. And so I knew of him and I knew who he was.

My first real interaction that really stuck out to me was my audition for chamber singers. I went in there and we talked and, the way that he presents himself and the way that he speaks is so just full of enthusiasm and passion and I love that! And it just rubs off on the choir program. Just speaking to him and just being able to tell right away, the kind of person that he was, I was just drawn to it so much. Because I wanted to be surrounded by great people and I feel like Dr. Evans is just that person. Not only does he totally know what he's doing, but he is [also] so qualified and creates great music and beautiful things and pushes his choirs to be the best that they can and he's ambitious. He's got all these great qualities, but set all that aside and he's also a great guy. And I think that's what makes you love him. He's a great guy.

T: Totally. So, follow-up question: How often did you meet with him during your degree? [Specifically] for advising related topics?

P: I actually met with him, pretty frequently. There were a couple times that, especially as I was getting ready to graduate, after chamber singers, I would just say, “Hey, dr. Evans. Do you have like 10 or 15 [minutes]? I have questions and I want to talk about them,” and he was awesome. He was like, “Yeah, come in! Let's talk.” And there were a couple times that we'd sit in there and I would ask him questions for hours. Well, maybe not hours. But I'd be in there for a good hour after chamber singers just asking questions, and he was always so awesome about saying things like, “You know, you could do this, or you could try this, or this is what I would do. And, you know, if the situation happens do this.” He was always so willing to take time out of his own schedule, time that I knew he wanted to be spending prepping the choirs, but he would help me because I had questions and he wanted to see me be successful as a music educator. And there were times that I had to stick up for the credits that I already took [in junior college] and had to bring syllabi to a professor and say, “Here are the requirements. Here's what I did in this class [in junior college]. Can it fulfill the requirement here?” I think with [Dr. Evans], he was always so great to work with me and anything that I needed. And so, he was awesome.
T: Great. This is a small question. Did you ever meet with Cary Youmans to discuss advising stuff or was it mostly through Dr. Evans?

P: I did meet with Cary Youmans. I didn't meet in person with Cary as much, but I did a few times. I mostly [messaged with him] over email, and that was mostly about the transferring of the syllabi and getting things transferred over into DegreeWorks.

T: Okay thank you. My last question is, if you were to give a couple pieces of advice to the incoming freshman choral ed class next year, what would you say to them?

P: I would say, before you start doing this, you have to know your “why [am I doing this],” and stick to it. Because if you don't have a “why” behind what you're doing when it comes to music, then you're going to get burnt out so quickly because it's a lot and [you take] minimal credits with a lot of work involved. This might come across as really blunt, but some people just can't hack it. Like they can't hang and they can't do it because their “why” isn't strong enough. And so I would say that if you're coming in, if you don't have a strong enough, “Why?” and “Why do I want to be a Choral educator? Why do I want to do this?” Then you probably won't make it very long in the program.

T: That's great advice. Thank you so much. I think that's basically the majority of what I wanted to cover. Thank you so much for your answers!
Appendix B
Person B - 30 October, 2021

Tanner (Interviewer): Okay, great. So first I want to ask you to state your name, when you graduated from USU, and where you're currently working.

Person B (Interviewee): [Redacted] I graduated from Utah State in 2020 with a music education/choral education degree. And I am now currently working at [redacted].

T: Perfect. Okay. I want to start by getting to know your background. Why did you decide to go into choral education? Just the degree in general.

P: There's a lot of reasons. Long story short, I auditioned for both the piano program and vocal program at Utah State. I was accepted into both and I actually chose education because I felt like it would give me a greater skill set that could be marketable in the job world. I had thought about piano pedagogy, but I would only be able to do a private studio with that [degree], versus an actual education license. Then I would be able to work if I needed to and do what I love because I love both [teaching and performing]. I love music in general and I had a really, really awesome experience in high school and junior high with music and wanted to give that same experience in that same place of safety for today's youth. And let them have a place where I could facilitate awesome music and awesome learning and growth for those kids.

T: Awesome. So why did you specifically choose to go to USU to pursue this degree?

P: I looked into a few programs. I was mostly looking into BYU, specifically BYU's piano program. And then I was a participant in the Utah Allstate choir when I was a junior in high school and the Utah State Chamber Singers was the invited choir to sing before the Allstate choir. My mom was standing in line to get inside the concert and was standing next to a parent of someone in the Chamber Singers, and I stopped by and saw them right before they went in to be seated. And I said, “Hi,” to my mom and she's like, “You should talk to this lady right here. Her daughter's in the Chamber Singers and she says really good things about it.” And so I talked to the mom for a little bit and I was like, “Oh, wow, that sounds really neat. I haven't really ever considered Utah State.” And then I watched their performance. I was sitting there watching their whole set and I just loved it. It felt like it fit my kind of style. There was a mix of really awesome and traditional choral pieces, but then there was some more fun, “Dr. Evans pieces.” You know what I mean? And they were performing and it was entertaining and they sounded great and I wanted to be a part of that. Then that's when I started looking more into Utah State and decided that it was a little bit smaller of a music program compared to BYU, which I personally felt more comfortable with because I didn't want to deal with as much of the stress or anxiety of the competition of other schools that I had seen. So I chose Utah State for a lot of different reasons. The big pull was seeing the chamber singers perform at All State.

T: That's so cool. So you went into this a little bit, but maybe expand on anything you haven’t touched on: What kind of experience did you have with music before you came to Utah State and studied collegiate music?
P: So my mom's family is really heavily into music and they all perform or do music in some way. And so I started really young. I started taking piano lessons from my grandma when I was little and started going around doing singing performances with my grandma and my grandpa. And then, I continued taking piano; I actually switched to a different teacher. I also took violin and was part of an orchestra and then I joined school choirs and I was in musicals and all of the stuff that was enjoyable to me and fun for me. And then as I started maturing more, music started meaning more to me. It became a way to express myself and to gain friends because it was a social thing. With all of these things combined, music was something I turned to; either to comfort myself or to express happiness or sadness or anything. Whether it was performing or listening, music is something that I've always turned to for those emotions. And again, there was a social connection in either singing with people or performing with people or listening to the same kinds of music as others. It's connected me to so many different things and created my world and connected me to the world that's outside of me.

T: So you had quite a bit of training and experience with professional music before you came to your degree, right?

P: Yeah.

T: Okay, so walking in as a freshman in the choral ed program, what kind of activities do you remember participating in? Whether through NAfME, or core choir events, what were some of the ones you remember that were most impactful for you?

P: Just when I was a freshman or?

T: Maybe start with any you remember from being a freshman and then you can expand it to the ones that you liked in general.

P: So when I first joined, I remember like one of my first experiences that was different from high school was Chamber singers. I joined chamber singers [my freshman year] and we did a music video within the first month of school. We went to the golden spike Memorial and we recorded a video over there, and that was a really cool experience being part of that. And then we had a couple social gatherings as a choir. We also performed with some of the vocal program guests that we had my first year, like Andrew Semonskey, who played in the Off-Broadway debut of Hunchback of Notre Dame. And he was really awesome; he did a master class and then he performed that night. And that was an experience that I really remember as part of the vocal program. We had people like that and that was really awesome for someone [like me] who had never seen anything of that caliber. Seeing him work with students one-on-one and then perform just for us, that was really neat.

I do remember that I attended an NAfME activity. There weren't very many NAfME activities, from what I recall. I just remember when I attended, that it was mostly band people, which was my experience with most of NAfME.
T: Yeah, I had a similar experience. So, let’s go more into your first-year experience. I know you had a lot of experience with music beforehand, but what things happened in your first year that helped you adjust to the culture of a collegiate music degree? Specifically the rigor and the environment of it.

