

Chapter XIV

Special Issues in Smaller Music Units

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Introduction

The National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) identifies a “small unit” in its data collection as a unit with fewer than fifty music majors. NASM also states in its size and scope standards that twenty-five music majors is the minimum viable number for a music department. Every small unit is distinctive to a particular place and with particular people (faculty, staff, students, and administration). It operates within its own unique college and community culture. Over years of numerous accreditation visits, one observes not only the uniqueness of each smaller unit but also the common strengths of small units, as well as how they have developed potential solutions to common areas of concern. Some would ask, is it possible for a music department to be small and excellent, too? Without a doubt! It is hoped that the following discussion will help focus on the means for achieving this goal.

Another definition of a small unit is one that has no more than ten full-time faculty, including the administrator. Those with four or fewer are usually only programs, and probably their mission is to provide music offerings for the general student. With a small number of faculty it is quite important that they have a professionalism that brings them to agreement on a shared mission and goals. The music executive must be a consensus builder who understands the dynamics and adopts an approach appropriate to ensuring that all members of the faculty work as a team. However, he or she must still provide the leadership needed to set priorities and consider innovation as needed.

This chapter will consider common strengths of small music units, approaches to the primary concerns of smaller units in maintaining educational and financial viability, and some specific suggestions on issues faced by all music units.

Strengths of a Small Department

A Special Faculty Group

The full-time faculty of small departments typically are particularly dedicated to their students. Having fewer music majors leads to a greater nurturing of individuals in the development of their talent and aspirations, and usually results in higher retention of students. Full-time faculty members generally teach in more than one area (e.g., history and theory, ensemble and private lessons, conducting and music education). This practical scenario is critical in the small unit and can provide a model for students of the complementary knowledge and skills requisite for a well-rounded musician. When available, the department often employs well-qualified adjunct faculty members to expand on the specialties of the full-time faculty. Typically, faculties in small departments heartily support the mission of their institution, resulting in high morale and cooperation in facing difficulties

that may arise. Music departments are often considered important to the overall mission of the small institution. Good communication and cooperation between the music executive and the institution's administration can often produce a win-win situation for the college's public relations and outreach, while helping to make available the resources needed to operate a successful music program.

Community Engagement

Small music departments can be a significant resource for their local community. Music faculty members serve as conductors, performers, arts organization leaders, speakers, and so on. This connection with the community can provide service and/or experiential learning opportunities for students, an audience for campus concerts, participants in joint campus/community ensembles, extra financial support for special programs, and partnerships with public school music teachers for events such as festivals. Many small departments have preparatory programs that provide an important service for the music training/education of children and adults as a community outreach. These offerings can include many services from private and group piano lessons for children to voice or instrumental lessons for high school students and adults, or a special lecture series coordinated with a local music concert series. Preparatory divisions or departments are gaining significance not only for the training of future musicians but also in the development of a general population of supporters of art music, which complements the importance of educating the non-music major in colleges.

When the campus has a radio station, faculty may reach a larger constituency in the community by producing and hosting a radio program in their particular area of expertise—"Music Education Matters," "How Jazz Works," "Keyboard Kaleidoscope," and so on. A professional in-residence ensemble can give students other opportunities to hear excellent musical performances. It is particularly important that smaller units cooperate with other nearby college or university music programs by working out an arrangement for students on each campus to be able to hear presentations by faculty and guest artists. Non-auditioned ensembles for the campus/community may open the door for developing more select, smaller ensembles with greater potential for excellence. An effective program for community engagement can be to have students "preview" a required solo or ensemble performance by taking it to a local retirement home, a church, or a social club and prepare program notes about the music to be presented. Regardless of a music program's size, our quest for excellence in our music making must always be paramount.

Educational Viability

Curricula

Humans have the tendency to want to be "all things to all people." Sometimes in its eagerness to serve a variety of students, the small unit attempts to offer more programs than are feasible for the resources that are available to deliver them. For a unit to be viable, required classes for a degree must be offered regularly with a reasonable number of students enrolled. Some classes, particularly at the upper division, may appropriately be offered only in alternate years in order to increase the class size. If only a few students are enrolled in a particular degree plan, it may be impossible to regularly offer upper-division courses with an

appropriate number of students. Thus, it could require that the music executive and faculty revisit the mission of the unit and consider if the degree offering should be eliminated.

