

A Content Analysis of ACDA National Conference Interest Sessions: 1960 – 2013

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Abstract

Since its inception in 1959, the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) has hosted national conferences ($N = 28$) designed to serve professional choral conductors and choral educators. Previous studies indicated that such conferences primarily were comprised of live choral performances by invited choirs. That research also reported, however, that over 30% of conference events were educationally focused interest sessions (Price & Orman, 2007). The present study categorized and analyzed interest sessions ($N = 458$) by subject area, topic, presentation format, and ensemble/voice type listed in ACDA National Conference programs, 1960 – 2013. Results indicated that *choral conducting and choral techniques* was the most frequent subject area represented, followed by *choral literature* and *performance practice, style, and interpretation*. *Vocal technique, vocal production and tone* was the most frequent topic presented followed by *multicultural music*. *Folk, pop, jazz, and rock* was the stylistic topic most frequently present in *performance practice, style, and interpretation*. Like previous studies, *choral literature* sessions were found to be a high interest topic. However, unlike previous studies, the sessions about *technology, assessment, and standards* tended to be of low interest to ACDA.

Founded in 1959, the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) is a professional organization of choral conductors and choral educators. Its mission is “To inspire excellence in choral music through education, performance, composition, and advocacy” (“American Choral Directors Association,” 2013). ACDA members ($N \approx 20,000$) consist of choral directors in private and public schools, colleges and universities, churches, community choirs, and various other types of choral organizations both national and international. The purpose of this study was to categorize and analyze interest sessions ($N = 458$) presented at ACDA National Conferences, 1960 – 2013, with an eye toward gaining insights into the organization’s success in meeting its stated purposes.

Brief Conference History

Since its 1959 genesis, ACDA has held primarily biennial national conferences. The early national conferences, beginning with the first in 1960, were held in conjunction with the Music Educators National Conference (MENC). For example, prior to the MENC 1960 Atlantic City Convention, ACDA was allotted two days for its own conference. ACDA officials required conference participants to pay a registration fee to ACDA for the two-day event. Notably, MENC officials did not require ACDA conference attendees to also hold MENC membership as a requirement for attendance. Likewise, ACDA conference attendees were not required to register for the MENC conference (De Journett, 1970).

ACDA conferences between the years 1960 and 1964 offered reading sessions, symposia and lectures, business sessions, and performances, together representing a broad spectrum of the choral field. Although most participants found reading sessions to be the most valuable, educational sessions, such as symposia, panels, lectures, and demonstrations, were actively attended and served the purposes, “To enlighten directors to choral music trends, and to provide

workable solutions to common choral problems” (De Journett, 1970, p. 56). ACDA leadership and a Convention Planning Committee selected guest lecturers and panel members to present at the conference (De Journett, 1970).

Because early conferences had evidenced a rather cobbled together approach to session topics, for the 1966 and 1968 conferences, ACDA leadership experimented with a format that centered on a more unified theme. These specific conferences purposefully focused on performance practices of various style periods: Baroque, Classic, and Contemporary. Both guest speakers and performing groups were selected for participation in the conferences based on those specified areas. Contemporary and Avant-garde music themes were favored and some performances featured new ACDA commissioned compositions (De Journett, 1970). Notably, interest session topics reflected such purposes.

Though the collaboration with MENC proved beneficial for the ACDA’s first decade, various tensions, related primarily to financial matters, arose between the leadership of the two organizations. So in 1971, ACDA split from MENC and sponsored its first independent conference in Kansas City, Missouri. In the years immediately following the division, conference attendance steadily increased, which led to the need, in 1977, for multiple offerings of interest sessions. Further conference growth and popularity precipitated the need for dual-tracks for interest sessions and concerts in 1993 and triple-tracks by 1999. Such expansion peaked in 2005 at the Los Angeles conference with six tracks. As the conferences expanded and were further refined, interest sessions played an increasingly important role in ACDA’s mission to promote choral music excellence and education (“American Choral Directors,” 2013).

Literature Review

Evidence suggests that interest sessions at conferences, such as ACDA national conferences, historically have served as a foundation for professional development for educators in all disciplines. Bauer (2007) suggested that a substantial body of literature related to the professional development of teachers was present at the time of his study, but that a need also existed for more extensive research about the professional development practices of music educators specifically.