P: I do think that voice lessons were kind of a shock to me. I was like, “Oh shoot. This is how we make professional vocal music.” And I had taken private lessons in other instruments, but not really voice. So when I got to college and voice became my main instrument, it was a huge learning curve for me. I also remember that there were quite a few juniors and seniors and students who were older than me who I became friends with largely because I sat next to them in choir. And they became people that I would ask my stupid questions to, like, “So what is IPA? What am I supposed to be doing with this?” Because I think in the choral ed program, we don't get the same kinds of classes or introduction to those things like IPA and diction. We don't get that because those are classes that the performance majors take, not choral ed. And so, I remember just being confused like, “Wait, what are the expectations for my voice lessons?” And I would ask my voice instructor and other peers, but I mostly felt comfortable asking other peers. There weren't any resources for me to find those resources. Does that make sense?

T: Yeah, you almost didn't know what you didn't know.

P: Yeah. So I'm like, “How am I supposed to know what I'm supposed to know?” And that first year was kind of just becoming friends with people and asking them, “Wait. How does this even work? Because I don't really know.

I tried talking to some school advisors, but they were not very helpful in my case. I think because they were more generic advisors for the Caine College of the Arts [and not Music Education advisors]. And yeah, they couldn't really help me, specifically with my degree, if that makes sense.

T: Yes, unfortunately it makes a lot of sense. To build off of that, you talked about asking peers for help because you were more comfortable talking to them and asking questions. So how did you meet a lot of the other choral ed students? And also the vocal students? How did you meet the people you felt comfortable talking with, being social with, and interacting with?

P: Yeah, a large part of it had to do with choir, honestly. Chamber singers, my first year, I sat in the front next to Kya and Savvy. Kya Beaut, she's awesome. She was a performance major and Savvy was performance and Ed. And on the other side of Kya was a soprano named Brooklyn, and she graduated; she was a senior that year. And she was choral ed, so she was one that I actually talked to a lot. I was really kind of sad when she left because I always wanted a person that I could talk to right before class started and be like, “Hey, what is this? What is this class? What am I supposed to do?” So it was awesome to talk to Brooklyn about a lot of things because she was very knowledgeable, since she was so close to being done with her degree.

So that's how I made a lot of my connections was choir and the events that we had with choir and class time. There were a lot of opportunities for me to make connections. Also, a cultural thing was “the booths” [outside of the choir room]. Basically any area in the Fine Arts Building, like
the atrium and the booths, I knew I could go there pretty much at any time of the day and there would be someone who I knew from choir or from the vocal program. So that was a good thing for me.

I also made a lot of connections with peers in my classes because we weren't in every single class together, but we were in the same year in school. We were the same freshman taking the same classes. And so that was another big way that I made friends and connections was through group projects, and aural skills, and group projects in music theory because we were all trying to figure it out together.

T: Yeah, you guys kind of all stumbled through together and I think that can build a bond between you guys. Something I'm interested in is your mention of Brooklyn. I don't think I ever met her because that was before my time. But what kinds of things did she do that really helped you and impacted you? Was it mostly advice and answering questions? Or is there other stuff she did that really helped?

P: Well, Brooklyn is a very kind, open person, so that's a big reason why we even connected was because she was just kind and we were both early to choir all the time. And so we were able to just chat and that fostered questions that would come up or things like that. Also, I'm pretty sure she was on the NAfME [council] and I think that's probably how I knew about NAfME meetings. Well, at least the few meetings I remember occurring. And I think that was a big help, knowing that someone who was nice was going to be at the [NAfME] meetings. Yeah, mostly I just observed people. I observed her and what she was doing and asked her questions every once in a while.

T: Okay thank you for that stuff about Brooklyn. So now I would like to talk more about advising stuff. So when you were still a student, how often did you meet with Cary Youmans? And how did you feel about your experience meeting with him, or whoever like the general music advisor was back then?

P: Yeah, it was not Cary because he wasn't an actual advisor at that time. It was...I don’t remember her name, but she was really nice and kind. I remember that I met with her and Cary when I registered during the orientation days and then I met with her again at the beginning of the semester of my freshman year. [During that meeting], we were there to talk about my registration for the next semester as well as my 4-year plan and what to keep “on the lookout” for. And she was not the most helpful for me. But of course, I didn't really know that until later.

That's the problem: I mostly advised myself. Because I was told that I could take this like a class and that would be fine and to give me credits, but it wasn't the most efficient use of my time and it ended up being not very good. Which is fine, but I could have gotten different credits done and gotten different things covered. But instead, they made me go a longer route.

So after that first semester, I didn't really talk to them. During my last couple semesters I emailed with Cary a lot about different credit things because by then, I was like, “I think I know what I'm doing.” I did meet with education advisors, but that's the tricky thing about our program because we're split.
T: Yes, we have music advisors, education advisors, and then Dr. Evans.

P: Yeah, and none of them communicate with each other.

T: True! So I guess that brings me to my next question: How often did you meet with Dr. Evans during the course of your degree? Specifically for advising.

P: Not frequently...almost never.

T: And do you wish he had reached out to meet with you for more advising?

P: I mean, there are lots of reasons for [why I didn't meet with him]. I am way too stubborn and I want to be independent. I want to do these things on my own, but at the same time, I think I didn't feel comfortable. I mean, Dr. Evans is awesome, but I don't think I really felt comfortable asking him questions, because...I don't know how to describe it.

I know Sydney Creer would meet with Dr. Evans frequently. And I know from what I heard about her experience that it was similar to my experience with the Caine College advisors. He wasn't the most helpful with class schedules and things like that. [For example], he told her not to take beginning conducting when she should have, and then she was supposed to take advanced conducting, but had not taken beginning conducting yet. And I don't know how that situation got rectified.

T: Yeah because advanced conducting is technically only taught in the spring for Choral people, right?

P: Yeah. So, I can't remember [exactly what happened], but I want to say that she took beginning conducting and advanced conducting at the same time, even though beginning conducting is a prerequisite. I think that's what happened, but maybe they solved it before she missed out on the class. I don't know, but I know that that happened to her a couple of times.

T: That’s so interesting. I'm so sorry that happened to her and I'm sorry that you didn't want to talk to him because of that.

So, going more into your experience with NAfME, which you mentioned briefly before, but did you ever go to the UMEA conference and did you enjoy that? Was that a good experience? And can you describe your experience a little bit?

P: Yeah UMEA was awesome! And I am a huge advocate for being part of NAfME and going on that trip because every year you're learning stuff! And I wish I had taken more advantage of some of those opportunities to make connections with other educators. For me, [UMEA] was a bonding experience with my peers, but looking back, I'm like, “Wow, I could have used that to make a lot more connections with other music educators.”

T: Yeah, but it is scary.
P: Yeah, but at the same time, when you walk into a job [having been to UMEA], you have all of this professional development already built-in. And you already know how to do [the job], you know? And you feel so much more prepared just knowing where you can get professional development and who to reach out for that, and that's just a really good comfort.

Also, you just get a lot more ideas [from UMEA]. So I walked into my student teaching and my teaching job with ideas that I didn’t get from Utah State. I had lots of Utah State ideas, but also [ideas] that were from educators who were already teaching in real jobs. I think that that is extremely valuable and it makes me excited to do that professional development in my job now.

T: Yeah, totally! So, building off of that: What things, outside of coursework, really helped prepare you to be a teacher? What experiences in choir or in extracurriculars do you look back on now, as a teacher, and say, “Oh, I’m glad I had this because it’s helping me teach.”

P: Being an undergraduate teaching fellow. I did that for about two years and that was extremely valuable to me because I learned a lot about one-on-one teaching and whole class teaching and I learned a lot about the technological side of teaching. In my current job, my district uses Canvas and I gained most of my Canvas skills from being a UTF. I worked for Dr. Chenette and Dr. Baker and Professor Hugo. And for all of them, I did canvas grading, I created assignments, edited a lot of things. Like for Tim Chenette, I did a lot of text quiz building and proctored things. It was a really good experience to know how to use the features to set up a class in Canvas, because now I'm using those skills to teach my older coworkers who don't know how to use it.

T: What classes did you TA for? Do you remember which ones?

P: Yeah, I did aural skills I, and I want to say that I did aural skills II as well. And then I [was a TA for] the music 1010 class for non-majors with Professor Hugo. And then I did Theory II with Sarah [Bakker]. Those are the ones I did.

