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*The University of Montana*

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A SURVEY OF CHORAL MUSIC GRADING PRACTICES IN  
HIGH SCHOOLS OF FIVE HUNDRED STUDENTS OR  
MORE IN THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

by

LAWRENCE M. HAGEN

B.A. Whitworth College, 1959

Presented in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Music

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

1962

Approved by:

  
Chairman, Board of Examiners

  
Dean, Graduate School

AUG 15 1962

Date

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The author is indebted to the choral directors of Washington high schools who responded to the request for information about choral grading procedures and who gave of their time and effort in filling out the questionnaire. The author also wishes to especially thank Professor Gerald H. Doty of the School of Music at Montana State University for his counsel and guidance.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM

Student evaluation in choral music has long been a perplexing problem. Systems or methods of grading may differ to a greater degree in music than in any other field. The subjectivity or lack of concrete grading criteria is perhaps the greatest single factor involved. Many choral music directors use a well-defined point system while others rely completely on subjective factors.

The purpose of this study is to survey current grading practices in high schools in the State of Washington in order to discover what is being done about this problem. No attempt has been made to define which system is the most advantageous. It is hoped that this survey will cause choral directors to evaluate their own grading systems and to discover which grading procedures fit best in their particular situations.

### PROCEDURES

A survey of music periodicals and educational journals revealed very little pertinent information in regard to choral grading methods. Although hundreds of articles have been written on grading in academic classes, physical education, the manual arts, and a few on grading instrumental

music, no treatment of the problem of grading choral groups was discovered.

A questionnaire<sup>1</sup> dealing with choral music grading was developed. The author was assisted by graduate music students and members of the Montana State University music faculty. Part one concerned a list of grading factors and their bearing on grades. Space was provided for respondents to add additional factors. Part two consisted of open end questions dealing with choral music grading in general.

This questionnaire, with an accompanying introductory letter<sup>2</sup>, was sent to all choral directors in high schools of five hundred or more students in the State of Washington. The study was limited to larger schools because it was felt that the background and experience of directors in these schools would be more extensive than that of directors in smaller schools. A follow-up letter<sup>3</sup> was sent approximately three weeks later to those who had not returned the questionnaire.

Nearly seventy per cent of the questionnaires were returned and the data contained therein are presented in tabular form in the main body of the paper.

In the few cases in the questionnaire where respon-

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<sup>1</sup>See Appendix B, pp. 19,20.

<sup>2</sup>See Appendix A, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>See Appendix C, p. 21.



dents checked two categories (great, moderate), the one with the greater bearing was tabulated.

## CHAPTER II

### TABULATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

The number and per cent of questionnaires returned are shown in Table I. Eighty-eight questionnaires were sent and sixty-one, or 69.3 per cent, were completed and returned.

TABLE I  
NUMBER AND PER CENT OF QUESTIONNAIRES RETURNED

| Number sent | Number returned | Per Cent returned |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 88          | 61              | 69.3              |

The number and per cent of respondents who indicated use of various grading factors and the extent of their bearing on grades are shown in Table II. Over eighty per cent of the respondents considered effort, attitude, and cooperation of great significance in grading. Nearly three-fourths (73.8 per cent) considered attendance of great significance.

Memorization of music, responsibility, and individual talent were given great importance by twenty to thirty-three per cent of the respondents.

