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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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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 forth years, he revised the course to be taught in a one-semester format instead.

What is covered in the course

- Physical formats: scores of different shapes and sizes, MLs, MTs, audio-visual materials and where to find them in the M. Douglas Library of Music
- Advanced search techniques for music materials
- Music databases: why to use them, how to navigate and search them
- Intellectual property: the fundamentals of copyright for musicians, music licensing, and avoiding plagiarism
- Citations and citation management software
- Authority and alternative sources: open educational resources, primary sources, music blogs, critically evaluating authority
- Program notes: writing like a music scholar
- Finding more sources: interlibrary loan and dissertations

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 (first-years), MUS 280 (sophomores), MUS 380 (juniors), and MUS 480 (seniors). 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
- Without regularly scheduled meetings, no opportunities existed for reinforcing concepts outside of class sessions

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.

Similarities:

- Zero credits
- Pass/No Pass
- Similar content
- Required for all music majors

Differences:

- Time elapsed between sessions: 1 year vs. 1-3 weeks
- Four 90-minute sessions vs. six 50-minute sessions
- Regularly scheduled class vs. sign-ups
- Grades: only attendance vs. attendance and assignments

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 50-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
- Higher number of students in class creates opportunities for working together
- Assignments serve dual purpose: 1) reinforce material by putting concepts into practice; 2) when students miss a class session they can make up points and still learn the concepts from that class period
- 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 their MUS 480 (senior level of four-year sequence) and those finishing the one-semester MUS 280 course.
- This assessment will test the hypothesis that students retain more information in the one-semester model
- It still remains 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.