

The State of the Bassoon in Music Programs Across the U.S.

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Purpose of Study

While teaching at a small regional institution located in the Southeast, I struggled with recruiting bassoonists. I sent out fliers, emails, posted YouTube videos of all-state etudes, and co-hosted numerous double reed days. No matter what I tried or what events I scheduled, I always encountered poor showings of student bassoonists. While visiting middle and high schools to work with and recruit bassoonists for my program, in most cases, I was met with an ensemble director saying “Well, we do not have any bassoonists in our program,” or “Since we do not have any bassoons to give out, I cannot start any students on the instrument.” It was indeed disheartening and led me to wonder what the root cause of this lack of bassoonists was. I contemplated my own beginnings on the instrument. After all, I had no idea what the bassoon was when I chose it. All I knew, as a sixth grader excited for band, was that I wanted to play something different. I asked my band director if I could play the English horn, and he said that the program did not own one. He offered oboe or bassoon to me. I chose the bassoon because the name sounded cool. That day, he handed me the case with a beginning band book and said “Here you go. I have no idea how to teach this. You are on your own.” The instrument I received was in poor condition and beat up from years of neglect. With no guided instruction in the first stages of learning the bassoon, I was really left to figure it out on my own.

Revisiting my own past while evaluating my difficulties with recruiting led me to suspect that recruitment of student bassoonists by both collegiate instructors for their institutions and K-through-12 music educators for their school music programs is indeed a widespread issue. For this reason, I decided to create a survey designed for music educators with instrumental programs in the United States focused on collecting data about bassoons. To my knowledge, an IRB-approved study addressing this topic has not been conducted in the US. I released the survey in February 2020 through Qualtrics and closed it in May 2020, after receiving 402 responses spanning 45 states. Arkansas, Idaho, New Hampshire, North Dakota, and Oklahoma are not represented in this study, as no respondents from these states participated in the survey. Furthermore, several states had large numbers of music educators taking part in this survey: Florida (109 respondents; 27.3%), Kansas (62 respondents; 16%), Tennessee (41 respondents; 10.3%), and Kentucky (36 respondents; 9%). I am thankful for colleagues, music educators, and several Music Education Associations who helped spread the word of this study. I am most grateful to the music educators who participated in this survey during the initial stages of the pandemic; especially considering

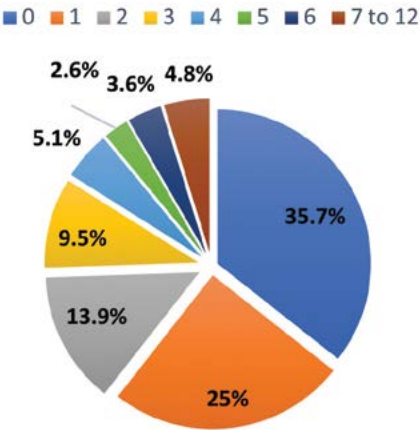
this was a time when so many had to quickly pivot to online instruction and completely redesign their programs.

Overall Findings

Number of Student Bassoonists in Music Programs

35.7% of respondents participating in this survey reported not having a single student bassoonist in their music program. 25% of respondents reported only having one bassoonist in their program. This adds up to the majority of programs (60.7%) having *only one or no* student bassoonists.

Number of Student Bassoonists



Instructional Support (Internal and External) for Student Bassoonists

A majority of survey participants (70.4%) reported that they have a bassoon instructor within thirty minutes commuting distance of their program and 79.4% reported that there is a collegiate music program within thirty minutes commuting distance. When asked “Do any of your program’s student bassoonists take private lessons with an instructor?” 64.3% of respondents selected “Yes” and 35.7% selected “No.” Respondents described the level of the bassoon instructor from which their students were taking lessons as: “Expert” (58.8%), “Semi-professional” (20.4%), “Woodwind Specialist” (7.9%), and “Unknown” (13%). For those who had bassoon students in their programs and were able to bring in bassoon instructors to work with them shared that they do so: “Multiple times per month” (16.2%), “Once per month” (3.4%), “A couple times per semester” (5.6%), “Once per semester” (7.3%), “Once each year” (18.2%). However, 49.3% of respondents shared that they never bring in a bassoon instructor to work with students in their programs. Comments that clarify as to why this is the case include: “I have tried to beg friends who play, but can’t find anyone willing,” “We are not allowed to have people visit the school during the school day with out [sic] a background check at that persons[sic] expense,” “I never bring anyone for any instrument. My school won’t pay for it,” and “I would do this however lack the resources to do so.”

