

NCCO Task Force on Choral Music in the Liberal Arts

Committee Report on Survey Findings

NCCO members were invited to participate in a survey in the fall of 2018 aimed at gathering information regarding their faculty status, institutional and departmental structure, teaching responsibilities, faculty evaluation criteria, choral ensemble offerings within their programs, and representative repertoire. Participants were also asked to provide feedback on NCCO's conferences and written publications, with particular focus on their relevance to participants' work in liberal arts-focused collegiate settings.

In total, 77 individuals participated in the ensemble. Task force members analyzed responses in different categories, and provided brief descriptions of their findings, which are summarized below (not every question warrants extensive analysis).

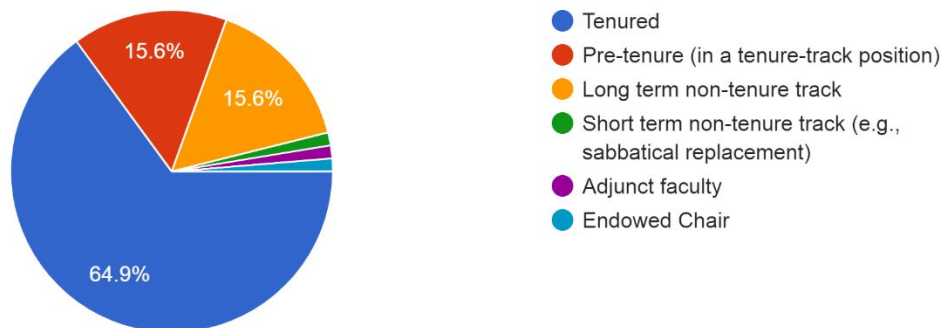
As the responses to initial questions suggest, the survey did not identify a single definition of what constitutes a "liberal arts" setting. Participants represent a wide array of institutions. NCCO members were encouraged to opt out of the survey if their teaching occurred primarily in R1 institutions or graduate level programs.

The NCCO Task Force on Choral Music in the Liberal Arts consisted of:

Dr. Barron Breland, Creighton University
Dr. Katherine FitzGibbon, Lewis & Clark College
Dr. John Hughes, Ripon College
Dr. Dirk Johnson, West Virginia State University
Dr. Michael McGaghie, Macalester College
Dr. Alec Schumacker, Hawai'i Pacific University
Dr. Andrew Morgan, Hendrix College (chair)

1. Please identify your faculty status from the following options.

77 responses



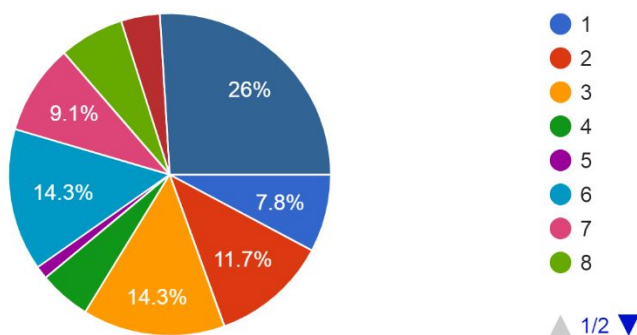
Findings: The overwhelming majority (81.8%) of respondents are tenured or pre-tenured in a TT position. This would indicate a continued need for NCCO to address concerns of faculty

members to successfully navigate tenure and promotion proceedings at liberal arts institutions, very much like the document produced and the panel held at previous national conventions. This process can be fraught with challenges, including departmental and college/university committees that are made up of non-musicians (and often non-performing or visual artists at all) as well as guidelines and documents that prescribe scholarship in a way that may not translate to performing artists.

There is, however, no small number of other types of faculty (19.2%), which may benefit from different types of professional guidance by the organization.