Some researchers have investigated the professional development preferences and needs specific to the music teachers. For example, Bowles (2002) reported that music teachers were motivated to engage in professional development to increase their skill and/or knowledge (82%), and to receive university graduate credit (72%).

Several recent studies have shown attendance at conferences to be a popular avenue for music teachers' professional development (Barrett, 2006; Bauer, 2007; Eros, 2012; Russell, 2012). According to these studies, professional associations often offer annual conferences that are well attended. Madsen and Hancock (2002) reported a positive correlation between music teacher career longevity and participation in annual conferences. Barrett (2006) suggested that conference session content tended to align with current classroom issues.

Research has suggested that topics presented at conferences often target conference attendees' interests. For example, in a questionnaire about music teachers' self-expressed professional development needs, music teacher respondents ($N = 456$) indicated that the most frequently chosen topics for workshops and professional development were *technology*,

assessment, instrument/choral literature, standards, creativity, and grant writing (Bowles, 2002).

A similar study reported that performance ensemble directors rated *new music/repertoire, instrumental techniques, recruiting, and conducting* as high-interest topics (Bush, 2007). General music teachers, on the other hand, considered *student assessment, music education for gifted/special learners, cross-curricular subject integration, and English as a second language* to be high-interest topics.

Some research has focused specifically on the professional development needs of choral directors and choral educators. For instance, a previously referenced study (Bush, 2007) reported that choral teachers specifically ranked *new music/repertoire* first in workshops they most often attended and *technology* second. *Music education for gifted/special learners* was ranked close to the bottom. Forbes (2011) compared the repertoire selection practices of outstanding choral directors. Forbes reported that the directors nominated as outstanding tended to select repertoire from workshops and clinics, reading sessions, live performances, and ACDA lists.

Ganschow (2014) reported that observing conference choirs and their conductors could influence secondary choir directors' decisions about choir rehearsals. Ganschow's survey of secondary choir directors ($N = 239$) found that from the categories *blend/balance, diction, dynamics, interpretation/musicianship, intonation, rhythm, technique, and tone quality*, participants chose *intonation* and *tone quality* as the topics most prioritized in their rehearsals.

Important to the methodology of present study, researchers have gleaned information about national music organizations through content analyses of journal editorial boards (Latimer, 2011), discussion forums (Bauer & Moehle, 2008), conferences (Todd & Hancock, in process;

Price & Orman, 1999; 2001; 2007), and state music organizations (Conway, Hibbard, & Hourigan, 2005b). A recent content analysis, for example, analyzed a state sponsored Alabama music educators professional development conference (Todd & Hancock, in process). It reported that the majority of the conference consisted of educational sessions (sessions, clinics, and speakers).

Several content analyses have focused on professional music organizations' national conferences. Price and Orman (1999) analyzed sessions ($N = 2,898$) from the MENC National Conference programs from 1984 – 1998. Results indicated that the majority of sessions were educational, with a major focus on performance-oriented topics. Additionally, Price and Orman (2001) investigated sessions ($N = 413$) from the MENC 2000 National Biennial In-Service Conference. Sessions were organized by category or perceived purpose, subject area, and focus within subject area. Results indicated the majority of sessions were educational (65.1%) followed by performances (17.3%). *Industry* was reported to be the largest of the various subject areas (28.8%).

In research closely related to the present investigation, Price and Orman (2007) analyzed interest sessions from the 2002 and 2004 National Biennial In-Service MENC Conferences, 2002 and 2004 Midwest Clinic, 2002 and 2004 Orff-Schulwerk Conferences, and the 2003 and 2005 ACDA National Conferences. ACDA sessions represented 534 of the 2,302 total conference sessions. Results indicated that performances dominated ACDA conference content, while educational sessions constituted the majority in the other three conferences. The subject topics presented in the educational sessions at ACDA conferences evidenced mostly *performance* (71.3%), followed by *industry* (11.8%), and *multicultural* (4.1%). *Research* sessions were the least offered (0.4%).