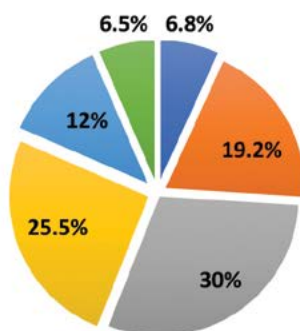
Number of Bassoons, Working Condition, and Brands

Fortunately, most programs do own bassoons. However, when asked “How many bassoons does your program own?” 17.1% of respondents selected “0” bassoons and 14.2% selected “1” bassoon. Though the average number of instruments (bassoons) in respondents’ programs is 3, an important distinction is that multiple respondents instruct several grade levels (for example both middle and high school) and serve as district art coordinators. As these music educators would most likely have several bassoons across several grade levels/music programs, this potentially skewed the average of instruments owned for individual programs.

Survey participants were asked to select descriptors of working conditions that applied to their program’s school bassoons. The most selected descriptor was “Used and in good working condition” (30%). “Used and in fair working condition” (25.5%) was the second most selected descriptor, followed by the descriptors “Gently used and in excellent working condition” (19.2%) and “Used and in poor working condition” (12%). “Brand new and in excellent working condition” (6.8%) and “Used and broken; does not work” (6.5%) were the least selected descriptors. Though the most selected descriptors were for instruments in good or excellent working conditions (comprising 56% of total selections), still many instruments in programs are in a playing condition that could be interpreted as suboptimal for the success of student bassoonists. Comments from respondents addressing the poor condition of their instruments include: “It’s just horrible and not worth fixing,” “The notes that play, sound pretty good...but not all notes play,” and “We have a school owned one, but it doesn’t work...”

Working Condition of School Owned Bassoons

- Brand new in excellent working condition
- Gently used and in excellent working condition
- Used and in good working condition
- Used and in fair working condition
- Used and in poor working condition
- Used and broken; does not work



As for which bassoon brand is most common in music programs, the American bassoon manufacturer Fox Products Corporation leads the field amongst bassoon instrument makers. 65.7% of respondents reported their program having a Fox bassoon(s). Schreiber comes in second with 19.3% of programs possessing this brand of bassoon. Selmer was the third

most prevalent brand (16.1%). However, when Conn is added to the Selmer numbers from the “Other” category, the percentage (18.4%) nears Schreiber’s. Besides “Unknown brand” being the most selected brand after Selmer, other brands of instruments that programs owned in multiple numbers were Yamaha, Amati, Jupiter, Linton, Moosmann, and Leshner.

Music Educators: Their Background and Comfort with Bassoon Instruction

Most survey participants teach at the middle (intermediate) and high school (secondary) levels (83.3%); 13.3% of respondents teach at the elementary level and 3.4% of respondents selected “other” as an option (for example: “I instruct at all three levels” or “arts administrator”). The three most common instruments of respondents (their main instrument in collegiate studies) were the saxophone, trumpet, and clarinet; over 40% of respondents selected these instruments (almost an equal distribution between the three). Close to 10% of respondents selected the bassoon as their main instrument in college. Out of all the wind instruments, the oboe had the least number of respondents (2.6%) selecting it as their main instrument in college.

When asked “Do you feel that your instrumental methods class taken during collegiate studies adequately prepared you to start student bassoonists in your program,” most participants selected “Yes” (24.1%) or “Somewhat” (39%). Over a quarter of respondents selected “No.” Though, when including additional responses from the “other” category from participants such as “Never took a methods class” or “My methods class did not include instruction on the bassoon,” the percentage of respondents who most likely would not feel prepared to start student bassoonists jumps to 36.9%.

