

The Conductor as Scholar:
National Guidelines for the Promotion and Tenure of Collegiate
Choral Conductors

POSITION STATEMENT

The National Collegiate Choral Organization (NCCO) charges College and University Promotion and Tenure Committees to regard the following question as the key consideration for promotion and tenure decisions:

What are reasonable and appropriate activities for a conductor in higher education to engage in so that he/she may be promoted and tenured given the parameters of the institution's profile, sense of mission, budgetary support, departmental mission and history, and the level of student motivation, talent and retention?

NCCO defines a choral conductor's scholarly activity through the following three statements.

- 1) Performance through conducting is the major part of a conductor-scholar's creative output and may or may not follow a particular trajectory. This may occur through a variety of opportunities such as, but not limited to, appearances at state, regional or national conferences of professional music organizations.
- 2) Conductors should exhibit some level of activity in areas which may include but are not limited to: presentations at professional conferences and the like, publication of reviews, articles, videos, recordings and/or adjudication.
- 3) The record of the conductor likely will show activities in a variety of scholarly or creative areas.

NCCO acknowledges that the conductor is the one who is responsible for articulating those pursuits that are considered scholarship and to illustrate how those activities fit within his/her institution's particular definitions and needs. Promotion and Tenure Committees are charged with being open and receptive to the explanations, and to consult the NCCO document "The Conductor as Scholar: National Guidelines for the Promotion and Tenure of Collegiate Choral Conductors" (attached below) for further explanations and examples of appropriate activities.

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 - Author of papers, articles, books, videos

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- Research by conductors is most often applied through performance
- Creative activities are ongoing and do not always follow a particular trajectory
- Performing opportunities at regional and national events are limited and highly competitive
- Budget, recruiting and recording resources can affect performances and opportunities
- Serving as a clinician for high school choirs is appropriate for the collegiate choral professional
- Maintaining healthy relationships within the profession is a crucial component to the success of the performance of the conductor
- Creative activities for the conductor will most likely take a wide variety of forms. It is possible, however, to be somewhat objective about the following:
 - the local, regional or national importance of the venue
 - whether the activity was by invitation/selection/adjudication
 - the importance of critical reviews found in journals, books or other media
 - the research, documentation, and preparation necessary to properly realize a performance or scholarly publication

---from Texas State University

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- Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio
- West Chester University of Pennsylvania

V. CONCLUSIONS

This document attempts to provide a qualitative, as well as quantitative, rationale for conductors and Promotion and Tenure committees to use in navigating the thorny issues of evaluating scholarly performance as a creative activity.

Compelling arguments can be made for the substance of the activity of conducting, the intellectual AND artistic acuity that is represented by the very highest levels of conducting, and how this is expressed in the act of rehearsing, teaching and performing.

---Doug Lowry, Dean, The Eastman School of Music

Institutions [must have] a process that allows for advocacy and education. [Music departments will also] benefit by developing healthy, professional, cross-disciplinary relationships which [will help] to mitigate competition and engage faculty in an understanding of the [unique] professional expectations of [conductors].

---John Beckford, Dean, Furman University

For a collegiate choral conductor to be promoted and tenured, the reviewing committees, in the final analysis, should decide about the overall impact of the conductor on the students, the department, the university, and the profession. Committees should be realistic in their expectations of what is reasonable and appropriate for the conductor based on the job description in which she was hired, the unique expectations of the department within the university community, and the resources of money, time, and personnel afforded to her to aid in the development of a university or collegiate choral program.

---Dr. Bonnie Borshay Sneed, Southwestern Oklahoma State University
 Founder and Chair of the NCCO Committee on Promotion and Tenure

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INTRODUCTION

The creative and scholarly activities of the college or university choral director are varied and difficult to quantify and assess. While some collegiate conductors participate in traditional research and publishing, the majority demonstrate their scholarship through public performance with university ensembles and/or choirs from other organizations. After substantial study and reflection, the National Collegiate Choral Organization has issued these guidelines in order to show not only the many kinds of scholarly activities conductors regularly undertake, but also how those disparate activities should be assessed and evaluated. The present document was created to assist American institutions of higher learning in developing promotion and tenure practices for conductors. The information presented here may also be helpful to individual choral conductors as they pursue tenure and promotion at their own colleges and universities.