T: Cool. Thank you. That's really good advice. I think this might be my last question, but don’t hold me to that. Looking back on your degree, the things you learned, and the experiences you had, what would you recommend for incoming freshmen? What things do you wish you would have done as a freshman that you now know in hindsight? You can take a second if you need to think about it.

P: It’s kind of difficult because some things in my degree could be better because of what the university could have done for me. The degree map was really, really helpful for me, but I wish it was a little bit better.

My advice would be to find those upperclassmen who know what they're doing and ask them all your questions. Don't be afraid to ask questions. And don't be afraid to get involved in different activities and to experience different things. I know I was also involved in a couple other events, like the USU Choral Scholars, and I was a part of other things that helped me create connections with the peers that were older than me and that knew more. And so, not only did I get different
performing experiences, I also got to ask my questions, which have [helped] build relationships with those people that I continue to have to this day. I made connections with people in Choral Scholars and Chamber Singers that I still call them up today and ask them for advice because they're all in similar degrees. Now, I can call them and ask them for different things and they can call me.

So finding those peers and making those connections. Because, not only do you need genuine friends to help you support you in your degree, but you need people who know what they're doing. And you need people post-college to help you, so reaching out and getting involved in those activities can really help [develop those connections] and I think NAfME has the potential to do that. Also, I know you all started [a student chapter of] ACDA this year, and I think both of those organizations have the potential to be a support unit where you can ask questions to those people and get answers.

I think my biggest thing is, if I was [talking to] little freshman [me], I would say, “Look at your degree map and figure out your crap. If you have a question about it, ask someone who's actually gone through the program.” Because [as a freshman], I would ask advisors, and they wouldn't know. But hopefully one day advisors will know.

T: This is all really good stuff! Was there anything else you wanted to say on that? I just want to make sure I get anything else you want to say.

P: I think that was mostly it. The most dangerous thing comes from not knowing what you don’t know. And so even if you feel like you do “know what you know,” [it is a good idea to] ask peers, “Is this all I need [to know] or is there something more?” Just find those friends, make connections, and don't be afraid to ask questions to people, because someone has something to say about it.

T: Yeah, totally. Alright, thank you so much!
Appendix C

Person C - 30 October, 2021

Tanner (Interviewer): Okay, to start, will you say your name, what year you are in the program, and where you're from.

Person C (Interviewee): I'm [redacted]. This is my second year in the program and I'm from [redacted].

T: Cool! What first got you interested in choir?

P: I have been in choir since fourth grade, I think. I liked it to some extent because I stayed in it even when I didn't have a very good teacher for middle school. When I hit high school, that's where it started to become something that I really, really loved because I had a really, really fantastic teacher who showed me what choir could be.

Then I made chamber choir my sophomore year and that was where I started to really get into it. We went to New York and sang in this huge Cathedral and so many experiences like that [got me really into choir]. And I think I decided before [those experiences] that I wanted to teach choir. I always knew I wanted to be a teacher, but choir became a thing in my freshman/sophomore year and my interest only grew more.

T: Cool. Why did you decide to come to USU to study Choral Ed?

P: USU is not even close to where I thought I was going. I thought I was going to end up in Idaho; I was sure that I was going to stay in Idaho. I applied to all the [Idaho] schools and I got in all the schools because I had really, really good grades and a really good SAT score. And there was one school that I was thinking I wanted to go to because I liked the choir director and my high school choir teacher had gone there. It has a program where you get a major and three minors in four years. However, they don't have a specific music education program, but I was wanting to go there.

It's like $46,000 a year. I got a $20,000 scholarship, just right off the bat for my grades. And I went to an overnight scholarship competition for a 32,000-dollar scholarship, which I did not get, and even if I had, it would have been fourteen thousand dollars, and the teacher that I ended up liking is now teaching at BYU. So it's a very good thing that I didn't go there. But after that I had a girl in my Calculus class who was competing for the same scholarship and also didn't get it, who was sitting behind me and she just goes, “Yeah, I would get a full ride at USU,” and I was like, “Hmm. I wonder if I would get a full ride at USU?” And I looked at it and it was like, “If you manage to keep A’s in all of your classes right now, then, yes, you’ll get a full ride at USU.” I ended up applying, and during the first week of COVID I got accepted into the honors program and during the second week of COVID I got accepted into the music school.

Yeah, so the scholarship worked out and I talked to a couple of my music teachers and they knew people from [USU] and they knew the music program was decent. And I was like, “Okay, I
know it's going to be better than another school that I shall not name because their choir program is terrible,” which was one that I wanted to go to, but their scholarship was terrible. So it just ended up being about opportunity, I guess.

T: All right, cool. Thank you. So what was your experience with music before you started this program? Had you taken voice lessons before? Piano? What was your relationship with music?

P: Mostly just choir. But I did take “class voice” for about four weeks.

T: What's that?

P: So, instead of a one-on-one voice lesson, it was four of us and the teacher helped us all at the same time.

T: Was this in high school?

P: Yeah, and it was my freshman year. It wasn't very consistent and happened maybe four times and I had basketball practice for half of it. So I would come halfway through the lessons. But we had that and it was $10 dollars an hour or something like that, and my teacher helped me pay for it. So, instead, I was paying $10 for every month or something like that. So, it wasn't a lot of money.

I never had piano lessons. I have tried to teach myself piano, but that didn't go very well.

I had two voice lessons from the same guy in separate summers for 30 minutes at a summer camp that was musical theater based. Then I had four lessons to prepare for my audition here. So basically, I did not have any private instruction coming here. I wouldn't count any of that because it was all very, very specific to whatever the lesson was for. So, even my audition voice lessons were just my audition songs. We didn’t go over a lot of stuff except for my audition songs.

T: All right, cool. Thank you.

P: Oh, and I took AP music theory. That's probably important.

T: So you had some experience in music theory.
P: Yeah.

T: Okay. So getting more into your experience here at USU, what kind of experiences in the choral area have been positive for you? And those can be from this year, last year, or just in general.

P: I had a lot of positive experiences so far in the women's choir working with Dr. Jessop. I was his choir president for my second semester. So I got to do a lot of “behind-the-scenes” things, like taking attendance and things that were really helpful to me because they are something I'm going to do in the future. And it was an opportunity to connect with Dr. Jessop a little bit. There
was one day where he was gone and I taught the choir the “Bring me a little water, Sylvie” clapping pattern. I also taught sign language for “Ain't No Grave,” and I was able to sign that song. And he gave me input on what songs we were doing and asked me for ideas and he actually ended up using a couple of my ideas. “Ain't No Grave” was one of them. And so I think I got a lot of really good experiences with him because he let me have a little bit of a role in the choir beyond just being a singer.

And this year, I love getting to learn from two new choir directors, even though they’re masters students. They’re both great and I love getting to learn from them and connect with them.

That's most of the stuff with the choir area. I've also had really good experiences with music theory and aural skills. I've loved both the professors for those classes. And all of my techniques classes have been pretty good. So the choral ed courses that I have to take are also pretty good. Yeah, so that's everything with choir.

T: Cool! So now I would like to get more specifically into your experience outside of classes, but still related to choral ed. So let’s start with your first year. I know some of your experiences are kind of biased because of COVID, but I think it's still really applicable to what we're doing in this program. So, what was your [first year] experience like? How did you meet people your first year? What activities did you participate in?

P: Most of the people I met were my roommates and the people on my floor.

T: Where did you live your freshman year?

P: The LLC in the honors building. So those are most of the people I knew. I didn't form any really close relationships with many of them. There are a couple people that I met in my classes that I had some kind of relationship with. There is another choral ed major named Sierra, who is a really good friend of mine, who I met in a bunch of our classes and ended up chatting sometimes.