When asked “Select your level of comfort in starting a beginning student bassoonist,” well over half of respondents selected “slightly comfortable,” “moderately comfortable,” or “extremely comfortable” (almost an equal distribution between the three). However, close to one third of respondents expressed possessing some level of discomfort (ranging from “extremely uncomfortable” to “slightly uncomfortable”) when starting a beginning student bassoonist.

When respondents were asked to select which aspects (multiple options could be selected by participants in the survey) of the bassoon elicit discomfort during instruction, “fingerings” was the top choice (64.6% of participants selected this option) followed by “technique” (52.5%). After those options, “reeds” (44.3%), “embouchure” (35.4%), and “selecting appropriate solo and ensemble literature” were also widely selected as discomforting instructional aspects by participants. Additional comments were offered such as: “ALL OF THE LEFT THUMB KEYS!!!,” “I am not as familiar as I feel I should be with quality solo literature...,” “...struggle with more advanced music selection and find it difficult to pick music for my double reeds...,” and “flicking.” Survey participants were asked if they would be more likely to start student bassoonists in their programs if they were offered a bassoon-specific clinic for music educators. 43.2% of respondents selected the option “Yes,” 42% selected “Maybe,” and 13.9% selected “No.” Only three respondents selected the option “I prefer not to answer.” Nonetheless, this indicates that a majority are open to starting student bassoonists if they were offered a bassoon clinic.

Most music educators (71.6%) participating in this study said that a student does not have to start on another instrument before beginning the bassoon. This indicates that

many support starting students directly on the bassoon and not requiring a transitional instrument. When asked “From which instrument have you switched students to the bassoon?” the clarinet (25.4%) was the most selected, followed by the saxophone (23.8%), and then the flute (19.8%). These instruments are the logical precursors to the bassoon; in most programs, these sections possess greater numbers and could afford to lose students to another section. The option “I start students directly on the bassoon” comprised 13.8% of the total selections. The euphonium/baritone was the most common instrument from the brass family for switching to bassoon. The data showed no significant number of other instruments as popular precursors to the bassoon.

When survey participants were asked if they felt the “timbre/presence of the bassoon is necessary” in their program’s ensemble, 64.2% of respondents selected “Yes.” 27% selected the option “Sometimes,” and 8.3% selected “No.” 0.5% selected the option “I prefer not to answer.”

Access to and Awareness of Supplies/Bassoon Music/Instruments/Reeds

Most survey participants have local music stores in the area where their program is located (9.7% of respondents do not have a local music store in their area) and when asked to choose selections of bassoon-specific offerings from these stores, only a small number of participants selected the option “My local music store does not carry any bassoons or bassoon specific supplies” (7.2%). 17.9% of respondents were unsure what their local music store offers for bassoon-specific needs. Over two thirds of respondents shared that their local music store sells bassoon reeds and bassoon supplies such as seat straps, swabs, hand rests, etc. As for purchasing and renting bassoons from these local stores, 51.2% and 37.5% of participants reported the ability to do so respectively. 56% of respondents reported the ability to purchase bassoon music from their local store and 64.2% shared that their local music store offers bassoon repairs. 25.3% of participants reported that their local music store sells reed-making tools such as reamers, knives, plaques, etc.

When asked “Are you aware of reliable online resources for bassoon supplies, supplementary instruction, quality bassoon reeds, etc.?” 39.1% of respondents selected “Yes,” 35.8% selected “Somewhat,” and 25.1% selected “No.” Though this data indicates that most respondents are aware of resources, a quarter of respondents being unaware of these resources can be considered sizeable.

Participants were asked “Do you have a recommended supplier of handmade bassoon reeds for your program’s bassoonists?”; 50% of respondents selected “Yes” and 38.9% selected “No.” The remaining respondents (11.1%) selected the option “I recommend my students get whatever reeds they can find online and/or in the local music store, regardless of them being handmade.”

