**ALBION COLLEGE MUSIC DEPARTMENT ALUMNI SURVEY OF MUSIC CURRICULUM 2009-2010**

**Introduction**

The Music Department Alumni Survey was designed to elicit feedback about the curriculum for music majors at Albion College. Questions and statements used within the survey were formulated from the goals and objectives the department designed and coincide with the NASM guidelines for curricula at degree granting institutions such as ourselves.

The survey was divided intro four distinct sections consisting of demographic information to be completed by all participants, followed by one section for each of the degrees offered at Albion College: 8-unit liberal arts music, 12.5-unit music education and 12.5-unit music performance. The degree earned by the participant determined which of the final three sections they completed. Following each of the three degree sections was one open-ended response to provide all participants an opportunity to express any thoughts that may not have been adequately addressed within the survey.

The Music Department Alumni Survey was sent via email to *N*=71 graduates of Albion College who graduated with either an 8-unit liberal arts music degree, or 12.5-unit music education or music performance degree between 2000 and 2009. The department felt that enough changes had been made in faculty and program design to warrant limiting the range of participants allowed to this ten year timeframe. The email list was provided by the Institutional Advancement staff of Albion College. After a clearly identified time period for completion, the survey yielded *n*=19 respondents, which was used for data analysis. While this number is statistically not as high as hoped, the number represents a reasonably equal balance among the three degree programs.

**Results**

Of the *n*=19 respondents to the survey, *n*=4 (21%) were 8-unit liberal arts, *n*=7 (37%) were 12.5 unit performance, and *n*=8 (42%) were 12.5 unit music education degree recipients. Beyond this relatively even distribution, respondents were asked what primary instrument or voice category they were. The largest group was instrumental-band, with *n*=8 (42%) consisting of *n*=3 woodwind, *n*=4 brass, and *n*=1 percussion. The instrumental-band included woodwind, brass, and percussion majors. The second largest group was voice, with *n*=6 (32%) followed by instrumental-strings at *n*=4 (21%) and piano at *n*=1 (5%). This distribution is consistent with the current representation of music majors in 2009-2010 and therefore is considered valid.

Using the 8-unit major as the foundation for the rest of the survey, it was designed to present the same set of statements for each degree program, along with additional statements specific to music performance and music education following. These statements have been collected and analyzed as one aggregate group in order to determine commonalities across the programs.

Concerning all of the statements used in the survey, the respondents were presented with statements for which they were to respond on a Likert-type scale of “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” with three gradations of possible responses in between from “agree” to “neutral” to “disagree”. Because of the length of the survey, and the detail in which it delved, it was felt that providing only five possible choices would encourage more respondents to finish the survey and would yield more significant results.

Foundational Skills

The first four statements addressed the respondent’s skill set in the following areas: (1) writing about music, (2) using research tools, (3) using music-specific technology, and (4) synthesizing music theory, history, and performance. These four skill sets are fundamental to any music degree program and are skills which every musician must have in order to be successful. Results from the four statements are illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Fundamental Skills

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Writing about music | *n*=3 | *n*=13 | *n*=2 | *n*=1 | *n*=0 |
| Using research tools | *n*=4 | *n*=5 | *n*=3 | *n*=7 | *n*=0 |
| Using music-specific technology | *n*=1 | *n*=5 | *n*=9 | *n*=4 | *n*=0 |
| Synthesizing theory, history, and performance | *n*=5 | *n*=11 | *n*=1 | *n*=2 | *n*=0 |

*NOTE: The statement began, “The Albion College music curriculum helped develop my skills in the following areas:”*

The most positive results occur in the statements concerning (1) writing about music and (2) synthesizing theory, history and performance with *n*=16 at agree or strongly agree for both. The most negative results occur in the statement concerning using research tools with *n*=10 responding at neutral or below. The fourth, using music-specific technology is fairly neutral, but leaning slightly toward the positive.

Music Theory, Aural Skills, & Keyboard Skills

The next set of statements focused on the four foundational theory courses MUS 101, 102, 201, and 202 and their corresponding keyboard skills labs. These courses are designed to provide music majors with a strong understanding of the “building blocks” of music from scales and chords to voice leading and analysis. Students are expected to visually identify and understand these concepts in theory, and reproduce these concepts both vocally and aurally in aural skills. The keyboard skills lab is designed to be the application portion of these theory courses. In Table 2 below, the results are indicated.

