

Humanities Department

Unit-Level Assessment Liaison Report

Spring 2019

Liaison Project Start Date: __Fall 2016__

Liaison Report prepared by __David Richardson__

Project Overview: The Associate in Fine Arts (AFA) in Music Education and the AFA in Music Performance both require students to complete a series of four classes in which they receive private lessons in the use of their primary instrument. At the end of each class, students engage in a juried music performance, evaluated by their instructor and at least one other Music faculty member. These classes (and juries) are typical for these, and advanced, degrees; however, they are not treated the same everywhere—some schools emphasize the quality of student performance applying high standards for performance, while others emphasize the process and tend to pass students through regardless of the quality of their performance. Our full-time Music faculty were univocal in their conception of the HWC program as consistent with the former (performance quality), and thus, given that our instructors come from many different music programs, our Music faculty members identified one important question to be whether all of the private lesson instructors also shared that conception and evaluated student juries accordingly. Secondly, they were interested in the quality of student performance, both in terms of meeting the outcomes and in terms of overall student development toward three core competencies—professionalism, instrument musicality, and instrument technique—across the course sequence.

Early stages (Fall 2014) of the project involved the development of a working rubric for the juries that would enable data collection and analysis (completed in Fall 2016), followed by the establishment of procedures that would ensure interrater reliability and easy, accurate data collection, and the development of data collection analysis and interpretation techniques that fit faculty members' questions, both the original ones and any new ones that might arise (completed Fall 2018). Subsequent iterations of the assessment would focus on the measurable effects (if any) of learning initiatives, in the form of improvements in student learning, and longitudinal tracking of students' skill development and demonstration of the core competencies.

I. Department Buy-In and Outcome Definition

The biannual execution of the Music Jury Assessments has facilitated regular consideration of the Learning Outcomes for the four classes that make up the sequence under review in this project (Music 181, 182, 281, and 282). This year was no different. Department buy-in was unintentionally re-established as a consequence of other actions (described below in II). In the course of researching instructor-specific conceptions of “Professionalism”—one of the categories on which music jury students are assessed—faculty members asked questions about the project as a whole, which led to a reminder explanation of the project’s origins, goals, and findings (so far). Faculty members universally affirmed (or at least did not object to) the value of the goals and general usefulness of the effort.

II. Assessment Research and Design

In last year’s report, I wrote, “For the AFA jury assessment, our working document has reached a point of effectiveness such that it needed a single minor adjustment and will likely be useable without revision going forward, allowing the faculty members to focus on the rubric use, norming, and data.” This proved to be true, for the most part; however, in light of experiences that occurred over the summer and in response to faculty feedback on a survey sent in November of 2018, we made major revisions to our procedure, abandoning the use of Ipads. The Ipads had been used to facilitate immediate data collection, but they required significant time and knowledge to set up and manage. Furthermore, they proved difficult for instructors to work with in regard to providing comments on student performances, which instructors value highly. As a result, the form was redesigned for paper-printouts, and procedures were adjusted to accommodate data collection and entry in December of 2018.

III. Pilot Assessment Tools and Processes

The new procedures were not so much piloted as used experimentally for the fall 2018 juries, along with a post-jury satisfaction survey of faculty. Responses were few, but unanimous in their appreciation for the changes and satisfaction with the procedures. Additional suggestions led to a few minor tweaks for the spring juries, but the form and procedures are now in a sustainable and demonstrably effective form (see below).

IV. Administer Specific Assessment

The measure was successfully used to rate Music Juries in both Fall 2018 (33 students) and Spring 2019 (# of students unknown at the time of this report). Fall data was entered in

December, 2018 and January, 2019, and analyzed in the following months (see section V). Spring Jury data will be entered once juries are complete and analyzed in the early fall.

V. Data Analysis

As described in the project overview, music faculty interests with respect to student learning include longitudinal assessment data over multiple semesters in order to track patterns of individual student progress through the sequence of individual lessons, as well as in developing larger pools of data for each level. That data would not be reliable, however, until we have confidence in our measure and in our raters' use of it. Thus, we have focused data analysis on rater consistency in the use of the rubric, as measured in rater agreement percentages on student performance in relation to the intended learning outcomes and a statistical measure (Cronbach-alpha) of interrater reliability in assessing student progress across the full arc of the course sequence. (Cronbach alpha is not appropriate as a measure of the judgments about Outcome performances because the choice is binary (yes/no) and offers too high of a variance for measuring reliability; in other words the statistic works better for evaluating consistency of usage when there are more than two choices—the more choices, the better.)

Data analysis showed that raters were highly consistent in their judgment of student attempts to demonstrate the learning outcomes (98% agreement), showing consistency within the individual courses and across the categories of outcomes as well as across the course sequence. Furthermore, data shows that most of the students (94%) successfully demonstrated two or more of the outcomes and overall, 88% of the ratings showed “Satisfactory Demonstration of the Outcome.” 8 of the 10 failed demonstrations were in the “Sight Reading” column, which makes sense because one of the things discovered in the course of the previous year’s juries was how inconsistent instructors had been in teaching and testing this skill (from fall 2016 through fall 2017, roughly one in five students was asked to sight read; this jumped to 40% in spring of 2018, and jumped again to just under 80% in fall 2018). The surprise, and accidental, finding, led to a renewed and more consistent focus on the subject in the Fall of 2018, putting some students in a “catch-up” position. It will be interesting to see if future juries show improvement on this skill.

In regard to the assessment ratings of students, the Cronbach-alpha score came back as $\alpha = 0.766673$, which falls within a typical guideline interpretations as “Fair” reliability among raters. This is a tremendous improvement over earlier versions of the form, which rated very low (e.g., SP17 scored .4389) and were “unacceptable.” Taken together, this data is suggestive of shared understanding and consistent use of the rubric by the raters and provides reason to have higher confidence in the quality of the data set and any resulting interpretations.

Additional analysis will focus on differences in core competency ratings by category and course, as well as the start of longitudinal tracking of students through the sequence of courses.

VI. Supporting Evidence-Based Change (Use of Findings)

Previously mentioned are improvements in the consistency of instruction and testing related to sight reading, as well as unmentioned improvements in the consistency of jury staffing; in the fall of 2018, 100% of juries featured two jurists, up from 96% in the spring of 2018, and 92% in the fall of 2017. Additional ideas for changes and improvements are anticipated to come from the deeper analysis of core competencies discussed above, as well as trends shown by the longitudinal tracking of individual students.

Success Factors: As I said last year and continue to affirm, Erica McCormack, working in the role of Liaison Coordinator, has been an invaluable source of wisdom, knowledge, and encouragement. Her advice and suggestions and general excellence as a colleague, and department/college leader, have made my job feel easy and exciting. Our data analyst, Fernando Miranda-Mendoza was also critical to my work. His patience with my many questions, and a Lake Shore Drive traffic jam, were exemplary.

Recommendations: I believe it is important to use colors in reports, whenever possible, which is why this **word** is green, and I strongly recommend renewing your library card. Also, keep watching this space for new and exciting developments in the assessment of Harold Washington College AFA students. Excitement awaits.