Then my second semester, I met one guy that I had two zoom classes with. Since we were in the same group for two of them, I was like, “Hey, if you ever want to study together,” and we ended up having a learning group meeting and he was the only other one who showed up. So he's the only one [from that group] that I met in person and now we're like, best friends. I think that's most of the people I met. There weren't really a lot of people that I met at all because everything was just so online. And I met the people in my choir, but there wasn't a lot of connection there because there wasn’t a lot of time. And I tried to do things during my second semester. Like I hosted a Zoom game night, but we couldn't do anything in person. We wanted to, but then Dr. Jessop stopped us when there was a second spike of COVID. So there was the zoom game night, where only four people showed up, but like there was not a lot of opportunity for meeting a lot of people. I definitely did not meet very many older choral ed majors because I was in the women's choir. I just had the one other choral ed major in that choir (Sierra), who didn’t know that there were auditions, so she ended up in the women's choir. And I was there because I didn't make any of the other choirs.
T: It sounds like you met most of the people in the program through classes or by coincidence. So how have you met other choral ed majors? Or have you not met most of them yet? Have there been other ways besides your classes?

P: ACDA was the biggest way I actually met people. I had seen you before because I think you were the tutor for my aural skills class. And almost went and talked to you because I was like, “Oh, he's a choral ed major,” but I was like, “I don't need help and I don't want to go bother him.” So I did not end up saying anything. And it is one of those things where I'm like, “I can't talk to these people. They're all so much better and older.” And I was like, “I can't go and just chat with them randomly. They don't know who I am. I'm not even in their choir.”

And so, the ACDA [conference] was the first time I actually met and talked to most of the choral ed majors.

T: Yeah, and that's like a year after you've started the program! That's problematic.

So getting into [your experience in] this program, what things helped you adjust to collegiate music? Especially considering the unique situation where you had little experience with voice lessons, but lots of experience with music theory.

P: I don't know. It's definitely a struggle with voice lessons and juries. Especially last year where [juries] were online. It was great because all of our voice lessons were also online, too. But then the second semester, voice lessons were online again, but then, two weeks before juries, they're like, “Just kidding. They're like they're in-person,” and I was like, “I've never had an in-person jury, what's going on.” So that was really rough and literally terrifying. I was planning for an online jury and I had been scheduled for voice recital hour only through videos. And I never sang live because I didn't think I was going to have to that year. And I didn’t need the extra stress because I was struggling immensely last year. And I was like, “I don't need that extra stress right now.” And then found out that they were in-person and I was like, “What am I supposed to do now because I have never performed in front of people.”

So, I did not have a lot of experience with singing solos in front of people and with preparing solo music. My voice teacher has been very helpful and understanding when I am panicking about juries literally every single semester and I’m like, “If I get kicked out, what am I supposed to do?”

I don’t really know how I’m adjusting to collegiate music. I’m just like, “Guess we're here now.” Because I didn't get an end to high school and I didn't get to start to college, it feels like I'm stuck in limbo between the two now. I still have to remind myself that I'm not in high school. So I don't know how well I have adjusted. Probably not very well.

T: So maybe it’s still happening?

P: Yeah, very much so.

T: So, okay, do you know who Cary Youmans is? And if so, do you ever meet with him?
P: How honest do you want this?

T: No shame here.

P: Yeah. I had to meet with him, my first semester because of [USU] connections where they were like, “You have to meet with your advisor,” and I was like, “I have zero questions.” So I made up some questions that I thought were decent questions. I was like, “Maybe this would be interesting,” and [Cary] shut me down. He was like, “Here’s where you could have found that information before you called me,” and I was like, “I had to call you. I had no option and they made me. I swear, I didn't want to call you. I got it figured out.”

This year, I [met with Cary] because I was talking to Dr. Evans about adding a semester. So I was trying to schedule out my degree plan, and I did that without an advisor. I'm figuring it out myself and I just have it on a spreadsheet, but I met with [Cary] just to make sure everything was okay and, I swear, the few questions I have, half the time he can't answer them. And I'm thinking, “This is not helpful right now.” I did finally figure out what the STEP program was, at the very least, but he didn't know about who we have to pay for the summer K12 certification workshop. I asked if we have to pay through the workshop itself or through the school, and if it’s through the school, do they charge it like a three-credit course? How does that work? And he was like, “I don't really know. You have toemail that workshop person.” And I was like, “I feel like this is something you should know.”

Yeah, so I don’t really talk to the advisors because I had the one really bad experience, and maybe he wasn't being mean, but he sounded very short with me. And I mean, since I'm able to mostly figure it out on my own, I would prefer to do that rather than go talk to him again. So it was not a great experience and I feel like he's definitely ill-informed about the choral education major.

T: Yeah. This isn't about me, but I agree. So follow up question: How often do you meet with Dr. Evans for advising?

P: I've met with him once because I reached out to him. I have talked to him maybe six times very shortly last year because I helped push the cart of stuff to the tent outside where the choirs would rehearse [because of COVID]. And I was one of two people who always wheeled that cart back to the office. So every once in a while, he was in there and we had like a two-second conversation.

So we interacted a little bit before I actually met him for advising. But it was a singular time because I was asking about how I could student teach in the fall [instead of the spring]. And he was very supportive and he thought it was a good idea, but that’s basically the only meeting I have had with him because I'm not in his choirs [because he doesn’t teach women’s choir].

Yeah, and I am doing Chorale next semester because I asked him during that meeting. And he was like, “Yeah, you can totally be a Chorale this semester,” but I was like, “I want to stay in Women’s Choir for the semester so I can learn more from Dr. Jessop,” and then I can learn from
[Dr. Evans] later and have this balance of learning from different teachers because I think that's really important. And then he told me that there were Masters students and I was like, “Honestly, that’s even better because there's two more people kind of getting thrown into a position that wasn't theirs before.” And getting to see them struggle through it and succeed through it is incredibly helpful for me. When they teach I can be like, “Here's something I really like that you do. And here's something I'm going to do differently.” And getting to do that with many teachers is very, very helpful for me.

T: Awesome. So considering all you've learned so far, what are some things you wish you knew walking in as a freshman that you know now?

P: I think stuff about the STEP program would be helpful to know because I didn’t know where to look. Someone just says, “Apply for STEP during your second year,” and I am like, “Apply for who?” I don’t even think it's linked on the online four-year plan. And so there's like no information about [STEP].

I also wish I would have taken voice lessons before I came [to USU], or piano lessons or something.

I don't know what I wish I would have known because I've basically found out everything for myself anyway, and I don't know how much of it would have changed my experience if I'd known it before. Right now, the stuff that is happening is the same stuff that I knew was going to happen or was told was going to happen and by someone outside the school. Some people told me, “This is what it's like to be a music major,” and then I walked in and was like, “Yeah, this is what it's like to be a music major.”

Maybe I wish I would have known good practice habits and how to practice [voice] because it's terrifying and frustrating and I'm horrible at it. And I feel like I'm still learning how to do that. So stuff I wish I knew was how to practice and how to sing in front of people and stuff like that. All of that aspect of the major has been a big struggle for me.

I also wish I would have met more people. I wish I had known people were there because I did not have a support system. I still don't have a huge support system. I have a close friend [from that zoom class], so there's a support system, I guess. And he has been fantastic, but not knowing how to build a support system has been hard.

T: Yeah! Well having more opportunities to meet people would have been helpful, too.

P: Yeah, but that's not really something you can know beforehand.

T: Yeah, totally. So I just have a few more questions, this has been really great! Thank you so much for your time. How has your experience been with ACDA? I know it's a new thing this year and they haven’t done a ton of stuff yet, but what has been your experience with them?

P: I joined it last year for the one online conference they had that I never actually watched. Dr. Jessop sent out the email about [ACDA membership] last year and I responded probably ten
minutes later, and he emailed me back and said, “I knew you were going to be the first one to respond.” So I was very excited about it. I think I was talking to another choral ed major and she asked me the other day, “Are you here because you love choir because you love singing?” And I was like, “I'm here because I love choir” and she's like, “Oh, I'm here because I love singing, so ACDA is not really a priority to me at all.” So I was gonna say, “But you're in choral education?”

For me, [ACDA] is a really important thing where I get to learn a lot and actually meet people. I think the [ACDA] conference was the most excited I had been in a while. I just like [ACDA] will be a really good thing.

T: Yeah! So here’s a follow-up question to that: What do you hope to get out of ACDA? What are some things you hope to see or some things that would be very helpful for you?