In a recent ACDA monograph, Schmidt (2002) listed repertoire performed at ACDA conferences, including national conferences, from 1960 – 2000. However, Schmidt offered no analysis that would indicate specific programming trends. Additionally, no research has addressed, in a sustained manner, the content and foci of ACDA conference interest sessions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyze the content of ACDA national conference interest sessions. The research questions that guided the investigation were as follows:

1. What subject areas and topics were most commonly presented?
2. What was the most common presentation format?
3. How often were sessions geared towards specific ensembles/voice type, and which types received more attention than others?
4. What choral stylistic genres were represented?
5. What significant trends occurred over time?

Method

Interest session titles and their descriptions (when available) were obtained from ACDA National Conferences programs held in the ACDA International Archives for Choral Music and *Choral Journal*, ACDA's official publication. Though listed as a national conference, the 1970 conference was excluded because ACDA was hosting its first independent divisional conferences, and the national conference consisted only of sessions sponsored by ACDA at the MENC national conference (Bauer, 1985). The bicentennial celebration conference in 1976 was also excluded because it was a special conference and did not fit the structure of other national conferences.

Interest sessions were those sessions listed as (a) interest session, (b) special interest session, or (c) general interest session. Reading sessions, rehearsals, master classes, and worship services were excluded. The categorization process was accomplished through analyses of interest session titles, interest session descriptions, conference evaluations, and interest session reports found in *Choral Journal* articles. Three interest sessions were omitted due to ambiguous titles and lack of description.

Following a procedure similar to Price and Orman (2007) and Todd and Hancock (in process), interest session years, conference locations, and titles were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. All interest sessions were categorized by presentation format and subject area. Some subject areas were then categorized into specific topics. Where applicable, interest sessions were also categorized by ensemble/voice type. This procedure followed one similar to Dorsey (2014).

An additional topics section was added to incorporate topics that appeared to be relevant in other research (e.g., Bowles, 2002; Bush, 2007) but that did not appear as topics in Dorsey (2014). These topics included *technology*, *special education*, *standards*, and *assessment*.

Reliability was determined by comparison of the researcher's categorizations with those of a second researcher, who independently categorized all interest sessions. The first comparison yielded a 67.5% agreement. A second categorization, after revisiting interest session descriptions, defining terms, and again perusing the article titles categorized in the *Choral Journal Index* (Dorsey, 2014), yielded a 95.4% agreement. Calculation of agreement was conducted using the formula $([\text{agreements}/\text{agreements} + \text{disagreements}] \times 100)$ (Price & Orman, 2007).

Data were then coded and uploaded to SPSS (Version 22). Descriptive statistics included frequencies to find the most common subject areas, topics, and presentation formats. Crosstab analysis was conducted to find relationships. Similar to previous studies (e.g., Latimer, 2011; Todd & Hancock, in process), results were organized by decade to analyze various trends over time.

Results

Subject Areas and Format Results

A total of 458 interest sessions were categorized into 10 subject areas. *Choral conducting and choral techniques* represented 37.3% of the sessions, followed by *choral literature* (16.8%) and *performance practice, style, and interpretation* (15.9%). All other subject areas were 10% or less. Table 1 shows the total frequencies and percentages for each subject area. The most frequent presentation format was lecture-demonstration (46.7%) followed by lecture (38.6%). All other formats were fewer than 10%.

Topic Results in the Three Largest Subject Areas

Choral conducting and choral techniques was further categorized into more specific topics. *Vocal technique, vocal production and tone* was 23.4% of *choral conducting and choral techniques* followed by *general* (15.2%), *conducting techniques* (11.7%) and *rehearsal techniques* (11.1%). Overall, *vocal technique, vocal production and tone* was 8.7% of total interest sessions.

Topics in the *choral literature* subject area were categorized as repertoire for *specific stylistic periods*, for *specific ensembles*, *specific forms*, or *general*. Sessions about *multicultural music* was 27.3% of the *choral literature* subject area followed by *Contemporary/Avant-garde*

music (19.5%). Sessions specific to literature from the *Medieval, Renaissance, and Classical* periods were absent.

