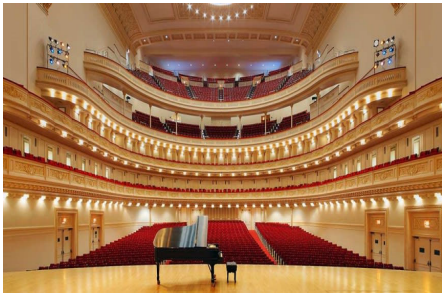


Improving Students' Skills in Music Performance, Theory, and Musicology

Department of Music

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The purpose of the Department of Music at Tennessee State University is to contribute to the comprehensive formation of all university students through multi-faceted engagement with music. By facilitating the expansion of the general student's aesthetic perspective and by nurturing the music major's development in performance, education, scholarly inquiry into both western and world music through technological innovation, our department aids students in becoming highly motivated, life-long learners.

Our department provides a variety of music programming to the campus community through performance and teaching. Many of our music majors come to our department to be a part of one of our renowned music ensembles while taking advantage of the fact that we are located in one of the most vibrant cities for music in the country in Nashville, Tennessee, aka Music City! In Fall of 2019, the Department of Music began the implementation of our newly developed Major Field Assessment (MFA). The primary goal for the MFA is to provide a capstone experience for our students that will aid in their professional preparation and set them apart from the competition in a very competitive industry.

Our MFA is completed by all music majors and is an electronic portfolio (e-portfolio) of work that serves as the capstone product for the music degree. Students build the e-portfolio

within TSU's learning management system (eLearn). The portfolio includes several components including, a) The student's biography page with relevant music experiences, accomplishments and career aspirations, b) Evidence of student mastery in music theory - one of the two essential course sequences in music that develop students' abilities to understand and critique the ways in which music is constructed, c) Evidence of student mastery in music history - the second of the two essential course sequences in music that cultivate students' perspectives in interpreting music within the cultural, political, economic, technological, and musical contexts in which the music was composed, d) A video recording of the student's senior recital - the culminating performance assessment for all music majors that includes a public solo performance of a variety of music repertoire across multiple genres that is between 45-60 minutes in length, e) The program for the students senior recital concert, and f) A post-recital performance reflection in which the student discusses the highlights of the performance, what could have been improved, and how the student will use their e-portfolio for future career and continuing education opportunities.

During the 2019-2020 academic year, our major field assessment team of two faculty launched the pilot. In the fall semester, we quickly realized that the team would have to expand significantly to better distribute the workload. In the spring of 2020, as the world transitioned into safer-at-home-measures due to COVID-19, our team had to come up with on-the-fly strategies to allow for our graduating music majors to adequately complete the major field assessment so that we could assess the results and make improvements. As this was a newly developed assessment for us that was under critique by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) for quality assurance funding purposes, we had regular meetings between May and August of 2020 to improve the logistics of administering the assessment, as well as offering more support to the students for whom this assessment would be consequential for beginning in the Fall of 2020. During this time, we also brought in three external reviewers who were academic experts in the fields of music theory, history, and performance, so they could score our student portfolios in our efforts to, a) establish interrater reliability via the Lawshe Method and, b) provide feedback on how the major field assessment protocols and documents and could be improved.

With this feedback, we set out into the 2020-2021 academic year knowing that, because the university would still be conducting most classes remotely, we would need to be flexible in

the performance requirements so that students could produce a high-quality performance in a safe way. We were able to make this happen, and for the 2020-2021 school year, we had 100% of our graduating music majors successfully pass all components of the e-portfolio with a score of 12 or better (based on a total score 16 on a 4-point, four category performance rubric). Based on these results, our major field assessment team – which had now grown to include six faculty – met in the late Spring of 2021 semester to compare pilot scores to base line scores and suggest more improvements. These suggestions were then brought before the music department faculty and were voted for approval. Some of the suggestions included a) Revising the Senior Recital syllabus to more clearly articulate the timeline for major field assessment implementation, b) Providing trainings and how-to videos for students in the capstone on how to build their e-portfolio and upload documents, c) Creating an infographic that communicates the components and flow of the process very clearly, d) Offering additional music theory and music history tutoring in other classes that students take place immediately prior to the senior recital (e.g. Applied Music, Music History II, Music Theory IV, etc.), and e) Creating a music department assessment data table that allows faculty to input their scores, provide written feedback, and share with the assessment team on what is working and what needs to be improved for the next administration of the MFA. With these plans in place, we embarked upon the 2021-2022 academic year, also knowing that our recitals would be able to return to public performances. This would help us greatly as we returned to a “new normal” for our department.

For the 2021-2022 year of our major field assessment, which was our reporting year to THEC, we again had 100% of our graduating music majors successfully pass all components of the e-portfolio with a score of 12 better out of a total rubric score of 16. In addition, we noticed that the number of completers since the pilot had risen from 7 in 2019-2020 to 11 in 2021-2022. Also, the average rubric score per grading component had also risen from 12.53 in 2019-2020 to 13.59 in 2021-2022. Our assessment team and our department are very proud of the work our students have done to prepare themselves for their future careers and educational pursuits. Many of our students have included their e-portfolios for job interviews and admissions into graduate programs and have credited the MFA for helping them show evidence of their knowledge and skills. Our team continues to work diligently to find more ways to improve the MFA for our students. For this year, we are including student feedback surveys and focus groups to better understand how students are experiencing the MFA process and what they believe could be done

to make it more efficient and relevant for them. We are also planning to meet with faculty from another institution that has a similar capstone in place so that we can share our stories with each other and see what we can learn as we continue along our improvement journey. I am thankful to our department chair, assessment team, faculty, staff, and most of all our students, for working together to create our Major Field Assessment e-portfolio. It has galvanized our department in new ways, led to more collaboration between faculty, and allowed for even more talent and creativity to be showcased by our students.



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