

2012 Undergraduate Council Program Review of Department of Music

Overview

The Department of Music at UCSD has internationally renowned faculty and a highly ranked graduate program, both of which are valuable assets to the undergraduate music students. Overall, the undergraduate program is doing a good job of serving its majors, minors, and general education students. Many students are very pleased with the program. However, the committee did notice some areas that could be improved. Indeed, we felt that making changes in three general areas would go a long way towards making the program uniformly satisfying to undergraduate music students, especially the majors. The three recommended changes are to 1) coordinate the instruction both between and within course sequences required of majors, most notably in the music theory and musicianship sequences, 2) make clear to prospective and current students that the program provides a liberal arts education and is not a conservatory, and 3) provide mechanisms for building a stronger sense of community for music majors.

Brief Background

Students can receive BA degrees in Music (in one of five areas of emphasis), Music Humanities, or Interdisciplinary Computing in the Arts (ICAM). As of 2011, the music department had 173 majors and 247 minors. Of the majors, 98 were in Music, 8 in Music Humanities, and 83 in ICAM. ICAM is a fast growing area. The faculty consists of 23.67 FTEs.

Response to Previous Review

In the previous CEP Review of the Department of Music (1999-2000), the committee made seven recommendations. The department responded substantively to all but one of these suggestions. Obviously the biggest change from the previous review has been the inauguration of the Conrad Prebys Music Center, which has centralized the administration of the department and provided ample and improved practice and performance spaces. This has also allowed the department to expand the number of performance and recital opportunities for undergraduates, as recommended by the prior review committee. The department was divided on the need for a capstone concert at the end of every major's career, feeling that there are adequate performance opportunities throughout a student's academic career. The recommendation that the department offer more courses in jazz and world music has been amply met, thanks to the addition of new faculty positions in jazz.

Recommendation #5 concerns what the committee saw as the disparity in technical and academic preparation among undergraduate majors. The department responds that the new facilities have helped to place students and faculty in closer proximity, and while we agree that this has been a major improvement, there are still problems of communication and clarity that we address in subsequent paragraphs. The committee notes that recommendation #6 which suggested a reduction in the number of required courses is the one area that the department feels it cannot

alter. Given the technical requirements of a typical Music major, we agree that the department should maintain its current level of required units.

Finally, the previous review suggested that “the formula for TAs should be adjusted to recognize the labor-intensive nature of most musical education.” The department feels that this matter is out of their hands, in this current budget crisis. We agree that unless funding for graduate students is increased, the formula cannot be altered by the department.

Evaluation of the Undergraduate Program

To prepare this report, the committee met with the department chairs (incoming and outgoing), Senate faculty members, undergraduate students (majors and minors), lecturers, teaching assistants, undergraduate student affairs officers, the student affairs manager, the academic business officer, and a dean of academic advising.

The committee found that the department is generally doing a good job of educating music majors and minors. Many students are very happy with their experience in the department. Not surprisingly, though, we did learn of ways to improve the program. Three areas of concern rose to the top. In decreasing order of importance, they are 1) better coordination within and between the core course sequences, 2) communicating to current and prospective students what kind of educational experience to expect, and 3) building a feeling of community for music majors. We feel that addressing these three issues will make a large difference in the quality of the undergraduate education and in student satisfaction.

1. Coordinating within and between core course sequences

Courses in music theory and musicianship skills constitute a critical foundation in the music major curriculum. It quickly became clear in our discussions with undergraduates and graduate instructors that the theory and musicianship courses need significant improvement, specifically Music 2ABC and Music 101ABC (and to a lesser degree 102ABC). These courses are not required for ICAM and the Music Humanities majors, but they are required of all other Music Majors (with the exception that 101C and 102ABC are not required for Jazz majors).

The problem with these courses is a lack of consistency and integration within and across the Music 2ABC and Music 101ABC sequences. Undergraduate students voiced strong and unanimous frustration with the flow and clarity of material presented in these sequences. Among the faculty and graduate students teaching these courses, there is not enough coordination with respect to how one quarter prepares students for the next, which is especially problematic given the sequential nature of these topics.

Skills taught in Musicianship such as sight-singing, dictation, and rhythm naturally build on one another and benefit from, if not demand, some rudimentary theory knowledge. While some music theory is at times introduced in the Music 2 sequence, it is not done so in a consistent way. It is not at all clear to students where exactly "music theory" begins in these course sequences, nor what skills and knowledge they are expected to possess by the end of each quarter in Music

2. Compounding these problems is the fact that the Music 101ABC sequence appears to vary widely each year, with almost no consistency from one year to the next with respect to how the material is paced across the three quarters.

Faculty indicated that these problems have resulted from constantly shifting teaching assignments within the sequences and from the absence of a single faculty member charged with overseeing the entire theory/musicianship area. The faculty expressed a desire for an LSOE "theory czar" who would oversee the theory and musicianship courses and advise the faculty and graduate instructors who assist with the teaching in these areas. We strongly endorse this idea and agree that it would be an enormous benefit for the department's undergraduate curriculum. However, even without such a position, we feel that the faculty could themselves do far more to provide coherence to the courses in this area. Most importantly, there is an urgent need for clear benchmarks regarding the skills and knowledge that students are expected to possess at the end of each quarter.

