

Music Educators' Perceptions of the Value of Courses in Their Undergraduate Music Teacher Education Programs

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In order to keep our profession relevant and effective, it is necessary to examine the way our professionals have been prepared to teach and how effective those teacher preparation programs have been. There are a number of factors which determine the undergraduate music education curricula, including those stipulated by accrediting bodies such as the National Association for Schools of Music, teacher licensure requirements as required by a given state's department of education, an institution's traditions, values, and willingness to embrace change or resistance to it, and the knowledge and willpower of music educators to make curricular changes where needed. Some undergraduate institutions prepare students for K-12 (or P-12) music in all of the four most common domains (band, choir, orchestra, and elementary general), while others track students for instrumental or vocal emphasis tracks, or for more specific tracks by area or grade level. These are often driven by state licensure requirements.

The literature produced a number of concurrent findings, such as a desire for a greater number of quality field experiences, more training in working with improvisation and composition, and more preparation with ensemble literature pertinent to their area of specialization. Other findings include desire for developing practical skills such as musical instrument repair, and administrative skills such as managing a budget and managing staff members. There may have been improvements to some aspects of teacher education programs as respondents with 20 or more years of experience rated some courses as significantly less valuable than more recent graduates.

Participants (n = 601) responded to an online survey (random sample facilitated by NAFME) to express how valuable courses were in preparing them for their careers, to list courses outside the typical curriculum which were particularly beneficial, to list any subjects that they wish they could have studied which they believe would have benefitted them, and to indicate their primary teaching area as well as other areas in which they taught.

Mean ratings for seven courses were rated particularly high, between 1.00 (extremely valuable) and 2.00 (valuable) on a five-point scale. These courses included student teaching (1.25), ensembles (1.55), applied lessons (1.60), conducting (1.80), early field experiences (1.88), aural theory (1.89), and music theory (1.92). Approximately 85% of choral directors and 70% of band directors taught elementary general music during their careers, while approximately 76% of elementary general teachers taught choral programs. Courses not typically required which participants found especially beneficial included instrument repair, guitar techniques, classroom management, foreign languages, and keyboard accompanying. Courses that participants wish they had the opportunity to take but could/did not include instrument repair,

budgeting/management-type issues, classroom/behavior management, more field experiences, and ensemble literature. The results suggest that there is a need for a greater emphasis on early field experiences, for music teacher education programs to prepare undergraduates for a broad range of careers, and for attention to practical skill development such as instrument repair, managing finances, and administrative concerns.