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A Doctor of Musical Arts or a Doctor of Music is the terminal degree for a performance area in music. The degree was created to allow performers to attain the necessary academic and scholarly background to work as musicians in university settings. Inherent in the degree from its inception was the premise that performance would be the primary activity, inclusive of a scholarly component. In the DMA program at many universities, recitals and/or lecture-recitals comprise a significant portion of the requirements for the degree. Most DMA degrees also include a final project which culminates in a written document of the length and complexity of a dissertation and which is publicly defended before a thesis committee. Therefore, in working towards promotion and tenure, a university conductor should continue to demonstrate activities in both musical performance and traditional scholarly activity such as publishing.

Robert Freeman, Director of the Eastman School of Music (1972-1996) stated that the DMA degree allowed musicians to study “historical, theoretical and aesthetic considerations that...change the way a work is to be performed in manners that are aurally demonstrable...The capacities to think clearly and to express oneself persuasively orally and in writing are as important for the musician as are the capacities to hear and listen.” (*Music Educators Journal*, October 1981, pp. 54-5)

NCCO does not hold that performance alone is the sole creative activity for conductors, nor that publication is the primary activity in which to be involved. Rather, NCCO acknowledges three parameters:

- 1) Performance conducting is the major part of a conductor-scholar’s creative output.
- 2) Conductors should exhibit some level of activity in areas which may include but are not limited to: presentations at professional conferences and the like, publication and/or adjudication.
- 3) The record of the conductor likely will show activities in a variety of scholarly or creative areas.

IIA. GENERAL DEFINITIONS

In most institutions of higher education, promotion and tenure committees normally examine candidates in three contexts: Teaching, Research, and Service, although it must be understood that, due to the uniqueness of the nature of the conductor/scholar, there is considerable overlap among these three components. This fact alone needs to be recognized and judged appropriately in developing criteria for evaluation. The following guidelines are intended to explain to both music and non-music colleagues how performance can be judged against traditional research and publication.

Some progress has been made in recent years among PT committees which have come to understand that public performance is a type of scholarship. "Research" or "Publications" are often now categorized as "Creative Activities" or "Scholarship," allowing for alternatives to studying a topic and then writing a book or article about it, or working in a laboratory and publishing the results.

Webster's Dictionary defines *scholarship* as "the qualities, knowledge, or attainments of a scholar," and *scholar* as one who is "learned" or engaged in "the acquisition of knowledge by study or research." ...[A] music scholar must be one who is musically learned or actively engaged in the acquisition of music knowledge by study or research. Further, a scholar engages in scholarship to become more intelligent about his or her area of expertise and add to the body of knowledge...a *music* scholar engages in music scholarship to become more musically intelligent and [to] add to the body of music knowledge.

---from Texas A&M University-Commerce

From the preceding it should be clear, then, that scholarly performance is similar to publication: it is peer-reviewed through the medium of the audience, which may contain other music professionals. The conductor is, through her preparation and rehearsals, actively engaged in scholarship, and may, through public performance, add to the body of musical knowledge.

Public performance exposes the conductor to a critical audience, and demands a level of skill and preparation that meets or surpasses scholarly activity which does NOT require public transparency. This does not mean, however, that every performance is considered a scholarly endeavor.