P: I think going to conferences is helpful and I really enjoy it. I think it's really important. I would also like more advice and to be pointed in specific directions by people who have done this longer than me. Like the older choral ed majors or by the masters students or by the professors.

I think all the things we were talking about earlier are things we should talk about in ACDA. And those things are really important because many of those things we don't learn in class. [For example], they don't teach you about the PPAT. I learned about it today and I was like, “That's something I wish I would have known.” That is something I have to do as a student teacher that I had no idea about until it was briefly mentioned, but not explained, by my classroom management teacher. So now it's just an extra thing to panic about and I have no information about it. But hopefully [ACDA will cover] things that you miss in other places because I think I would do well from learning those kinds of things.

Also jazz and stuff like that. Jazz choir is a huge thing in Idaho and not a huge thing here. Show choir is bigger here, which is interesting to me. I didn't know show choirs existed in the Northwest because they are so absent in Idaho. So things like that, where there is no class for jazz choir and I have no idea how to teach jazz. I think learning those kinds of things that are outside of what you're going to learn in class are really important. I shouldn't be finding these things out from a teacher who said it offhand. It’s panic-inducing!

I hope to also get a little more confidence. I am constantly thinking, “I'm gonna fail. They're gonna kick me out.” Juries are the [one where I need the most confidence], obviously, because that's where they literally kick you out. But having a support system and getting some confidence and realizing that I should be here because sometimes I'm like, “Am I supposed to be here?”

T: Totally. Not that this is pertaining to the recording, but you definitely deserve to be here from what I've seen.

Also, I wanted to ask quickly: What has been your experience with NAfME, the National Association for Music Education? Do you know much about it? What has been your experience with it so far?
P: I did go to that conference on Zoom [last year]. But I want to go to the [in person] UMEA conference. It sounds fantastic! But I have no idea how that gets set up. I don't know who's in charge of the NAfME thing. I've asked Dr. Evans. I asked somebody else and I was like, “Hey, where's the NAfME chapter for this?” And they were like, “I don't know. Maybe ask Dr. Wheeler.” And I don't remember if I asked Dr. Wheeler or not, but if I did, he didn't give me a straight answer. I think [NAfME is] very, very thrown together and I think it should be a lot more put together than it currently is. I also hate how much the classes are separate sometimes, and I think music educators should all be able to work together. Once you get out of your techniques classes, everyone has gone their separate ways and you don't really talk to a lot of [band or orchestra] people. And choral ed majors might have to teach those classes, so we're going to want to work with our band directors in our future schools. I think that's incredibly important.

This is kind of off topic, but I was watching this choir teacher teach [in a high school] one day, and randomly the band teacher walks over and goes, “Hey, we're feeling really good right now. Can your choir come over and listen to us?” And it was very clear that this was not an abnormal thing for either [the choir or the band]. I'm sure their choir has gone over and sang for [the band] as well. You got to work with the other people in music, but they're always so separate and it frustrates me so much. In high school and in college, everything in band, orchestra and choir is so separate and it shouldn't be because we're all music educators. I get that there's stuff that choir directors are doing differently, but it shouldn't be so alienated. And especially from choir to [band and orchestra] because they're instrumentalists versus vocalists and it's a very different ball game. And our personalities are so different, but I feel like we should be working more with the other like music education people that aren’t choir. Not to mention that we should be working together as choral educators. I feel like there's a lot of disconnect in both areas and it frustrates me.

T: Yeah, totally. Okay, last question. What do you want to see from the program now? Not from a class load perspective, but like in support groups, auxiliary groups, events, and anything in that nature? What do you want to see from the choral ed program?

P: I know this is a [choir class issue], but I feel that women's choir is very outside of what Chorale and Chamber Singers do. The people in Chorale and Chamber are very connected and nobody's in the women's choir. And I was genuinely not good enough to make Chorale my freshman year and I was stuck in women's choir. I sobbed for like an hour after that happened, even though it ended up being a fantastic experience. But at the same time, I didn't connect with any other choral ed majors. One of the biggest places you connect with people is in choir and I didn't get that because women's choir is so separate from everything else and it's really, really frustrating. Also, there’s not a lot of connections, in choir in general, which I miss a lot. Those connections I made in high school are one of the reasons I want to be a choir teacher, and they are just not there anymore.

I think ACDA is a really, really good step [in the right direction], but maybe we should meet more than once a month. I know that everybody is busy, but maybe twice a month would be better because there are so many things we need to go over. At least twice a month, maybe even
weekly. And as long as you communicate that you can't make it, it's fine. I don't think it should be required or have graded attendance. And also posting the topics that we are going to talk about in our meetings. So if you see the topic and think, “Hm, I'm not really interested in that topic,” then you don't have to show up that week.

Also, I feel like there's very little communication of what to do in the program. Like, “What am I doing here? Where do I go?” More communication would be helpful.

T: I know communication as a general thing needs to be improved, but what specific parts of communication would be more helpful for you? What would want to be communicated about?

P: Events that happen and how everything [in the program] works because it's so confusing. I sit there and read the syllabi for the classes and I'm still confused. It’s not like I'm not paying attention. Some of the stuff is just super confusing. Also, stuff about the STEP program, or what you're going to do when you’re student teaching, or stuff like that where there's no general information about it. You just find out as you go and it would be helpful to be able to plan ahead a little bit. So, I think that would be really helpful. And communicating about events that are happening and conferences and stuff like that. And I think that that's been a little bit better this semester for sure, so thanks for that.

T: Yeah, well we’re doing our best to improve. Okay, I think that's all my questions. Thank you so much for your time.
Appendix D

Person D - 31 October, 2021

Tanner (Interviewer): All right, the recording has started. Will you just start by stating your name, what year you are currently in the program here at USU, and where you're from?

Person D (Interviewee): Yes. I am [redacted]. I am a senior in choral ed at Utah State. And I am from [redacted].

T: Cool. So my first question is: What got you interested in choral education, in general?

P: Well number one, I've always loved choir, but I also have a love for teaching and for being a mentor and for helping other students who might be interested in music. And it was a great way to have a career in music that also had good job security and also keep music in my life.

T: All right, cool! So what got you interested in USU’s choral education program, specifically?

P: So I had seen the chamber singers perform during my junior year [of high school]. Actually, I guess I had a couple interactions with the USU choirs: I worked with the chamber singers while I was in middle school, and then I watched them perform again my junior year of high school when they sang at the Allstate festival that I was performing in. And their performance was so fun and so engaging and it just looked like a place I wanted to be. I'd applied at a couple other schools around, but they all seemed disinterested in me. They didn't care if I came [to their school], but at Utah State I didn't get that feeling. I felt like it was genuine and that it was a really good and uplifting place to be. So I ended up choosing the Utah State program over the others.

T: Yeah. Can you expand on who, specifically, gave you that energy? Was it the students, faculty, overall environment, etc.?

P: Faculty, mostly. I didn't have any exposure to students [at Utah State]. It was the students from other schools that turned me off from going to those schools. But I hadn't had bad experiences with Utah State.

T: All right, cool. Not to go too deep into this, but did you do tours of other schools, or did you inquire into their programs? How did you find out about them?

P: Yeah, mainly just inquiry. I was also applying for theater education at the same time and I had gotten an offer to come audition for scholarships for the theater program [at Utah State] and I'd gotten that from a couple other schools. And it was actually my experience with the theater auditions that made me choose Utah State, specifically, but then I decided that I'd rather do choir. So, it was actually the theater program and the theater department that was very inviting and got me to want to be here. And I've done absolutely nothing with them in my time here.
T: Sad! So, before you started this program, what was your experience and relationship with music? Had you taken lessons before? Were you very familiar with music theory? What was your exposure to music before this program?

P: I was heavily exposed to music. I hadn't done vocal lessons, specifically, but I’d done piano lessons for years and done various bands and choirs and theory classes as well. And I loved all of those things. So, I did as much music as I could in preparation for it.

T: Yeah! Could you expand just a little bit? Like what ensembles in high school did you participate in? How long did you take piano lessons?