Small departments frequently have success offering the Bachelor of Arts in Music as the only degree. When there is faculty expertise and student interest in a particular area, the necessary courses can be offered as a concentration within the BA degree. When schools determine that both the BA in Music and the Bachelor of Music in Music Education (a professional degree with 50 percent of the coursework in music/music education) are important to their mission, alternate-year course offerings often become critical. With the need for a continuing supply of music teachers, this is an important degree to consider offering when feasible. A more detailed discussion of degree standards and their implications is contained in Chapter VI.

Non-Majors

A diverse number of programs for non-majors can increase the number of people that encounter quality experiences with art music during college, but non-majors also can provide the means of broadening the scope of music course offerings. A course such as Music in World Cultures could potentially fulfill a general education core requirement, as could a music technology course or a jazz course in addition to the more usual music appreciation class. Music majors also need to be exposed to a wide variety of music literature, partially through classes such as these. Non-major participation can make possible the offering of a conducted or chamber ensemble when this would not be feasible with only music majors' enrollment. Opening ensembles to community participation can often help provide more complete instrumentation for an ensemble, particularly if scheduled in the evening.

Artistic and Scholarly Community

Faculty and students need to sense that the small department defines both an artistic and scholarly community. Not only must faculty be the best teachers and musicians that can be recruited, but they also must be capable of covering the core areas of the curriculum: music history, music theory, ensembles, piano, and private applied study areas as the need arises. Faculty members in the small department must be willing and qualified to share the teaching responsibility for non-majors in several areas. Full-time music faculty should not be expected to teach more than other college faculty due to the nature of music instruction. Departments should aim to keep within NASM's recommendation of a 3:2 ratio of clock hours to credit hours for figuring applied teaching load credit; expecting more than this will not support the best effort from a faculty member.

Maintaining, if not increasing, the critical mass of twenty-five music majors for a "community of scholars" may take considerable recruiting efforts. Recruitment (to be discussed later in this chapter) requires a good deal of faculty cooperation. Remember, however, that music minors, community musicians, and part-time faculty, in addition to the music majors and the full-time faculty, all contribute to the artistic and scholarly community.

Faculty should be models for students of artistic standards, particularly through their public performances. Collaborative efforts between full-time and part-time faculty in chamber music presentations can also serve this function. It can provide opportunities for faculty engagement with various types of music, which can be seen as important to faculty development, and bring adjunct faculty into closer contact with the department. Music executives should make sure that the institution's promotion and tenure committees

understand that music faculty's continual learning of new music for performance and teaching is an important application of "scholarship." Faculty conductors can share their experience with the greater community by offering seminars for area conductors using student ensembles as demonstration groups.

Faculty Development

Faculty development funds, which may not be guaranteed on an annual basis, are often quite difficult to allocate in small departments. It is critical that all faculty interact with others in their field beyond their department. A minimum allotment of funds for each faculty member would include national organization membership and annual state meeting participation. Faculty presentations at state and national conferences should be encouraged and are often funded by the provost's office.

Teaching/Learning/Assessing

Students enrolling in smaller institutions often need very clear instructions about how to get the most out of their practice time. A special session on how to practice as part of a freshman seminar or in a recital hour early in the semester, before students are ready to perform, can be quite helpful. Even assigning practice room time for all students can highlight the need for daily practice. Using written objectives for the semester and written evaluations in the studio can help the less experienced students see the necessary steps to becoming a total musician. Questions like "Are they integrating learned technique into their repertoire pieces?" Or "Are they integrating knowledge of musical style into their repertoire pieces?" in a mid-semester check-off evaluation can help the students reflect on their progress, as can an end-of-semester written narrative. Students' written reflections on their performances have helped them recognize what it takes to present their best performance. This approach can also address the problem of not having as many peer models as one would find in a larger music unit.

Financial Viability

Necessary Costs

It is a fact that music units cost more than other departments. A more extensive and varied equipment inventory is necessary for a music major program—pianos for teaching, practicing, and performing; stereo systems for listening to music; MIDI computers for learning about new technological applications to music; instruments for techniques classes and ensembles; and routine maintenance on all of these items. Specially designed spaces are required—practice rooms, rehearsal rooms, studios, performance spaces—and private instruction is of paramount importance in keeping with the uniqueness of the discipline. That being said, in any size music unit, but especially in a smaller unit, the institution's administration must be aware of all the costs entailed and ensure that the unit is being administered as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible.

