

Chapter VI

Music Curriculum

*Robert J. Werner, Dean Emeritus
College-Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati*

Introduction

As pointed out in Chapter II, “design of the curriculum and development of educational policies lie at the heart of the academic enterprise.” Understanding and implementing this important responsibility is fundamental to the success of a music program. A sequential series of courses and experiences are what we know as “the curriculum.” In higher education curriculum design is acknowledged to be the faculty’s responsibility, but the music executive is also obligated to be sure that each curriculum is in keeping with the accepted national norms as delineated in the accreditation standards of the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM).

Regardless of NASM membership status, it behooves the music unit to observe these standards, which have been developed over many years by the Association’s member institutions. They represent the agreed-upon norms for each area of the discipline.* Many faculty members might not be fully aware of these standards except possibly at the time of accreditation or renewal of NASM membership. The music executive has the primary responsibility of overseeing the various areas of professional and service curricular offerings and bringing these standards to the attention of the music faculty.

Administrators at all levels must also be fully aware of their institution’s mission and goals. These objectives become the foundation upon which all units—whether college, school, or department—should develop their programs. In designing either degree programs or service courses that support the general university constituencies, such an approach becomes particularly important.. The music executive serves as the intermediary between the music unit’s faculty, the dean, and all other university administrators in order to assure that these standards are met. As such, he or she is expected to be both a facilitator and, when necessary, an initiator of courses and curricula as appropriate to the institution’s overall mission.

Normally music units have an elected faculty curriculum committee, or two if the size of the programs warrants: one for undergraduate matters and another for graduate. The primary responsibilities of such committees include reviewing proposed new courses and degree offerings, eliminating current courses or degree programs if necessary, assuring the proper sequencing of offerings, and assessing the professional relevance of each degree program on a regular basis. They should also work closely with the music executive to be sure that needed resources are available. Thus, the administrator should be an *ex officio* member of all such committees. The committee’s recommendations are then taken to the full faculty for discussion and action.

* The NASM handbook that contains these standards may be downloaded by going to <http://nasm.arts-accredit.org> and then to “Membership Procedures,” where a PDF version is available.

Curriculum committees and administrators must seriously consider each new course proposal as to whether it complements or replaces current offerings and if it will substantially improve the overall curricular offerings. They should also determine if there would be sufficient need and interest to sustain enrollment and the potential impact on other courses. They should also consider whether instruction of the course will affect faculty loads so much that courses already being offered or required could be disrupted. Finally, the committee's responsibility includes being aware of all resource implications, such as financial, facilities, and personnel. The administrator should be able to assure the committee that the support required would be available at the time the course or degree program is offered.

In order to provide an appropriate basis for required curricular offerings, especially basic musicianship courses, faculty should be aware of the level of competencies shown by entering students: undergraduate, transfer, and graduate. Most institutions require applicants to take a series of tests during the admissions and audition process to assure a minimum level of background for entrance-level courses. Remedial instruction, if needed, should be made available if it represents the mission of the institution. In planning curricula and courses, faculty must acknowledge the diversity of background, aptitude, and talent of entering students at every level—a particular challenge when enrollments are small and all students have to be accommodated in the same class, and also for faculty who teach these courses.

The music executive should regularly review all printed documents, catalogues, or other publications to be sure that their descriptions of courses and curricula accurately represent the offerings. These documents can be considered a “contract” with students at the time they enter the program and therefore become the basis for student planning and advising that then lead to the successful and timely completion of their degree programs.

The professional literature contains countless articles and books on curriculum. They provide a comprehensive view of curricular concepts and strategies over several decades. Many national programs have led to the revision of music offerings over the years, but the period from the 1960s and through the present has been particularly active in this area. The music executive should be well versed in this literature and the implications these approaches may have for the various types of programs and courses for which they are responsible in support of the unit's mission. It is not the purpose of this chapter to review various curricular concepts but rather to discuss the framework necessary to support whatever curricular offerings are agreed upon by the music faculty and approved by the administration at all levels.