2. How many tenure-track faculty members teach in your music department?

77 responses

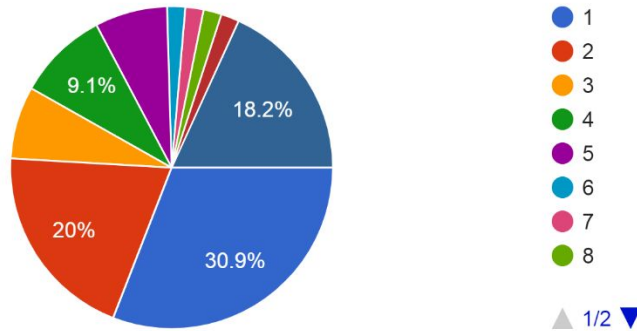


Findings: This was the most evenly spaced answer, with about half of the respondents (54.6%) serving in music departments or programs with 6 or fewer tenured faculty and about half (45.4%) with 7 or more. This particular spread of data may not help NCCO tailor its efforts towards a specific subset, but could be helpful in recognizing the wide disparity of department size among its liberal arts choral conductors, meaning there are no one-size-fits-all solutions to some of the challenges.

One potential pitfall of this particular question could be how respondent defined their music 'department.' Where some liberal arts institutions have music programs housed within other departments or combined in larger performing arts groupings, respondents may not have teased out music-specific faculty when responding to the 'size of department' related questions.

3. How many full time non-tenure track faculty members teach in your music department? Skip this question if it does not apply to your department.

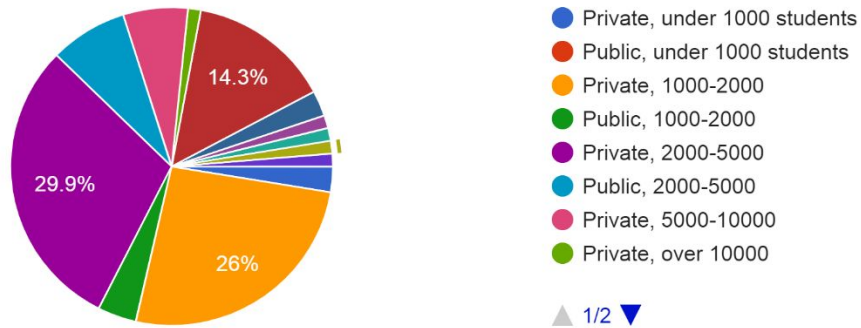
55 responses



Findings: This question revealed another even spread. Almost exactly half of the respondents to this question (50.9%) reported 1 or 2 full-time, non-tenure track faculty within music departments. If the non-respondents are considered (those who completed the survey but chose to skip the question if it did not apply to them, which could be assumed as 0 full time non tenure-track appointments), then 2 or fewer is the great majority (64.9%). The next highest number of respondents is the other end of the spectrum – those whose departments rely on 10 or more full-time non-tenure track faculty members (18.2%). Of course this data cannot yet be seen as evolving one way or another over time, but it could be interesting to explore whether the anecdotal stories of tenure track positions becoming sparser and institutions relying more and more on non-tenure track lines is the reality or not.

3a. Which of the following best describes the institution where you are employed?

77 responses



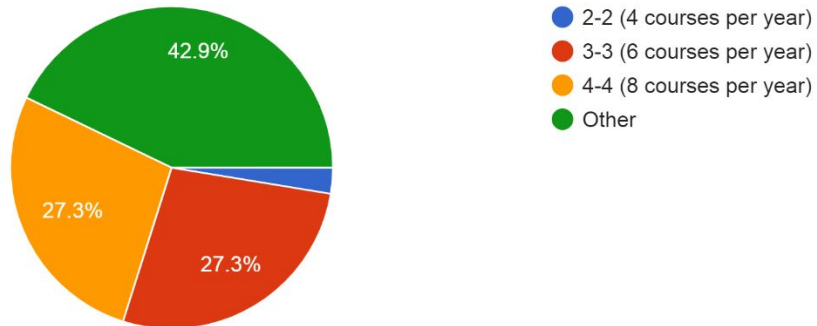
Note: the response options on the right do not display the full range of choices participants were given. Additional choices were “Public, 5000-10000” and “Public, over 10000.” The pie chart does contain results for those additional choices. Some respondents selected “other” and provided their own category.

