

Examination of First-Semester Music Majors' Knowledge of Music History in Relationship to Instruction Received in High School Ensemble Classes: A Research Study Design

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Poster Abstract

University music history and applied music professors often lament deficiencies in new undergraduate music majors' knowledge of music history. Though music history is one of the four strands of the Texas Essentials of Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and as such a required component of music education curriculum in Texas public schools, its teaching is largely neglected in Texas secondary school bands, choirs, and orchestras. (Though the most oft-cited reason given for this, anecdotally, is lack of time in the rehearsal, an examination of *why* music history is neglected is needed, but is beyond the scope of the present study).

The field of music history pedagogy is an emerging one: it was only in 2010 that the American Musicological Society began publishing its *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*. Despite the rise in the number of scholarly articles being published about the pedagogy of music history, there is a noted paucity of literature addressing the teaching of music history at the secondary school level and, more specifically, by band, choir, and orchestra directors within the milieu of the ensemble rehearsal.¹

The purpose of this pilot study is to assess first-semester undergraduate music majors' knowledge of music history in relationship to instruction they received in high school ensemble or other music classes. This study is still in progress, and thus the data presented here are preliminary. Participants ($N = 56$) from six Texas Universities completed surveys including questions about the frequencies of their high school ensemble directors' discussion of certain music history factors during rehearsal and a music history diagnostic quiz consisting of two parts.

According to preliminary data, 41% of participants said their high school ensemble director rarely or never discussed the historical style period of music being performed, 30.3% indicated that their director rarely or never discussed the composer of the music, and fully 50% said their director rarely or never discussed historical performance practice. Such numbers support the observation that music majors may be beginning their university course of study with serious deficiencies in their understanding of music history. Results of participants' music history diagnostic quiz scores further

¹ Dirkse, Scott. "A Bibliography of Music History Pedagogy." *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 5, no. 1 (Fall, 2014): 59–97. <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/161>

sustain this hypothesis. Only 19.6% of participants could put six style periods of music history in correct chronological order, and only 3.6% could match 8 or more of 12 given major composers with their associated style period.

Results of the present pilot study suggest that further investigation into the teaching of music history within the high school ensemble class is warranted. Furthermore, they suggest that pedagogical materials, resources, and curricula for the teaching of music history in the high school ensemble rehearsal setting may be needed.