---Adapted from John Beckford, Dean, Furman University

IIB. DEFINING CREATIVE ACTIVITY FOR CONDUCTORS

1. Performances as a conductor with one's own choir(s)

There is a difference between a "scholarly" concert and a regular concert. Not every semester concert has a scholarly component. (For example: a holiday concert, a luncheon Rotary meeting, singing for the trustees, etc. These are important for the visibility of the program, but do not constitute scholarly output.) The scholarly performance will consist of a concert containing mostly classical art music, will have significant program notes, or it may be a lecture-recital. If the concert is based on a new or newly discovered composition, then the concert may be considered as scholarship through performance by disseminating that music to a wider, discriminating audience. Though the burden lies on the conductor to make the differentiation, promotion committees need to be receptive to such a case being made.

Conductors, however, may perform other concerts during the semester and their importance should not be minimized as they are the professional output of the conductor, even if they may lack the above elements of a scholarly concert.

---Adapted from John Beckford

A scholarly performance requires not only research into the composer, his/her times, and the specific piece(s) being performed, but also an intensive, lengthy rehearsal process that enables the musician to understand the composer's ideas and to clarify their execution.

---from West Chester University

2. Conference appearances with university/college choirs usually are peer-reviewed through the submission of recordings of multiple-year live concert recordings, and may be applied for only after a minimum of three years with an ensemble. Return conference appearances generally must wait a period of two to three years before another invitation is offered to the ensemble. This is true for divisional and national level appearances, and in most states.

3. Publication may include serving as a:

- Reviewer of music, recordings, books
- Composer of original music, scholarly editions of older music, or musical arrangements.
- Author of conference presentation paper, articles, books, or instructional videos.

Publication of significant research in any field is rarely easily attained, and the same is true in music. The number of refereed journals in choral music is exceedingly small. Publication of any material which requires reproduction of musical examples can take years simply to acquire copyright permission, and many publishers are not interested in investing the time and expense to assist with this task. Further, economic conditions have forced many smaller publishing firms to be purchased by larger corporations. Any publication activities should be seen as a major and significant accomplishment.

---compiled from Georgia State and other institutions

With the above information in place, committees may now engage in more informed judgments of the choral conductor's scholarly activities. Section IV lists specific institutional examples that NCCO has deemed appropriate and significant. Uniformity among institutions is unlikely and not expected because of the unique demands that are placed on each conductor in an individual department or school of music. There is, thus, a need for institutional flexibility. The conductor is responsible for, and must be given the opportunity to articulate, those pursuits that are considered creative activities and illustrate how they fit within his institution's particular definitions and needs.

III. GUIDELINES FOR PROMOTION AND TENURE COMMITTEES

1. *Research by conductors is most often applied through performance* whether with one's own choir or with another. While there are conductors who publish documents concerning historical, theoretical or pedagogical issues, there are many others who do not write about the application of the knowledge that went into the performance. Performance art is best understood when it is experienced. The research is shared in a public performance, or through presentations at conferences, or demonstrations given at clinics. All are viable options and components of the Creative Activity portion of the portfolio. Those instances where a conductor publishes an article or book should be acknowledged as significant.

It is normally not possible for [conductors] to produce research or creative portfolios as quantitatively impressive as those in other academic disciplines...

---from Georgia State University

The rationale for why the output will be quantitatively smaller is that the conductor cannot "publish" his craft without taking the choir with him...The practicality of having to have your "instrument" with you (and the expenses and logistics that entails) would argue that the quantity of the output would be less.

---from Robert Cutietta, Dean, University of Southern California Thornton School of Music

2. *Creative activities are ongoing and do not always follow a particular trajectory.*

The educational and musical aspects of conducting and guiding a university choral program demand that students be engaged across the entire spectrum of Western music. Because much of the research conductors engage in is directly applied in rehearsal, and then finds its application in a performance that is rarely repeated, conductors by nature pursue an eclectic variety of research.