Findings: The majority of respondents teach at private institutions (66%), with 32% teaching at public institutions and 1 respondent indicating institution size but not public/private, not surprising numbers given the intended respondents from liberal arts institutions. Size proved to be a wider spread, with 2.6% < 1,000 students, 29.9% 1,000-2,000 students, 37.6% 2,000-5,000 students, 12.9% 5,000-10,000 students, and 16.8% over 10,000 students.

The clearest conclusion to draw from all of this survey data regarding respondent rank, makeup of music departments, and institution size, is that there is no singular answer to how music departments are structured or to how college/university size can affect faculty size within music departments and programs. Our organization serves an extremely diverse population in these questions, with varied resources and personnel at their disposal.

4. How many courses are you expected to teach in a typical academic year? Include in your tally all credited ensemb...d by your institution's faculty policies.

77 responses



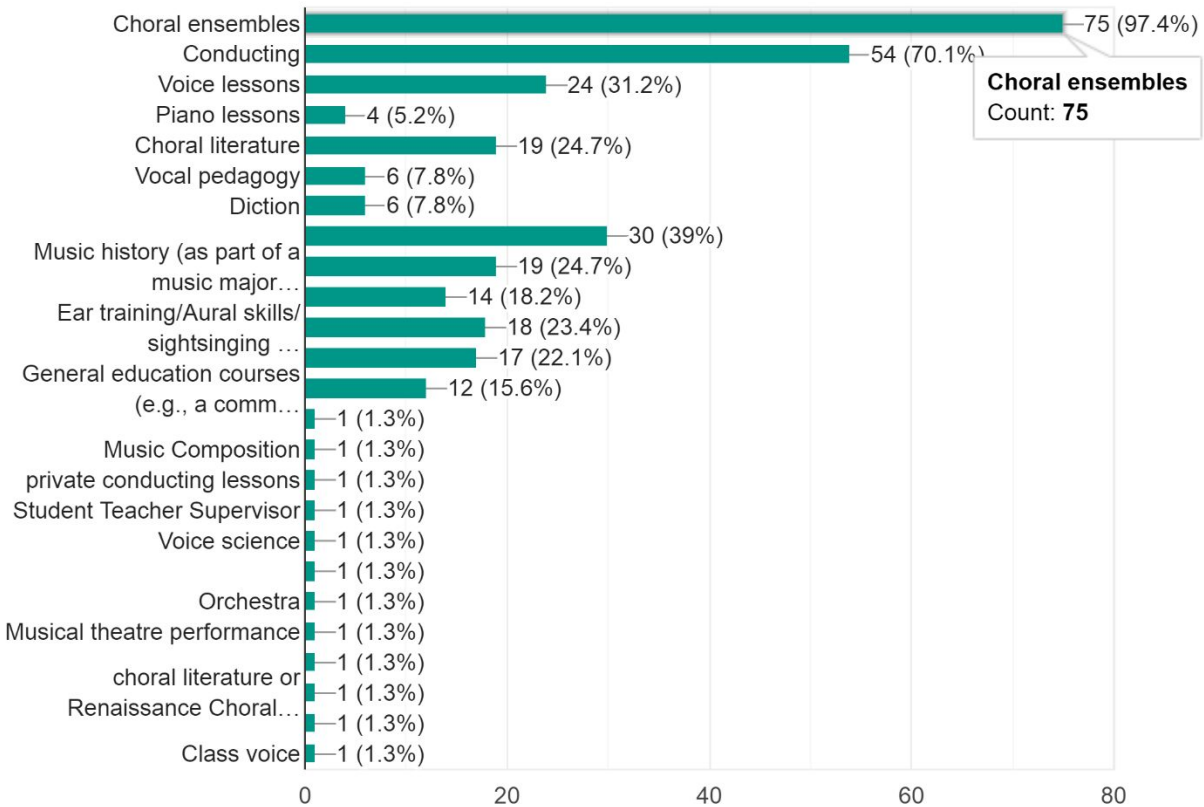
Findings: Choral faculty at liberal arts schools have varied course load requirements. 75% of respondents reported having either 4-4 or 3-3 loads, with the other 25% reporting 5-5, 4-3, or 2-2 loads. There was a great deal of variety within those numbers as well, as several respondents reported teaching January terms or summer terms as well, or that they were on 2-2 loads but ensembles didn't count toward that load.