The subject area *performance practice, style, and interpretation* was further categorized into specific stylistic topics. Five of the sessions focused on two styles, and were counted twice to incorporate each style. Sessions focusing on three or more styles were categorized into the *general* topic. Sessions focusing on *folk, pop, jazz, and rock* styles were 30.8 % of the *performance practice* sessions, followed by *Baroque* (12.8%) and *multicultural* (12.8%).

Ensemble/Voice Type Results

The majority of sessions were not focused on a specific ensemble/voice type (70.5%). Seven sessions specified two types of ensembles and were counted twice to incorporate each type of ensemble. Children (4.5 %) and Middle School/Junior High (4.3%) were the types most frequently specified (percentages reflect total number of sessions).

Subject Area Results Over Time (by decade)

The conferences spanned over five complete decades and one incomplete decade. In the 1960s, *choral conducting and choral techniques* dominated 44.7% of the sessions, followed by *choral literature* (15.8%) and *educational techniques and philosophy* (10.5%), *choral composition, arranging, editing, and publishing; choral ministry; and performance practice, style, and interpretation* (7.9%), and *advocacy* (5.3%). *Professional activities, history and analysis of choral music, and research* were absent during this decade.

In the 1970s, *choral conducting and choral techniques* and *choral composition, arranging, editing, and publishing* decreased to 29.1% and 1.8% while *performance practice, style, and interpretation* and *history and analysis* increased to 18.2% and 7.3% respectively.

Advocacy and *choral ministry* slightly decreased, and *educational techniques and philosophy* and *choral literature* remained about the same.

In the 1980s, *choral conducting and choral techniques* slightly decreased to 25.8%. *Choral literature* and *educational techniques and philosophy* increased to 21.0% and 17.7% respectively. *Choral composition, arranging, editing, and publishing* and *choral ministry* slightly increased, and *advocacy* stayed the same. *Professional activities* was present in this decade at 1.6%. *History and analysis* and *research* were once again absent.

Choral literature evidenced a large increase in the 1990s to 27.7%. *Choral conducting and choral techniques* also increased (36.2%) while *educational techniques and philosophy, performance practice, style, and interpretation, choral ministry, and advocacy* decreased. *History and analysis* and *research* each showed a 1.1% representation, and *professional activities* slightly increased. *Choral composition, arranging, editing, and publishing* was absent during this decade.

The 2000s was the only decade to include all ten subject areas. *Choral conducting and choral techniques* showed a large increase to 43.4%, while *choral literature* largely decreased to 12.3%. *Educational techniques and philosophy* and *performance practice, style, and interpretation* continued to decrease, while *choral composition, arranging, editing, and publishing, choral ministry; advocacy; professional activities; and history and analysis* continued to slightly increase. *Research* increased to 5.7% during this decade.

In the current decade, *choral conducting and choral techniques* is still dominating about 40% of the sessions. *Performance practice, style, and interpretation* and *choral literature* appear to be decreasing, while *educational techniques and philosophy, choral ministry, and professional activities*, all appear to be increasing. *Choral composition, arranging, editing, and*

publishing and *research* appear to be remaining the same as the previous decade. Sessions on *advocacy* have yet to be present (Table 2).

Additional Topics Results

Three sessions total were about educational *standards* in choral music. Two sessions were during the 2001 conference, and the third session was in 2009. Two sessions were about *assessment* in 1999 and 2007, and two sessions were on *special education*, both recent in 2011 and 2013.

Six sessions were about *technology*. The first session appeared in 1997, while the others occurred in the 2000s. The largest number of *technology* sessions at one conference was two and occurred in 2013.

Discussion

Because ACDA organizational committees decide which particular sessions will be included in a conference, those sessions arguably represent the topics the organization leadership considers most relevant to their constituents. Exploring the subject areas and focus topics of interest sessions can not only evidence the values of the organization, but also aid in addressing the professional development needs of the members.

Although Price and Orman (2007) reported that ACDA conference interest sessions focused primarily on performance, the present study suggests that the majority of interest sessions focused on choral teaching pedagogy. The difference could be attributed to the present study's sample, which included all of the ACDA national conferences from 1960 – 2013 while Price and Orman (2007) only examined the 2003 and 2005 ACDA conferences. Additionally, different procedures could have been used to determine categories and topics.