Overall Findings by Location

Rural Areas

Close to a third (31.1%) of the music educators from this study identified their program’s location as being rural. The states that were represented in this population were: Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, North

Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming. When asked if they felt they had the necessary level of financial support to successfully run their music programs, 46.7% reported “Somewhat” and 36.3% reported “No.” Only 17% of respondents felt they had adequate financial support.

59.4% of respondents with programs in a rural area reported *not having a single bassoon student*. A quarter of respondents reported having only one bassoon student. Although most rural programs own bassoons, 31.2% of them do not. When these participants were asked to select the condition(s) of their school-owned bassoons, the most selected condition was “Used and in fair working condition” (33.3%); when combined with the conditions “Used and in poor working condition” (14.8%) and “Used and broken; does not work” (6.7%) this makes up the majority of selected conditions by respondents. The condition “Used and in good working condition” was the second most selected option (28.1%). A comment that stands out from one of the respondents regarding their instrument and bassoon student situation is “I do not have my own bassoon sadly, And [sic] use a loaner from a local university when one is available. We only have one bassoon in our district, and we dont [sic] have the funding for a newer model. Therefore, it is difficult to choose students to play the instrument, as well as keep it maintained without losing time instructing the student.”

Over a quarter of rural respondents do not have a local music store in the area where their program is located. When prompted to choose selections of bassoon-specific offerings from these stores, 11% selected the option “My local music store does not carry any bassoons or bassoon specific supplies.” A quarter of respondents were unsure what their local music store offers for bassoon-specific needs. Close to three quarters of respondents shared that their local music store sells bassoon reeds and two thirds reported that their local music store sells bassoon supplies such as seat straps, swabs, hand rests, etc. As for purchasing and renting bassoons from these local stores, 48.9% and 30.4% of participants reported the ability to do so respectively. 47.8% of respondents reported the ability to purchase bassoon music from their local store and 62% shared that their local music store offers bassoon repairs. 18.5% of participants reported that their local music store sells reed-making tools such as reamers, knives, plaques, etc. Participants were asked if they were aware of reliable online resources for bassoon supplies, supplementary instruction, quality bassoon reeds, etc.; 33.6% selected “Yes,” 40.2% selected “Somewhat,” and 26.2% selected “No.” Additionally, they were also asked if they had a recommended supplier of handmade bassoon reeds for their program’s bassoonists. 40% of participants selected “Yes” and 47.7% selected “No.” 12.9% selected the option “I recommend whatever reeds they can find online or in the local music store.”

60.8% of respondents with programs in a rural area said there was a collegiate music program within thirty minutes commuting distance of their school. Yet only 40.7% reported having a bassoon instructor within thirty minutes commuting distance. This could imply that many of these collegiate programs do not have a bassoon instructor on faculty. Only 17.7% of rural respondents said their bassoon students take lessons with a private instructor and 68.1% reported that they never bring in a bassoon instructor to work with their students. Some comments from respondents regarding bringing in bassoon instructors are: “I would do this however lack the resources to do so,” “Once every three years (we have a rotation

with other professionals),” and “We are not allowed to have people visit the school during the day with out [sic] a background check at that persons [sic] expense.”

When asked which instrument they studied in college, saxophone (18%) and trumpet (12.3%) were the most selected on the survey by music educators. 9% of rural respondents selected bassoon as their primary instrument. 50% of respondents selected a woodwind instrument and 43% selected a brass instrument as their primary. 56.6% of these music educators had some level of comfort instructing bassoonists. Close to two thirds said their collegiate instrumental methods program prepared them in some way (most selected the descriptor “somewhat”) to start student bassoonists in their programs. Respondents shared they had the most discomfort with teaching “fingerings” (61.3% selected this option), “technique” (56.8%), and reeds (45.9%). “Selecting appropriate solo and ensemble literature” and “reeds” were the next most chosen options (35.1%). Close to two thirds of rural respondents selected that they would be more likely to start student bassoonists in their program if offered a bassoon clinic tailored to music educators; 56% of respondents have never attended a bassoon clinic specific to music educators. When asked if they believed the bassoon was a necessary timbre in an ensemble, 48.4% of participants selected the option “Yes,” 39.3% selected “Sometimes,” and 10.7% selected “No.” 1.6% of respondents selected the option “I prefer not to answer.”