4a. If you selected "Other" for the previous question, please describe how your institution determines your yearly teaching load.

Findings: This was a short answer question, allowing participants to describe their typical loads. As such, no graph or empirical data is available. Frequent among responses was a 2-3 or 3-2 course load. Several respondents teach a J-term or summer course, although the responses do not indicate what this course might be (choir, theory, etc.). Several individuals also teach at institutions that use a credit hour system; for those participants, a 24 credit load spread across 2 terms was most frequent.

5. Select from the following list any courses you teach on a regular or semi-regular basis (i.e., courses you routinely teach within a 2-year period).

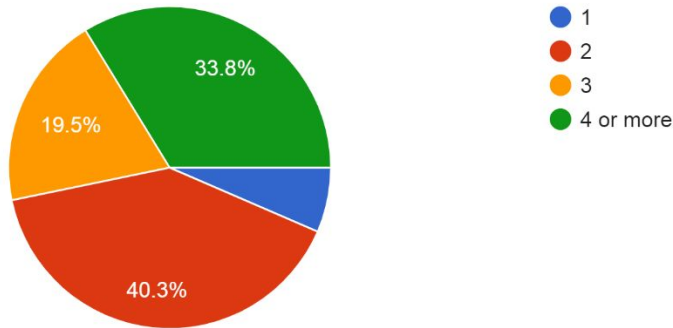
77 responses



Findings: Responses indicate that choral music faculty at liberal arts schools have varied teaching responsibilities. Outside of choral ensembles, the most frequently taught classes are conducting, choral methods, voice lessons, choral literature, and music history. It is noteworthy that many respondents teach music courses such as theory, ear training, and music history; those individuals likely work in smaller music departments where faculty are expected to teach in multiple areas. A more in-depth survey platform (Survey Monkey, for example) would allow further analysis of results.

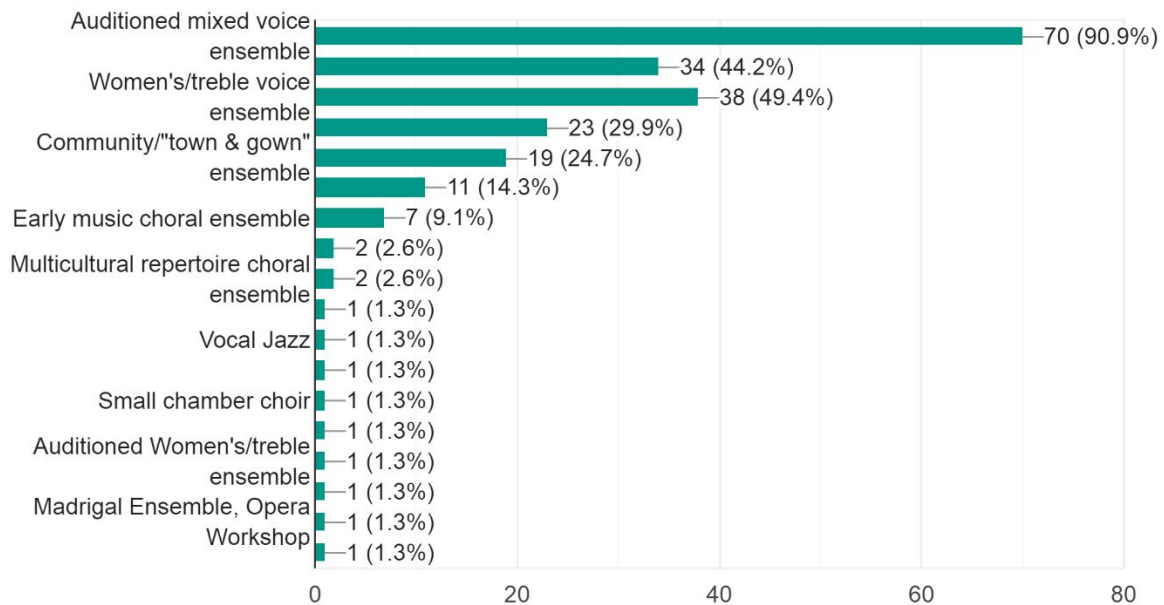
6. How many choral ensembles does your program offer? Ad hoc, temporary, student-led, or community e...or academic credit by your students).

