

Getting 'em and Keeping 'em

Short 'n' Snappy Ideas

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These ideas have worked at University High School in Spokane Valley, Washington. You may find better ideas to work for your demographics, but these are just a few helpful hints that have worked for me.

Repertoire, Repertoire, Repertoire!

I truly believe that repertoire is one of the most important recruiting tools and best ways to keep students involved. Music feeds the soul, and a healthy diet of good choral repertoire will keep singers active. On day one, I NEVER go over the syllabus. We sing. And it's always a call and response song that they will sing walking down the hallways. Day two, I usually have 5-10 students dropping other courses to join choir. It's affective and contagious. If you are interested in repertoire ideas, contact me at the email on the back of this packet.

Ensembles that Meet Your Need

With small feeder school programs (something we are working to fix), it has become necessary to build ensembles that not only promote great choral education, but can meet the needs of the students at hand. Most of the students in U-High's program are either new to choral music or students that were originally instrumental musicians.

U-High Ensembles:

- Lirico Chamber Singers: 10-12 SATB Zero Period (16-20) *Auditioned*
- Delos Concert Choir: 10-12 SATB Large Choir (50-80) *Auditioned*
- Chanteuse Treble Choir : 9-12 SSAA Large Choir (60-70) *Auditioned*
- University Choir : 9-12 SATB Training Choir and Vocal Enhancement Class (40-50)
Non-Auditioned
- Titan Jazz Choir: 9-12 SATB Meets outside of the school day (12-16) *Auditioned*
- MAN Choir! : 9-12 TTBB Meets outside of the school day (20-40) *Non-Auditioned*
- Anonymous 8: 10-12 SSA Treble Chamber, Meets outside of the school day (7-10)
Director Invitation

The above ensembles were created due to the NEED of the students. For example, Anonymous 8 was created as there were over 50 females auditioning for 8 positions with the Lirico Chamber Singers. MAN Choir! was developed to recruit. Once men were part of the group, they wanted more. Therefore most of them audition for Delos and the smaller ensembles as well. MAN Choir! has become a group with a following, and there are now over 10 chapters across the Northwest, including Boise and Missoula.

I have found that once a student gets involved in one ensemble, they want more. Most singers at U-High are involved in at least two groups. Scheduling is quite difficult, but when the desire is there, students will make it work.

Get out of the Music Hallway

Coach, dance, be active at pep assemblies, go to sporting events... anything you can do to get your face out there and show students that you are active in the school creates familiarity and students are more adept to seeking out the choral classroom. I

actually recruited this year while proctoring the WASL (after “time’s up, pencils down,” of course).

Apparel/Create a Logo

Students love clothes that they can show off. Each choir at U-High has their own designed t-shirt/sweatshirt. Student designed or designed by a professional, it is an easy way to get students to join. Below is an example of the MAN Choir! t-shirt:



Guys love wearing this shirt. One the back is stated “Real Men Sing.” (Feel free to steal this logo, as other schools have. You merely need to change the U to whatever works for your school.)

Stay Current

KNOW WHAT YOUR STUDENTS ARE UP TO... to a certain degree. It may hurt or be uncomfortable, but here are a few ideas:

- Read the *Twilight* series and be able to discuss teenage vampire romance (or whatever current novel is the hot-topic)
- Watch a couple minutes of MTV a week, just to keep up on horrible reality tv
- Listen to the radio... and not just your normal stations: It is VITAL that we understand the current music students are listening to
- Go to concerts of current bands
- Watch American Idol (that is hard for me), Top Chef, Project Runway and discuss with students
- Observe the music students listen to at dances
- Be ready to start arranging music. Every year I arrange one or two pieces that the students can perform, and it is a current song. Students love this as they get to break from the mold and add a “shock factor” to their parents. A few songs I have arranged that have benefitted recruitment:

Maroon 5	<i>This Love</i>
Blink 182	<i>I Miss You</i>
Christina Aguilera	<i>The Voice Within</i>
Stevie Wonder	<i>Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing</i>
Queen	<i>Somebody to Love</i>
Flor-Ida	<i>Apple Bottom Jeans/Low</i>
Rosie Thomas	<i>Pretty Dress</i>
Guster	<i>Demons</i>

YOU ARE NOT SELLING OUT by doing music like this. I balance educational repertoire and these pieces are not commonly performed. Just enough to get the fire burning for students to want more... or to join! You'll be surprised when you walk around a corner and hear it being sung by a number of your students (i.e. *Apple Bottom Jeans* in the streets of Venice, Italy... locals loved it).

Student Leadership

Even if a student isn't the best vocal soloist, they have something to offer. Our job is to find that gift. Setting up a student government is the obvious solution to this task. The more students lead, the more they want to get others involved. Create a public relations officer and sections leaders for each choir. Also, each ensemble at U-High has two representatives for our bi-weekly government meetings.

Walk the Talk...

So often we find ourselves teaching/directing when we know that our own musical soul needs to be fed. Be part of an organization other than only directing your program: church choir, community choir, local symphony chorale, professional choir, community theatre, professional theatre. It is vital that we are able to tell our students about our personal CURRENT experiences rather than constantly recalling on our own high school and college days. They need to know that choral life goes on after schooling.

Get the Jocks

Try to involve at least one head "jock" in each ensemble. They usually will bring along a few with them. And once you've hooked them, watch your numbers grow.

Be a Dork!

Let your inhibitions go. Play the *Macarena* or *Cha-Cha Slide* as a warm-up dance and JOIN IN! Take advantage of school dress-up days. Break out in song in the middle of the cafeteria. This will turn heads, and you never know who might just want to join.

Again, these are just my ideas and experiences and things that have worked for me. If you have any further questions or ideas, contact me at rseaton@cvsd.org

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