The final four items (general music knowledge test,

TABLE II

NUMBER AND PER CENT OF RESPONDENTS INDICATING USE OF  
GRADING FACTORS AND THE EXTENT OF  
THEIR BEARING ON GRADES

| Grading factors                 | Bearing on grade |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             | Total using factor |             |
|---------------------------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------|
|                                 | Great            |             | Moderate    |             | Slight      |             | None        |             | No Response |             | Num-<br>ber        | Per<br>cent |
|                                 | Num-<br>ber      | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber | Per<br>cent |                    |             |
| Effort                          | 52               | 85.3        | 8           | 13.1        | 1           | 1.6         |             |             |             |             | 61                 | 100.0       |
| Attitude                        | 51               | 83.6        | 9           | 14.8        | 1           | 1.6         |             |             |             |             | 61                 | 100.0       |
| Cooperation                     | 50               | 82.0        | 10          | 16.4        | 1           | 1.6         |             |             |             |             | 61                 | 100.0       |
| Attendance                      | 45               | 73.8        | 14          | 23.0        | 1           | 1.6         | 1           | 1.6         |             |             | 60                 | 98.4        |
| Enthusiasm                      | 30               | 49.2        | 23          | 37.8        | 6           | 9.8         | 1           | 1.6         | 1           | 1.6         | 59                 | 96.7        |
| Tardiness                       | 26               | 42.6        | 20          | 32.8        | 13          | 21.3        | 2           | 3.3         |             |             | 59                 | 96.7        |
| Singing Test                    | 21               | 34.4        | 24          | 39.4        | 7           | 11.5        | 6           | 9.8         | 3           | 4.9         | 52                 | 85.2        |
| Memorization<br>of Music        | 20               | 32.8        | 22          | 36.1        | 12          | 19.7        | 3           | 4.9         | 4           | 6.6         | 54                 | 88.5        |
| Responsibility                  | 18               | 29.5        | 22          | 36.1        | 16          | 26.2        | 4           | 6.6         | 1           | 1.6         | 56                 | 91.8        |
| Individual<br>Talent            | 13               | 21.4        | 36          | 59.0        | 11          | 18.0        |             |             | 1           | 1.6         | 60                 | 98.4        |
| General Music<br>Knowledge Test | 6                | 9.8         | 24          | 39.4        | 12          | 19.7        | 17          | 27.9        | 2           | 3.3         | 42                 | 68.8        |
| Sight-reading                   | 3                | 4.9         | 26          | 42.6        | 18          | 29.5        | 11          | 18.0        | 3           | 4.9         | 47                 | 77.0        |
| Private Lessons                 | 1                | 1.6         | 5           | 8.2         | 17          | 27.9        | 36          | 59.0        | 2           | 3.3         | 23                 | 37.7        |
| Outside Choral<br>Activities    | 1                | 1.6         | 10          | 16.4        | 29          | 36.1        | 26          | 42.6        | 2           | 3.3         | 33                 | 54.1        |

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sight reading, private lessons, and outside choral activities) were rated of great importance by less than ten per cent of the respondents. Other grading factors were reported by smaller numbers of respondents.

The number and per cent of respondents using a point system<sup>4</sup> for grading are shown in Table III. Eight respondents, or 13.1 per cent, used a point system, while fifty respondents, or 82.0 per cent, did not. Three, or 4.9 per cent, indicated partial use of a point system.

TABLE III  
NUMBER AND PER CENT OF RESPONDENTS USING  
A POINT SYSTEM FOR GRADING

| Using       |             | Partial Use |             | No Use      |             |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Num-<br>ber | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber | Per<br>cent |
| 8           | 13.1        | 3           | 4.9         | 50          | 82.0        |

The criteria used in awarding of points in point systems are shown in Table IV. Percentages apply to the total number of questionnaires returned. The tabulation includes responses from those who indicated partial use of a point system.

Quartet tests, citizenship, and attendance were used by eight or more respondents. Musical growth was mentioned

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<sup>4</sup>See Appendix D for a typical point system, p. 22.

by six respondents. Choir officers, discipline situations, written tests, and damage to school property were used by three or less respondents.

TABLE IV  
CRITERIA USED IN AWARDING OF  
POINTS IN POINT SYSTEMS

| Grouped criteria                   | Number of respondents using | Per cent of respondents using |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Quartet test                       | 10                          | 16.4                          |
| Citizenship                        | 8                           | 13.1                          |
| Attendance                         | 8                           | 13.1                          |
| Growth                             | 6                           | 9.8                           |
| Choir Officer or<br>Section Leader | 3                           | 4.9                           |
| Discipline Situations              | 3                           | 4.9                           |
| Written Tests                      | 2                           | 3.3                           |
| Damage to School<br>Property       | 2                           | 3.3                           |

The number and per cent of respondents who informed students what was expected of them for an A, B, or C grade is shown in Table V. Forty-seven, or 77.0 per cent of the respondents informed students what was expected of them for a given grade, while nine, or 14.8 per cent, did not. Three, or 4.9 per cent, informed students to some degree as to what was expected of them for an A, B, or C grade.