Ganschow (2014) found that directors often were influenced by watching choirs and conductors at conferences. This could include demonstrations during interest sessions. About 48% of the sessions were lecture-demonstration format: a clinician speaking about a topic, and then demonstrating the techniques with a live choir. The attendees not only learned about a pedagogical technique, but they witnessed it being put into practice.

Yet, about 39% of the sessions presented information through lecture format. These sessions were informative and involved no demonstrations. *Choral conducting and choral techniques, performance practice, style, and interpretation, choral ministry, educational techniques and philosophy, and choral literature* were presented in both the lecture-demonstration and lecture format, while *choral composition, arranging, editing, and publishing, advocacy, professional activities, history and analysis, and research* were almost exclusively lecture format.

The most frequent topic was *vocal technique, vocal production and tone* (8.7% of total sessions). Ganschow (2014) reported *tone quality* and *intonation* were the topics most prioritized in choral rehearsals. The present study's results were comparable in *tone quality*; however, only three sessions addressed *intonation* (less than 1% of total sessions). *Vocal technique, vocal production and tone* was the topic most consistently present in all decades. From 1960 – 1990, it remained between 5-8% of total sessions, and from 1990 – 2013, it grew to between 9-10% of total sessions. *Vocal technique, vocal production and tone* as the most frequent and consistent topic discussed was not surprising in this context. Choirs sing most of the time, so constantly improving vocal production and choral tone presumably would be of high-interest to choral conductors.

The second most frequent topic discussed was *multicultural music* (6.7% of the total sessions). *Multicultural music* was the second most frequent topic in *performance practice, style, and interpretation* and the most frequent topic in *choral literature*. These results compare positively with Price and Orman's (2007) findings that 4.1% of ACDA educational sessions were *multicultural*. It appears ACDA attempted to apply *multicultural music* as a standard of quality choral repertoire, and therefore incorporated it into the conferences.

African American music constituted a large part of the Ethnic and Multicultural considerations. *African American music* comprised the majority of *multicultural* sessions and 4% of total interest sessions. The first sessions appeared in 1973, before the committee formation in 1979. Although it decreased in the 1980s, *African American music* sessions substantiated a marked increase throughout the 1990s with 9% of total sessions. During the James Kinchen chairmanship (1989 – 1991), the committee sought to incorporate more minority conductors and performers at all conferences, and challenged ACDA to become, "A national organization of choral musicians which is inclusive and diverse enough to be totally 'American' as its name!" ("Repertoire Ethnic," 2013). Once again, it appears the organization attempted to implement such transformation through conference exposure.

Perhaps the most unexpected result was *folk, pop, jazz, and rock* music as the most frequent style addressed in *performance practice, style, and interpretation* sessions. Although absent in the 1960s, *folk, pop, jazz, and rock* style constituted 42% of the *performance practice, style, and interpretation* sessions from the 1970s to the present. Although sessions appeared to consistently decline beginning in the 1980s, *folk, pop, jazz, and rock* still comprised over 20% of the style types per decade.

The February 1977 *Choral Journal* (Grier, 1977) explained some possible reasons for offering more of these sessions. In an article describing the problems faced by vocal jazz and show choir directors, a member letter expressed a lack of preparedness and knowledge in training students in “swing-show choir” skills. In the article, an ACDA representative promised that the upcoming convention in Dallas would address these problems with, “A positive awareness of the value of Vocal Jazz, Swing and Show Choir music” (Grier, 1977, p. 33). Perhaps the conferences offered several performance practice sessions on *folk, pop, jazz, and rock* styles because it was the area many members considered themselves the most unprepared to teach.

Technology results of this study were incompatible with results of previous studies. Bowles (2002) and Bush (2007) both found *technology* as a high priority interest topic at workshops and conferences. However, this study evidenced *technology* sessions as only 1.3% of total sessions. The Technology committee was formed in 1992, and in the 2006 constitution and bylaws revision, the committee, “Shall explore uses of technological resources to enhance the work of ACDA and the continuing development of the choral art” (“ACDA Technology Committee,” 2015). ACDA generally provides technological resources through their website, *ChoralNet*. Perhaps the membership’s technology needs were already satisfied, so providing multiple technology sessions was unnecessary.

