

Department of Music and Dramatic Arts
Major Field Assessment Report
June, 2008

DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC GOALS

“Within its Mission, Role, and Scope, the working goals of SLU are to develop and maintain: 1. Quality educational programs. 2. A positive environment for students’ overall development. 3. Appropriate standards for the assurance of graduates’ competencies in major fields of study. These goals remain consistent for the three degrees offered by the Department of Music and Dramatic Arts (B.M., B. M.E., and M.M.).

Bachelor of Music Degree

One of the departmental objectives for the goals listed above states that “students completing the BM degree will be well-prepared for continued studies at the graduate level.” The assessment criteria that pertain to this survey states that “85% of graduates will respond with ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ to the question ‘How satisfied are you with your readiness for graduate level (Masters or Doctorate) music study? (item 36).’” The twenty B.M. students answered with an average of 4.42, thereby giving a positive response to this criterion.

A recurring theme throughout student comments for all three degrees involves dissatisfaction with music history classes and theory classes. For the latter, a hiring freeze was lifted last year and we expect an improvement from a recent change in personnel. The former has been an intractable issue due to the lack of a full-time music history specialist on our staff.

Bachelor of Music Education Degree

A departmental objective for this degree program states, “students completing the BME program will have developed sufficient teaching techniques and skills that they will be well-prepared for their first teaching position.” The assessment criteria that pertain to this survey states that “85% of graduates will respond ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ to the statement ‘I believe my undergraduate training at SLU has prepared me well for my first teaching position (item 42).’” The six B.M.E students answered with an average of 3.94 thereby bringing us within six-hundredths of a point of achieving our goal.

Some relatively low scores reflect dissatisfaction with lack of in-service training, learning to develop lesson plans and instructional objectives, and learning to communicate with parents. These long-standing complaints have all been addressed in the recently implemented redesign of the BME degree. The next MFA report will reflect student critiques of a completely revised curriculum (e.g., there are now 180 hours of required in-service training prior to the student teaching semester, and new courses and syllabi to address lesson planning). Availability of course offerings continues to be a problem for music education students, due in part to minimum class size guidelines and highly specific prerequisite requirements in education courses. Advisor’s lack of knowledge about education requirements has also been a long-standing issue that has been addressed by requiring all upper class BME students to be advised by education faculty.

There was a thoughtful comment that the department would benefit from its own music education specialist (currently, two music education specialists are housed in the Department of Teacher Education); this position has in fact been listed as a high priority in the current budget request.

Master of Music

One of the department's objectives for the goals for this degree program states, "graduates of the MM program will be well-prepared for further graduate study at the doctoral level." The assessment criteria for this objective states, "85% of graduates will list 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' as a response to the statement 'my graduate experiences at SLU prepared me well for further education at the doctoral level (item 34.)'" The 23 M.M. students answered with an average of 3.76 thereby missing our departmental goal by .24 points. Concerns were expressed regarding graduate advising and theory instruction; both faculty positions have been recently replaced.

It appears that the senior exit survey is somewhat useful in measuring the goals of the music department. The criteria from the survey instrument have been used for eight years. The information gleaned from the results may aid the department in its quest to improve specific areas of the degree programs.

Conclusions

A review of the exit survey data shows no urgent areas for improvement across the degree programs, but low scores were observed for the following items:

In item 32, one B.M.E. student participated in a study abroad and/or student exchange experience and found the experience to be unsatisfactory. In item 33, one B.M.E. student participated in the Honors program and found the experience to be unsatisfactory. In item 34, two B.M. students participated in undergraduate research programs such as OSCAR, PROFIT, SURE, and SOAR and found the experience to be unsatisfactory. These results should be interpreted in the context of extremely small samples. The most serious complaint among undergraduates centers on the quality of facilities (specifically carpeting, which has been recently replaced).

The scores for major field subject testing are difficult to interpret without more information about the scoring system. Taken at face value, our students appear to fall close to the mean, which is the target for our undergraduates. Without the availability of national norms, it is difficult to derive meaningful conclusions, and consideration should be given to discontinuing use of the expensive and time-consuming ETS Major Field Test.

Recommendations for Curricular Change

- Music majors are instructed in Computer Literacy in MUS 217 Computer Applications for Music Majors. Currently, the curriculum for the course is limited to teaching the program Finale, the industry standard for music notation. Although students find the content useful, the syllabus could be modified to allow opportunities for learning to infuse technology in the K-12 curriculum (for BME students). The syllabi for MUS 303 Introduction to Music Education and EDUC 490 Special Methods in High School Subjects should also be considered from this standpoint.
- The syllabi for MUS 661/662 Styles and Analysis should be studied to address concerns about sequencing of course material (again, a new theory professor has been hired in the past year).