
CREATING AN EQUITABLE ASSESSMENT PROCESS FOR THE BACHELOR OF MUSIC DEGREE

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INTRODUCTION

This fall we plan to revisit our Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for the Bachelor of Music Degree. It currently has three concentrations: Music Education, Music Industry, and Music Performance. Assessment data is combined into a single report each spring.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

In this report I suggest four new SLOs and hypothesize a fifth. The new outcomes are adapted from our old outcomes but intended to streamline our current, highly complex assessment process and provide more meaningful information for faculty. Additionally, I would like to incorporate our emphasis on DEI initiatives into the assessment process.

Some of these outcomes bring together general goals of the original outcomes. I removed outcomes that were specific to concentrations, focusing instead on the core. These outcomes show what *all* BM students should be able to accomplish. While distinctions among concentrations are important, these outcomes emphasize their similarities for purposes of assessment. I also removed outcomes that related to degree requirements, specifically keyboard proficiency, ensemble participation, degree recital, and the Praxis exam.

We could go back to the old model, with multiple core outcomes and then additional concentration outcomes. One thing to keep in mind: the less time I have to spend on assessment for PASS the more time I have to study equity-based issues, such as evaluating assessment tools and the assessment process from an equity perspective. *Note: When we actually start this process, CARS/PASS would be happy to help facilitate the conversations.*

Students graduating with the Bachelor of Music degree should be able to:

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1. describe music that they have heard and/or seen using appropriate music theory terms. (upper level theory classes, including jazz?)
 2. articulate the relationship between historical/cultural context and musical content. (upper level history courses?) [the first two could also be done with program notes; what about industry?]
 3. perform on an instrument at a level appropriate to their major. [final recital]
 4. combine their knowledge of music theory, aural skills, communication skills, and conducting to lead a rehearsal as a conductor.
 5. Diverse repertoire? Students will perform at least one work by an under-represented composer on their degree recital.* *This one is a place-holder—I'll need to talk to a lot of studio faculty to determine whether it is even a good idea to suggest.*

DEI GOALS

1. Flexibility as far as what counts for repertoire, performance ability
2. Also gives some flexibility for future curriculum changes made to increase our DEI offerings because we're not doing a specific exam that would need to be changed
3. I think we should have an outcome specific to DEI
4. I also think we should use some of my assessment time to do DEI-related assessments/meta-assessment

FACULTY STAKEHOLDERS

1. John first
2. Then all faculty as a whole.
3. Technically theory and history areas, since they have specific outcomes related to their coursework.
4. Music ed because they typically get their own set of things and might feel overlooked.

OUTCOMES DISCUSSION

It is best to measure outcomes at the end of the degree. This shows what students remember and will be taking with them from the degree. However, in the SOM curriculum, students take their core history and theory classes early in the degree and their specialized courses at the end—there are no core classes required to be taken at the end of the degree. Additionally, although specialized courses ostensibly build on core classes they do not explicitly cover those topics. Further, taking exams outside of classes (our current assessment model) has been very work-intensive and it is not clear whether this affects student motivation. This issue would be resolved if the assessment were tied to a course—but there is no obvious course option.

This leads to a philosophical question: should our outcomes focus on 1) core content 2) concentration-specific courses or 3) a mix? Below are the pros & cons of each.

1) Only assess core content (this fits the outcomes provided above)

Pros:

- The focus is on what the degree has in common—and the commonality is why they are all BM degrees.
- If these are the core, aren't they especially important?
- Simple because it is one set of outcomes for all students

Cons:

- No core course required at end of degree, so how do we administer test? A separate test or project?
 - Hard to enforce/collect.
 - Also challenging to grade—not part of anyone's load, and we have lots of students graduating each year.
- We would have to decide whether we are committed to testing at end of degree, or is mid-degree assessment (at end of core rather than end of degree) ok?

2) Only assess concentration-specific content

Pros:

- More career focused—do they know what they need to know for their career path? That's a very reasonable question
- These classes occur near the end of the degree program so they are technically more holistic, but...

Cons:

- ...in our program, there is a disjunction between core and concentration-specific content and so concentration-specific courses may not build on core work in the same way they do in

other programs. So if we focus on concentration-specific outcomes we are basically ignoring core skills.

