Graduate Program Goals and Student Assessment — University of Minnesota School of Music

Procedure. In preparing this document, the Director of Graduate Studies and Associate Director of the School of Music, Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, adapted prose from the self-study compiled during the 2013–14 school year in preparation for the National Association of Schools of Music site visit, as part of our regular re-accreditation process. (This document was put together by Scott Lipscomb, then Director of Undergraduate Studies and Associate Director under the leadership of then-Director, David Myers.) Prof. Bribitzer-Stull then shared this draft document with the School of Music Graduate Committee and School of Music Graduate Student Advisory Council for additional input.

Graduate Program Goals and Content. The faculty of the School of Music aspire to provide our graduate students with a breadth of competencies. In so doing, we can draw a fairly distinct line between our practice-oriented and research-oriented degrees; these two realms will be examined in turn. Generally speaking, the School of Music’s curricula are organized around a deep commitment to ensuring that performing musicians receive systematic training both in the methods of historical musicology and in music analysis, while students in research-oriented degrees are exposed to methods of research and musical exploration outside of their major. One cannot receive a graduate degree of any kind from this School of Music without having demonstrated a range of competencies in communicating about the music one makes, researches, and/or teaches. Thus, much of the following prose outlines both our practices in, and our aspirations toward, offering our students a breadth of training appropriate to their specific discipline.

Where practice-oriented MM degrees are concerned (e.g., Choral Conducting, Collaborative Piano & Coaching, Orchestral Conducting, Guitar, Organ, Piano, Instrumental Performance, Violin Performance [Suzuki Pedagogy], Voice, and Wind-Band Conducting), students are required not only to undertake lessons in their fields of specialization and to pursue associated performance opportunities, but to develop and demonstrate an advanced level of competency in the fields of musicology/ethnomusicology and analysis. The week before embarking on the first semester of graduate work in an MM program, each student takes a battery of diagnostic exams in tonal and 20th-century music theory, ear-training, and music history; these exams are developed, administered, and evaluated by the faculty of the theory and musicology/ethnomusicology divisions. If deficiencies come to light, such remediation as is indicated must be undertaken promptly, generally within the first year of study (see the Graduate Handbook, p. 7). In the course of a graduate program, each MM student’s work in performance is supplemented with a “Supporting Program” of 11 credits at the 5xxx- or 8xxx-level. Two of these credits are electives of any kind, but nine must be in the fields of musicology/ethnomusicology or theory/composition, with at least one 3-credit course taken in each of these two areas. Thus, every student undergoes a process of exploring music from both historical and analytical perspectives, engaging in relevant contemporary literature in these fields, and developing writing skills under the guidance of established scholars.
This work continues at the DMA level. Entering DMA students who did not receive their MM degrees at the University of Minnesota undergo the same battery of diagnostic exams as entering MM students (described above), and remediate accordingly, if necessary. Further coursework in academic areas factors heavily into DMA programs. Including coursework transferred in from the MM program, students must take a total of twelve credits of coursework in musicology/ethnomusicology and theory/composition, with at least one 3-credit course in each of these two areas taken at the University of Minnesota. DMA students are also required to take nine other credits, either inside or outside the School of Music. It is our intention to use three of these credits to require a course on music bibliography and research for students who don’t have one on their master’s-degree transcript. Beyond such coursework, the final phase of the DMA candidate’s experience involves the development and defense of a doctoral thesis/project (see the Graduate Handbook, pp. 23-4). While format and scope varies—these may be analytical or historical studies, annotated editions, studies of performance problems, or interdisciplinary studies, for instance—the baseline expectation is of a paper of 5000-8000 words. A member of the Academic area faculty (i.e., a musicologist, ethnomusicologist, theorist, or composer) sits on each final defense committee. Finally, note that DMA students have the option of doing a “secondary area” of study in lieu of two of their five recitals. These secondary areas comprise sustained work in one discipline—theory, musicology, composition, conducting, or education/pedagogy—as determined by the faculty in that discipline and laid out in our Graduate Handbook.