77 responses



7. Which of the following choral ensemble types does your program offer?

77 responses



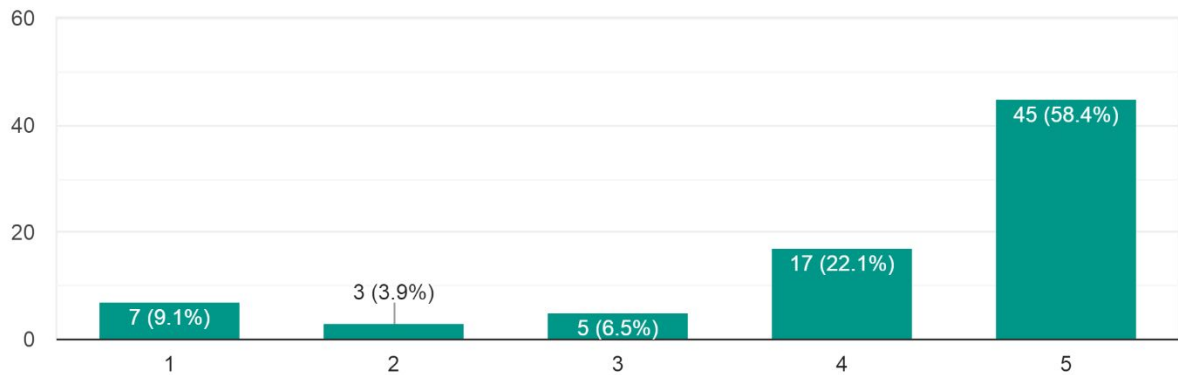
Findings (6 & 7): By far, auditioned mixed choral ensembles are the most common type of choral ensemble offered in liberal arts settings, a response that is not surprising in and of itself. Non-auditioned choruses and treble voice ensembles occurred with similar numbers of responses. Perhaps due to the range of institutions included in this survey, the results are difficult to analyze. With several respondents at schools of over 10,000 students offering responses along with individuals at far smaller institutions, significant or surprising trends do not emerge.

8. Please list 4-5 representative pieces you have taught and performed with your flagship/premiere ensemble in the past 2 semesters.

Findings: The nature of this question is somewhat flawed, as “flagship” and “premiere” are highly subjective terms. Furthermore, some respondents do not distinguish one ensemble as their premiere choir. Responses included works for large choirs with orchestral forces, such as Britten’s *War Requiem* or Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9*. A large number of respondents, presumably those who teach at smaller institutions, would not be able to mount performances of these works. If anything it is to be gleaned from the responses, it might be that (a) works from the Western music canon still constitute a core body of repertoire in the field today, (b) music by living composers was mentioned by a large majority of respondents, and that (c) works by non-European or non-American composers was far less common. Evaluation of trends among collegiate choral repertoire selection would be a fascinating topic to explore, but one that would ultimately require extensive inquiry, beyond the scope of this survey.

9. To what extent do your institution's tenure and promotion criteria for scholarly activity recognize and account for the creative activities you pursue?

77 responses



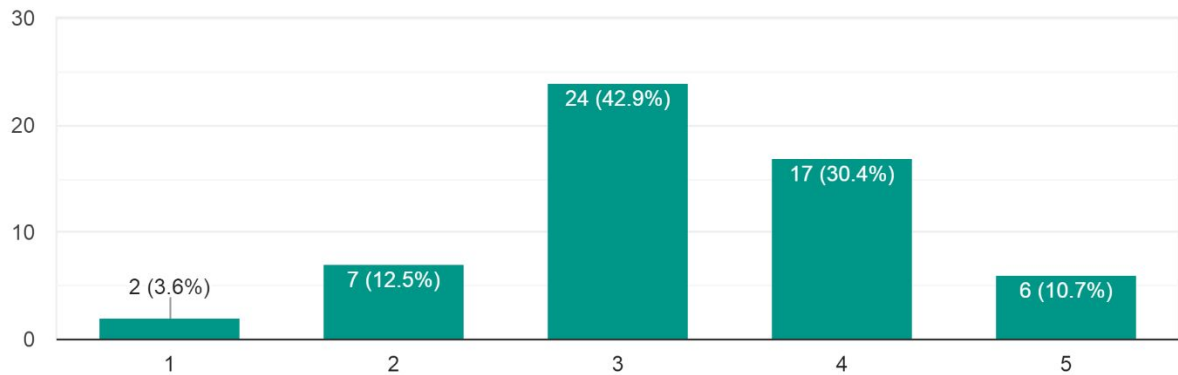
Findings: The results indicate that participants generally feel that their professional activity beyond the institution receives appropriate consideration in the tenure and promotion processes used by their institutions.