Academic Programs

One of the important obligations of the music executive, particularly when he or she is new to a position, is the review of the efficacy of the degree programs being offered, the courses that support them, and the opportunities available for the general student. The executive should guard against the tendency to add programs without assuring their need or the amount of support they would require.

Faculty at times can be rather myopic in their view of the *entire* music curriculum. Administrators may face a considerable challenge in the rather proprietary attitude of some, particularly senior faculty. Understandably, they often zealously protect courses that they have taught for years as to content and focus. Faculty members also may wish to add courses

and programs that will provide them with more of an opportunity to work with students who have a particular interest in their subdiscipline.

The music executive must make sure that careful attention is given to all curricular requirements as to what they entail in regard to faculty assignments, scheduling, the particular needs of the constituency to be served, and the resources that each degree program requires. Faculty members sometimes may have as their reference the music units from which they earned their degrees rather than what would be the most appropriate programs for the music unit in which they are now employed.

The administrator is responsible for awareness of how a given course or series of courses complement each other so as to meet the appropriate educational objective. In reviewing proposals the faculty curriculum committees should work with the administration in considering all aspects of a given proposal. However, far too often a quid pro quo exists among faculty that makes rejection of another's proposal quite difficult.

As stated before, each music unit must clearly define its mission and objectives so that they may provide a clear-cut foundation for proposing and reviewing any new curricular offerings or eliminating old ones. Within some state systems new degree proposals must undergo not only a local campus review but also a systemwide review and comment by all other state institutions offering similar programs. Therefore, the music executive must be aware of the missions and offerings of all institutions within the state system and often those in the region as well.

Baccalaureate Curricula

The music executive should know the basis for and the history of music instruction in higher education. The formal study of music came to us from European conservatories and universities. The conservatory's primary mission was to train both composers and performing musicians who would become members of their nation's orchestras and opera companies. These institutions did not give baccalaureate degrees but rather recognized the completion of study by awarding a certificate. The university, on the other hand, concentrated on the historical and analytical studies of music. Thus a dichotomy existed between the students enrolled in the conservatory, who were taught to perform or create music, and the university student, who was educated to examine and research music. Additionally, in the United States music teachers were trained in the state's teacher training institutions, often known as "normal schools."

This duality in type of musical study was still evident in the United States in the late 1940s, a time that was to some extent still influenced by the eastern liberal arts institutions. Professionally this situation was represented by two organizations formed at that time to promote the study of music within the liberal arts format, the College Music Association and the Society for Music in Liberal Arts Colleges. In 1957 they would combine to become the College Music Society, which today represents all areas of musical study, along with NASM, which was founded in 1924 to assure national standards for music curricula.

A significant contribution of music programs in the United States was to define and combine these two approaches to music study by implementing a more liberal arts-based approach, leading to two types of "music major" degrees: the traditional Bachelor of Arts degree in music, and the development of the professionally oriented Bachelor of Music, which in effect replaced the conservatory certificate programs. Each degree can have an important place in an institution's mission. Since most professional music programs have

moved from the independent conservatories to the present-day comprehensive universities and colleges, these programs have included liberal arts or “general studies” to broaden the musician’s education. The constantly evolving NASM accreditation standards that define the parameters for each area of study reflect this development.

The two types of degree differ in the amount of music courses taken and the focus of curricular requirements. The professional degree, the Bachelor of Music, should normally take at least 65 percent of its coursework from the discipline, based primarily on a core group of musicianship courses. Specific degrees concentrate on areas such as performance, composition, and so on. When baccalaureate degree programs are intended to combine two areas such as performance and pedagogy, they must allow for competencies in both areas. It is recommended that all degrees develop teaching skills appropriate to the major area.