TABLE V  
NUMBER AND PER CENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO INFORM  
STUDENTS WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THEM  
FOR AN A, B, OR C GRADE

| Inform      |             | Partially inform |             | Do not inform |             | No response |             |
|-------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Num-<br>ber | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber      | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber   | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber | Per<br>cent |
| 47          | 77.0        | 3                | 4.9         | 9             | 14.8        | 2           | 3.3         |

The factors announced to students for the purpose of determining grades are shown in Table VI. An A, B, or C grade is determined by the degree of excellence in each area.

Effort and attendance were used by sixteen or more respondents. Cooperation, superior musicianship, and singing tests were mentioned by eight to ten respondents. Written tests, outside work, good voice, leadership, growth, and group success were listed by five or less respondents.

TABLE VI  
FACTORS ANNOUNCED TO STUDENTS FOR THE  
PURPOSE OF DETERMINING GRADES

| Grading factors       | Number of respondents using | Per cent of respondents using |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Effort                | 17                          | 27.9                          |
| Attendance            | 16                          | 26.2                          |
| Cooperation           | 10                          | 16.4                          |
| Superior Musicianship | 8                           | 13.1                          |
| Singing Test          | 8                           | 13.1                          |
| Written Tests         | 5                           | 8.2                           |
| Outside Work          | 4                           | 6.6                           |
| Good Voice            | 3                           | 4.9                           |
| Leadership            | 3                           | 4.9                           |
| Growth                | 3                           | 4.9                           |
| Group Success         | 1                           | 1.6                           |

The number and per cent of respondents whose choral grades were higher, lower, or the same as academic grades are shown in Table VII. Choral grades in forty, or 65.6 per cent, of the schools were higher than academic grades; in nineteen, or 31.2 per cent, of the schools the choral



and academic grades were approximately the same. One, or 1.6 per cent, reported grades were lower than academic grades.

TABLE VII  
NUMBER AND PER CENT OF RESPONDENTS WHOSE CHORAL GRADES WERE HIGHER, LOWER, OR THE SAME AS ACADEMIC GRADES

| <u>Higher</u> |             | <u>Lower</u> |             | <u>Same</u> |             | <u>No response</u> |             |
|---------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Num-<br>ber   | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber  | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber        | Per<br>cent |
| 40            | 65.6        | 1            | 1.6         | 19          | 31.2        | 1                  | 1.6         |

A variety of reasons were given for high choral grades. The high level of selectivity was mentioned by eight respondents. One respondent felt since choir was "an activity and a class," that grades should be higher. Another thought that good grades developed better morale in the group. It was also mentioned that high grades would help keep students in the group and attract additional members.

Several respondents said they gave no grades below a C, while one respondent stated that he gave only one A last semester. In one choir a B was the average grade, yet in another choir a C grade was "an unwritten request to leave the group."

The number and per cent of respondents who were satisfied or dissatisfied with their grading systems are

shown in Table VIII. Thirty-four respondents, or 55.7 per cent, were satisfied with their grading systems, while twenty-four respondents, or 39.4 per cent were not.

TABLE VIII

NUMBER AND PER CENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO WERE SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED WITH THEIR GRADING SYSTEMS

| Satisfied |          | Not satisfied |          | No response |          |
|-----------|----------|---------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| Num-ber   | Per cent | Num-ber       | Per cent | Num-ber     | Per cent |
| 34        | 55.7     | 24            | 39.4     | 3           | 4.9      |

A great variety of comments were made by respondents who were dissatisfied with their grading systems. Six of them felt that choral grading was too subjective and they would have liked to make it more objective.