Table 2 – Music Theory, Aural Skills, Keyboard Skills

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Component | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Music Theory | *n*=7 | *n*=9 | *n*=2 | *n*=1 | *n*=0 |
| Aural Skills | *n*=2 | *n*=10 | *n*=3 | *n*=3 | *n*=1 |
| Keyboard Skills | *n*=1 | *n*=4 | *n*=6 | *n*=6 | *n*=2 |

*NOTE: The statement began, “The Albion College music curriculum has helped me to understand and apply the basics of the following areas:”*

According to Table 2, music theory (82%) and aural skills (63%) have the most positive results with a majority of respondents selecting agree or strongly agree for both. The keyboard skills category represents the least positive results with 74% selecting neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree.

Music History, Part 1

The other foundational course work in every music degree program is music history. At Albion College music history is a two semester sequence covering musical periods from Ancient Greece through the 20th century, musical genres such as the symphony, art song, and concerto, mediums including orchestral, piano, and choral as well as the composers who write in those mediums. Music majors in all three degree programs take the same two semester sequence of music history. Described below in Table 3 are the results from the *n*=19 respondents concerning these four aspects of music history.

Table 3 – Music History, Part 1

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Aspect/Component | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Musical periods (Baroque, Classical, etc) | *n*=9 | *n*=6 | *n*=1 | *n*=3 | *n*=0 |
| Genres (Symphony, Concerto, etc) | *n*=7 | *n*=8 | *n*=1 | *n*=3 | *n*=0 |
| Mediums (Orchestra, Piano, etc) | *n*=7 | *n*=9 | *n*=2 | *n*=1 | *n*=0 |
| Composers (Bach, Mozart, etc) | *n*=5 | *n*=11 | *n*=0 | *n*=3 | *n*=0 |

*NOTE: The statement began, “The Albion College music curriculum has provided me the knowledge and understanding of the historical development of music in the following areas:”*

For all of the aspects/components surveyed concerning music history the majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. A small minority, *n*=3 disagreed with the statements, and no respondents (*n*=0) strongly disagreed.

Music History, Part 2

The second part of the Music History portion of the survey dealt more specifically with musical forms. Form in music can be considered through a theoretical lens, but in the case of this portion of the survey it is considered through a historical lens. Part of the music history sequence focuses on form in terms of its inception, development, and the changes that occur from composer to composer and from era to era. The participant’s responded to the following statement: “The Albion College music curriculum has helped me develop a working knowledge and understanding of musical forms and structures from a historical perspective.” Results from this segment of the survey show *n*=3 strongly agree, *n*=12 agree, *n*=4 were neutral and *n*=0 disagreed and strongly disagreed. Overall, this was a very positive result with 80% of the respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.

Private Lessons

The study of solo repertoire and technical studies or etudes is critical to the advancement of all music majors. Regardless of the degree program, all music majors take private lessons. 12.5-unit majors study a minimum of 4 units, while 8-unit majors need only a minimum of 2 units of private study. However, most 8-unit majors choose to study more. The participants responded to the following statement: “The Albion College music curriculum has helped me develop a working knowledge of solo repertoire and technical studies in my major area of study.” Used in this regard, “major area of study” refers to the participant’s area of private lessons, whether is be voice, piano, winds, strings, brass, or percussion. Results show a wide range of responses with *n*=5 strongly agreeing, *n*=9 agreeing, *n*=2 being neutral, and *n*=3 disagreeing (*n*=0 strongly disagreed).

Ensembles

Understanding performance practice through ensemble participation is also one of the pillars of any music major’s experience. Depending in the student’s principle instrument or voice, they participate in one of the department’s major ensembles every semester that they are in residence. Results from the survey indicate that *n*=7 strongly agreed that the Albion College music curriculum help develop their practical knowledge of performance practice in their particular ensemble performing, *n*=9 agreed, n=0 were neutral, *n*=2 disagreed, and *n*=1 strongly disagreed. In the whole, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the curriculum has been beneficial in this area.

Concert Attendance & Music Major Meetings

A non-course related requirement that must be fulfilled by all music majors is concert attendance. All majors are expected to attend a minimum of 14 department-sponsored concerts each year the student is in residence as a music-major. The purpose of this requirement is to help insure that students are experiencing a wide range of musical genres, styles, ensembles, and performers. Additionally, music majors must all attend a regularly scheduled music major meeting where their colleagues perform repertoire on their major instrument or voice. These meetings may also include master classes by professional musicians when they perform recitals on campus. When the statement was posed, “The Albion College music curriculum has helped me develop a basic knowledge of the standard repertoire of other instruments than my own major area of study, through recitals, music major meetings, or master classes attended,” the results are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4 – Concert Attendance & Music Major Meetings

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| …basic knowledge of the standard repertoire of other instruments than my own… | *n*=5 | *n*=5 | *n*=5 | *n*=3 | *n*=1 |

Synthesis of Knowledge

Ideally, when a music major graduates from Albion College with a degree in music, they should be able to synthesize all of the material learned from music theory, history, private study, ensemble participation, etc. as these are all interconnected areas. The final statement posed to all music major graduates was “The Albion College music curriculum has helped me to work independently on a variety of musical problems by synthesizing my knowledge in performance, aural, verbal and visual analysis (theory), composition, repertoire knowledge, and music history. “ Results from this final statement are shown below in Table 5.

