

Chapter XV

The Role of Community Music Programs in the Context of the Music Unit

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Introduction

During my thirty years of involvement in music in higher education and community arts education, I have witnessed much discussion about and growth in the number of music schools that support the presence of a “divisional community music school” within the context of their organizations. In addition, CMS and NASM have devoted much conversation to the value of these “non-degree” components and how best to operate them.

The National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts defines community arts schools as “nonprofit, non-degree granting, community-based institutions offering open access to quality arts instruction by professional faculty.” As divisions of college music units, community music programs have many different names: community division, extension division, preparatory department, laboratory school, and the like. In addition, they tend to have two distinct but overlapping purposes: teacher training of undergraduate and graduate students and/or the training of community members in the various disciplines of music. While these two missions do not share every characteristic in common, most community music programs, to a greater or a lesser degree, resemble the higher education programs in music around the country. This short overview seeks to define carefully the role of these “divisional” community music schools and how they can succeed in the context of a collegiate music unit.

The Role of the Music Unit in Serving Its Community

Since the 1960s and even before, many universities have grappled with the issue of the role their institutions play in the surrounding community. In response to this concern, some have created public school collaborations, health services support, special training programs for professionals, and a variety of other efforts. In many cases, the music unit did not participate in the leadership of these discussions on campus. Many music units, focusing on the college-age population and their needs, have looked to public performances as the primary method for “serving” the community. As discussions about service in the community have evolved, many collegiate music units created programs to provide music instruction to members of the local community: a strong example of community service. As these programs have grown, some music units have developed full-service “community arts schools” that are professionally administered and feature experienced faculty members in the various disciplines. Other programs have developed to serve as training activities for undergraduate

and graduate students, while still others combine these two functions. Whatever the mission, many college-level music units include a community arts focus of some sort.

The Importance of an Appropriate Mission for a

Community Music School

It is hoped that the quality of the community program's mission will be as seriously considered as the mission of the college-level curriculum. My bias is toward a professional community music program with a "place at the table" in the administrative structure of the music unit. This approach comes from a desire to ensure the quality of instruction for the community music school students and a deeply held view that college music units have a responsibility to develop programs that improve the music instruction in their regions. In my work at the Hartt School of the University of Hartford, we created a community music school with high standards and proven results while complementing the work of the collegiate activities. The mission was equivalent to an independent community music school, and the quality of the programs and the faculty were second to none.

Having described my ideal, it is fair to say that other models can be successful, depending on the unit's needs, space, and curricular requirements. For example, it might be appropriate for a college music unit to create a training program for undergraduate or graduate students. In that case, however, the public must be made aware that the teachers are, in fact, students, and the unit must provide sufficient supervision by qualified faculty members.

The Educational Value for the College Student

In today's music environment, it is imperative that college students in music, even performance majors, be exposed to the value of teaching and working with youngsters. A community music program within the context of the college music unit is a great way of meeting this goal. However, as the college training takes place, the needs of the community music school student still should be seriously considered. If independent teaching is done by college students who do not have significant experience, parents must be made aware of it, fees must reflect this circumstance, and a careful process of supervision should be in place.

One model of college student training that I developed can work in a professional community music school. A one-credit course can be developed in which college students observe professional teachers working one on one with a student for most of a semester. This allows the college student to understand sequence in teaching. At the end of the semester, the roles can be reversed for a lesson in which the college student teaches the community student with the professional teacher observing. This approach ensures supervision and a serious approach to observation, while not allowing the young student to become a "guinea pig" for college student instruction.

What Kinds of Music Programs Can Be Offered?

There are numerous curricula for community music programs. A review of the National Guild Web site (www.nationalguild.org) gives a broad overview of the kinds of music programs offered by American community music schools. In general, it is recommended that

programs be offered only if they meet the quality standards for the music unit as a whole. Before programs are developed, a survey should be undertaken of what music programs already exist in the region. Since such a need for quality music education exists in our country, it seems important not to compete directly with other activities in the region. In addition, program offerings should be tied to the availability of qualified faculty to teach in the program. This often leads to programs in the community music school that parallel the strengths of the college music unit.

