

Four year public Roundtable Report, Dr. Robert Hansen, Director Four Year Public Institutions

After greetings, introductions, and welcome of new members, the floor opened to suggestions for topics to discuss.

John Richmond brought up the impending dramatic change in high school demographics that is just a few years away, when the cohort of college-bound graduating seniors will be significantly smaller. The prospect of declining enrollment and the resulting implications for music programs of all sizes demand a re-imagining and re-doubling of recruiting efforts and practices.

The conversation revealed that some institutions are respond reactively and other proactively. Some responses and plans are broadly-based within the institution while other institutions' lack of planning call on music units to proceed with their own plans. The common ground is that in public institutions, funding is enrollment driven. Recruiting and retention of a shrinking demographic challenges us all.

Strategies include international recruiting, increasing faculty involvement in recruiting, and close coordination with admissions officers and staff. Creative and engaging methods of recruiting will be needed. The focus on First Gen recruiting, while admirable, is still recruiting from a shrinking base.

The conversation became framed around two approaches for music programs. Enrollment solutions exist externally and internally. First is bringing new students into the programs as new baccalaureate students and as non-traditional students into degree and/or certificate programs at the undergraduate and graduate level. The second approach focuses on ways to increase credit hour production in the music unit from within the institution. This is accomplished through attractive course and curricular offerings that meet market demand, scripted music minors for students in BA/BS programs, and certificate or specialization programs that can attach to professional music degrees.

This topic occupied most of the time allotted to the session. Other discussions revolved around the continuing struggle to deal with the COVID pandemic. Compliance with mask wearing advice, testing, and vaccinations varies greatly around the state, though resistance to these precautions was reported by all those present. One issue that has arisen as conferences and workshops come back online is the difference in vaccination requirements for participation from state to state.

Prior to adjourning, the conversation turned to changes trending in some doctoral degrees away from a research-oriented component to appeal to students seeking a strictly performance degree. It appears that the need to populate programs may be compromising the rigor and status of the degree. Some students, particularly in public education, use the degree to bolster compensation. Concern was expressed that holders of such doctoral degrees may not be fully qualified to supervise doctoral and masters-level students in the academy.

The second roundtable discussion began with a conversation about relationships with Education Departments and issues of control. Near unanimous discussion centered around the efforts to pull the music education curriculum into the music unit and away from the education unit. Reasons included frequent curriculum changes initiated in the ed department, trends toward pushing content testing procedures earlier in the course of study, often before music students have had the course content, and failure to adequately involve music educators in the supervision of clinical teaching. Some participants shared experiences where education faculty justified their curricular choice, claiming the mandate of TEA or state law, when in fact such mandates are a matter of interpretation and not of actual mandate.

Education departments seem to respond to perceived mandates by creating new courses rather than incorporating them into existing course inventory. Sometimes these added courses run afoul of the requirements of NASM accreditation. Institutions that appear to have positive working relationships have achieved them in part because music students comprise one of the largest cohorts in the teacher certification track and the ed departments do not want to risk losing SCH production to the music unit.

A brief conversation comparing data on graduate assistantships revealed significant differences among institutions on the number of positions available, the inclusion or exclusion of tuition waivers, the amount and funding source of compensation, and the exempt/non-exempt status of the employees. Differences in the FTE calculation also came up in conjunction with the assignments of those positions that include instructional responsibility.

The session closed with a poll of branding and marketing restrictions imposed by the university on music units that perceive the necessity of having strong and attractive branding. Strong consensus supported the view that the successful recruiting essential to music units requires the ability to create strong branding.

A lively two days of discussion proved fruitful and beneficial to those present. The Director of the 4-year Public schools expressed the importance and value of communications via the TAMS list-serve, encouraged members to use it, and acknowledged Phillip for his excellent service in maintaining it.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Hansen, Director  
4-year Public Schools