Standards and *assessment* as high-interest topics was another dissimilarity between the present study’s results and Bowles’ (2002) results. The current study evidenced only two *assessment* sessions in 1999 and 2007 and three *standards* sessions. Two sessions of the *standards* sessions addressed the nine National Standards for Music Education in a choral classroom, both in 2001. The National Standards were implemented in 1994 as part of “Goals

2000: Educate America Act” (Adderley, 2000). Perhaps the need for two national standards sessions in 2001 was because “Goals 2000” was not being implemented successfully in choral classrooms. The other educational *standards* session occurred in 2009 and involved implementing Common Core standards into the choral curriculum. Because Common Core was launched in 2009, the discussion for this session was most likely timely and informative. Although few *standards* sessions were present at the conferences, the ones presented seemed to be relevant to the current classroom issues.

The present study’s results were in agreement with Bush’s (2007) study. Bush reported that performance ensemble teachers were less interested in *assessment* and *music for special learners* than their general education counterparts. *Assessment* and *special education* each only represented 0.4% of the total number of interest sessions. As Bush suggested, perhaps either these topics were not high priority in the choral classroom, or proficient training in these areas had been provided.

Perhaps the lack of interest in topics such as *assessment*, *standards*, *technology*, and *special education* were low on ACDA’s priorities because the membership is comprised of church, professional, college, and community choir directors, not just school directors. Many of the previous studies that listed these topics as high priority surveyed music educators teaching in schools. In the present study, the *educational techniques and philosophy* subject area comprised 10.3% of total sessions. When compared to the *choral conducting and choral techniques*, *choral literature*, and *performance practice, style, and interpretation* subject areas, *educational techniques and philosophy* sessions were considerably less, but still more than the other six subject areas. Perhaps the *educational techniques and philosophy* sessions satisfied the needs of

the school choir teacher population, while the three most frequent subject areas tended to be more relevant to all the ACDA constituents.

Another result that agreed with Bush's (2007), Bowles' (2002), and Forbes' (2011) findings was the large focus on *choral literature*. While *choral literature* was the second most frequent subject area of interest sessions, this study did not include the large number of reading sessions and roundtable discussions offered at each conference. Also, because the conferences are about 57% performances (Price & Orman, 2007), members are exposed to repertoire performed by all levels and types of ensembles. Even though the national conferences afforded exposure to several other repertoire opportunities, ACDA still devoted 16.8% of interest sessions to *choral literature*. Arguably, ACDA places a high value on *choral literature* exposure at conferences.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Perhaps a comparison of interest session topics with ACDA purposes can shed some light on ACDA's success in responding to members' needs. The second purpose of ACDA reads, for example, "To foster and promote the finest types of choral music to make these experiences possible." One could assume that the types of repertoire provided in interest sessions reflect what ACDA considers to be exemplars of the best choral repertoire. The two types most prominent in the *choral literature* subject area were *multicultural* (27.3%) and *Contemporary/Avant-garde* (19.5%). Further research is needed to compare the percentage of styles and genres performed with those offered in interest sessions.

The third ACDA purpose states, "To foster and encourage rehearsal procedures conducive to attaining the highest level of musicianship and artistic performance." As topics in the *choral conducting and choral techniques* subject area, *rehearsal techniques* was 9.9% of the

subject area, and 3.7% of total sessions. Likewise, *musicianship* was 8.2% of the subject area and 3.1% of total sessions. The fourth purpose of ACDA, “To foster and promote the organization and development of choral groups of all types in schools and colleges,” was addressed also as part of the *choral conducting and choral techniques* subject area with 8.8% devoted to the topic *organization and administration* (3.3% of total sessions). Such findings suggest that ACDA perhaps is successful in addressing these purposes.

The fifth purpose of ACDA, “To foster and promote the development of choral music in the church and synagogue,” was addressed in the *choral ministry* subject area (5.5% of total sessions). Except for the 1990s, *choral ministry* sessions were well present in each decade (about 8% of total sessions in 1960s, 1980s, and the current decade). However, most of these sessions focused on music in the church. Only one session addressed music in the synagogue, and only three sessions were about *Jewish music*. Apparently, ACDA is addressing the needs of some, but perhaps not all, denominations.

