GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course:</th>
<th>Music 101 and 102</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materials used, n:</td>
<td>30 randomly selected essays from several sections of MUS 101 &amp; 102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubric/Scoring standard used:</td>
<td>Gen Ed rubrics for writing, critical thinking and info. literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of assessment:</td>
<td>June, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Report by:</td>
<td>Antoni Piza, Music and Alec Magnet, English</td>
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**WRITING SKILLS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CCNY rubric</th>
<th>Average scores*</th>
<th>AACU rubric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>Structure and Organization</td>
<td>Evidence and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average scores*</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strengths:** Most essays show willingness to do a good job although not all of them succeed. It’s important to acknowledge the purpose of these assignments, which seems to be to get the students, first, to understand and apply terms and concepts correctly, secondly, to pay thoughtful attention to the experience and uses of music (at a concert, in education), and only finally, to compose analytic, argumentative papers.

**Weaknesses/Concerns:** It appears that students don’t proofread their work. Most essays seem to be composed a few hours before they are due. In addition, the papers generally reflect the low priority of the thesis and organization goals of the Gen Ed learning outcomes/rubrics in the assignments.

**Other comments:** It would be useful to give the students two things: 1) samples of prototypical writing in the genre of reviewing (reviews from the NY Times or a good paper from previous semesters) and 2) scaffolds, i.e. step-by-step music writing guidelines.

In addition, possibly more emphasis could be placed on argument and analysis without sacrificing too much of the primary goals (concepts and experience), which are important to preserve.

**CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average scores*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explanation of issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average scores*</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strengths:** The students are “forced” to verbalize a non-verbal language (music). This effort is very difficult to quantify with the rubric. It is a worthwhile process because it is good to be “critical” (to think) about everything, not only the verbal and visual humanities (literature, philosophy, art), but also the “sound humanities” (music).

**Weaknesses/Concerns:** In both the concert reviews and the North Korea papers, students spent a lot of time expressing opinions—“I think,” “I feel”—without much grounding in argument, evidence, or self-analysis. Most students don’t moderate or pace their subjective, emotional responses. To say “I like this…” is too uncritical.
INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understand info needs/search efficiently</th>
<th>Evaluate info sources</th>
<th>Credibility of sources</th>
<th>Use info ethically</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strengths:** The assignments directed students to sources—concert programs, articles, videos—and required them to engage with those sources in their papers.

**Weaknesses/Concerns:** The papers rarely moved further than summarizing, repeating, and describing their sources.

CONTENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content learning outcomes</th>
<th>Average scores*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.27</td>
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Course learning outcomes assessed:
• Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring creative expression, including, but not limited to, arts, communications, creative writing, media arts, **music**, and theater.
• Articulate how meaning is created in the arts or communications and how experience is interpreted and conveyed.

**Strengths:** The concert review assignment encouraged students to apply fundamental concepts and terms from music theory. The North Korea assignment introduced students to the study of music situated within politics and culture.

From reading these papers, it is clear that the students learn a lot: sonata, symphony, Baroque, quartet etc. Most students of MUS 101, 102, 145 will never become music majors; they won’t even become jazz and classical music buffs. However, in their adult life they might work and interact with people who happen to say “Debussy” or “Bebo.” Thanks to these classes these words now ring a bell. These students have become somewhat literate in music.

There is no doubt these students are better prepared for a cosmopolitan world through a great improvement in music literacy; classroom experience of world music, multicultural music, tolerance for other music and “the other” in general.

**Weaknesses/Concerns:** Carelessness in the writing which at times seems rushed, inattentive and unedited. The vocabulary is often misplaced or misused. Instructors should make sure students use the pertinent terms; the students must use the terms indiscriminately to impress the reader or the instructor. The papers don’t tend to apply music concepts and meaning with much analytic depth or rigor.

**Other comments:** The assignments in Music classes are doing something educationally really valuable that may be obscured if we rely too exclusively on the Pathways learning outcomes/rubrics to assess their effectiveness. These virtues should not be overlooked—or, worse, lost in an effort to improve according to just one standard. That said, it is possible to, while working to preserve these virtues of the assignments, there is room for improvement, especially when it comes to thesis and argument, critical thinking, and information literacy.
**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Patterns (e.g., common strengths or common weaknesses) in the samples of student writing that was evaluated.

In general, students’ essays need re-writing and editing as they seem to be written in a hurry.

The actual assignments could be more focused, specific, and simple in what they ask students to do in their papers.

a.) In the **concert reviews**, for example, many students tried to discuss five, six, seven pieces of music in one short paper. After their paragraphs describing the venue, program, and musicians, few students had room to give each piece of music more than a couple of sentences. It is not a suggestion to getting rid of those descriptive paragraphs. They were often quite vivid, and with the engaged and mindful attention they seemed to enrich the experience of going to these sorts of concerts for the students—many of whom had never been to a classical or jazz concert before and clearly could use the opportunity to process the experience. Possibly, explicit instructions to focus on **one** piece would encourage deeper, more analytic responses, rather than two sentences that name-check a couple of keywords superficially in relation to each of the pieces on the concerts program. Furthermore, if low-stakes and scaffolding assignments were built into the course before the concert—say, assigning the students to write in-depth explanations of a few key terms of basic musical theory—then the students might be primed to hear explore those concepts more analytically in their review of the particular performance they went to. It is important to find a balance between writing and content instruction so that time is not “stolen” from the actual content.

b.) In the **article response papers about children in North Korea**, very few of the papers primarily focused on **music**. The assignment sheet needs to be much clearer that the paper is specifically about the role of music in political indoctrination. Most of these papers ended up being fairly straightforward summaries of the article, with a little bit of “I think this is bad” at the end. Most of the papers introduced the videos of North Korean children’s performances at about the same point, which likely reflected the order in which the questions were asked on the assignment sheet. (Rather than developing their paper into one coherent argument, the students seemed mostly to answer the questions on the sheet more or less in order, as students tend to do.)

