

## **Jessica Nápoles Written Statement:**

Sometime around 1994, my mentor André Thomas asked me to serve as the undergraduate representative for the ACDA student chapter at Florida State University. I had no idea what ACDA was, but I knew that the right answer was yes. That Fall, we officers arranged a carpool for all of us to drive to the Florida ACDA state conference. Henry Leck was the headliner. I remember distinctly feeling so inspired in that room, overwhelmed by the energy of choir directors of all ages and experience levels, seeking tools for their own and their singers' development. My roommate Sandy and I stayed up late in our room sight singing some of the music we picked up at the exhibits and in reading sessions (we still do this 30 years later!). It was my first experience with ACDA, and I never stopped attending ACDA conferences. I am still inspired each time I attend. What struck me then that is still true today is that ACDA is comprised of people who want to grow and be nurtured—by each other and by our beloved art.

In anticipation of the 2015 conference, Mary Hopper invited me to serve on her planning committee, as National Honor Choir Chair. She didn't know me, yet she had faith in me and gave me an opportunity to serve. That is the spirit of ACDA, a community of volunteers who work to uplift each other, cultivating leadership, investing in our greatest asset, people. That year we had 5 honor choirs, each with about 300 singers, and everything was sent via postal mail. I regularly interacted with approximately 1,500 singers, their teachers, parents, adjudicators, and everyone who had a question about honor choir. I must have spent easily 1,000 hours on honor choir tasks that cycle. Rather than feeling exhausted or burned out, I was exhilarated. I loved being able to facilitate life-changing experiences for so many young people. I went on to serve in various roles (Honor Choir Chair for one more term in 2017, then Assistant Conference Chair in 2019 and 2021) on the national conference planning committees, and now in 2025 as Conference Co-Chair with Edie Copley. Along the way, I learned so much about leadership, how to run a successful conference, and how to build up people around me. That is the spirit of ACDA. I have served with phenomenal people who care deeply for our organization and its success. I fondly remember Lynne Gackle's commitment and recognition of the service of our volunteers. She created the first Volunteer Award in the organization, and I watched her honor Stan McGill in this way, tears in his eyes, so moved was he. Truly, the yeoman efforts of our volunteers keep our organization relevant, current, and evolving. Regularly, when people learn that I am serving on the planning committee, they ask "What can I do?" "How can I help?" "Whatever you need, count on me." That is the spirit of ACDA. People helping others, working for the betterment of choral music, the organization, their singers, their places of worship, and their communities.

In my work at the University of North Texas, I serve as a hybrid faculty member, with one role as a music educator and the other as choral conductor. I direct an auditioned mixed undergraduate choir, and I help train future choir teachers. What a privilege it is to invest in the new generation of teacher conductors, those who will contribute to building and growing our community of musicians, artists, and educators. I also engage heavily in research, my own and my graduate students'. I served in a similar job prior to UNT at the University of Utah. In my opinion, my position affords me exactly the type of stimulation I crave intellectually, while also feeding my need for artistry. I believe that the marriage of practice and scholarship is important, and much of my research centers on testing pedagogical claims empirically, so that indeed research can inform practice. As the Chair of the ACDA Research & Publications Standing

Committee, I am grateful that one of ACDA's purposes is "to foster and promote significant research in the field of choral music." I served a 10-year term on the Editorial Board for the *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* as it was just becoming the official scientific research journal for ACDA. Authors have made significant contributions to the body of scholarship, and we are richer for it.

At FSU, Judy Bowers instilled in all of us a deep connection to pedagogy and a commitment to developmental choirs. Indeed, this investment in developmental choirs ensures that programs at all levels continue to flourish. The model of educating only the elite singers is simply not sustainable. I also learned from Judy that the building of culture in a choral ensemble is critically important. Singers should be given opportunities to thrive and feel celebrated, irrespective of their entry level; life is better with music in it. Pedagogy is at the root of excellence in the choral profession.

I believe that ACDA plays an important role in fostering and promoting "choral singing that will provide artistic, cultural, and spiritual experiences for all," but only if we continue to widen our circle. Researchers, composers, conductors, community and international partners—all choral musicians share in the responsibility to engage with others in ways that include rather than exclude. Exclusion can sometimes happen as a result of elitism, marginalization, and a lack of willingness to understand and embrace the richness that comes from our diversity. While serving as Ethnic & Multicultural Affairs R&R Chair in both Florida and Utah, I sought to broaden our concept of quality repertoire and push boundaries for what was considered excellence in choral music. As a Cuban American woman and second-generation immigrant, I resonate with values of community and bonds of extended family. I am extremely privileged to regularly feel included in this profession by peers and colleagues. I also recognize that is not true for everyone, and that we must do everything we can to break down barriers to belonging, and more importantly, mattering.

Looking to the future of our organization, I believe that my experiences as conductor, researcher, teacher, and leader position me well to represent the many voices within ACDA. Bringing people together is a strength of mine, as is my tenacity in finding common ground to create bridges between conflicting ideas. My own personal philosophy of leadership is that effective leaders know in which contexts it is necessary to be alpha and in which contexts beta is more appropriate. Further, empowering others to serve and grow into their leadership elevates us all. As JFK posited, "A rising tide lifts all boats." The success of one takes nothing away from another. We are all stronger when we bolster another's success. If selected to lead, I would continue (a) seeking avenues to cultivate leadership in others, especially new voices eager to serve; (b) prioritizing pedagogy, so that singers at every level become lifelong choristers; (c) embracing the legacy that forged paths that continue to sustain us, and (d) looking to scholars, conductors, and composers who can carve new courses for keeping our profession vibrant and significant.