Suburban Areas

Over half of music educators from this study identified their program’s location as being suburban. Forty out of fifty states were represented in this population; Arkansas, Connecticut, Idaho, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Wyoming were the states that did not have representation from suburban programs in this survey. When asked if they felt they had the necessary level of support to successfully run their music programs, 86% responded with somewhat or yes (evenly split amongst both categories).

While a majority of suburban programs had one (24.5%) or more bassoonists (52.9%), 22.6% reported not having any student bassoonists. Most programs own one or more bassoons. Fortunately, 60% of respondents reported having bassoons that were in good working condition or better; yet 40% of bassoons are in fair condition to unusable (a bulk of these are in fair condition).

Most survey participants have local music stores in their suburban-located program (only three participants shared that they do not have a local music store in their area) and only a small percentage of participants selected the option “My local music store does not carry any bassoons or bassoon specific supplies” (5.1%). 14.5% of respondents were unsure what their local music store offers for bassoon-specific needs. Three quarters of respondents shared that their local music store sells bassoon reeds and close to that amount shared that these stores sell bassoon supplies such as seat straps, swabs, hand rests, etc. As for purchasing and renting bassoons from these local stores, 52.3% and 38.8% of participants reported the ability to do so respectively. 59.8% of respondents reported the ability to purchase bassoon music from their local store and 67.7% shared that their local music store offers bassoon repairs. 29.4% of participants reported that their local music store sells reed-making tools such as reamers, knives, plaques, etc. Participants were asked if they were aware of reliable

online resources for bassoon supplies, supplementary instruction, quality bassoon reeds, etc.; 54.2% selected “Yes,” 35.1% selected “Somewhat,” and 21.6% selected “No.” Additionally, they were also asked if they had a recommended supplier of handmade bassoon reeds for their program’s bassoonists. Just over half of participants selected “Yes” and 36.9% selected “No.” 8.9% selected the option “I recommend whatever reeds they can find online or in the local music store.”

Over 80% of respondents reported that both a collegiate music program and a private bassoon instructor were within thirty minutes commuting distance, with over 70% sharing that their bassoon students took lessons with an instructor. 80% of these respondents reported that their students took lessons with an expert or semi-pro bassoonist. Over half of respondents bring a bassoon instructor into their program to work with bassoon students at least once per year; 11% of respondents bring in a bassoon instructor multiple times per month to work with their bassoon students.

When asked which instrument survey participants studied in college, clarinet (16.85%) and trumpet (16.35%) were the most selected. 8.65% of respondents selected bassoon as their primary instrument in college. Between brass and woodwind instruments, there is basically an even split of participants selecting these instruments as their primary instrument in college (89% of respondents identified as brass or wind players). Two thirds of these music educators had some comfort in starting a beginner bassoonist. 60% of respondents felt that their instrumental methods course prepared or somewhat prepared them to adequately start bassoonists in their programs. They, like rural respondents, possessed the most discomfort with teaching “fingerings” (68.5% selected this option), “technique” (50.5%), and “reeds” (41.3%). “Embouchure” was selected by 36.4% of respondents as an aspect of discomfort in bassoon instruction. 60% of respondents shared that they have attended a clinic that was specific to bassoon instruction. Furthermore, 72.43% of respondents shared they would consider and be more likely to start student bassoonists in their program if offered a bassoon clinic tailored to music educators. When asked if they believed the bassoon was a necessary timbre in an ensemble, 73.7% of participants selected the option “Yes,” 18.7% selected “Sometimes,” and 7.6% selected “No.”

Urban/Metropolitan Areas

Only 52 respondents completing the survey identified their program’s location as being in an urban/metropolitan area, the lowest participation in the survey from any area. The states that were represented from this population were: Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming. When asked if they felt they had the necessary level of support to successfully run their music programs, three quarters responded with “Yes” or “Somewhat” (over half selected this option) and a quarter responded with “No.”