The general standards for the 120-semester-hour (180-quarter-hour) professional Bachelor of Music degree are distributed as follows: major area of specialization 25 to 35 percent, supportive courses in music 25 to 35 percent, general studies 25 to 35 percent, and electives 10 to 15 percent. Some adjustment of the distribution may occur in areas such as jazz studies, pedagogy, music therapy, and music education. Again, the music executive should review the national norms established by the NASM member institutions for each degree offered.

Music education degree programs should at a minimum be composed of 50 percent music courses, as these programs must also accommodate courses with a specific educational focus such as methods and philosophy, as well as other requirements for state certification. Normally these degrees will be titled Bachelor of Music in Music Education or Bachelor of Music Education. Degrees in music therapy also require only 50 percent of courses to be taken from the discipline to complement those requirements needed for licensure. Bachelor of Music degrees that indicate “with Emphasis in ____” or “with Elective Studies in ____” shall also require a minimum of 50 percent of the coursework to come from the field of music.

Some institutions are authorized to offer only professional degrees under the Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science designation. When this is the case, the degree content should still conform to the percentages expected of professional degree programs. Recently, the degree Bachelor of Musical Arts has been developed to signify the addition of studies in an area outside of music so as to advance the student’s interdisciplinary competencies. This requires at least 50 percent coursework in music and 15 percent in the supportive discipline.

The liberal arts degree contains fewer courses in music, usually 30 to 45 percent, with the remaining courses having more of an emphasis on general studies. These degrees carry the title of either Bachelor of Arts in Music or Bachelor of Science in Music.

Some four-year and comprehensive institutions also offer two-year degrees; when they do, these programs should conform to the guidelines for two-year degrees offered by community or junior colleges. National standards for programs intended for transfer to a baccalaureate program should be the equivalent of the first two years of core musicianship studies, including at a minimum theory, studio instruction, and performance ensembles. Support for two-year programs should include a qualified faculty, facilities, appropriate library holdings, and financial stability. An important part of the mission of institutions offering these degrees should be to provide musical studies and opportunities for the general student. Since admission is usually open to all high school graduates, students majoring in music should be tested for their aptitude for undertaking professional studies and be provided remedial instruction when necessary. Student advising is most important for successful transfer to upper division studies or vocational programs.

All baccalaureate degrees in music must satisfy the basic requirements in performance, musicianship, music history, and supportive areas such as technology and pedagogy. If the institution has a mandated maximum number of hours/credits for all baccalaureate degrees, the music unit will have to be sure that all required courses are accommodated, often through rather “creative bookkeeping,” such as a music history course being counted as a humanities credit or a music technology course fulfilling a general technology requirement. In some institutions certain music education courses may be accepted to meet state certification or college of education requirements. Needless to say, this necessitates skillful negotiation by the music executive.

A variety of certificate or diploma programs are offered at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Such programs most often concentrate on performance, indicating a level of accomplishment beyond the usual degree requirements. Published materials should make clear the criteria that will be used to assess the awarding of such distinctions.

Each music unit has an obligation to offer music courses and experiences for the general college student (non-major). Today it is becoming even more essential that music faculties assume the responsibility for developing musical understanding and participation among the general public represented by these students. Many performance ensembles are open to qualified students, and sometimes studio instruction as well. The music executive should take care to assign faculty to “non-major” courses who have both the skills and commitment necessary to enable these students to develop a mature musical understanding since they will become the potential audiences and supporters of “concert music” in the future. The music unit should engage the campus, local, and regional communities through performances and other opportunities that lead these constituencies to a greater appreciation of the art of music.

At times it can become necessary for the administrator to encourage the music faculty to rethink the purpose of the service responsibility they have to the general university students by providing musical offerings that develop insight and self-knowledge not duplicated by any other subject in the curriculum. Music executives and faculty members should also be aware of any curricular offerings in other areas of the institution, such as the humanities, social sciences, and technology, that might complement the music curricula. By developing a dialogue with other disciplines, many times the music curricula can be enriched and made more relevant to the students and faculty in these areas. Faculty members are expected to support the careers of their graduates, but often they, and hence their students, are so singularly focused that they can ignore the most important part of a professional education: the development of a more comprehensive view of the society in which they live.

