

Building Bridges That Last...
University/Community Ensembles benefit the entire community
Otis C. French, Clinician

Background/History: In the late 1980's the university band program had suffered numerous years of being unable to fill the concert, jazz, and pep band with enough students to offer full ensembles. The decision was made by the music department chair to move the concert band rehearsal to the evening, and to advertise in the local community for anyone interested to participate. This has gradually led to all current ensembles, to include the choir and string programs, to be organized in the same manner.

Current University/Community Performing Ensembles: Consists of ESU students, (some registered for credit, some just participating for the fun of it), area community members to include some of the local high school and middle school band directors, area high school and home school students.

University/Community Concert Band: Approximately 77 members, ratio of community to student are 45/32.

University Jazz Ensemble: 21 members, ratio 10/11

University Brass/Woodwind Ensemble: 15 members each ratio is 7/8.

University Pep Band: Football 55-members/Basketball 10-15 members ratio 20/35 football, approximately even split for basketball.

Concert Choir: 50 members, varies, but generally 10/40

University String Ensemble: 15 members, ratio 7/8.

Positive Benefits to University Programs: Allows the university to have full ensembles for students who wish to continue to participate in music, while providing an opportunity for the community to be involved with the music program. Allows university to invite community participation, brings people closer to faculty and students. Adds some stability to ensembles as many community members participate for numerous years, and invites stronger players to work with weaker players (both student as well as community) creating a closer bond between members. Area high school/home school students get to see the university as an opportunity for additional playing, and allows for them to be a part of their local university environment. Family members who play instruments can also participate with their children. Many community members help with day-to-day operations, contribute services such as printing and advertisement, and in many cases become a source for donations to the university foundation or general scholarship funds.

Drawbacks/Problem Areas: Having ensembles open to everyone allows for a wide range of ability levels. This can create frustration amongst members if music is too hard or too easy. Community members who have been participating for long periods can become quite "territorial" with "their" chair! University Students can become "lost" in the large ensemble. Handicapped/Special-Needs members. Overflow in certain sections.

Community members torn between wanting to devote more time to music and practice than their schedules allow. This sometimes results in sporadic attendance by community members.

Management of the program:

Recruiting Methods: University wide/various mediums, local newspaper, direct contact with area band directors, and area charter/home school directors, word-of-mouth.

Awards/Incentives: Community members can earn participation letters/pins; pep band membership also awards a shirt and jacket with university band logo, efforts made to have potluck social time once per semester before and after rehearsal.

Testimonials/Discussion: Many community members have commented on how staying active in music, and the weekly interaction with the younger students have helped their quality of life. Some of our Nursing students were able to recruit a prospective nursing student to attend ESU rather than another university through their contact and conversations surrounding band rehearsals. Students in various majors find area community members who are doing the jobs they are training for. With some of our “special-needs” members, there have been some frustrations dealing with the unique needs of individuals. From this, there have been some very positive outcomes and some negative ones. There have been some frustrations from community members who believed they had “earned” a particular chair or part because of their longevity. This has continued to be a concern, trying to keep everyone seated appropriately, keeping students challenged and interested, while being sensitive to the community members. This is also on going!

Quotes/Comments

“Speaking of University/Community ensembles, in my encounters with participating musicians who are members of the community I am often gratified to hear positive comments about their interactions with East Stroudsburg University students. It is the same kind of positive feedback that I often hear about our students who are interns with community businesses. In essence the message is usually something to the effect that the proximity to the students gives them the opportunity to interact with and feel closer to the students attending the university. One comment I recently heard, (and I am paraphrasing), “As a musician, it has given me the opportunity to share my experience with some folks younger than I, and also for me to learn some new things from them.”

I wholeheartedly encourage and support the ESU ensembles. They provide tremendous vehicles for creating positive interaction between the community and the university and as a by product they offer a vital educational experience for our student musicians.”

Doug Smith, University Relations, East Stroudsburg University

“I wanted to say thank you for giving me a reason to get my old face (“chops”) back in shape. As a result, I’m in better playing shape than I’ve been in 10 years, and am having great fun playing my horn again! I also wanted to say thanks for providing the opportunity for my more ambitious students to develop at a pace more suitable to their talents. I don’t know of too many university programs that are willing to open their arms to non college-level students, but the fact that we have one so close to home is absolutely thrilling to me! I plan on trying to “fill the pipeline” even more as time goes on.”

Mr. Rick Wygant, lead trumpet in University Jazz Ensemble, area music educator.

“Bringing the younger musicians who are still growing and learning their instruments together with the older musicians who are interested in keeping their chops up is a wonderful idea for everyone involved. I am having a terrific time standing next to kids younger than my children, creating a decent sounding musical group. The giving and taking of information between myself and the younger members of the percussion section is very gratifying to me.”

Mr. Charles Cahn, Percussion Section, area Businessman

“Regarding community/college bands, as a community member I am always grateful for such programs that allow me to continue to play. As a college student at Syracuse University in the early 80’s, I did not fully appreciate the benefit of this type of organization until now. There are some disadvantages to this as well however. The stability of the group fluctuates depending on the student membership, and as a community member we sometimes are asked to play a variety of parts or different instruments, given the organization’s needs.”

Mr. Dave Gordon, Trumpet Section, area Lawyer

“In thinking about the college/community ensemble from a community member perspective, I can lift up the following themes or questions for discussion. Does the mission statement of the ensemble speak to the needs of students who are serious about their craft, students who just look to pick up a credit or two, high-level community players, weekend warriors who might have lower expectations or less available energy to put into the process? How do the college students perceive the presence of community members? Do they resent that some community members may have a higher chair placement than students? Should community members be “equal partners” in the ensemble or should they be subordinate to the needs of the students enrolled for credit? Are the community members a positive example that music can be a life-long activity for them?”

Dave Goss, Euphonium Section, area Minister

“Our bands provide us with a great opportunity to play with more experienced and accomplished area musicians. This is not without some challenges, dealing with some older players who are a little set in their ways, or not as accomplished as they may think they are.”

Bill Bishop, Saxophone, ESU Sophomore, Fine Arts Music Major

“University/Community Band has allowed me to play in full ensembles. And if I stay in the area after I graduate, I already know that I can keep playing and keep in touch with the people I have met during my time here.”

Tony Petro, Trumpet, ESU Junior, Media Communications Major

“The University/Community Ensemble has forged a link between the school and town like never before. It has provided an opportunity for the college community to join with local citizens in the universal language of music, and work toward a common goal. In my personal instance, the band includes my daughter, a high school junior who wants to pursue music education, and me, and East Stroudsburg University Alumni from 20+ years ago. Playing in the band also serves as a respite for me as I deal with daily Kidney Dialysis treatments. My daughter feels more recognized for her music than in any previous venue.”

Margaret Stiff, Saxophone, ESU Class of 1981

“The most rewarding part of participating in the ESU concert band is the fact that my eight year old son has developed a love for music, and is currently taking piano lessons. He became interested after hearing me practice my bass clarinet parts at home!”

WendyLeDuc, Bass Clarinet, area Elementary Schoolteacher

“Our students now get to play in a larger and more balanced group that performs a wide range of music in a variety of styles. Many of the community members are very accomplished musicians. There are several area high school and middle school band directors, as well as private instrumental instructors. Our groups grew out of a small university setting with a limited number of music majors, and many students not wanting to participate in band due to being “burned out” from high school. There were many area community members who wanted a place to play locally; putting them together with our smaller number of students seemed like a win-win situation. This concept has now extended to all our ensembles including our choral and string programs.”

Professor Terry Flatt, Chair, Music Department, ESU