

WHAT IS DIRECTOR CERTIFICATION AND WHY DO I NEED IT?

It has long been acknowledged by the leaders of the Barbershop Harmony Society that the most important problem we face when it comes to recruitment and retention of members is the shortage of qualified chorus directors. Having a qualified director is central to the health of every chapter. So many things – the quality of the music, the fun of the rehearsal, the challenges and rewards of the musical program on all levels – depend, to a very large degree, on the skill, energy, and commitment of the director. And although almost every chapter has someone who stands in front every week and waves his/her arms, too many of them were chosen not because of their musical knowledge or directing skills, but because they were simply willing to do it. The big question then remains: How do we train and nurture our directors?

A few years ago, a select group of knowledgeable chorus directors was appointed to discuss ways of solving this difficult problem. One suggestion was that the Society should have a list of things every good chorus director should know or be able to do. This led to the development and revision of the curriculum at Harmony College/Director College and the concept of "Director Certification." The general idea calls for directors to take a planned sequence of classes that will allow them to progress toward greater proficiency as musical leaders. Once a director satisfies the requirements, he or she will receive a pin and certificate of achievement and will be celebrated in both his/her chapter and at an appropriate District event.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Can I get credit for work already completed at HC/DC or do I have to start from scratch?

We are eager to give credit for work completed. Indeed, the whole point of the program is to encourage directors to seek further training, not to put up barriers to their musical growth and development.

2. I have a musical degree. Why don't I automatically qualify for certification?

Having formal training in music is, of course, a wonderful and appropriate background, and so it may be entirely possible for you to apply that experience to the certification process. The feasibility of this is left to the judgment of experts such as Greg Lyne. But let me make a few general comments on why prior training doesn't necessarily replace courses at Directors College. Directors College is like no other place, if for no other reason than the fact that it is focused exclusively on barbershop music and on directing a "modern" barbershop chorus. Courses in, say, primary or secondary music education, do not automatically insure that the skills and knowledge relevant to directing a barbershop chorus have been effectively and directly addressed. Furthermore, it is almost impossible for us to judge the nature and adequacy of musical education backgrounds. Standards vary enormously, the proficiency of students in their prior courses varies considerably, and skills are forgotten or only marginally useful due to disuse. Finally, exercising leadership in a group of adult men may involve quite a different set of skills than is needed to work with young students. Our preference, therefore, is for everyone to have the remarkable experience called Directors College. In this way, we can insure that all directors have a common and shared level of competence that is specifically related to, or aimed at, our brand of music. However, please note: We are not at all indifferent to prior training, we honor and value it; we are sincerely interested in facilitating, not hampering, your education as a barbershop director; and therefore we will do all we can to provide credit for prior work where it seems fully appropriate.

3. None of my chorus members seems to care about this. Why should I?

Indifference can be debilitating, but the certificate will surely indicate to the members of your chorus that you are trying to become a better director, and thus trying to make it possible for them to enjoy this hobby even more. If you are re-energized by attending Directors College, if you become a more effective musical leader, if you increase your directorial skills, then your chorus members will be far from indifferent.

4. What does the certificate do for me?

A certificate has no inherent worth; it won't make you a better director. The pursuit of that certificate, however, is sure to do so. It will have both specific and general outcomes – the development of directing skills and rehearsal strategies, an increase in your knowledge about our brand of music, and a sharpening of your communication and motivational expertise.

5. I can't get the one class I need for certification at Directors College. What can I do?

It may be possible to change your program at Directors College to accommodate your needs, but the more common strategy is to take the course at a district school. For a few of the requirements, notably the course on the Structure of SPEBSQSA and the History of Barbershop, independent study at home is available.