Other Resources

It is particularly important for the smaller units' music executives to find funding from numerous sources. Basic costs are often not linked to student numbers; units might see little

difference between costs associated with having twenty-five majors as compared to seventy-five. Thus, one must take advantage of monies that may be available from budgets other than the music department's, such as library budgets for CDs, DVDs, periodicals, music scores, and listening equipment, or information technology budget for computers, music software, and so on. Also investigate the marketing budget for the cost of placing ads in periodicals or local newspapers. Government work-study funds for students are a great source for hiring students to work as assistants in the music office, choral or instrumental librarians, computer or piano lab monitors, performance hall ushers, stagehands, recording technicians, and so on. Scholarship money for non-music majors who perform in ensembles offers an excellent recruitment strategy for the university and certainly benefits the large ensemble program of the music department.

Writing grant proposals for special projects, summer music camp scholarships, and so on often becomes a way of life. Music executives are drawn more and more into fund-raising in departments of all sizes. Alumni and friends of the college can have strong allegiances to the institution and its program. They can be forthcoming with scholarship donations, and money can be raised at special events such as a gala opening concert, madrigal dinner, or cabaret night. Charging for faculty recitals, guest recitals, and some large ensemble concerts can also generate some funds. And finally, preparatory departments can be quite successful in generating additional revenue by finding uses for building spaces at times when music students or faculty do not typically need them. Group lessons can be considered for certain students in place of more expensive private teaching. Adult "students" in these programs can become strong supporters of the department.

Credit Hour Production

Since administrators at all institutions look at credit hour production as a critical part of the budget process, music executives can increase class size by rotating required music courses and creating classes that will be accepted for credit as a general education core requirement. These courses can generate high enrollments. They can recruit non-majors into dynamic, experiential courses such as electronic keyboard, guitar, and voice classes and, of course, various types of ensembles—African drum ensemble, handbell ensemble, choirs, non-auditioned campus band, and so on. Many departments will charge a private applied study fee to offset some of the cost of private instruction. Some units have tried having freshman music majors take a shorter private lesson coupled with a small group lesson weekly, in their effort to save instructional salaries. It is important to serve the non-majors by offering applied study, but many times they can be well served in class instruction unless a student is particularly advanced. Music majors taking secondary piano can also be well served in piano classes while learning extended skills possible on electronic keyboards.

Part-time Faculty

The use of part-time faculty can make up for curricular offerings not covered by full-time faculty at a much lower cost. This route has become a necessity in small departments where qualified adjuncts are available. A fee attached to private lessons can supplement the private instruction adjunct budget. Adjunct faculty should be recognized for what they do by paying them to sit for jury exams, perform with full-time faculty, teach masterclasses, solo with large ensembles, and judge or be a clinician for a recruitment event. All of these tasks add to their compensation while also getting them more involved in the unit's mission.

Equipment Maintenance

This topic is covered in Chapter XI as it applies to all units. However, in the smaller unit it is quite important that the music executive be an effective advocate with administrators, at all levels, regarding the special needs of a music program in regard to such items as regular piano tuning and other instrument maintenance. Student fees connected with instrument use can supplement the music repair budget. The music executive should have a long-range plan in place for the replacement of practice pianos and the repair and upgrading of pianos in studios, rehearsal rooms, and performance halls where needed. Smaller units can often take advantage of the fact that some companies will allow a two-budget-year lease/purchase plan for large expenditure items. If instruments cannot be purchased for an instrumental techniques class, they could be rented and even sometimes borrowed from a music store that will then sell them for a reduced cost or use them as part of their rental plans.

Recruitment

It will not come as a surprise that the number one concern in small departments is how to recruit more music majors. There is no magic formula to move from a very small department of fewer than 25 to a larger small department of 50 or more, but it can happen over time. General recruiting procedures for all music units are discussed in Chapter V.

Paramount in recruiting for a small music unit is determining and highlighting the assets of your school and department. As stated earlier, the special attention that each student typically receives should be apparent in all aspects of the recruiting process. This could include giving individualized attention via a letter or phone call, or during a special high school day for musicians, a summer camp, , or audition day events. Smaller units have an advantage in showing that their faculty cares about students as people and that this atmosphere permeates the campus. Recruitment in a smaller unit requires involvement by all music faculty members, who must have a commitment to this goal.