9a. Please elaborate on your institution's tenure and promotion guidelines as they relate to your professional work.

Findings: Many respondents commented that their institutions prioritize teaching above other areas of professional work, a common element of smaller liberal arts institutions. The majority of comments suggest that performances, compositions, guest conducting appearances, and clinician work satisfy institutional expectations for tenure and promotion, and that issues where these activities are not fully recognized are rare. NCCO's *The Conductor as Scholar* was mentioned by several as a useful tool for navigating the tenure and promotion process at their institutions. It may be the case that liberal arts colleges encourage a holistic view of professional activity, and do not maintain strict policies regarding types of activities that satisfy requirements for tenure and promotion.

10. To what extent do you feel that recent NCCO conference sessions (interest sessions, discussion panels,...O conferences, please do not respond.

56 responses



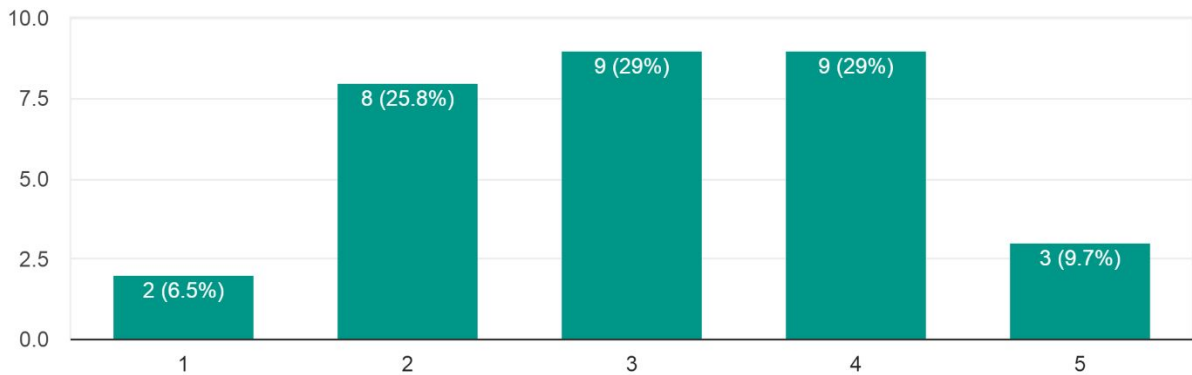
10a. Please comment on the relevance of NCCO conference sessions to your work in liberal arts settings.

Findings (10 & 10a): Many respondents indicated that conference sessions appeal primarily towards attendees who work in large institutions with prominent music degree programs. This applied to interest sessions, discussion panels, and the repertoire performed by the selected choirs. Specifically, the focus on highly advanced repertoire fails to provide useful information to individuals who do not work with music majors. A few selected quotes illustrate this summary:

- “Any session that assumes I have a captive audience of music majors and voice students who must take choir is not useful to me.”
- “few of the performances are works that I can do with a smaller program, non-majors in the choir, or lack of grad students.”
- “Almost all the repertoire presented was much too difficult for my "y'all come" chorus- which is our only ensemble!”
- “There was NO outreach to smaller institutions and programs, NO recognition that we exist, NO discussion of our challenges, NO panels on repertoire, recruiting, and voicing challenges. NO discussion of choral music in the context of a liberal-arts curriculum as opposed to in a School of Music, NO mention of the chorus made up of overcommitted non-music-majors for whom it is an extracurricular activity.”

