



POINT LOMA
NAZARENE UNIVERSITY

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MUSIC PROGRAM

SPRING 2015 ASSESSMENT REPORT

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Overview and Description

Each year at the end of the Spring Semester, the PLNU Department of Music conducts an assessment of a portion of its programs. Music Academics, Applied Instruction and Performing Ensembles are all assessed on a rotating basis, the assessment data is tabulated and the results are used to either make changes to our programs or to confirm that we are hitting our goals. In Spring 2015 we assessed the following LO's:

- Demonstrate essential competencies and musicianship skills in written music theory, Aural Skills, and keyboard
- Develop applied music skills in one primary performance area in both solo and ensemble settings.

As outlined in the Department of Musics Assessment Plan, these LO's were assessed using the following instruments:

- the *Piano Proficiency Exam* (given each semester) to measure “essential competencies in keyboard” at the initial and developing levels,
- the *Music Theory Placement Exam* and the Final Exams in MUT100 and MUT120, which provide entrance/exit scores to measure “essential competencies in written music theory” at the initial level
- the *final juries* for the Spring 2015 semester

Criteria for Success

The Department of Music has set the following standards as the goals for measuring the above LO's:

- *Piano Proficiency Exam* – 80% of students will pass all portions of the PPE by the end of the fourth semester of attendance at PLNU.

- *Music Theory Placement Exam* – 80% of students will pass the Placement Exam on the first attempt (usually at the end of MUT100) and 95% by the second attempt (at the end of MUT120)
- *Final Juries* – Students should be able to demonstrate an improvement from semester to semester as their scores and rubrics are compared. Should score no less than Developing and Proficient in at least one category.

Procedure

Assessment data is collected every semester. The Departmental Assistant stores and tabulates data for the Piano Proficiency each semester and tracks student progress. The Music Theory Placement Exam is given during the first week of the semester to all entering students, both entering freshmen and transfer students. The results of the test are tabulated and scored against the student's equivalent score in MUT100 or MUT120 in order to gain entrance/exit data. The tests are scanned and stored as pdf's on the server for five years. The Department of Music stores five years' worth of assessment artifacts and their associated rubrics. Tabular data is maintained for ten years. End-of-semester juries are video recorded and the videos are edited for length, slightly compressed and uploaded to a server. Students are sent a link so that they can download the video. Videos are stored for four years. The Jury committees submit scanned copies of their scored rubrics and students are also provided with copies of these.

The Music Faculty met on 12 May 2015 for a full day of assessment and discussion. The eight faculty members were broken into four groups with two members per group and asked to view a handful of juries at random. Each group was provided with a USB drive that contained anonymous jury videos. They were also provided with copies of blank rubrics as well as the rubric that the jury committees used to score the jury. No faculty member was working in her/his area of expertise. That is, the piano faculty were examining voice or instrumental juries, voice faculty were examining piano juries and so forth. They first examined the videos, scored the performance against the rubric

then checked their against that of the jury committee that scored the student. In this way they were able to both think about the quality of the work itself, how it scored against the departmental standards, as well as how the jury committees were functioning against departmental standards. The meeting ended with a lunch provided by the department, a discussion about each group’s findings and a set of suggestions for changes and improvements.

Conclusions Drawn from the Data

Music Theory Placement Exam

Table 1—Results of the Music Theory Placement Exam from 2009 to 2013

Year	No. of entering freshmen	Average entrance score	Average exit score	Percentage of students scoring 80 or higher
2009	22	8	83	65%
2010	23	6	86	100%
2011	29	10	92	100%
2012	27	12	87	83%
2013	27	10	86	84%
2014	17	13	76	65%

The results of our first two music theory courses represent among the most dramatic changes that we see in our entering freshman music majors. Many students, during the first few days of the semester when the test is administered, are unable to complete even a single portion of the entrance exam whereas most comfortably pass all of the sections of the same exam when administered at the end of the semester. However, the quality and the mix of the entering freshman class vary wildly from semester to semester. Some years we have quite a few students test at higher levels of music theory and who were fortunate enough to have access to either AP Music Theory classes or the Certificate of Merit program. During other years, however, such as the entering class of 2014, we admit an entering freshman class that benefitted from few if any of these opportunities. Although we did not hit our target of passing 80% on the first pass (during MUT100 in the Fall) we did pass more than 95% in the following semester with the final exam to MUT120. We feel that the pace and the content of MUT100 are

appropriate and are still pleased with the overall progress of our students. However, we realize that more and more students are coming out of California schools with little or no background in music theory in spite of the fact that such training is part of the core standards for California music programs. We are not planning on changing our approach at this point but will continue to monitor our entering classes. If we continue to see that our students need multiple attempts to pass the test then we may have to institute training for our students in the Summer before they arrive on campus.

Piano Proficiency Exam

The Piano Proficiency Exam is administered at the end of each semester by the Piano Faculty who also score the exam. The results are submitted to the Music Office where they are entered into a spreadsheet maintained by the Departmental Assistant. Both student scores and progress over time are tracked in the Music Office.

Table 2—Results of the Piano Proficiency Exam from 2009 to 2014 organized by entering class, showing the percentage of the class that completed all sections during the 4th to the 9th semester of matriculation.

year	# of semesters					
	4	5	6	7	8	9*
2006	20%	26%	37%	45%	65%	76%
2007	34%	54%	54%	54%	85%	85%
2008	44%	52%	61%	61%	74%	74%
2009	43%	46%	62%	67%	89%	89%
2010	19%	28%	35%	54%	61%	61%
2011	15%	18%	25%	30%	71%	84%

* —note that the final column may not be 100% as a result of students who transfer, drop the music major or do not complete the piano proficiency requirement.

The Piano Proficiency continues to be a source of concern for the faculty, specifically because students find ways to delay passing all portions of the exam until late in their music studies when they actually need the skills earlier in their work. At this point we are not even close to hitting the mark that we have set. The Piano Faculty have searched for ways to revamp the exam but have not reached a consensus yet. It is likely that the entire process will need to be re-examined and that a new approach will need

to be developed that more closely matches the expectations of the music faculty and that ensures that the students acquire badly needed keyboard skills at the beginning of their music studies where they are needed most.

Final Juries in Spring 2015

The committee felt that the day spent in reflection and assessment of our student's performance skills was both beneficial and instructive. We are aware that standards vary widely across the department and that juries represent everything from an upper-division student preparing a difficult sonata movement to a first-semester freshman who is taking lessons and seeing written music for the very first time in her life. We are also aware that different committees approach the jury process differently and that standards vary widely from jury to jury. The faculty suggested standardizing the look and feel of the scoring rubrics, even though the specific language will need to differ (between, for instance saxophone and classical voice) there should be enough uniformity that all of the rubrics look familiar from discipline to discipline.

Changes to be Made Based on Data

Music Theory Placement Exam

No changes to be made at this time. The quality and preparation level of each entering class need to be monitored from year to year. If preparation levels continue to drop then the class scope and timing may need to be adjusted.

Piano Proficiency Exam

The Piano Faculty are encouraged to find some creative solutions for the PPE. We are consistently not hitting our targets and need to find a way to redesign the process in order to ensure that necessary keyboard skills are in place earlier in the student's music studies.

Final Juries

- Standardize the look and feel of the rubrics (see attached) so that they all look familiar and score the same way
- Avoid + and – signs in scoring and avoid allowing a faculty member to circle the line on the side of the box between numbers of a rubric.
- Encourage a performance mentality as opposed to a “test taking” mentality. Encourage students to dress, behave and approach these juries just as if they were walking out on stage.