Nearly two thirds of participants have one (30%) or more (36%) student bassoonists. 34% of participants have no bassoonists in their programs. Three quarters of music educators teaching in these areas shared that their program owned two or more bassoons and over half of their school-owned instruments were in good working condition or better.

Most survey participants have local music stores in their urban/metropolitan area (only two participants shared that they do not have a local music store) and only a small number of participants selected the option “My local music store does not carry any bassoons or bassoon specific supplies” (4 total). 21.1% of respondents were unsure what their local music store offers for bassoon-specific needs. 69.2% of respondents shared that their local music store sells bassoon reeds and 61.5% shared that these stores sell bassoon supplies such as seat straps, swabs, hand rests, etc. As for purchasing and renting bassoons from these local stores, 48.1% and 42.3% of participants reported the ability to do so respectively. 51.9% of respondents reported the ability to purchase bassoon music from their local store and 51.9% shared that their local music store offers bassoon repairs. 21.1% of participants reported that their local music store sells reed-making tools such as reamers, knives, plaques, etc. Participants were asked if they were aware of reliable online resources for bassoon supplies, supplementary instruction, quality bassoon reeds, etc.; 36.7% selected “Yes,” 28.6% selected “Somewhat,” and 34.7% selected “No.” Additionally, they were also asked if they had a recommended supplier of handmade bassoon reeds for their program’s bassoonists. Just over half of participants selected “Yes” and 29.3% selected “No.” 19.5% selected the option “I recommend whatever reeds they can find online or in the local music store.”

Nearly all music educators (96.2%) with programs in this category who participated in this survey have a collegiate music program within thirty minutes commuting distance of their school and nearly the same percentage of respondents have a bassoon instructor within commuting distance. Close to two thirds of the music educators described their bassoon instructors as possessing expert skill level (bassoonists who have extensive training, degrees, and/or background). For those who have student bassoonists in their program, 71% reported that these students take lessons with a private instructor. 56% of respondents reported bringing in bassoon instructor to work with their bassoon students at least once per year.

When asked which instrument was the instrument they studied in college, saxophone (18.4%) and bassoon (14.3%) were the most selected on the survey by music educators. 53% of respondents selected a woodwind instrument and 27% selected a brass instrument as their primary. 70% of these music educators had some level of comfort instructing bassoonists. This is the highest level of comfort instructing bassoonists out of all the locations. Close to two thirds of respondents said their collegiate instrumental methods program prepared them in some way (most selected somewhat) to start student bassoonists in their program; however, well over a third did not feel this way or did not have a methods course offering during their collegiate training. Music educators had the most discomfort with teaching “fingerings” (56.5% selected this option), “reeds” (52.3%), and “technique” (47.8%). “Selecting appropriate solo and ensemble repertoire” was another area of instructional discomfort, with 30% of participants choosing this option. Over two thirds of urban/metropolitan area respondents selected that they would be more likely to start student bassoonists in their program if offered a bassoon clinic tailored to music educators; over a third of respondents have never attended a bassoon clinic specific to music educators. When asked if they believed the bassoon was a necessary timbre in an ensemble, 61.2% of participants selected the option “Yes,” 32.7% selected “Sometimes,” and 6.1% selected “No.”

Conclusions

Number of Bassoon Students in Music Programs

When I think about the difficulties of recruiting bassoonists and my experiences encountering no student bassoonists in middle (intermediate) and high (secondary) school music programs, it comes as no surprise as to why. 60.7% of music educators who responded to this survey reported that they have one or no bassoonists. Location-wise, the data shows that music programs in rural areas are suffering the most in their numbers of student bassoonists, as nearly 60% of respondents with a program in this type of location reported having *no* student bassoonists. Furthermore, just over a third of respondents with programs in an urban/metropolitan area and close to a quarter of respondents with programs in a suburban area reported that they have no bassoonists. This comes as a surprise considering programs located in these areas do possess instruments and most have access to bassoon instructors within a commutable distance. This substantial lack of bassoonists in school music programs would indeed negatively impact the recruitment of bassoonists to institutions of higher education.