P: Yeah! I took piano lessons from the ages of 3 through 12, and then I stopped and did some accompanying work and that got me involved in other ensembles. In middle school, I played for the jazz band and then [I sang in] the choirs there. Then in high school I played [the piano] for the jazz and pop pieces for our choirs, was in the choirs, and I was in two choir classes every year of high school. In my senior year of high school, I was in six music classes: I had two choir, two theater, a dance class, and music theory.

T: Nice! So, going from your experience before this program to your first-year experience, what were some of your first-year experiences that you remember? I know you started a semester after a lot of the freshmen in our year started, but what were some of the things you remember happening that first semester? And I'm talking about events in the [choral] area, like anything with NAfME, any kind of socials, basically things that you remember from your first year.

P: So, my first year was awkward because I came [to the program] in the spring semester. I remember having no idea what was going on and having no easy way to find that information. I probably had a little bit of a different first-year experience than most people because I had a close friend who was two-and-a-half years ahead of me in the program. And so, whenever I had questions, I was just like, “Aubree, tell me what's going on.” Like, “What is this? What's your experience?” And that was something that was very helpful to me that a lot of freshmen probably wouldn't have. Actually, the only reason I was involved with NAfME at all is because she had told me about it and not because I heard anything myself. If it weren’t for her, I wouldn't have ended up going to the UMEA conference like two weeks after I started at Utah State. So I did actually have some experience with NAfME that first year.

The vocal area, itself, just intimidated me and I did everything that I thought I had to because I was scared of what would happen if I didn’t. [For example], I really just remember going to lots of recitals and [attendance for those] being pushed. I don’t know if that’s what you...

T: That's great! Any answer is good. I’m not looking for anything specific. So what were some of the hardest parts of that first year in the program?

P: Okay, number one, understanding the expectations of the vocal area itself, because that was a whole thing that I was not familiar with, especially having not taken voice lessons before. So I was completely clueless in understanding that whole process, and the syllabus wasn't helpful and it was very scary. So that was difficult. And then also feeling like there was nothing “choral”
happening. I was in a choir, but at first I didn't know who the choral people were and you don't really take any choir classes until the last couple of years [of the program]. And so I was like, “I'm in this choral major, and I'm doing nothing choral at all.”

T: What choir did you start in?

P: I was in Chorale my first semester.

T: And were there any choral ed majors in there that you knew of when you started?

P: Not when I first started, but by the end, I knew of a couple like Lexi and Kennan. But it took a couple weeks to learn that.

T: Okay, so you had to get to know them first?

P: I didn't actually meet them through choir; I met them through other classes.

T: So your first exposure to them wasn't in chorale?

P: No, it was literally in World Music. When Lauren, another chorale ed major at the time, was like, “Sit by me. And here are all the people who are choral people.” So if I hadn't had that experience, it would have been a lot longer before I'd met anyone.

T: So, to expand off of that, how did you meet some of your colleagues in the choral ed department? What was your exposure to that?

P: Yeah, two primary ways. I met the ones that were in our year in school through World Music class because we all ended up sitting together. And it was a long class where we had a lot of opportunities to talk.

And I don't think I met or talked to any of the upperclassmen other than Abby\(^{38}\), who I already knew, until the next year when I was in Chamber Singers and we were doing stuff together in that class. So really, my first semester, I only met the freshmen in the program through that one class we had together.

T: Hmm. So a lot of your exposure [to other choral ed majors] came from your experiences in Chamber Singers?

P: Yeah. And it really wasn't until we went to Boise [on a choir tour] because we spent a couple of days stuck together. And before that I hadn't talked to a ton of them, I just knew of them.

T: Okay, cool. So here’s another question about your first-year experience: Moving from your high school and piano training to collegiate music and collegiate vocal music, what things helped you transition? I know that [collegiate music] can be really jarring and different, but was there a tough transition? And if so, how did you make that?

---

\(^{38}\)Name changed for privacy.
P: Yeah, the hardest part of the transition was the expectation of learning so much solo vocal rep because I had never really sung solo before, so that was difficult. But my voice teacher was very helpful because in my first semester, we chose a lot of songs that I was already familiar with, so that kind of saved me the first semester more than anything.

I don't really think anything else was super helpful. I don't remember any other interaction. I guess because I was a pianist, I was playing in a couple other people's voice lessons, and I got to see the experience of different teachers, which was helpful for me that semester because I didn't know it was going on.

T: So that's how you learned the dynamic [of voice lessons], through your own voice lessons and then through your accompaniment in other people's voice lessons?

P: Yeah, because that first semester, I was sitting in lessons with Lori, Cindy, Jenny Erikson...that might have been it that first semester. So I had those three at least, and then in my second semester, which was the next school year, I was in basically every other voice studio as well.

T: Alright cool. So now let’s move towards your first-year journey of figuring out what the expectations were and how to move forward in the degree. What was your exposure to the CCA advising faculty? More specifically, with Cary Youmans or whoever was in charge when you first started.

P: So I met with an advisor right before I started my first semester and it was not Cary Youmans. It was someone else; a woman I can’t remember. She was delightful, very helpful to me, and because I was starting at an awkward semester, she was like, “Oh, since you're here at this time, you want to actually start with these classes in the degree plan, and not the ones that are listed there.” So that was a really good experience. And then after that, Cary became the prime advisor and I met with him once at the beginning of my second semester up here, which would have been my first full school year. And it was really not helpful at all. At that point, I had started to map out [my degree] myself because this is the kind of person I am. I'd gone through like every class and organized them all and [figured out] when to take them. And so I met with him and he really had nothing to offer me. He was just like, “Well what do you want?” And then I had a massive list of questions and then he kind of answered them, but it wasn't super helpful. Most of what I found out came from just asking other students.

T: Hmm. And were those other students just colleagues at your level or upperclassmen? I know you mentioned talking to Abby a lot.

P: Yeah, I asked Abby for everything. [During] my second semester, I made a plan and mapped out my entire degree and when I'd have to take [certain classes] to graduate when I wanted. And she basically walked through [the plan] and said, “Okay, here’s things to know about these classes and when you can and can't take them.” And she helped me find those holes [in my plan] that I wasn't aware of on my own.
I would ask [Aubree] more questions [at the start of my degree], but the longer I've been in school, the more I have asked other people. Like last year and this year I'd be like, “Hey, you took this class from this professor. How was this? What do you recommend?” But it probably wasn't until last year that I started doing that, my junior year.

T: Hmm, okay. So when you designed your degree map for yourself...can you describe that process a little bit?

P: Yeah, so I went to the University's degree map for the choral program and made a list of every class that was on there that I knew I still needed. And I tried to place them in the suggested semesters, but it was complicated because they didn’t list some of the classes that are required for the secondary education program because they were listed separately. And so then I went through [a separate list] and found every class [that I needed]. So these were the three places I looked: The choral map, the elementary endorsement map, and then the secondary education classes [from the STEP website] because like those three things were all in different places. But I put those all in a massive list and then started placing them in my plan, then I talked to Abby to help me and she was like, “You need this here. You need this here.” And she helped me organize it.

T: And did you find those maps through [independent] research or just from messing around on the internet? Or did someone help you find them?

P: Abby probably showed me [the degree map] as I first got here and then I knew that the resource existed and kept going back to it.

T: Okay, thank you.

P: I also want to say that the theater department showed me those [degree maps] two and a half years earlier, when I first applied.

T: Hmm, interesting. So now, talking about your experience with Dr. Evans from an advising standpoint, when did you first meet with him for advising? And how did that meeting go? It doesn't have to be an exact date, but describe your experience with getting advising help from Dr. Evans.

P: So I met with him exactly once and it was right after I had met with Cary during my first fall semester. I had asked Cary a bunch of questions, and he knew some of the answers, but he didn't know others. So then I went to Dr. Evans with those [questions] mainly because I was planning to graduate a semester earlier than “I should,” so I was short a voice credit and a choir credit. And I asked him what that meant and if they had seen that before. And so he was able to answer that for me, but then I ended up not taking his advice because I asked people later who told me that it was...well, he told me that you could take two credits of voice lessons in one semester, but then I talked to Cindy later about that and she said, “No, you can't do that.” So I ended up doing a summer semester [of voice lessons] just so I could get that last credit.
Dr. Evans also told me that I could also get an exemption for one of the choir credits, but I didn't trust Cary Youmans to do that for me, so I ended up just taking two choir classes this semester. So that was the only time I talked to [Dr. Evans] about classes.