11. To what extent do you feel that topics explored in *The Choral Scholar* (including the journal's research article... *Choral Scholar*, please do not respond.

31 responses

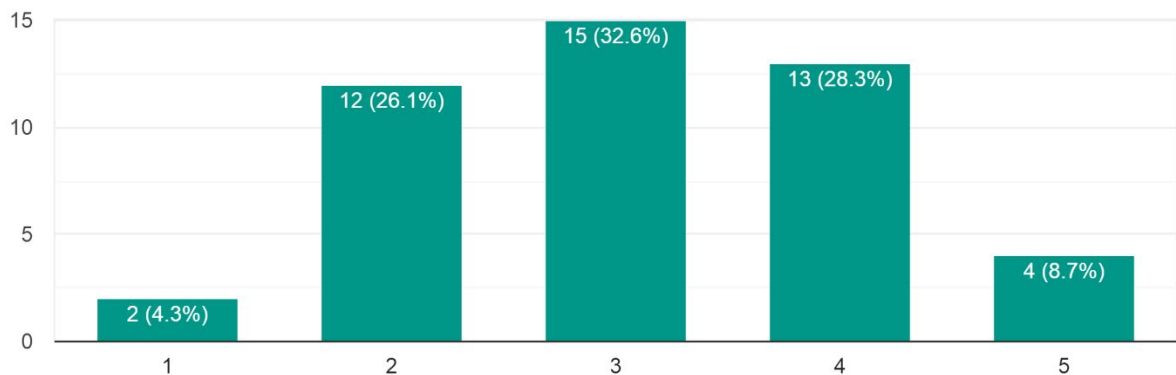


Findings: Results for this question are clustered in the center, which might be interpreted as a lukewarm response. More troubling, however, is the fact that only 31 of the 77 respondents completed this question; participants who don't regularly read *The Choral Scholar* were asked not to respond. One might surmise that the 77 people who responded are at least moderately invested in NCCO; after all they responded to an email survey. NCCO leadership might consider delving into this issue further in order to find strategies to increase readership or alter the

publication to make it more appealing to individuals who teach in liberal arts settings.

12. To what extent do you feel that music published through the NCCO Choral Series is suitable for the colle...O Choral Series, please do not respond.

46 responses



Findings: As with the *Choral Scholar*, responses to this question suggest participants generally do not find the works published in the NCCO Choral Series to be highly suitable for the ensembles they conduct. Responses were slightly higher than those for Question 11 (n=46, 59.7%). Further interest may be found in comparing these results with a similar survey question of all NCCO members.

13. What could NCCO do to better support your work as a liberal arts collegiate choral conductor? Include in your response any feedback or suggestions concerning NCCO conferences, publications, or other organizational goals and services.

Findings: While the full comments are available [here](#), this discussion will identify several recurring themes that emerged in reviewing the survey results. It should be noted that many respondents are very much in support of NCCO's services and mission. The purpose of the comments below is to draw attention to areas in which some members feel NCCO could do more to support individuals to teach in liberal arts settings.

- Some respondents feel that NCCO, in its conferences especially, needs to do a better job at providing content for individuals who work in small institutions. Several individuals expressed concern over the usefulness/relevance of topics covered in interest sessions, the choirs selected to perform, and the panelist discussions. The result of this perception may

be detrimental to NCCO's organizational needs: some individuals mentioned they had lapsed membership, and opted not to attend conferences because they felt the organization did not serve them well.

- Many individuals want to see increased discussion of ideas to enhance recruitment and retention for small choral programs.
- Sessions and performances that focus on large masterworks for chorus and orchestra are not useful to members who work predominantly with small choirs of non-music majors. Sessions aimed at discussing repertoire appropriate for a mixture of ability levels and ensemble sizes would be appreciated.
- Many individuals would like NCCO to offer breakout sessions and roundtable discussions to allow for networking and dialogue for individuals who work in small liberal arts colleges.
- Some individuals would like to discuss curricular issues that go beyond strictly choral music teaching. This is especially true for those who teach interdisciplinary courses, general education classes, and other non-choral music courses such as theory and music history.