3. *Performing opportunities at regional and national events are limited and highly competitive.* The size, quality, and institutional support of the university's music program have a direct impact on the conductor's ability to program appropriately challenging repertoire. Conductors in small, liberal arts colleges are not able to perform the same kind of literature that is heard at a college or university with a School of Music or graduate program in music. While the aesthetic experience can be comparable among schools, the level of repertoire is significantly different, and may preclude conference invitations or success in performance competitions outside the state or district. It is important for promotion and tenure committees to understand that being invited to such events requires peer review, and is fully equivalent to being chosen to read a paper or to publish an article in a refereed journal.

III. GUIDELINES FOR PROMOTION AND TENURE COMMITTEES (CONTINUED)

4. *Budget, Recruiting and Recording resources can affect performances and opportunities for the ensembles.* To be competitive with other choirs in applying for conference, festival, and competition appearances, a certain level of funding must be available to purchase music, find scholarship funds for students singing in ensembles or accompanists, special instrumentalists for certain compositions (organ, brass, strings, winds), etc.

5. *Serving as a clinician for high school choirs is appropriate for the collegiate choral professional.* College conductors are chosen to serve as a type of consultant, to help the choirs achieve a higher degree of musicianship than they might otherwise perform. It is rare for a college conductor to work with other college choirs unless it is in an honor choir-type setting, and usually outside his/her state. High school involvement on the part of the conductor is an essential part of recruiting and provides visibility for the institution.

6. *Maintaining healthy relationships within the profession is a crucial component to the success of the overall program and therefore to the success of the performance of the conductor.* There should be evidence of contributions to the local, state, region and/or national choral organizations such as ACDA, NCCO and MENC. This type of service to the profession should be regarded as an integral component of one's professional activity.

7. *Creative activities for the conductor will most likely take a wide variety of forms.* Therefore, there is no one single area listed below that is the most preferred. Each conductor, based on his/her situation, will choose activities that are most appropriate and realistic.

When determining the significance of the activity, in certain areas of the music discipline, such as Music History, Theory and Music Education, it is possible for the refereed review process of scholarly/creative activities to be as formalized as in other academic disciplines. *In other areas, such as performance [conducting], however, it is not possible for the refereed review process to be as formalized.*

It is possible, however, to be somewhat objective about the following:

- 1) the local, regional or national importance of the venue
- 2) whether the activity was by invitation/selection/adjudication
- 3) the importance of critical reviews found in journals, books or other media
- 4) the research, documentation, and preparation necessary to properly realize a performance or scholarly publication.

---from Texas State University

The typical and predictable battles between performance faculty and theorists/musicologists are, in most cases quite resolvable if one simply accepts that human beings respond to and are inspired by music in different ways. Music inspires some to compose, some to conduct, some to perform, some to analyze and [some to] think and write.

---Doug Lowry, Dean of the Eastman School of Music

IV. SPECIFIC CRITERIA FROM FOUR ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

The documents in this section are as widely varied as the institutions themselves. The following is not intended to be comprehensive listing. Rather, these may serve as examples of how four distinct institutions with different missions, resources, and student populations, have grappled with the issue of evaluating conductors' creative activities.

The question must be: What are reasonable and appropriate activities for a conductor in higher education to engage in so that he/she may be promoted or tenured given the parameters of the institution's profile, mission, budgetary support, departmental mission and history, and the level of student motivation, talent, and retention?

1. Creative Activities recognized by the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music

Adjudication
 Awards
 Clinics-Workshops
 Compositions
 Continued Performance Activities
 Editing
 Guest Conducting/Performing
 Professional Organizations
 Publications/Reviews
 Research (to include technical studies and testing of instruments)
 Recording/Broadcasting
 Technological Expertise

2. Creative Activities recognized by Texas A&M University - Commerce

Performance

The faculty member . . .