Our research-oriented degrees, as broadly defined (encompassing MA and PhD degrees in musicology/ethnomusicology, music theory, composition, and music education (recently revised to an MM)/music therapy), approach the attainment of intellectual breadth in a range of ways, as detailed in the individual degree programs. In every case, however, students are required to move beyond their specific fields of study into closely related fields. Musicology/ethnomusicology MA students, for example, are required to take at least one course in theory, together with seven credits of coursework in music (or a closely related field) outside of musicology; there is more such coursework at the doctoral level, together with twelve credits of coursework outside of music. MA students in theory are required to take at least one course in musicology/ethnomusicology and two courses outside of music (which may include music education), with one further musicology/ethnomusicology course, and two additional courses outside of music required at the PhD level. Our graduate programs in music education (MM and PhD) and music therapy (MA) also provide significant opportunities for students to develop a breadth of competence, both within and beyond music-related disciplines.

The School of Music prides itself on developing graduate students who are not only accomplished in their chosen fields of research or performance, but who are well-equipped to embark on professional lives, many of which will involve teaching. While students in the fields of musicology/ethnomusicology, theory, and composition do not actually take courses in pedagogy, they receive ample opportunity to teach and do so under the close supervision of seasoned professionals. While students in these realms will occasionally be supported financially in whole or in part by scholarships or fellowships,
the vast majority of them spend most or all of their time in graduate school supported through Teaching Assistantships. TA assignments vary widely and can include undergraduate theory courses, classical music surveys, world music courses, and/or courses on the history of rock (depending, of course, on the specific student’s primary fields of study and areas of expertise). Our intention is that each student serving as a TA be closely supervised by instructors who understand and value the importance of fostering sound, effective pedagogy and monitoring the work of these apprentice teachers in the classroom. We are in the midst of crafting new TA training and mentoring processes to be implemented starting in 2015–16.

The role of Teaching Assistantships in the lives of our graduate students in performance-oriented degrees is widely varied. Students in guitar, for instance, are routinely entrusted with running their own undergraduate classes in guitar performance; students in voice and a range of other instruments enjoy teaching assistantships that involve giving individual lessons to undergraduates; and students in choral conducting are consistently placed, via teaching assistantships, in charge of their own undergraduate choirs. Many graduate students in our programs do not have teaching duties at all. All, however, are provided opportunities in their curricula to take coursework directly related to the development of pedagogical skills. Our MM degrees in performance generally require four credits “directly related to the emphasis, particularly in the areas of literature and pedagogy,” to be chosen in consultation with the adviser. These opportunities expand at the doctoral level, which generally require a total (counting master’s work) of eight to twelve credits of courses in pedagogy, literature, or related work. Needless to say, with this range of options available, it is up to students through consultation with their advisers to determine course work that will be most helpful in developing them into well-rounded professionals.

Fulfillment of the recitals required of all of our performance graduate students (one recital at the master’s level, five at the doctoral) has considerable value in the development of professional competencies. Students are entrusted with scheduling the recital space, with promoting the event, with developing a program (authoring their own program notes), and—in those many instances in which an ensemble is involved—with gathering, rehearsing, and generally managing the players involved.

Graduate students in music education and music therapy, as a result of their past academic training and experiences, typically arrive with significant pedagogical knowledge. Throughout their graduate study, pedagogical issues continue to play a major role in their coursework, research, and reflective practices.

We acknowledge the lack of systematic pedagogy requirements for our graduate degrees. As we move into the future, these are all areas we need to strengthen in order to be in full compliance with National Association of Schools of Music standards and guidelines, but—most important—to ensure that our graduate students benefit to the greatest extent possible from their artistic, academic, and pedagogical experiences while completing their degrees.
**Student Assessment.** Historically, incorporating student achievement data in school-wide planning has not been typical of the School of Music’s operations. Recently, however, the university has begun to identify a variety of metrics—including student achievement data—that will be used to assess the effectiveness of academic units and to aid in planning. Student-related metrics are likely to include credit hours produced, time to degree, placements of graduates, and performance on identified Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). It is our intention to monitor these data closely on an annual basis to track our students’ and programs’ level of success. In fact, this year we begin implementation of a new annual written review process for all of our students. (TAs will be given a written review every semester.) Finally, we take this opportunity to note that the University of Minnesota recently became part of the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP), data from which also will be incorporated into School of Music planning.