The eighth purpose of ACDA is “To foster and promote significant research in the field of choral music.” Sessions on *research* comprised only 3.3% of total sessions. Likewise, *history and analysis of choral music* was only 2.0% of total sessions. Both subject areas were absent through the 1960s, showed increases in the 1970s, were absent throughout the 1980s, and then increased through the current decade. Such findings show that *research* is perhaps increasing over time, though only moderately. These results are similar to Price and Orman’s findings (1999; 2007). More research is needed to investigate the relationship between ACDA and research in all areas.

The twelfth purpose of ACDA is “To disseminate professional news and information about choral music.” This purpose was addressed in the *professional activities* subject area

(3.3% of total sessions). Although absent in the first two decades, *professional activities* sessions showed increase every decade beginning in the 1980s from 1.6% to 8.0% in the current decade. The majority of these sessions (73%) involved participating in ACDA sponsored activities, like setting up student ACDA chapters or writing for *Choral Journal*. Perhaps by promoting *professional activities* within the organization, ACDA was able to encourage an active and growing membership.

The mission statement of ACDA is “To inspire excellence in choral music through education, performance, composition, and advocacy.” Although education and performance were well represented in the *choral conducting and choral techniques, educational techniques and philosophy, and performance practice, style, and interpretation* subject areas, it seems *choral composition* and *advocacy* were the two subject areas lacking in representation. For instance, the sixth purpose is “To foster and promote the organization and development of choral societies in cities and communities.” However, the *advocacy* subject area was only 2.8% of total sessions.

Similarly, the ninth purpose of ACDA is “To foster and encourage choral composition of superior quality.” However, *choral composition, arranging, editing, and publishing* was only 2.8% of total sessions. Both subject areas of *advocacy* and *choral composition* have been declining in total number of sessions when compared to the other subject areas. However, it is possible that these subject areas are being represented in other ACDA activities. For instance, ACDA shows their commitment to excellence in choral composition through the annual Raymond W. Brock commissioned composition award (“Raymond W. Brock,” 2013).

In sum, this study suggested that ACDA officials appear to respond to their constituents’ needs by implementing the organization’s mission statement and purposes through selection of

national conference interest session topics. It also found, however, though ACDA appears to be successful in supporting education and performance through national conference interest sessions, it has proved to be less successful at those conferences in promoting composition, advocacy, and various research foci. However, because this study only examined the frequency of subject areas and topics offered at past conferences, further research should investigate which sessions ACDA members most frequently attend, what interest session topics they perceive as most relevant to their needs, and whether those sessions tended to be experiential or research based. Those findings could serve to better inform ACDA officials about future national conference content.

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Table 1

Distribution of interest sessions by subject area

Subject Area	Frequency	Percent
Choral conducting and choral techniques	171	37.3
Choral Literature	77	16.8
Performance practice, style, and interpretation	73	15.9
Educational techniques and philosophy	47	10.3
Choral Ministry	25	5.5
Professional activities	15	3.3
Research	15	3.3
Advocacy	13	2.8
Choral composition, arranging, editing, and publishing	13	2.8
History and analysis	9	2.0

Note. $N = 458$

Table 2

Distribution of subject areas by decade.

Subject Area	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	Avg.
Choral conducting and choral techniques	44.7	29.1	25.8	36.2	43.4	40.2	37.3
Choral literature	15.8	18.2	17.7	27.7	12.3	10.3	16.8
Performance practice, style, and interpretation	7.9	18.2	21.0	19.1	15.6	11.5	15.9
Educational techniques and philosophy	10.5	14.5	17.7	7.4	5.7	11.5	10.3
Choral ministry	7.9	5.5	8.1	2.1	4.1	8.0	5.5
Professional activities	0.0	0.0	1.6	3.2	4.1	6.9	3.3
Advocacy	5.3	3.6	3.2	2.1	4.1	0.0	3.3
Research	0.0	1.8	0.0	1.1	5.7	6.9	2.8
Choral composition, arranging, editing, and publishing	7.9	1.8	4.8	0.0	3.3	2.3	2.8
History and analysis	0.0	7.3	0.0	1.1	1.6	2.3	2.0

Note. Avg. is the average or total percentage each subject area was represented overall.