

Assessing Student Learning in the Music Department

A Range of Strategies are used: Quantitative-Qualitative / Objective-Subjective

ETS Major Field Test Results

A standardized test taken by all music majors before graduation. Currently used by 138 schools nationwide.

	Overall Score		Listening Comprehension Sub-Score		Music Theory Sub-Score		Music History Sub-Score	
	Raw Score (/200)	Percentile Rank	Raw Score	Percentile Rank	Raw Score	Percentile Rank	Raw Score	Percentile Rank
Average for all 5,557 students who have taken test 2006-2013	147		48.5		47		48	
CSB/SJU Average 2006-2013	159	90	60	94	59	91	55	77
CSB Average 2010-2013	162	95	63	98	62	96	58	89
CSB/SJU Average 2006-2009	156	83	57	86	56	86	52	68

Conclusions:

- 1) The percentile rankings show that CSB/SJU students are doing very well in comparison with a broad range of students from other schools. (However, the data would be more telling if the comparison was with our close peers.)
- 2) CSB/SJU student scores have increased in recent years.

Assessment at Applied Juries

Music students perform before a jury of faculty at the end of each semester. They complete a form that asks for a self-assessment of their progress. The applied instructor adds comments after the performance. This is an excerpt from one such form.

Student Self-Assessment at the End-of-the-Semester Jury

1. What goals did you achieve in the course of this semester?
I improved the breath support that I use and I increased my range. I played a lot of lyrical pieces this semester and my expression improved. I focused on the phrasing and breathing.
2. Are skills or understandings gained this semester demonstrated in your jury performance?
In the etude, I am required to interpret the piece to find phrasing and breathing. Also this piece challenges me to focus on clarity of attacks and tone throughout.
3. List unanticipated learning outcomes (if any) gained this semester.
This semester I realized that instead of just playing the notes on a page, I am starting to think about what they are doing. I pay more attention to the chords that I am outlining melodically, or where I fit in harmonically.

Instructor's Comments

Excellent progress in tonal development and phrasing! Works diligently on any areas of concern and continuously progresses at a fast rate.

Student's level of repertoire and technique is (circle one)
below average / average / above average for the 3 semesters of MUSC 227/337.

Departmental Assessment Plan

Different content areas within the music department assess their curriculum, strengths and weaknesses, and student learning every five years on a rotating schedule. This is an excerpt from the most recent Composition Assessment Report prepared by the music composition instructors.

Overall Assessment of Student Work in Composition Projects 2005-2010

(Likert scale of 1-5 = poor-exceptional, where 3 = fully meets expectations for an undergraduate composer in a B.A. program.)

	Average of all MUSC 357 students	Average of Comp Majors only in MUSC 357 (and 359)
Invention of basic material	3.55	3.72
Development/elaboration	3.05	3.27
Structure/organization	3.00	3.27
Musicality	3.68	3.72
Creativity	3.38	3.82
Overall (average of above)	3.37	3.56

Notable student achievements during the assessment period

[Three composition students] completed musical compositions as honor theses and were awarded departmental distinction when they graduated. [One other] did not quite complete the honors thesis document, though his song cycle was successfully performed.

[Five students] have entered orchestral compositions in the Duluth Symphony's annual student composition contest. [One student's] piece, The Singing Bone, won in 2005-2006 and was performed by the Duluth Symphony on their Young Person's series.

This is our  sic.

Students' weakest skills are developing and elaborating their musical ideas and creating music that is well structured; structure becomes exponentially more challenging as they try to compose more extended works. This is hardly surprising as these are skills that are learned over time with experience. Nonetheless, could we be more effective in teaching these skills? Perhaps spending more time looking at scores by master composers in lessons would be helpful. Perhaps giving students more exercises on developing and elaborating material either in lessons or as outside assignments would also be fruitful.