T: So that was the only time you've had an advising appointment with him?

P: Yeah.

T: So, when you got into the STEP program, did you figure [the application process and requirements] out by yourself, or did Abby help with that as well? Or was it something else?

P: I think she helped me at that point. Also, I was probably doing independent research. I knew that I was at the point that I needed to start looking into those classes, so then I went to the STEP websites to try to find the information.

T: And how was that experience? Was it relatively easy to find everything or was it hard? If you remember, I know it was a while ago.

P: It was relatively easy because the STEP website is better than the music websites, in general. And from Abby I knew I needed to be in the STEP program before I took specific classes and that was pretty much all I'd heard of it. So then I just independently [figured out the application and scheduling].

T: Okay, cool. Thank you for your answers. So, talking more about auxiliary groups in the choral area, what has your experience been with NAfME? I know you talked about going to the UMEA conference, but is there anything else you'd add to that experience? Or other experiences you've had with NAfME, both positive and/or negative?

P: My main experience with NAfME is that they don't think about choral majors at all. They are an afterthought, and I have no idea how they choose the presidency, but that just seems to happen with no input from anyone. And then they have like one meeting a semester and then never talk to us again until it's time for UMEA, and they say, “Sign up,” so we do and that's pretty much all I've ever gotten out of NAfME.

T: And that’s consistent through your whole experience here at USU?

P: Yeah, consistent every year.

T: Okay, and how have your experiences at UMEA been? I know you talked a little bit about it before, but is there anything you want to expand upon there?

P: I adore UMEA. I think it's so fun and it's like the one thing that actually gets me excited about my career. So I love it every year; I went that first semester and I've gone back every semester since. So I've been three times and I plan on going in the spring. So yeah, it's always a great experience. It's gotten me into the real choral world and taught me things that, especially early on, I felt like I was missing from my classes. They cover some of [the stuff I was missing] in the
later choral classes, but at the beginning, you don't get any of that. So it was really helpful for that reason.

T: Cool, thank you. And now, talking about the other main auxiliary group, ACDA, what has your experience been with them? I know it's more of a recent development, but what are your feelings, thoughts, and general impressions of it so far?

P: I appreciate that ACDA is choral focused. That's its purpose, but it feels more specific to what I need. I also appreciate that there is a lot of outreach and communication to make sure everyone knows what's happening, rather than like, “Oh, something with NAfME is happening? Why did we not know about that?” And [ACDA] always has email communication and this desire for it to be something helpful in preparing us for careers.

T: Yeah, cool. I agree. What would you like to see in ACDA that hasn't already been happening, so far? I know there was the conference that we attended last week, but is there anything else that would be especially helpful for you? Or what could have been helpful if we had ACDA in the past?

P: I think I would have different answers to this as a freshman or sophomore because a lot of the things I would like to see from ACDA do eventually get covered in the later [choral] classes. And so I think it would be good to see elements of the choral methods and choral lit classes discussed more in depth in that kind of space. Again, especially as an underclassman because you don't get any of that kind of instruction, so I'd love to already be thinking about that and even start getting connected with schools and teachers in the area to see what they are doing.

T: Yeah, totally. Thank you for your answers on that. So, thinking back on your experiences so far with your classes and with the auxiliary groups and with meeting people, what advice would you give to an incoming freshman about being in this program? It could be about classes or about how to make their experience easier or anything. What advice would you give to a freshman?

P: The thing I always default to when I'm talking to [freshmen] is I start pouring knowledge on them from my own experience and from being here. Something I always tell them is that if you have questions, ask me or ask any of us because those of us who are experiencing the program currently will have better answers than anyone else.

And that’s the big thing I say to every one of them: talk to [the upperclassmen]. We can help you, but also, do what you can to be a lover of choir on your own because you really don't get [choir classes] until your third year of school, and you need that independently earlier on.

T: Yeah, was there anything else that wanted to add to that?

P: Not necessarily.

T: Okay, great. I appreciate your answers and you taking time to answer my questions for this.
Appendix E

Interview Questions

I used the following questions to guide the interviews with each person from my study. The question order and format were adjusted slightly between interviews based on the answers of the interviewee.

For All Interviewees

Why did you decide to major in choral education at USU?

How much experience with music did you have before you started this program?

What was your first-year experience like? What things helped your adjustment to collegiate music in that first year?

How did you meet the other choral education majors?

What kinds of choral-related activities have you enjoyed in the past?

What do you wish you knew about the program as a freshman?

For Current Students

Do you know who Cary Youmans is? If so, how often do you meet with him?

How often do you currently meet with Dr. Evans for advising help?

Are you an active member of ACDA? If you are, have the meetings thus far been helpful for you? Could they be more helpful for you in some way?

Do you participate in NAfME? If so, what has your experience been like?

For Previous Students

How often did you meet with Dr. Evans for things related to advising?

What professional auxiliary organization(s) were you a part of during your degree?

Which did you find the most helpful and why?

What could these auxiliary groups have done to be more involved in your success as a choral education student?
Appendix F

Vocal requirements for Choral Education Majors

The following information was copied directly from the MUSC 1635 syllabus for freshmen music majors taking voice lessons at USU.

VOICE AREA REQUIREMENTS/ MUSC 1635 SYLLABUS

VOICE PERFORMANCE, CHORAL EDUCATION, and BACHELOR OF ARTS MUSIC VOICE EMPHASIS

INSTRUCTORS:

Errik Hood  Cindy Dewey  Laurie Hart  Venicia Wilson
Jennifer Erickson  Heather Honaker

LESSON ATTENDANCE/PREPARATION

Attendance is expected and required at all individual voice lessons. If you must miss a lesson due to illness, etc., you should notify your instructor PRIOR to your scheduled lesson time.

Lessons you miss will be made up only at the discretion of the instructor. Any unexcused absence will lower your final studio grade by a letter (one letter for each unexcused absence). Any lessons missed by the instructor will be rescheduled.

Students are expected to have warmed up for at least 15 minutes prior to their voice lesson. If you have not warmed up, you may be asked to take the first 15 minutes of your lesson time to vocalize on your own, while your teacher has an unscheduled break.

Students are expected to have music learned (accurate pitches, rhythms, and text) by their next lesson. If you are assigned multiple pieces in one lesson, it is your responsibility to seek clarification about which pieces should be prepared for the next lesson. Students who come to lessons without having sufficiently prepared their music will be asked to leave and to spend their lesson time on their own, in study of the music, thus forfeiting the lesson.

Students are expected to have translated the texts to their songs (word-by-word literal translations AND poetic translations) within the first week that the song is assigned. There are a
number of sources for help with translation. The USU Library has two volumes called, *Word-by-Word Translations of Songs and Arias*. One volume includes French and German texts, the other Italian texts, as well as a subscription to IPA Source. There are also a number of free online translation services, and there is nothing better than a big dictionary to get you started. If you have done all you can to translate your song/aria, and still cannot fill in all the blanks, then it is appropriate to ask your teacher for help at your next lesson.

Students are expected to have transcribed their songs into IPA symbols, and to have practiced the correct pronunciation of the texts to their foreign language songs. Students should be able to recite the poem of any song assigned by the following week. Every student should have *The Bantam New College Italian & English Dictionary*. This is the only Italian-English dictionary available for under $100 that includes symbols to indicate whether the stressed e’s and o’s are open or closed. This dictionary is currently available at Amazon.com for as little as $5.99 new.

For each song assigned, students are to complete a Song Analysis Form.