A few of the more pertinent quotations are included here. "I would like to make it [choir] more of an academic challenge and then students would never question grades." "I would like to teach more of general music knowledge." "I cannot grade fairly unless I spend more time with the individual student." "I need more concrete materials to grade on." "There is too much left to the teacher's judgment." "I would rather give no grades." "I doubt that an adequate system can be devised."

## CHAPTER III

### CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study show that grading in choral music is generally not based on skill, progress, proficiency, or musicianship. It is based to a great degree on extra-musical factors and is largely subjective.

Those respondents who used point systems were generally quite satisfied with them. A great percentage of those who were dissatisfied with their grading methods did not have a well developed grading system and many stated that they did not know what to change.

A majority of respondents informed students what was expected of them for each grade (A,B,C). The factors used were mostly subjective, but many directors stated they would like to use more objective factors.

Choral grades are generally higher than academic grades. The major justification for this is the high level of selectivity in choral music classes. Students who participate in a select choir are usually more talented academically also. Too many directors seemed to give high grades simply on the basis of good group performances.

The minority of directors who used some type of quartet singing test praised it highly. Students are not embarrassed as easily in a quartet as when they sing alone

and quartet singing provides a quick method of checking each student's progress.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of material presented in this paper, the following recommendations are made by the author:

1. Grading in choral music should be investigated more fully by individual directors.
2. Choral directors should seek ways of using quartet singing as a testing device.
3. Students should be informed as to what is expected of them for a particular grade.
4. Attendance at outside choral concerts should be stressed.
5. Music fundamentals should receive more attention in choral music classes.
6. Use of outside reports on music subjects for extra credit should be considered.
7. The earning of high grades in choral music classes should be made more challenging.
8. The areas of skill, progress, proficiency, and musicianship should receive more stress in choral grading.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Missoula

April 16, 1962

Dear Choral Director,

You have perhaps found the problem of student evaluation in choral music a perplexing one. This problem presents itself in all subject areas but especially in music. Systems or methods of grading probably differ to a greater degree in our field than in any other.

I am conducting a study of this problem in partial fulfillment of the requirements leading to the Master of Music Degree in Music Education at Montana State University. The study is entitled, "A Survey of Choral Music Grading Practices in High Schools of Five Hundred Students or More in the State of Washington." Upon completion of this survey the results will be made available to all participants.

The purpose of this study is to learn what methods are being used and the merits of each. The study has been limited to high schools of five hundred students or more because the background and experience of a teacher such as yourself is probably more extensive than that of teachers in smaller schools.

I am a graduate of Rogers High School and Whitworth College in Spokane, have taught two years in Lynden, and plan to teach in Washington next year.

Enclosed you will find a questionnaire dealing with systems of grading in choral music. I would deeply appreciate your filling out this questionnaire and returning it to me in the enclosed self-addressed envelope as soon as possible. All information pertaining to this study will be kept confidential. Your time and effort will be most helpful.

Sincerely,

*Larry Hagen*  
Larry Hagen



APPENDIX B

A Survey of Choral Music Grading Practices in High Schools of Five Hundred Students or More in the State of Washington

Directions: In Part I please check the appropriate column and list any additional factors you use in evaluation of students. In Part II check the appropriate column and add additional comments where necessary. If additional room is needed please use the back of the second page.

| Part I<br>Grading Factors:                     | Bearing on Grade |          |        |      |
|--|------------------|----------|--------|------|
|  | Great            | Moderate | Slight | None |
| Attitude                                       | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Cooperation                                    | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Effort   | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Enthusiasm                                     | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Responsibility (care of music, robes, etc.)    | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Attendance (rehearsals, performances)          | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Tardiness (rehearsals, performances)           | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Individual Talent                              | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| General Music Knowledge Test                   | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Singing Test                                   | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Sight-reading                                  | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Memorization of Music                          | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Private Lessons                                | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Outside Choral Activities (church choir, etc.) | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Additional factors:                            |                  |          |        |      |
| _____  | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| _____  | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| _____  | ( )              | ( )      | ( )    | ( )  |
| Additional comments:                           |                  |          |        |      |