Graduate Programs

Graduate degree programs should not be offered unless demand is sufficient to ensure a community of students capable of advanced work and the faculty includes members capable of graduate-level teaching in each area where degrees are offered. Faculty members must serve as models of advanced accomplishment as scholars, performers, composers, and/or teachers. Since national standards require that “at least one-half of the credits required for graduate degrees must be in courses intended for graduate students only,” it is incumbent upon the music executive to ascertain if the necessary resources are available to offer these degrees. Admission standards should be such that students admitted to graduate study have

the appropriate preparation to successfully complete the degree requirements of the program.

A general master's degree in music is usually designated as either a Master of Arts in Music or a Master of Science in Music. The degree program should be divided into one-third core curriculum music courses, one-third other studies in music, and one-third elective studies. The professional master's degree is practice-oriented, research-oriented, or a combination of the two. It should require one-third of coursework to be in a major field (performance, theory, etc.), one-third in other studies in music, and the remaining third in elective studies. This degree is known as a Master of Music with the field of specialization usually also designated.

The Master of Music degrees also have specific terminal requirements such as a recital, a staged performance, conducting opportunities, or research and thesis. The faculty must be willing and able to provide support such as advising and serving on student graduate committees. These requirements, which affect faculty loads, should be seriously considered when determining whether to offer these advanced degree programs.

There are other post-baccalaureate programs such as the Master of Arts in Teaching, Master of Fine Arts, Master of Musical Arts, and Specialist degrees. In each case standards for these degrees should be carefully examined before offering them as part of a graduate program in music. Some music units offer an artist diploma in performance, considered the equivalent of an additional year of study beyond the master's degree.. This program, which seems particularly attractive to students in such areas as voice and piano, can provide an opportunity for a student to develop more advanced professional skills without the added requirements of the Doctor of Music Arts degree..

Doctoral degrees should be offered only by those institutions with the resources and commitment necessary for this level of advanced work and then only in those areas of the discipline that are appropriate to the resources of the music unit. Many states designate only certain institutions that may offer the doctoral degree. These degrees fall into two categories, the research-oriented Doctor of Philosophy and the practice-oriented degrees such as the Doctor of Musical Arts, the Doctor of Music Education, or the Doctor of Education in Music Education. In a few schools the practice-oriented designation used is the Doctor of Music, but normally this title is reserved for an honorary degree in the field. Doctoral degrees are primarily intended for those students who are preparing for a career in academia.

Once again, the music executive and the faculty must be aware that graduate studies require considerable resources in the way of continuing budget support, facilities, library collection, technology, and the appropriate number of faculty specialists needed to offer specific degree programs. A rigorous music unit review of all degree and course proposals is important so as to maintain the highest professional standards and to meet accreditation standards.

Faculty

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that all curricula, in the final analysis, are dependent upon faculty performance. No matter how well articulated the goals of each course or degree program are or how precise the syllabus may be, what happens in the classroom, the studio, and the rehearsal hall is truly "the curriculum" where the student is concerned. Thus, the music executive has the important responsibility of seeing that the most qualified faculty member is assigned to each of the course offerings and other degree requirements.

This task can be particularly challenging in a smaller department that requires most faculty to be qualified to teach in more than one area of the curriculum. It also requires the building of a team effort to ensure the continuity expected in each curriculum, which music executives, especially new ones, can find challenging. It can take years to develop an effective faculty team where each member plays a significant role in the overall professional educational experience. The team will also continually need adjustment as retirements, resignations, and attrition due to budget cutbacks or tenure not being granted can affect the overall faculty balance and strengths.