Instruments and Reeds

The overall finding of a low number of bassoons owned by music programs (31.3% of respondents report having 0-1 bassoon) is significant as it indicates that if a music program wanted multiple bassoon players or had multiple students interested in starting the bassoon, nearly a third of programs would not have the instruments available to satisfy that demand. Moreover, with a sizeable number of respondents (44%) sharing conditions of their instruments as being in fair working condition to broken, it is even more difficult for both the music educator (starting and retaining bassoonists) and the bassoon student (progressing in skill and sticking with the instrument) to succeed. My first bassoon was a beat up, old wooden Bundy and I recall having many challenges navigating that instrument in my first year due to its state of disrepair. Had a bassoon teacher not stepped in to find an instrument in better working condition, I might have had a more disenchanting experience and could have decided to switch instruments.

44.3% of participants shared that reeds were an instructional aspect of bassoon that elicited discomfort. This discomfort could potentially be alleviated if music educators knew where to get high quality, functional handmade bassoon reeds for their students, or at least point their students in the right direction of a reputable reed supplier. Even though half of respondents have a recommended supplier of handmade bassoon reeds for their bassoon students, the other half is composed of music educators who do not have a supplier or only have a general recommendation for students of getting reeds anywhere they can. Bassoonists know that reeds are a crucial aspect of success on the instrument and to have an unreliable, non-functional bassoon reed will not only create playing difficulties for the student, but potentially foster poor playing habits to accommodate the shortcomings of a poor-quality reed. Furthermore, though the data indicates that most respondents are aware of reliable online resources for bassoon supplies, there is still a quarter of respondents who are unaware of these resources.

Music Educators' Training

The survey indicated that most music educators do feel their collegiate studies prepared them in some way to teach bassoon and they are comfortable, in some way, with starting beginning bassoonists. This is a positive sign for future bassoon students in music programs and would indicate that future music educators in collegiate programs are being prepared by their institutions to take on some form of bassoon instruction. Yet, there is still a considerable percentage (36.9%) of music educators who would not feel prepared to start beginning bassoonists. Fortunately, over half of respondents have attended a bassoon clinic that was tailored for music educators. And when asked if they would be more likely to start beginning bassoonists in their programs if a bassoon clinic tailored for music educators were offered, 43.6% selected "Yes" and 42.4% selected "maybe." This shows that music educators would be open to this type of opportunity.

Music Educators Instructional Concerns with the Bassoon

Instructionally, "fingerings" and "technique" were the biggest challenges for music educators who participated in this survey. Fingerings and technique do go hand in hand and it would be relatively easy for the Society at large to widely share and promote resources for music educators. Furthermore, fingerings issues and questions could be addressed remotely, as it is possible for bassoon instructors to demonstrate over virtual platforms. This could benefit programs that do not have much financial support and/or nearness to a bassoon instructor. Even though not as significant of an instructional concern as "fingerings" and "technique," just over a third of survey participants shared that selecting appropriate solo and ensemble literature elicits instructional discomfort. Anecdotally, over the years, I have worked with many young bassoon students (without regular guidance of a local bassoon teacher) who came to me with solo and ensemble music beyond their playing abilities; most of them had been given a list of approved repertoire (i.e. lists shared by state bandmasters associations and MEAs) by level for their instruments and had their pieces chosen or recommended by their school ensemble directors. It is completely understandable that these music educators did not have a comprehensive knowledge of repertoire suitability for their bassoon students. To my knowledge, a widely available/easily accessible resource that provides focused guidance (e.g. range, technical difficulty in reference to the demands of the specific instrument, length, etc.) for music educators looking to select appropriate repertoire for their bassoon students does not exist.

Access to Bassoon Instructors for Additional Instructional Support

Fortunately, data from answers to questions in this survey indicate that many bassoon students are getting instructional support from a trained bassoonist outside of their music program. However, it is important to note that there is still an issue regarding access to bassoon instructors for many programs, most notably those located in rural areas. Since most music educators with music programs in a rural location said there was a college music program but not a bassoon instructor within commuting distance, this could imply that these collegiate music programs do not staff a bassoon instructor. Due to potential budget limitations of these rural collegiate programs, it could be unfeasible to staff a bassoon

instructor. Though not ideal, these issues could be addressed remotely over a virtual platform with a bassoon instructor who is willing and capable to teach students in this modality.

