

The PLNU Department of Music assesses student competence and progress in four areas with the following tools:

- progress on basic musicianship via an entrance and exit exam at the end of the first or second semesters of the Freshman year in MUT100 and MUT120
- progress on basic keyboard skills with the Piano Proficiency test in the second and third years in the sequence of classes MUA141-143
- progress on music research, literature and critical thinking through the Music Research paper in MUH332
- development and articulation of calling, role, path and purpose through the final essay that integrates interviews, career path and reflection on their growth as a musician in the capstone course, MUH431

The stated goals for these four assessments are:

- 80% of students will score no less than an 80% on the final exam, thereby demonstrating “Proficiency” with all of the basic materials of music
- 75% of students will complete at least four of the six sections of the Piano Proficiency by the end of the Sophomore year (4th semester)
- 80% of students will score no less than “Proficient” in all categories of the Music Research Paper assessment rubric and “Mastery” in at least one section
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The Music Theory Entrance/Exit Exam

All entering music students are asked to complete an entrance exam in the first week of their freshman year (see Entrance Exam, below) that assesses their level of knowledge in all of the fundamental music-theory skills—keys and scales, intervals, chords and basic harmonic functions. In addition, this course also covers reading notation in bass and treble clef, basic sight singing and aural skills. The only students who do not take the test are those students who completed the Music Theory AP with a score no lower than a 4 and transfer students who have completed the lower-division music theory sequence.

Students are then given a version of this same test as the final exam for MUT100 (Basic Music Theory) and this material is a portion of the final exam for MUT120 (Music Theory I) during the Spring semester. The reason for covering this material twice is that some students test out of MUT100 and will, thus, not complete both the entrance and exit portions of the assessment. Testing at the end of both classes ensures that all entering freshmen complete both portions of the assessment.

Although this assessment tool has been used for ten years, accurate data has only been maintained for three. A change was made in 2009 to record not just the final exam scores, but to compare these scores back to the entrance exams, maintain scanned copies of both the entrance and exit exams and tabulate records based on the results. The table below provides the data for these students:

Table 1—A comparison of the entrance and exit exam scores for freshman music majors 2009 to the present

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	-- *	

*-- exam to be given Dec. 2012

As can be seen in the table above, the results of the entrance and exit exams are always dramatic. Music majors often arrive at PLNU with strong performing skills and musical talent, but with little or no preparation in music theory. Music Theory AP courses have been decimated in the past ten years as California public schools have staggered under continual budget cuts. Nowhere have these budget cuts been felt more than in the arts. As demonstrated by the extremely low entrance scores in Table 1, many of our students arrive with substantial gaps in all of the basic musical skills. However, the PLNU music faculty continues to demonstrate a remarkable ability to help our students gain a strong foundation in these basic skills within a very short time. The department's stated goal was that at least 80% of students would score at least an 80% on the exit exam during their first attempt. Not reflected in the table above are the students who repeated the exam in the hopes of improving their scores.

The scores from 2009, the first year in which we began recording this data, shows that a significant portion of our students, six out of twenty-two, did not demonstrate proficiency with musical materials by the end of the first semester. As a result of this finding, substantial changes were made to the fundamentals course, MUT100, so that greater time and emphasis was placed on in-class drilling, interaction with the material, practice tests and required tutoring for students who scored less than 80% on unit tests. The results in the following years clearly demonstrate a significant improvement as a result of this adjustment.

The Piano Proficiency Exam – MUA201

Every Music Major or Minor at PLNU is required to demonstrate basic keyboard knowledge and competency. Students are provided with three courses to help them complete this requirement, Piano Classes One and Two and the Piano Proficiency Class (MUA141, 142 and 143, respectively). The Piano Proficiency Class can be repeated until the test is passed. Once students pass all six portions of the exam they are given credit for MUA201 on their transcripts.

There are six sections to the Proficiency exam:

- A Bach Two-Part Invention or a Sonatina by Clementi or Kuhlau. More difficult Baroque or Classical literature is acceptable. The work does not have to be memorized.
- A prepared hymn (not gospel song) arranged in chorale style, suitable for congregational singing.
- The “Star-Spangled Banner: or “America” (My Country Tis of Thee) with conventional harmonies.
- One folk song, played at sight; the student will provide the harmonies of a single-line melody.
- One four-part hymn at sight.
- A simple improvisation using I-IV-V chords

Table 2, below, lists the results of three years of accumulated data, for the classes that matriculated in 2007-2009 (graduating classes of 2010-2012).

Table 2—Student Progress on the Piano Proficiency Exam (MUA201) broken down by matriculation year

Matriculation Year	No. of majors entering/ continuing	No. who completed at least 4 parts by the 4th semester	Percentage of students at or above target	No. of students who did not complete in 8 semesters
2007	27/20	11	55%	3
2008	22/15	9	60%	3
2009	23/21	11	52%	11*

* the eighth semester is SP12. Most of these students will finish this year.

The stated goal for the Music Department is that 75% of students will finish 4 out of the 6 sections by the end of the fourth semester (end of the sophomore year). The purpose of the exam is to ensure that all students obtain sufficient keyboard skills to be able to complete the work in upper-division classes. The purpose of requiring that four out of the six sections be completed by the end of four semesters is to ensure that these keyboard skills are acquired early enough in the student's academic career to be of use in these same upper-division courses.

Our results indicate that our students are passing the exam, but not in our envisioned timeframe. Only a handful of students each year graduate without the exam completed, usually only two or three, requiring them to return to campus and finish the exam at a later date. However, close to half of our students each year are postponing passing the exam until their last year of study. Our feeling is that there is an administrative oversight that allows students to fall through the testing process. The faculty are exploring ways of monitoring student progress more closely and tracking their progress concurrently with the piano classes.

The Research Paper in MUH332 and the Final Essay in MUH431

MUH332 is the second in a series of four courses devoted to Music History and covers the music of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. In each of the courses students are required to complete a major project by the end of the course and the project for this course is a research-oriented paper that pulls together the student's abilities to analyze, research and listen critically, then pull all of their ideas together in a paper that uses clean, academic prose. For many of the music students this paper is their first experience with developing and supporting a musically oriented thesis.

We have not yet collected data on this item as it is a new part of our data collection. Although the paper has been assigned in this course for many years this year will be our first attempt at tracking how our student's critical thinking skills are developing. Our goal is that at least 80% of our students will demonstrate "Proficiency" and at least one area where they are demonstrating "Mastery."

MUH431 (Faith, Life and Music) is the capstone course for all music majors and is usually taken in the Spring semester of the Senior year. Since its creation in 2005 this course has evolved into a dynamic mix of very pragmatic career development materials intermingled with source readings on the influence of Christian faith upon the practice of the discipline. By its nature the course contents shift with the vocational aspirations and interests of the class members, so the crafting of consistent and objective assessments has been challenging. The findings from the Spring 2011 course measure an average score that is significantly higher than the current goal (see [Music_Evidence_2010-2011_Assessment Report Music Part 2.pdf](#)). However, the department could profitably continue to examine the ways in which the course objectives are defined and evaluated, so as to have a clearer definition of intended outcomes.