- Doesn't acknowledge what all BM students have in common

3) Assess both core and concentration-specific content (our current model)

Pros:

- Generates more data—allows us to assess broader range of skills
- Acknowledges importance of both core and career preparation

Cons:

- Work intensive because it likely involves more outcomes
- Doesn't solve problem of when/how to assess core—and now that becomes a bigger problem because we are doing more assessments in general
- Generates more data—which means more work for assessment coordinator/CARS (not a problem unless no one is interested)

CURRICULUM MAPPING (GENERAL)

Course Type*	SLO 1	SLO 2	SLO 3	SLO 4	SLO 5
Theory Core	X	X		X	
History Core		X			X
Lessons	X	X	X		X
Conducting/ Ensemble		X		X	X

Bold type X indicates the primary source of instruction for that outcome.

*These course types are required for all BM students.

LOGIC MODEL: SLO #1

By the completion of the Bachelor of Music degree, students will be able to describe music that they have heard and/or seen using appropriate music theory terms.

Educational Programming	Intermediate SLOs	Distal Outcome
In-class drills on basic tonal terms and musical examples Prelude assignment (drills on basic tonal content) Etudes (longer analysis examples covering basic tonal content)	Students will be able to define basic tonal music theory terms. Students will be able to recognize examples of music theory concepts when they see them on a score.	By the completion of the Bachelor of Music degree, students will be able to describe music that they have heard and/or seen using appropriate music theory terms.
----- In-class aural drills and out-of-class assignments on basic tonal content	----- Students will be able to recognize examples of music theory concepts when they hear them.	
Required upper-level course in post-tonal music	Students will become familiar with a wide range of repertoire.	
Coursework and projects in upper-level post-tonal course	Students will become familiar with a wide range of analytical terms.	

DESIGNING MEASURES

There are three obvious answers for this:

1. Program Notes w/Rubric
 - Pros:
 - Seems a natural fit
 - Would be easy to implement the requirement—everyone has to do a final recital
 - Practical life skill—something they might actually have to do in the future
 - Neatly ties together theory, history, and performance

- Cons:
 - Who will grade it?
 - Would a theory and history instructor always have to be on the committee?
 - Faculty buy-in: would private faculty want to grade/supervise this?
 - There are many final degree recitals each semester so there would be lots of program notes to grade.
 - How would we train raters?
 - What if a student didn't complete the program notes?
 - Grading could take a long time.
- Final: This originally seemed like a great idea but feasibility is a huge problem. My concern would be that no one would want to grade and it would be the same raters over and over. That would increase the workload on those same people and could lead to consistent rater tendencies.

2. Exam

- Pros:
 - Potentially quick to grade
 - Potentially could be automated on Canvas
 - Would require minimal faculty involvement
 - Just making the test and the key
- Cons:
 - Hard to enforce, and I hate enforcing this kind of thing
 - Could maybe include it in a required course—but there aren't any required senior-level courses, especially given the different concentrations
 - Information wouldn't be as robust because we'd be segmenting every skill into component pieces
 - If we didn't, it would be very hard to test
 - This is actually a big concern for me
- Final: This basically fixes the problems of the first model but has a significant problem of its own—is it really testing *synthesis*?

3. Class project

- Pros:
 - Every student must take two upper-level theory courses and one needs to be 252 or 253
 - So, we could have an assessment tied to 252 or 253
 - These classes typically include a final project with some degree of synthesis, which is really the goal of this
- Cons:

- What scores do we take? What if a student chooses to take both 252 and 253?
 - Most importantly, what if one student fails the assessment in both classes?
- Different instructors each time these courses are offered, and the courses can vary in layout—would every instructor be ok with doing this for assessment?
- Puts some onus on individual instructors to grade assignment according to rubric and report scores to coordinator
- Would it be the exact same project in every class every semester? Possibly (for instance, make a video...)
- Final: This might be the solution, although it requires a low level of buy-in across multiple faculty members (theory for this outcome, musicology for #2). That being said, this could help spread the work among faculty—theory and history do #1 and #2, performance does #3 and #5, conducting does #4.
- But! This wouldn't necessarily be during the last semester of coursework. See “Outcomes Discussion” for more information.

This outcome gets at a fundamental problem of assessment of higher-level skills—how do we get a neat, tidy, effective assessment that covers complex skills? One of my values that is emerging is that effort should be proportional to interest in results. We can easily come up with outcomes that are easy to assess (for instance, make 241 exit assessments the final theory exam), but are those really our goals for students?