Perceived Value of the Bassoon's Timbre/Presence in Music Programs

Though close to two thirds of survey participants feel that the bassoon is a necessary timbre/presence in their ensemble, it is disheartening that such a sizeable percentage feels that it is only sometimes necessary or not necessary at all. Furthermore, of the survey participants who find the bassoon to not be a necessary timbre/presence in their ensemble, the largest percentage was from rural areas; moreover, this locale possessed the highest percentage of participants reporting their program not having a student bassoonist.

Moving Forward

This study provides only a snapshot of the state of the bassoon across the country, as participation did not occur in all fifty states and for some locales there is certainly unequal representation. However, I feel that it offers a good start and provides valuable insight for what the likely situation is regarding the bassoon across the United States. Seeking out more comprehensive data regarding the bassoon and bassoon students from throughout the country and beyond should be a priority for the Society. In interpreting this study, several questions rise to the top. What is the future of the bassoon? What can we do to get more programs starting and supporting bassoon students? What steps could be taken by our Society to remedy some of the substantial underlying problems involving bassoons in school music programs? In my opinion, the measures suggested below could benefit our school music programs, bassoon students, bassoon instructors, bassoon reed makers and technicians, as well as our double reed community at large:

- Strategizing with the leadership of our Society, instrument makers, and communities on how to get quality, affordable, working instruments into the hands of music programs and student bassoonists
- Finding ways to help music programs connect with bassoon repair technicians (e.g., regional visits—potentially at a host school) to address bassoons in their programs that are in disrepair
- Providing private lesson funding opportunities (through IDRS-led initiatives and grant-funded institutions such as the Play It Forward Music Foundation) for rural, economically disadvantaged regions, and students/families/music programs without the financial resources to support quality bassoon instruction
- Creating and funding continuing education as well as instructional workshops on the bassoon specifically designed for music educators (outside of typical Music Education Association conference offerings)
- Supporting and sharing resources (potential funding for private bassoon studio startups, as well as technical and instructional resources) by the Society and other grant-funding institutions to assist bassoon instructors in offering lessons/group classes through multiple modalities

- Supporting performance tours of bassoonists in our school systems to expose students and music educators to the instrument
- Encouraging the Society to find ways to communicate with music educators to make them aware of the initiatives and resources that support the instruction of bassoon students in their music programs
- Making online resources such as those listed below available on the IDRS website:
 - Database of bassoon instructors (those who choose to share their contact information) across the country and beyond
 - Lists/Links to reputable reed makers for music instructors and bassoon students
 - Lists of solo and ensemble repertoire with a breakdown of their difficulty (range, technical demands, etc.)
 - Lists/contact info of reputable bassoon repairpersons

It bears repeating that in this survey over one third of educators did not find the bassoon to be a necessary timbre at all times in their ensemble. In this chicken-or-the-egg dilemma, is it that they do not think it is a necessary timbre and so do not bother starting bassoons, or do they not have any bassoonists and so do not find the timbre necessary? Regardless, it is my fervent belief that if we as a Society are able to get bassoons (quality, working instruments) into the hands of willing students, along with quality reeds, and provide access to bassoon instructors who can demonstrate how to unleash these students' potential, we could turn this disappointing trend of diminishing numbers of bassoon students around and convince many skeptics that the instrument is truly worthwhile. And in doing so we would be helping to create many more wonderful bassoonists to welcome into our world.



Lauded by the American Record Guide as a bassoonist who "...shines her warm instrument in quite a different light" and "phrases her long lyrical lines so that they not only sing but breathe with the gorgeous tone of a high baritone..." Dr. Shannon Lowe serves as the Assistant Professor of Bassoon and Aural Skills at the University of Florida School of Music. Dr. Lowe is a proud Fox Artist and recently released the recording A Musical Bouquet: Old, New and Borrowed Works for Bassoon and Strings through MSR Classics.