Part II

- |  | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|--|------------|-----------|
| 1. Do you use a point system in grading?<br>If yes, please include a copy if possible.                                     | ( )        | ( )       |
| 2. Do you inform students what is expected<br>of them for an A, B, or C grade?<br>If yes, what is expected for each grade? | ( )        | ( )       |
| 3. How do choral grades compare with academic<br>grades in your school?<br>If higher or lower, why?                        | ( )        | ( )       |
| 4. Are you satisfied with your present<br>grading system?<br>If not, what could you change?                                | ( )        | ( )       |

If you have additional comments that might be useful to this study, please include them on the back of this page. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sign if you so desire:

Name .....

School .....

Check here if you ( )  
wish a summary of  
the results of this  
study.

APPENDIX C

1920 Charlott  
Missoula, Montana  
May 8, 1962

Dear Choral Director

Approximately three weeks ago I sent to you a questionnaire dealing with systems of grading in choral music. Since the spring of the year is an especially busy time, you have perhaps put it aside to be filled out at a later date.

The questionnaires that have been returned indicate a wide variety of methods in the grading of choral music. Over one third of them also indicate dissatisfaction with present systems. If you have not already done so, I would appreciate your filling out the questionnaire and returning it to me to make the survey as valid as possible.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,



Larry Hagen

APPENDIX D

Choir Point System

Grades are determined on the following basis:

- 160 points or above will help you receive an A
- 125 points or above will help you receive a B
- 75 points or above will help you receive a C
- 40 points or above will help you receive a D
- Below 40 points will receive an F

Every student is credited with 100 points at the beginning of each grading period, which is a median C grade. These points are credited on the assumption that all students will fulfill the basic requirements listed in items I, II, and III. Points are given for activities considered as extra or non-requirements. Demerits are given for failure to carry out activities considered as requirements. Semester ratings are based on the total of the two inclusive quarterly periods.

Points given quarterly:

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Music librarian . . . . .                | 10-30 |
| Roll and point tally . . . . .           | 25    |
| Robe custodians . . . . .                | 10-30 |
| Church choir members . . . . .           | 20    |
| Accompanists . . . . .                   | 10-30 |
| Section leader . . . . .                 | 10-30 |
| Ensemble member . . . . .                | 15    |
| Choir council member . . . . .           | 20-30 |
| Officers . . . . .                       | 35    |
| Utilities chairman and workers . . . . . | 5-20  |

Points per occurrence:

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Solo or Ensemble at a contest:          |    |
| Preparation for Solo . . . . .          | 25 |
| Preparation for Ensemble . . . . .      | 15 |
| Division I Rating . . . . .             | 20 |
| Division II Rating . . . . .            | 15 |
| Division III Rating . . . . .           | 10 |
| Division IV Rating . . . . .            | 5  |
| Solos presented elsewhere . . . . .     | 25 |
| Accompanists . . . . .                  | 15 |
| Ensembles presented elsewhere . . . . . | 15 |
| Student directing in public . . . . .   | 15 |

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Reports on music articles and reviews of musical show, assemblies, or TV programs . . . . | 0-10 |
| Performances on Friday evening, Saturday or Sunday . . . . .                              | 10   |

Demerits per occurrence:

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Tardiness . . . . .                                  | 10    |
| Missing extra rehearsal . . . . .                    | 10    |
| Missing any performance . . . . .                    | 200   |
| Damage of school property . . . . .                  | 5-15  |
| Failure to put music folders away . . . . .          | 5     |
| Rehearsal or performance distraction . . . . .       | 10    |
| Improper care of choir robes . . . . .               | 20    |
| Poorly dressed or groomed for a performance. . . . . | 10    |
| Discipline situations . . . . .                      | 15-30 |
| Missing ensemble rehearsal . . . . .                 | 10    |
| Failure to memorize music . . . . .                  | 15    |
| Failure to conform to choir council rules. . . . .   | 10-30 |
| Unexcused absence . . . . .                          | 5     |