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Four Years vs. One Semester: Music Information Literacy Delivered in Different Time Frames

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Comments
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Four Years vs. One Semester: Music Information Literacy Delivered in Different Time Frames

Taylor Greene, Performing Arts Librarian at Chapman University

Background

In the fall of 2014, the Performing Arts Librarian at Chapman University began teaching the Music Information Literacy sequence; a series of four 90-minute sessions which students were required to take once per year. In the fall of 2017, based on the lack of retention he noticed in students in the third and fourth years, he revised the course to be taught in a one-semester format instead.

**The four-year model**

**Description:** This model was based on the assumption that students need different types of information at different points in their college years. The class is split into four classes: MUS 180 (freshman), MUS 280 (sophomore), MUS 380 (junior), and MUS 480 (senior). Classes were scheduled by the Performing Arts Librarian outside of class times and students would sign up for sessions using a Google Doc. Each class was 90 minutes and worth zero credits, though each was a required course.

**Benefits**

- The classes were a one-time, easy commitment, once per year.
- Students learned different information each year.
- Seeing students each year meant that music students would go to the library at least once per year.

**Pitfalls**

- Student retention of information proved to be very low for some students. When reintroducing material a year later, students often had difficulty recalling previously covered concepts.
- Longer class sessions lead to packing in several topics into each session.
- Scheduling was complicated and messy. Keeping track of students' grades was difficult and required creating an Access database.
- Inefficient: the Performing Arts Librarian covered the same material in multiple sessions for a small number of students.

**Notes**

The four-year system of Music Information Literacy has been used since fall of 2014. Currently, the students who started on this model are being taught out through their graduation. The last MUS 480 (senior level class) will be offered in the 2018-2019 year.

**The one-semester model**

**Description:** Beginning in 2017-2018, the one-semester MUS 280 course is required of music majors in their sophomore year. The class meets for six 90-minute sessions at regularly scheduled class times. The time elapsed between sessions is 1-3 weeks, with two weeks being the most common. Students are given very short assignments to be completed either partially or entirely outside of class time.

**Benefits**

- Greater frequency of contact with students increases familiarity between the librarian and the students.
- Shorter class sessions makes each class more focused.
- More frequent opportunities to reinforce or build on concepts.
- Efficiency: the Performing Arts Librarian teaches each session once per semester to the entire class.

**Pitfalls**

- Students may be absent from some classes.
- Some students were unhappy about a required course being worth zero credits.
- Classroom management: class sizes are much larger, leading to less individual attention and more distracted behavior.
- Students receive information in their sophomore year that may not be useful until one or two years later.

**Notes**

This course would likely function better as a credit-bearing course rather than being offered for zero credits. Unfortunately, music majors’ required classes are currently at the maximum allowed by the university. This should be changed for the 2019-2020 year, when the course is planned to be offered for one credit.

Conclusion

After teaching the first one-semester class in fall 2017, the one-semester model is showing promise. The inclusion of graded assignments has been beneficial in giving students opportunities to immediately put the concepts into practice and much less class time is dedicated to review. Though classroom management has been more challenging, more in-class assignments in future semesters will likely help.

What is next?

- In the spring 2018 and fall 2018 semesters, the Performing Arts Librarian will perform an assessment to compare retention of concepts between students finishing the one-semester MUS 280 course and those finishing the four-year MUS 280 course.
- This assessment will test the hypothesis that students retain more information in the one-semester model.
- It will remain to be seen how students will put Music Information Literacy concepts into practice in their junior and senior courses. More assessment will be needed in the future to test students’ knowledge of music information literacy near graduation.