Will the Community Music Program Make Money

for the Music Unit?

Many astute music school administrators seek new ways to generate revenue, and such discussions often turn to community programs. The answer to the net revenue question is complicated and depends upon a careful analysis of costs. Obviously, if private lesson fees are greater than salaries, a net profit occurs. However, there are other costs to consider: administration, promotion, instrument maintenance, space costs, security, educational materials, and so on. A profit can still occur if the program is large enough to cover its costs with the differential between tuition and expenses. The problem with the discussion of profit is at least partially related to mission: quality education in music is expensive, and if the mission of the program is profit, will it reflect the quality standards for music at the institution as a whole?

In addition to strict earned income, one additional financial factor should be noted. The hallmark of most community music schools is open access, that is, providing instruction regardless of the student's ability to pay. This system requires having funds available for financial aid. Many foundations, corporations, and individuals are willing to fund pre-college students who are in need, even though they may not show the same interest in funding collegiate-level professional training in music. Therefore, many grant opportunities exist that can bring new funds.

How Is Space Allocated?

One of the complicating factors in developing community music schools within the context of colleges is the competition for space. One thing is for sure: a well-managed community music school with good teachers will grow, and the demand for instruction has the potential to overwhelm the underprepared institution. In general, the conflicts come in the areas of practice space for college students and teaching space for community programs. It is important to address this issue before the program grows too large. Limits can be placed but should be enforced with an understanding of teaching loads, salaries, and potential income for faculty from the school. Music school leaders are encouraged to address the issue with a plan and an agreement among college students, community faculty, and college faculty.

How Are Faculty Chosen and Classified?

Many levels of teachers have the ability to serve the community music program: college faculty, community-based teachers, graduate students, undergraduate students (with

supervision), and recent graduates of the college. In all cases, individuals should be hired to teach in the community programs based on their skills in working with students at the level of those represented in the community program. Just because college faculty members have success with advanced students does not necessarily mean they will be skilled teachers for beginners (and vice versa). College students need to be carefully interviewed and supervised in their teaching. By and large, the goal is to create a faculty that can be evaluated for quality on the same terms under which college teaching is evaluated. Many large divisional community music schools classify their faculty as university “staff” to distinguish them from tenure-track faculty, and some have even created full-time positions with benefits, the costs of which are covered through tuition.

What About Fund-raising?

In many discussions with community music school administrators and faculty at collegiate-based programs, the topic of fund-raising leads to words of frustration about the university development office and even the leadership of the college. From this admittedly anecdotal information, it appears that many divisional community music programs have restrictions on their ability to raise funds. This situation is unfortunate for two reasons: it limits the potential for a fully developed community music school, and it ignores the fact that many foundations and individuals who do not support college-level music will support community-based programs. Although circumstances at any given institution may vary, it is recommended that fund-raising be permitted for financial aid support and special programs at the very least. Since independent community music schools raise funds for about 40 percent of their total yearly income, it seems reasonable to assume that divisional schools will support themselves through nonearned income as well.

Who Benefits from the Presence of the Community Music Program on Campus?

I will never forget the excitement at Hartt when the Community Division was featured on the annual holiday card of the University of Hartford. That demonstration of support underscores the importance of a community music school to a college or university. The value to the music unit is varied and consequential: a community music program can provide employment for students or graduates, increase the college’s reputation in the local community, and generate net revenue if handled properly.

Where Does the Program Fit in the Administrative Structure of the Music Unit?

To some extent, the answer to this question depends on the mission of the community arts school and its size. However, a general principle is that the director of the community music school, whether faculty or staff, should have a voice and presence within the administration of the school. This person needs to have access to discussions about the school as a whole as well as the opportunity to make the case for the community music programs at the highest appropriate levels.

Conclusion

This chapter has suggested multiple good reasons for developing and maintaining a community music school within the context of a college music unit. Careful planning and good support will ensure its success.

Resources

For further information, contact:

National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts, www.nationalguild.org

National Association of Schools of Music, specifically the section on the Accrediting Commission for Community and Pre-Collegiate Schools (ACCPAS), www.arts-accredit.org