Table 4 – Synthesis of Knowledge

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| …work independently on a variety of musical problems by synthesizing my knowledge… | *n*=3 | *n*=7 | *n*=1 | *n*=1 | *n*=1 |

**Conclusions & Actions**

Instrument Methods Sequence

Based on the results of the Alumni Survey and Department discussions it was agreed that we would revise the instrument methods sequence of courses (MUS 240-246). As the courses are currently structured, all music education students are required to take six of the seven courses which are each .25 units. The department agreed with the concerned addressed by many of the alumni that one hour a week was not enough time to learn to play and teach all of these instruments. This, coupled with the need to reduce the number of adjunct faculty we employ to teach within the Music Department led us to the following new model.

Each of the instrument methods courses will be paired and combined, and increased to .5 units of credit. High Brass Methods (MUS 240) and Low Brass Methods (MUS 241) will be combined into a Brass Methods (number TBD) for .5 units. The same will be done for Woodwind Methods and String Methods. Percussion Methods, because of the vast amount of material to be covered, will also change from a .25 unit to a .5 unit course.

In addition to the added meeting time each week, within each of these courses students will learn about how to write/compose/arrange for the instruments being studied. By doing this, we eliminate the need for Orchestration class (MUS 215), freeing up 1 unit of coursework to filled with other pertinent courses.

Lastly, each instrument methods course will have a lab component (0 unit) along with the regularly scheduled class meeting times. The lab will be an ensemble setting where students have the opportunity to perform on these secondary instruments in a small ensemble. The added benefit of “real-life” experiences on these instruments is increased as we will have students from the conducting classes rehearse these secondary instrumentalists in the lab, thereby giving the conductors a “real life” experience as well.

Below is how the music education sequence would look before and after these changes:

Before After

MUS 240 – High Brass Methods - .25 units MUS 2?? – Brass Methods - .5 units  
MUS 241 – Low Brass Methods - .25 units MUS 2??L – Lab – 0 units  
MUS 242 – WW Methods (single reed)- .25 units MUS 2?? – Woodwind Methods - .5 units  
MUS 243 – WW Methods (dbl. reed) - .25 units MUS 2??L – Lab – 0 units  
MUS 244 – High String Methods - .25 units MUS 2?? – String Methods - .5 units  
MUS 245 – Low String Methods - .25 units MUS 2??L – Lab – 0 units  
MUS 246 – Percussion Methods - .25 units MUS 2?? – Percussion Methods - .5 units  
 MUS 2??L – Lab – 0 units  
MUS 215 – Orchestration – 1 unit \*Orchestration melded into methods courses  
TOTAL UNITS: 2.75 TOTAL UNITS: 2

An aspect of the music major experience that we have lacked up to this point, are pedagogy and literature courses. The next step is to develop a set of courses to meet this need, utilizing the .75 units available within the music education major, and the 1 unit available in the music performance major. Note that eliminating MUS 215 – Orchestration would free up 1 unit in the performance major curriculum.

Keyboard Skills Lab

One of the other concerns that arose from the Alumni Survey and within the Department discussions was the need to revise and solidify the Keyboard Skills Lab. At various times, this lab has been its own separate set of courses, integrated within the music theory sequence, and somewhere in between. There is a strong need to have this lab be much more applicable to the music theory sequence, and much more applicable to the music major’s practical needs.

For education majors, keyboard skills will be used on a daily basis in the K-12 classroom setting to assist in learning melodic lines, to harmonize student melodies, or to accompany various musical performances. For the performance majors, keyboard skills will help to develop the inner ear, to understand the connection between soloist and accompaniment, and to develop a deeper understanding of how a composition is created.

The time devoted to keyboard skills and its connection with Music Theory 101, 102, 201, and 202 will not change. But the evaluation process, piano proficiency test, will become more substantial and rigorous. We are in the process of redesigning the proficiency test and hope to implement it beginning with the incoming first-year class. Once the actual test is designed, we will include below.

Piano Proficiency Test Goes Here

The department considered all of the responses to the Alumni Survey, and we feel strongly that the two areas addressed represent the majority of the deficiencies identified by our alumni. The Music Department does have the added benefit of being a member of the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) which conducts periodic reviews of the program, its curricula, and determined if it meets the expectations of this national organization. We have been a member of NASM for over 50 years and have always been members in good standing – a strong support of our program.