- performed regularly with an accomplished ensemble that:
 - requires a rigorous, competitive audition for membership,
 - performs a substantial, demanding repertoire,
 - has performances periodically reviewed by knowledgeable members of the media;
- performed regularly as an organist or pianist in a professional setting that:
 - requires a rigorous, competitive audition for employment,
 - involves a substantial, demanding repertoire,
 - includes an annual review of performance;
- performed for a solo recording which was subsequently published and distributed;
- periodically performed a full recital or two half-recitals with another member of the faculty on campus;
- performed frequently as an accompanist for student and/or faculty recitals;
- presented a recital or master class by invitation or conducted an ensemble concert by invitation at a regional or national conference;
- guest conducted or performed a significant solo with an accomplished ensemble.

2. Creative Activities recognized by Texas A&M University - Commerce (continued)

Scholarship

The faculty member . . .

- presented a lecture, clinic, or paper at a regional or national conference;
- authored a substantial article that was published in a refereed professional journal with regional or national distribution;
- authored one or more chapters of a book previously accepted for publication;
- completed continuing education in post-doctoral studies.

3. Creative Activities recognized by Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio

Scholarly or artistic engagement must be ongoing. Projects may change, and the pace of activity associated with them may vary. But because such engagement strengthens teaching, the College expects its faculty members to keep themselves professionally involved in the creative work of their discipline by the regular and disciplined pursuit of knowledge and the development of their skills.

- Active and effective participation in one's field, through publications, exhibition, or performance
- Active participation in scholarly or artistic discourse, through the presentation of invited lectures, conference papers or posters; or through other active scholarly involvement in conferences; or through the receipt of grants
- Active work with students on artistic, scholarly, or research projects that go beyond regular courses
- Exchange of information, ideas, and techniques with peers
- Acquisition of new skills or the pursuit of secondary fields of scholarly interest

4. Creative Activities recognized by West Chester University of Pennsylvania

Most Desirable Performances and Publications Outcomes:

- a live, public, solo or collaborative recital (or lecture recital), an ensemble performance, or a CD recording
 - that is given in front of a large audience, preferably off campus
 - that is invited (e.g., at a professional conference, by a host presenter, etc.)
 - that is reviewed in the local or professional press
- off-campus performances, including solo tours or directing an ensemble on a tour, preferably at the regional or national level
- an invitation to perform solo or chamber music at other campuses, festivals, or on professional recitals
- an invitation to guest conduct, especially at the regional or national level, or to provide a master class for students/musicians at other universities
- an article published in a juried periodical appropriate to the author's field
- extensive, scholarly program notes written for concert programs
- receiving outside grants or awards for research, to encourage collaborative performances, for CD publication, or to support public performances
- commissioning new music and performing it as a soloist or conductor of an ensemble

4. Creative Activities recognized by West Chester University of Pennsylvania (continued)

Important, but Less Desirable Performance and Publication Outcomes:

- Local public, solo or collaborative recital (or lecture recital), or ensemble performance, including performances on campus to a local audience. These would also include performances as an instrumentalist with area professional ensembles (which do not include solo playing), or solo performances on concert series sponsored by local churches, civic groups, musical associations
- Articles or writings on musical matters published in local papers, for in-house websites and journals, or other non-juried periodicals.
- Serving as clinician for local groups, or providing master class instruction for on-campus groups, when those are not normally a part of teaching load.

Note: It is understood that some members of the Department of Applied Music perform with their ensembles as part of their teaching load. One or two performances a year with an ensemble should be considered part of the teaching responsibility. However, those faculty who regularly perform more frequently should be viewed as surpassing their basic responsibilities. It should also be noted that, for pianists and singers, performing from memory is the norm and that this places an additional burden on the musician.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This document attempts to provide a qualitative, as well as quantitative, rationale for conductors and Promotion and Tenure committees to use in navigating the thorny issues of evaluating scholarly performance as a creative activity.

Compelling arguments can be made for the substance of the activity of conducting, the intellectual AND artistic acuity that is represented by the very highest levels of conducting, and how this is expressed in the act of rehearsing, teaching and performing.

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 Founder and Chair of the NCCO Committee on Promotion and Tenure