For successful team building, one must attempt to make the best use possible of the wide range of faculty members' backgrounds, experience, and ability so as to provide the most effective sequential set of learning experiences throughout each degree program. This criterion also plays an important role in hiring new faculty. The full extent of the position's teaching responsibilities should be clearly defined when developing the job description. Throughout the search and when making the final decision, the specific competencies of the candidates in these various areas should be foremost in each faculty appointment.

In the smaller department faculty often must be able to teach in several areas, particularly for entry-level faculty positions, which are usually assigned these multiple instructional responsibilities. Unfortunately, most graduate programs, especially at the doctoral level, do not adequately prepare graduates for such diversity of teaching. National standards now emphasize the responsibility the music unit has, particularly with graduate programs, for requiring supervised teaching experiences, in one or more areas of the discipline, for all students aspiring to obtain a faculty position in higher education.

Generally the appointment of studio faculty members is prioritized based on the specific needs of the performing ensembles. These faculty members then are expected to teach in academic areas such as theory, history, or music education when they may have had little or no supervised teaching experience in these areas. Therefore, candidates' backgrounds must be carefully examined as to their ability to fulfill these responsibilities as effectively as possible. Mentoring of new faculty should also be provided, particularly when multidisciplinary assignments are necessary.

Some Concluding Thoughts

As has been stressed throughout this chapter, the music executive must have a thorough understanding of the mission and goals of the music unit and the entire institution. This awareness will provide him or her with a clear focus for the review of current and future curricular considerations and serve as a constant reference for all curricular decisions. The music curriculum should not be allowed to become static; rather, it should be regularly reviewed and assessed for relevance in preparing music professionals to work in their chosen field. We have not tried to duplicate the extensive discussion of national standards contained in the *NASM Handbook* but rather to highlight those areas that should be given particular attention by the music executive, especially when assuming a new position but also throughout one's tenure in administration.

Resources will determine the support that can be given to any curricular offerings. The most important are the human resources represented by the faculty (both full-time and adjunct), graduate teaching assistants, and staff. The availability of adequate personnel resources has to be carefully monitored by the music executive, since they can be seriously affected by such things as sabbaticals, personal leaves, and for younger faculty their concerns

about fulfilling promotion and tenure criteria established by the faculty and administration of the music unit.

Central to most administrative considerations is the adequacy of the annual and continuing budgets. The music executive is responsible for the allocation of these monies, which therefore becomes a tangible expression of the mission of the unit and in some ways the priorities of the unit's administrator. A major portion of funds in most institutions comes from an FTE (full-time equivalency) formula based on student enrollments. Since music requires a good deal of one-on-one instruction, the executive must be sure that the institution's allocation formula takes this into consideration. See Chapter VII for a more complete discussion of the music budget.

Facilities, equipment, and technology are all important for the successful implementation of curricula. Having a sufficient number of specific-use facilities, such as studios, rehearsal halls, and performance venues, is also critical for optimal results. They should be considered music's "laboratories" and as such their availability should be the responsibility of the music unit.

Almost all of the topics discussed in this volume have some impact on music curricula as they affect the development and implementation of each curriculum in some way. Educational institutions, and faculty in particular, can often be quite resistant to change. A large part of a musician's training is how to be conservators of the past; hence their roots are to some extent still in the "conservatory." As music executives take on the challenges facing music programs, they have the responsibility of anticipating what today's students will need for success, if not survival, in the future. Today's music curricula should be shaped not only by the past but also by a professionally considered perception of the future.

Effective professional curricula require a creative administration and a faculty willing to risk change. The music executive often faces the significant challenge of persuading colleagues that providing a realistic definition of their mission is a necessity. Likewise, institutions gain from more imaginative approaches to curricular planning that recognize the partnership between all aspects of musical instruction in the preparation of a successful graduate. All members of the music unit's community have a stake in providing the most effective curricula possible for the future professional musician and their constituencies. The success we have in achieving this goal will certainly have an important influence on the future of the art of music in our society.