In addition, particularly in the case of the Music 2 sequence, clarifying those benchmarks explicitly would be enormously helpful to transfer students. Many transfer students come from institutions where musicianship skills are taught in a very different way, and therefore cannot place out of the lower division Music 2 course, even though they do place out of some or all of the Music 101 courses. This causes a problem in that many transfers are then forced to take a third year of taking Music 2 to complete the degree. This difficulty of transferring coursework in musicianship classes is a common problem faced by most music departments, given that there is less standardization of content in those courses compared with music theory. However, if the faculty were to outline and make clear to incoming students what their standards are regarding musicianship courses, it would help incoming students prepare and plan better for placement tests, in addition the added benefit of increasing consistency from one year to the next in terms of what is actually taught in these classes, which is without question a major cause of frustration for the current students, whether they are transfers or not. An even better goal for the department would be to work towards articulating both the theory and musicianship courses with the community college system, a process that would be a huge benefit for transfer students, who constitute an increasing population within the department.

Finally, both undergraduates and graduate instructors complained that there was often insufficient coordination among the instructors and teaching assistants in the Music 2 sequence. We were told that most Teaching Assistants (who teach lab sections) do not attend the instructor's lectures, and that this often leads to material being repeated or out of order. Again this is basically a matter of organization and oversight, more than new resources. We urge the faculty to address these problems since the theory and musicianship courses are not only foundational in terms of student knowledge and skills, but are also critical in establishing a feeling within the undergraduate community that the faculty is attentive to their needs.

To a lesser degree, we heard similar complaints from students and graduate instructors with respect to the 170 series of courses, which are part of the curriculum for both ICAM majors and Music Majors with an emphasis in Technology. Again the problems in this area, while perhaps not as severe as those in the theory courses, revolve around a need for faculty to take a more active role in course development and oversight. It appears that on at least some occasions,

certain courses in this sequence - notably Music Psychoacoustics - were taught in a way that had little to do with their stated topic in the catalog, and that did not provide the foundational knowledge that students expected and needed. Again with respect to the ICAM area, faculty expressed a desire for an LSOE position to oversee the courses and help achieve this goal. We concur with the faculty that such an LSOE for ICAM would be of great benefit for the department. Whether or not that position comes, however, we again urge the faculty to take a more active role in oversight of the curriculum to achieve better integration and consistency across the courses and from one year to the next.

2. Communication / Branding

One of the consistent complaints from undergraduate students involves conflicting interpretations of what kind of music education they can expect at UCSD. Some students enter the program with extensive background in performance while others want to focus on music technology or computer programming. Some students focusing on performance, notably vocalists, felt that the department lacked enough specialized courses that are typically part of a performance training program. Students with extensive background in theory are sometimes frustrated at taking classes in which the level of instruction seems directed at those with very little theory background. These are problems endemic to any large, diverse program, but it seems that Music needs to articulate not only what it *does* but what it *does not* do. Despite having a faculty of superb, internationally recognized performers, the department does not offer a traditional conservatory experience for undergraduates but, rather, a general liberal arts education in music. Students need to understand what this distinction means from the time they enter the program and through their upper division curriculum. For example, some students expressed frustration with not being able to access instruments and practice rooms at all times, including all summer. The committee's sense was that these students were mistakenly expecting, at some level, a conservatory-like experience. We deeply respect the advising that students get once they are in the program, but we feel that better branding of the program's salient features (modern and contemporary composition, ICAM, avant garde performance methods, jazz and music of the African diaspora, etc.) is necessary. Such branding could appear on the website, in catalogue copy, and in various promotional opportunities such as Admit Day, and would help defray some of the concerns students express about failed expectations.

3. Community

One of the major recommendations of the previous review concerned the need for better facilities, a condition admirably met by the construction of the Conrad Prebys Music Building. This has led to a greater centralization of functions and the potential for better interaction among students, faculty, and staff. It might seem that a music department, by definition, is a site for collaboration and community through ensemble work and performance, but students complained about feeling disenfranchised from each other and from faculty members. They perceive themselves to be undervalued compared to their graduate student peers. The department attempted to counteract this feeling many years ago by instituting the 143 seminar required of all music majors. We feel this is a valuable opportunity for students and faculty to meet and discuss matters of common concern, but we also heard that it is less a forum for discussion than an opportunity for visiting speakers and faculty members to discuss work in progress. Students felt

that the primarily “top-down” nature of the seminar’s presentations left them little chance to engage in discussions with one another and hear each other perform or present their work. We wonder if it might be possible to revise 143 to include more undergraduate participation through individual performances, colloquia, and information dissemination.