The small department can and should work closely with the institution's admission office. Let them know that the music department wants to supplement their all-school efforts by inviting a high school choral, instrumental, or jazz ensemble to join your college ensembles in a concert once a year, and take music ensembles to middle schools (perhaps a better place to start than high schools) or to rural and/or small high schools to perform. The department might start with a one-day festival during the school year to bring choral or instrumental ensembles to campus for a clinic with the music faculty. In all recruitment efforts, current students who display a positive attitude about their education at the school should be asked to talk informally with student visitors and their parents. This approach can often have very positive results. On audition days, make all attendees feel special. Have enough time to talk to the prospects and make them feel at ease. You want to find out if each student is likely to be a good fit and a good prospect for retention at your institution.

Of course, scholarships are very important to the institution and the music program. Recruiting students not only with scholarships for music majors but also with ensemble grants for non-majors is a very productive strategy. This extra funding attracts students who want to continue using their developed music skills though not as a music major. It is important to use the university's Web site to let students interested in the institution know what to expect as a music major and how they may continue to be involved with music as a general student.

Facilities

Not only do people need to work in appropriate environments, but instruments also must be kept in spaces with proper temperature and humidity control, even when classes are not in session, so as to give the greatest possible time of service. It is not wise to spend thousands of dollars on instruments and then not care for them properly. Music executives must be persistent in these matters with heads of buildings and grounds departments and administrative budget committees. This responsibility can be challenging for smaller institutions, but these entities must realize that facility needs for even the basic functions of a music department are quite different from most other college departments. Music facilities and their unique requirements are fully covered in Chapters IX and X.

Communication

As has been inferred throughout this chapter, effective communication within the music department (with faculty, students, and staff) and outside the music department (with administrators, high school teachers, and the community) is an essential responsibility of the music executive. One of the ways to communicate with students is through a music department handbook, which should contain all the policies of the department on such topics as applied lesson credits and requirements for semester juries, recital performances, recital attendance, piano proficiency, and primary instrument repertoire. It should also include degree plans, sophomore evaluation requirements, sophomore and/or senior portfolio requirements, practice room assignment policy, ensemble dress, and any number of other procedures specific to the department.

It should go without saying that the music executive must have close communication with the faculty, usually at regularly scheduled meetings. A faculty handbook can also be very useful, especially for adjunct applied faculty, to ensure all understand practice requirements, student evaluation policies, required recitals, and so on. Faculty and department administrators need to develop and carry out the goals and objectives together. All should be involved in such routine business as keeping track of student progress, approving recital proposals, discussing results of juries and sophomore evaluations, listening to auditions and determining scholarships, determining recruitment strategies and goals, scheduling concerts, gathering information for annual reports, developing Web pages and newsletters, and so forth.

Music executives should establish a policy for evaluating faculty teaching as part of their annual reviews, meeting with faculty individually as necessary, and attending concerts of faculty and students as time allows. In the smaller unit it is equally important to have a procedure for mentoring newer faculty, since often they will have assigned responsibilities with which they have had no previous experience.

Outside the music department, the music executive will find it more necessary than most department-level administrators to interact and communicate the needs of the department with a great many offices across campus. These could include the offices of admissions, development, marketing/PR, campus event scheduling, printing, information technology, student affairs, and grants. It is important that he or she also be looking for partners/collaborators outside the institution to provide opportunities for both faculty and students with such groups as professional musicians and music organizations, other arts organizations, and sponsors for scholarships programs or concerts. This communication

must of course also include public school teachers and private music teachers through such means as a Web site, personal contacts, letters, campus visits, and so on.

The Music Executive

Besides having responsibilities that are usually much greater than the average chair of a college department, the music executive of a small department will probably have significant teaching responsibilities. This situation can make it even more challenging to have the time to manage, much less lead, the department in creative ways. A full-time administrative assistant and student workers are essential to support the diverse operations of the music programs. Music executives in the small department often find that they need to develop procedures for sharing some of the administrative responsibilities with other faculty members.

Certainly higher education has many more small music departments than large ones. Thus, the small department is a very important resource for assuring a more secure place for the future of art music in this country. Small departments are a wonderful place to be. The music executive in these institutions has a significant professional responsibility that can provide considerable personal satisfaction.