If the goal is to make those papers more analytic and thesis-driven, then, first, a greater emphasis on the conversation among sources, rather than just on what one source says, might be a first step. Scaffolding paragraph and summary assignments would allow the students time to digest the article and also provide an opportunity then to move **beyond** summary—though class time would have to be spent teaching the students what that was and how to do it. Closer analysis of the videos, with the article as an explanatory source might help here. So, too, might more sources. One student made the fascinating decision to resist the assigned article’s apparent othering of North Korea. That paper included multiple other sources that the student had found on their own contesting the absolute foreignness of North Korean culture. A few students managed to make the leap to indoctrination happening **even in the US**, and some of their processing of stereotypes about music was truly interesting. One, for example, explained that they’d always thought that music was about freedom and personal expression. They’d never considered that it could be a tool of indoctrination and totalitarianism. This conflict could be a great topic for another source for comparison and contrast.
Were the Writing Rubrics (CCNY rubric and AACU rubric) useful instruments for evaluating these samples of student writing? Which rubric was more appropriate for these essays?

The point of these assignments was to secure concepts and ideas in the students’ minds, to focus their attention, and to encourage them to process experiences in a productive manner. Generally, the concert report does not have a thesis, although it might. Therefore, the CCNY writing rubric’s emphasis on thesis, argument, topic sentences, and so on was not entirely applicable. The first two columns of the AACU writing rubric—Context & Purpose and Content Development—were much more useful measurements. However, the last two columns were either redundant or only useful for a research paper.

Was the Critical Thinking AACU rubric to be a useful instrument for evaluating these samples of student writing?

The problem with the Critical Thinking rubric is that it is clearly designed for research papers specifically. The Concert report is its own world, with its own conventions and ideally it needs its own rubrics. There also might be a way to adapt at least some of critical thinking rubric sections.

Suggestions on what can be done on instructional, departmental and/or institutional level to improve student writing and critical thinking and information literacy skills in Gen Ed courses.

**Institutional level:**
Provide funds for creating music-specific rubrics, scaffolding, and re-writing. Perhaps the WAC fellows can work with faculty on these projects.

**Departmental level:**
Choose experienced teachers to design those above
Paid workshops on using writing to teach and on developing writing assignments. Updated and widely available handbooks and sample assignments with explanations for instructors.

**In class/instructional level:**
The specific suggestions are above on page 3. In summary: There could be more focused, directed, specific assignments. More scaffolding and instruction of what analysis and analytic writing is in the context of a music class. More low-stakes writing—for example, a five minute in-class prompt to explain some particular term or concept. If the students hand them in at the end of class and the instructor reads even just some of them, they’ll get good idea of how well the students understand the material and what specifically they need more work with. And the students will learn better just from the work of writing out an explanation.

While class time spent on scaffolding and low-stakes prompts and writing instruction, seemingly takes away from time spent on content, students who spend time thinking/writing about the content that *is* covered, are likely to better internalize it.

* Scale 1-4 reflects the ability range from the beginning level to the accomplished level – it is meant as a “college span” scale; it is expected that the majority of freshmen would not be at the “accomplished” end of the scale.

1 – beginning  2- developing  3 – competent  4 – accomplished
General Education Program Learning Outcomes

Pathways - Flexible Core General Outcomes

A Flexible Core course in any category must meet the following three learning outcomes.

- Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions
  
  **Writing and Communication Skills** - The student will be able to:
  - formulate a clear thesis
  - provide coherent, unified and effective organization of a paper
  - develop abundant details and examples that provide evidence in support of sound logic
  - use standard diction, grammar and mechanics of English

- Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically.
  
  **Critical Thinking skills (AACU VALUE rubric)** - The student will be able to:
  - clearly frame an issue or problem and consider it critically
  - select, use, and evaluate information to investigate a claim or point of view
  - analyze his or her and others’ assumptions and evaluate relevance of contexts when presenting a position
  - present a position taking into account its complexities and limits as well as others points of view
  - develop logical conclusions based on evaluation of evidence

- Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view.
  
  **Information literacy skills** - The student will be able to:
  - demonstrate a clear understanding of information needs and ability to search efficiently
  - effectively evaluate information sources
  - articulate credibility of sources
  - use information ethically

Pathways - Flexible Core Area Specific outcomes

In addition courses in each category will have to satisfy at least three of the specified learning outcomes.

**C. Creative Expression**

- Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring creative expression, including, but not limited to, arts, communications, creative writing, media arts, music, and theater.
- Analyze how arts from diverse cultures of the past serve as a foundation for those of the present, and describe the significance of works of art in the societies that created them.
- Articulate how meaning is created in the arts or communications and how experience is interpreted and conveyed.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the skills involved in the creative process.
- Use appropriate technologies to conduct research and to communicate.