**DUE DATES for SONG ANALYSIS FORMS:**

- **Fall Semester**: October 18, 2018 (last day before Fall Break)
- **Spring Semester**: March 8, 2019 (last day before Spring Break)

**CREDIT HOURS AND MINIMUM PRACTICE REQUIREMENTS**

All Voice Pre-Music majors must register for MUSIC 1635 and will receive 12 hour lessons each semester. **Students must practice a minimum of 2 hours daily.** Remember that this is the MINIMUM requirement. A dedicated student will need to spend more time than this.

Students should expect to spend about one hour in music study/preparation for each hour that they spend singing their music. Students should set time aside daily for vocalization, singing of repertoire, and repertoire study and memorization. **All of the following activities may be counted towards meeting your minimum daily practice requirement:**

1. Warming up the voice (W)
2. Working on specific vocalizes (V)
3. Singing the repertoire (S)
4. Translating the texts (T)
5. Transcribing texts into IPA (I)
6. Practicing recitation of texts (R)
7. Memorization of music (M)
8. Listening to artist-level singers (L)

Each student will keep a daily practice record that indicates how much they practiced, and in which activities they were engaged in during that practice time. (Use the key given above.)

**VOICE AREA RECITAL HOUR AND MASTER CLASS HOUR**

Voice Recital Hour is held on Thursdays from 12:30 1:20 p.m. in FA 214. Performers should dress appropriately. No jeans, tennis shoes, or flip-flops. Women should wear dresses, skirts, or dress pants. Men should wear collared shirts. An accompanist is provided, but you may bring your own. You will receive an email at the beginning of each semester that outlines on which dates you are to perform at Voice Area Hour. You may also check the Voice Area Bulletin Board for the schedule. Scheduled singers must perform their selection from memory, unless they are singing an aria from an oratorio. All other singers in attendance at VRH should have music with them, and be ready to perform if called upon. If your music is not memorized (unscheduled singers only) you should have two copies with you—one for yourself, and one for the accompanist.

Voice Area Master Class will be held each Tuesday of the semester from 12:30-1:20 pm in FA 214. Voice pre-majors are required to attend all Tuesday Master Classes. Music performed for the master class may be a 'work in progress', and need not be memorized. If you plan to perform with music, you will need to have three copies of your music, one for the accompanist, one for the master class facilitator, and one for you to perform from. You should be secure musically (pitches, rhythm, text) and should have your IPA and word-by-word translation work done prior to singing the piece in master class.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:** The learning that takes place through participation and observation in these classes is irreplaceable. As a result, all voice majors are expected to attend all class meetings whenever possible. Voice Majors are allowed **three absences total** from VRH and Master Class. This includes both excused and unexcused absences. Each absence over three will result in the lowering of your applied studio grade by one degree (A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) unless an appropriate alternative assignment approved by Dr. Hood is completed, this includes class conflicts. These assignments might consist of written critiques of live performances,
recording reviews, lesson observation reports, etc., and will vary in length and scope based upon the number of classes missed.

**RECITAL/ CONCERT ATTENDANCE**

It is expected that voice majors attend ALL the vocal events (recital, concerts, operas, special vocal events) presented on campus. An up-to-date list of events will be posted by Dr. Hood’s office (FA 208B) and updates on events will be included in email announcements. It is your responsibility to check regularly for updates and changes. Failure to attend the recitals/concerts/opera/events offered each semester may result in the lowering of your final grade. Students who have work/class conflicts must email Dr. Hood PRIOR to the event in order to be granted an excused absence. Dr. Hood or his designee will collect student IDs before the event, and will return IDs to students at the end of the event. If you forget to bring your student ID with you to the event, you may use your driver’s license as a substitute.

**VOICE AREA BULLETIN BOARD/ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Students should check either the bulletin board outside Dr. Hood’s office. Dr. Hood will also send regular updates and announcements via email. These emails are sent directly via the class roster, so be sure that you check that your preferred email is correct in the Banner system.

**JURY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

**WHO?** All voice majors must present a jury at the end of each semester of study. The jury requirement will be waived in any semester in which the student has successfully completed a recital.

**WHEN?** Memorization deadline for jury pieces is in the 10th week of each semester. Students are required to bring an accompanist or have an accompaniment CD for each of their jury pieces for their memorization pass-off. Students will be required to recite the poems translations from memory, as well as sing each of their required pieces from memory at this lesson. If a student has not memorized all of the required repertoire by this lesson, then s/he cannot earn a grade higher than 85 for the studio portion of her/his semester grade.
Memorization deadlines:

Fall Semester        Week of November 5-9, 2018
Spring Semester      Week of March 18-22, 2019

Juries are generally scheduled in the first half of finals week. A sign-up sheet will be posted outside Dr. Hood’s office three weeks before the end of the semester. Students should select a time in consultation with their accompanist. Your accompanist must sign your jury time to indicate that he/she is available and has received copies of all the music you will present. There will be a posted closing date for jury sign-up. If you have not signed up by that time- you FAIL.

WHAT? All voice majors doing a jury must fulfill the following MINIMUM repertoire requirements. All music must be memorized. Minimum repertoire requirements must be met with solo vocal literature. Duets, etc. may be offered for juries but are to be in addition to minimum requirements. Any music presented but not memorized (with the exception of excerpts from oratorios and other chamber works normally performed with music) will not count towards the minimum repertoire requirement.

Semester 1 & 2      5 songs memorized / 3 of these offered for juries each semester
Semester 3 & 4      6 songs memorized / 4 of these offered for juries each semester
Semester 5 & 6      6 songs memorized / 4 of these offered for juries each semester
Semester 7 & 8      7 songs memorized / 5 of these offered for juries each semester

Music Therapy (All Semesters)  4 songs memorized/3 offered for jury each semester

Students who have learned a major opera role may use up to two arias from the production in lieu of other jury repertoire.

Students are responsible for ensuring that they have enough pieces selected to satisfy the minimum repertoire requirements. If your teacher has not assigned you the minimum number of pieces, then it is your responsibility to bring additional repertoire suggestions to your lesson.

GRADING? Juries will be evaluated by a panel of judges consisting of Dr. Hood and at least two other voice instructors. Your jury performance will be assigned a grade by each of the
jurors. The average of your jury scores will account for half of your final grade. The other half of your final grade will be determined by your instructor. Your studio grade (50%) may not be more than 5 points higher than your jury average. **Students must receive a final grade of B- (80%) or better in order to progress in voice lessons. Students receiving a final grade of C+ or lower must repeat that semester of lessons in order to advance.** The grading scale is as follows:

- **A** = 93-100
- **A-** = 90-93
- **B+** = 87-89
- **B** = 83-86
- **B-** = 80-82
- **C+** = 77-79
- **C** = 73-76
- **C-** = 70-72

**HOW?** Students are expected to arrive for their jury at least 15 minutes before their assigned time. Students may forfeit (FAIL) their jury if they are not on time. If your accompanist is late we will fit you in when he/she arrives. Students must bring with them at least 5 copies of the jury repertoire/evaluation sheet, an electronic template of which will be provided each semester. The student will select the first piece to be performed and the judges will select subsequent pieces. You may be asked to sing only a portion of some of your repertoire. Appropriate dress is required for juries. (Women – dress/skirt with stockings/tights or pantsuit; Men – dress pants & collared shirt. No jeans, tennis shoes or flip-flops.) Students should introduce themselves and announce their first selection, including title, larger work if applicable, and composer. Correct pronunciation is expected.
Author Bio

Tanner Pruett is a senior in the Choral Education program and will graduate in the spring of 2022. He is an active member of the USU honors program and is proud to present this project as his capstone. Tanner was a member of the USU Chamber Singers for three and a half years and he founded and directed USU’s first handbell ensemble for one and a half years. Tanner has competed in the Cal-Western Regional NATS auditions, where he placed second in the Lower College Musical Theatre category. In the auditions for the Northern Utah NATS Chapter, he placed first in the Lower College Classical category and third in the Lower College Musical Theatre category. Tanner has performed in USU Opera Theatre’s productions of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* as Leaf Coneybear, and *Orpheus in the Underworld* as Aristaeus/Pluto. After graduation, Tanner plans to teach high school choir and later complete a Master’s degree in Choral Education.