A related issue concerns students majoring in ICAM. While they are integrated into courses in Visual Arts, Mathematics, and Computer Science, they often do not feel close to their Music Department cohort. They sometimes feel that the required courses they take in Visual Arts do not pertain to their interest in Music. We are not in a position to comment on the relevance of the cross-disciplinary nature of ICAM, but we do take seriously the complaint about community. The committee would like to see if there is some way to better integrate ICAM students into the Music program, perhaps by modifying 143 to include them or even to divide 143 into two seminars so that the entire cohort of majors could meet in common. Whatever solution is found, ICAM is clearly a growing focus of the department where students need to feel connected to their music colleagues.

Recommendations

While we feel that the undergraduate program is in good shape, we have some specific recommendations for improvement.

1. *Coordinate between and within the 2ABC, 101ABC, and 102ABC series.* We suggest appointing a representative faculty committee to generate a document outlining what each course in each series should accomplish, as well as how each series is related to each other. We believe that such a committee could provide a document with an appropriate level of detail that the entire faculty would endorse (and enforce).
2. *Make clear to current and prospective students that the goal of the undergraduate program is to provide a liberal arts education and it is not a conservatory.* Be clear about what the difference is and what students should (and should not) expect. Such branding could appear on the website, in catalogue copy, and in various promotional opportunities such as Admit Day.
3. *Build a stronger feeling of community among the music majors.* We first note that heeding recommendations 1 and 2 above will help with the sense of community because students will feel more valued, experience less frustration, and share a core background. In terms of additional concrete recommendations, we suggest two potential avenues. First, there is a desire for more opportunities for musical collaborations with fellow students, and providing such opportunities seem like a natural way for the students to interact and to increase shared experiences. Second, the 143 seminar could be partially restructured to encourage more active participation from majors. For example, students could occasionally showcase their talents, especially their collaborations with other music students. The seminar could also be used to build a bridge between the music majors and the ICAM students, who currently do not participate in 143 and who feel disconnected from music majors. These are just some suggestions for building a sense of community that the committee noted; clearly, there are many

other ways to achieve the same goal. The key is for the department to actively consider options and to implement change.

Respectfully submitted,

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Michael Davidson
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July 19, 2012

October 4, 2013

PROFESSOR RAND STEIGER, Chair
Department of Music

SUBJECT: Undergraduate Program Review for the Department of Music

The Undergraduate Council considered the report of the subcommittee charged with reviewing the undergraduate program of the Department of Music at its December 14, 2012 meeting. The Council supports the findings and the recommendations of the review subcommittee, which highlight the outstanding faculty and staff of the Department, and provide recommendations that would “go a long way towards making the program uniformly satisfying to undergraduate music students, especially the majors.” Our comments on the review subcommittee’s recommendations are as follows:

1. Coordinate the instruction both between and within course sequences required of majors, most notably in the music theory and musicianship sequences

The Council supports the report’s recommendation for an LSOE to coordinate these important course sequences, but agrees with the review subcommittee’s assessment that greater oversight and involvement by Department faculty can also effectively manage the current issues with those courses. Thus, the Council is pleased to see that the Department has taken actions to address the issues outlined in the report.

The Department has identified the lack of consistent staffing for these sequences as a potential source for the problems associated with the 2 and 101 series. The Council is pleased to see that the Department now requires more active supervision and support for graduate student instructors. We will ask the Department to report on this policy at the time of the follow up review. The Council also supports the Department’s plans to designate a faculty member as coordinator for the theory sequences.

2. Make clear to prospective and current that the program provides a liberal arts education in music and is not a conservatory

The review subcommittee and the Department’s response both speak to the great job that the Department’s advising office does to address student questions and complaints about what the nature of the undergraduate program in Music at UCSD includes and what it does not. We agree with the review subcommittee’s assessment that targeted communications to parents and students considering UCSD’s undergraduate music majors are essential and in the Department’s best interest.

3. Provide mechanisms for building a stronger sense of community for music majors.

The report recommends that the Department consider ways in which Music 143 can be used as a way to create a real sense of partnership, collaboration, and community among faculty and students across the Department. The Council is in support of this recommendation. We recommend that the Department collectively evaluate and rethink the structure of Music 143 to achieve these goals, and particularly consider ways in which a different format might also address the perception shared by some students of the “top down” nature of the Department.

Additionally, we agree with the recommendation that ICAM majors be integrated into Music 143 and advise ICAM faculty in the Department to initiate discussions with their counterparts in Visual Arts about this recommendation. We see added benefit to this proposal, as it initiates a faculty conversation about the lack of community expressed by ICAM majors in the Department of Music that may exist within the Visual Arts ICAM cohort as well. Our hope would be that ICAM faculty will discuss possible solutions for both departments, as needed.

The Council thanks the Department faculty for their thoughtful response to the report of the review subcommittee. We are pleased to see that the Department has taken steps to resolve some of the issues addressed in the report through locally-developed measures. The Council looks forward to learning of the Department's progress in these endeavors at the time of the follow up review in Spring 2014. Additionally, at that time, we will ask the Department to report on its success in implementing the remaining recommendations (items #2 and #3 above). The Council has found this to be a positive review and congratulates the Department for the successful review.

Sincerely,



Michael D. Todd, Chair
2012-13 Undergraduate Council

cc: G. Boss R. Rodriguez
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