Potential Choice: Option #3 (assess during 253/252)

- I will work with theory/comp area to make the following:
 - Assignment instructions that would work for both courses
 - Can't be identical assignments in case students take both 252 and 253
 - Can be generally the same, like creating a video presentation on a piece related to the class
 - Rubric for assessing the outcome that is
 - Fast
 - Easy
 - Potentially separate from how they assign grades for the assignment
- This information will then need to be posted in an accessible location (perhaps Teams?) so that every faculty member who teaches those courses has access to the project instructions, rubric, and reporting instructions

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- Think more (with PASS's help) about what to do if a student takes 252 and 253

POTENTIAL RUBRIC ELEMENTS

- Must use theory terms
- Must use terms accurately
- Must use terms appropriately for the repertoire (so for instance it may be the notes of C major but it isn't tonal, so calling it "major" is inappropriate)
 - Basically, they have to choose which terms to use based on the repertoire

IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY

- This outcome would be primarily taught in MUS 241 and MUS 252/253
 - MUS 241: tonal terms and analysis techniques
 - MUS 252/253: post-tonal terms and analysis techniques
- As it stands, the outcome is very broad so it is hard to pin down specific lesson plans, but it would be very important to make sure each instructor knows what we will be assessing at the end of the program.
- These courses are primarily taught by full-time faculty in the Theory/Comp area who are very invested in the curriculum. Buy-in isn't an issue with them. However, we sometimes need to have someone else teach 241 and especially 141 (prepares students for 241 but not required) so it would be important to communicate with all instructors of these courses each semester. Their openness to fidelity assessment could vary.
- Self-report seems to be working pretty well for us right now—we regularly discuss our students' progress through the curriculum and whether we are satisfied, as well as general issues we are observing (such as poor attendance).
- If we see consistent problems outside of the curriculum, like with attendance, we might need to bring in someone to help us address them. Right now attendance is a big issue but we're hoping it will improve as the pandemic recedes.

DATA COLLECTION, DESIGN, AND METHODS

- General outline
 - Data will be collected from a project at the end of MUS 252/253.
- Sample
 - Attempt to get all students who take 252 or 253

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- From above:
 - This may not be the same as all students who graduate from the program
 - Probably need to track by name or ID to make sure you aren't double-counting
 - What if a student takes both and gets different grades each time? Taking later score seems reasonable.
 - But what if they take them the same semester?
 - Timing
 - Single group, single time-point
 - At end of theory core (presumably, although some students may take one more tonal theory course before graduating)
 - Modality
 - This will be decided in consultation with instructors. It might be a paper or video based on the past.
 - Who will collect and how will you store?
 - Instructors will collect assignments
 - Instructors will assess assignments using rubric
 - Instructors will send final assessment results to assessment coordinator
 - Requires IRB approval?
 - If only for internal improvement, no IRB approval necessary
 - If you want to publish might need IRB approval

INTERPRETING RESULTS

I would assume that the program would be implemented (this is based on required coursework and this requirement is not likely to be changed in the immediate future) and I assume that the outcome will be met (high fidelity and favorable outcomes). But of course that will require testing!

LEARNING IMPROVEMENT

Scenario	Learning Improvement Plan
High fidelity, Favorable outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disaggregate data—is every demographic hitting the outcome equally?
Low fidelity, Favorable outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructor training/communication—are outcomes stored in an accessible location? Are project instructions stored in an accessible location? Are all instructors grading the same way? Does the assessment need to be adjusted to be more easily administered?
High fidelity, Unfavorable outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conversation with instructors—what do they think the breakdown is? Do we need to make changes to the classes to hit material earlier/more often? Do we need a practice assignment? If the instructor feedback is mixed or uncertain, or if these interventions don't work, work with CARS to find other possible problems & solutions
Low fidelity, Unfavorable outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructor training/communication—are outcomes stored in an accessible location? Are project instructions stored in an accessible location? Are all instructors grading the same way? Does the assessment need to be adjusted to be more easily administered? Conversation with instructors—what do they think the breakdown is? Do we need to make changes to the classes to hit material earlier/more often? Do we need a practice assignment? If the instructor feedback is mixed or uncertain, or if these interventions don't work, work with CARS to find other possible problems & solutions

- Logic model for high fidelity/unfavorable outcomes
 - First, we need to check whether the logic model for the program makes sense. If there aren't citations for each item, now would be the time to find them.
 - Then we would need to pinpoint exactly where the lack of progress was coming from. This might mean more assessment, particularly assessment of intermediate goals. It may be that we overestimated the skills students enter the program with and we need to provide "remedial" content.

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- Once changes are made, we will need to retest, likely at the intermediate level, in order to make sure the changes are actually improvements.

MOVING FORWARD

Key Takeaway: Assessment is very, very complex—much more than collecting data and “doing math stuff” to it. It involves a lot more thought than I think most faculty realize.

Professional Development: I would really like to shape our assessment process to be more equitable. This is both a personal goal and a priority of the SOM. However, it will take much more time than one week. I plan to do more research on equity and assessment in order to help guide the SOM towards an equitable assessment plan; this could also be a future publication.