

Citrus College Repeatability Statement (by Robert Slack)

I have heard all the arguments in support of continuing the practice of repeatability for fine and performing arts courses. While that ideology is appreciated, most arguments fall short of successfully explaining the true necessity and nature of arts repeatability.

The following quotes from the California Academic Senate are examples of recent justifications supporting the need for repeatability:

*“Whereas, the inclusion of experienced, skilled performers greatly enhances the quality of a performance group, which means repeating students are an essential part of the learning environment in any such endeavor, contributing to the success of the other participating students.**

“Whereas, performance groups regularly consist of both performing arts majors and non-majors, and that arrangement is beneficial to the participating individuals, the performance group as a whole, and to society in general both by providing cultural experiences for the surrounding community and by fostering a well-rounded and “culturally engaged citizenry”.*

Unfortunately, phrases such as “experienced, skilled performers” and “culturally engaged citizenry” could be interpreted by the legislature, LAO, and other skeptics as code for experienced “community members” who attend courses to prop up enrollment and bolster an ensemble’s performance ability. This position is understandable if our primary mission were to support “community” bands and choirs. There is concern that there are too many such CC programs in the state. The LAO and others are asking tough questions and we need arguments that better explain the validity of arts education.

Although the above quotes may be factually accurate, they unfortunately do not adequately address why we should support artistic development or comply with the Chancellor’s vision of a Community College’s mission. This abridged mission places at the forefront basic skills, successful transfer and CTE preparation – not greater community involvement.

A more dynamic repeatability argument would be one that is driven by skill acquisition and the critical “basic skills” component of what actually takes place in the arts classroom. The key argument that has not been presented is the concept of the “Three P’s”: Psychology, Physiology, and Physics; or more simply put, the Mind, the Body and the Instrument (e.g. horn, piano, paintbrush, clay). Similar to traditional learning, young musicians and artists and even athletes begin their journey acquiring intellectual and

conceptual knowledge as the foundation. Students activate the intellectual knowledge to develop physiological growth, the learning of how the mouth/hands/etc... need to function to achieve the intended result. This developmental growth engages the intellect, which in turn activates kinesthetic responses developing the physiology of the body to work in concert with an inanimate object such as a musical instrument. The instrument/tool or more importantly, the physics of that instrument, must be engaged via intellectual knowledge, which in turn develops physiological responses. This crucial developmental cycle leads to artistic growth and is only achieved through constant repetition and time.

The developmental rewiring of the brain, acquisition of artistic knowledge and physical dexterity are equally important to the growth and future career options for artists. These tangible skills and artistic sensibilities are crucial to anyone beginning a career in the entertainment, artistic or production community. The vast majority of successful writers, directors, designers, producers, editors, composers, arrangers, and production engineers all began their professions as young artists, many of whom attended community colleges. Simply explaining the need for an arts education from a narrow point of view—a view that culminates in either becoming a performer, educator, or “engaged citizenry”—excludes the multitude of possible careers paths stemming from an arts education.

These repetitive courses in music and the arts successfully set the stage with foundational knowledge that allows students multiple career paths within a diverse industry. One only needs to look at the credits of any major motion picture, touring act, television show or theatrical production to understand the thousands of potential jobs within this global production community. People with a fine and performing arts backgrounds fill the vast majority of these careers. These occupations supporting California’s leadership as the Mecca for media and entertainment require critically important foundational arts skills—skills only achieved by sufficient exposure to the foundational artistic and physical knowledge provided by course repetition.

* Source 2010 California Academic Senate 9.06 S11 repeatable courses