

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment
Course Level Plan
MUS 101 Music Appreciation

MUS 101, Music Appreciation, is a high-impact General Education course. Currently, HCC offers twenty to twenty-two section of MUS 101 per academic year. As a Gen. Ed. requirement, nearly all of these sections enroll high numbers of students. The goal of this plan is not only to implement a working outcomes assessment plan for MUS 101, but also to assure that each section offered meets the same required General Education goals set for the course in HCC's SLOA plan.

The following are the primary content goals for courses in the Arts and Humanities as stated in HCC's 2004 SLOA plan:

Students should be able to:

1. Articulate judgments concerning the values of cultural, humanistic or artistic texts (works).
2. Engage critically the ideas, forces and values which have created our world.
3. Demonstrate insight into historical process involving both change and continuity over time.
4. Practice the critical and analytical methodologies of the Humanities and the Fine Arts.
5. Demonstrate an aesthetic understanding of the creative process.

The secondary content goals for courses in the Arts and Humanities state that students should:

1. Demonstrate observational and analytical skills in a structured situation.
2. Formulate conclusions based on observations and information.
3. Apply critical thinking skills.

Based on the above primary and secondary content goals, the following two outcomes were created to address all of the content goals listed above. These outcomes are the outcomes that will be listed on ALL MUS 101 syllabi at HCC.

1. Students will be able to analyze and critically evaluate a musical performance
2. Students will be able to recognize and identify important fundamental developments and trends in Western Music.

The assessments for these outcomes should address both the cognitive and affective domains

On the cognitive level, students should be able to analyze and differentiate ideas and concepts both from written/verbal forms, (i.e. ideas gleaned from a textbook, lecture or other materials), AND from aural musical experience, (i.e. differentiating musical forms, hearing contrasting sections, timbres, etc.), and apply these cognitive skills to help them evaluate musical experiences.

On the affective level, students must get past the levels of "Receiving" and "Responding" to musical phenomena to a point of "Valuing" that phenomena. "Valuing" occurs when students can express, (both with some degree of emotional complexity, and with an adequate grasp of the fundamentals of music), their own judgments about the relative worth of a musical experience.

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These are the thresholds that the MUS 101 outcomes have been designed to attain. In the cognitive domain, evaluation, the highest level of cognitive thought, is the goal. In the affective domain, valuing, the middle level of the domain, is the goal.

Since common instruments such as the multiple choice test or quiz are usually designed to assess the recall of information, they cannot be the only tool used to assess the MUS 101 outcomes in a valid way. While these tools have their function to assess the lowest levels of the cognitive domain, other tools must be used to validly assess learning at the upper levels of the cognitive and affective domains.

Assessment Instruments

The instrument best suited to this task would combine the student's efforts towards building a knowledge of musical mediums, styles and music history with his or her ability to isolate and discuss the basic elements of music. Such an instrument requires students to understand information presented in the course and would further require them to synthesize that information into a cohesive evaluation of a piece of music. Such an evaluation would necessarily require the student to process information in both the cognitive and affective domains.

As stated above, one aim of such an exercise is evaluation, the highest level of cognitive thinking. Therefore, the cognitive levels of learning such as knowledge, (the ability to *recall* information), comprehension, (the ability to *understand* the meaning of that information), application, (the ability to *use* that information), and analysis, (the ability to separate information in order to understand complex structure), must all be attained before the student can successfully complete the exercise.

To accomplish the goals in the cognitive domain, the best assessment tool should:

- 1) Require students to isolate and discuss elements of music heard in a listening example
- 2) Require students to use these elements to make some general statements about the basic form of the example
- 3) Require students to use a knowledge of musical timbres to incorporate meaningful statements about the musical medium into the overall evaluation of the musical example.
- 4) Require students to synthesize knowledge of music history and style periods gained in the course with an analysis of the elements, medium and form of a piece of music to create good, logical arguments for the probable style period for the example.
- 5) Require the student to evaluate the piece of music objectively on its own merits rather than on the basis of the student's personal preference. (e.g. Students might explain, based both on their evaluation of the piece and on additional research, what makes the piece in question either a work of genius or a fairly commonplace example of the time period. He or she may also isolate and discuss particular traits common to an individual composer, etc.)

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Any assessment instrument designed to evaluate learning in the Arts and Humanities must also include thinking in the affective domain. In MUS 101, the aim of such an instrument is to assess the student's ability to receive musical stimuli and respond to musical ideas.

To accomplish the goals in the affective domain, the best assessment tool should:

- 1) Require the student to incorporate meaningful emotional responses to the piece of music as a part of the discussion of elements, medium, form, etc.
- 2) Require the student to explain, using appropriate terminology and application of concepts, what it was about the musical example that elicited such emotional responses

The best single assessment tool to reach all of the goals stated above is already being used by most MUS 101 instructors at HCC as a part of their assessment strategy. Though the instrument itself and its use varies from class to class, the Music Critique has been an effective assessment tool in most MUS 101 classes here at HCC. Because the critique is capable of assessing both cognitive and affective learning simultaneously, it is the perfect assessment tool for MUS 101. By Fall 2007, MUS 101 sections will start basing 25% of each student's final grade on such exercises. As we track data and can validate this approach both internally and externally, this exercise as a percentage of the final grade may become weighted more heavily.

Though the critique will be the primary assessment for MUS 101 sections, this does not mean that other assessments, both cognitive and affective, should not be used. Instructors will have the freedom to choose to use tests, quizzes, projects, papers, etc. to assess student learning. The critique is intended to be the standard by which student learning outcomes across ALL sections of MUS 101 can be assessed. Samples of critiques will be collected by instructors (with the student's permission), the names of students will be removed from the graded example, and these graded samples will be "normed" with samples from other classes. By the close of the semester, FA 2007, all MUS 101 instructors will have helped to create a standard for grades given on the critique. This standard will conform to a grading rubric which the student will get a copy of each time the critique is assigned. In this way, students know what is expected of them at the outset of the assignment. At the end of the Fall 2007 semester, MUS 101 instructors will evaluate the rubric used during the semester and make any suggestions for changes needed to further "norm" critique grades.

We will collect data each semester for two years. By the close of Spring 2009, we will have collected enough data to make some decisions about the validity of the critique as the principle SLOA tool for MUS 101. At that point we will begin the second stage of this SLOA project, which is external validation.

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Update: Spring 2009

The common assessment rubric for all MUS 101 sections taught at HCC has been in place in all sections since the Fall Semester of 2007. Before this, selected instructors piloted the rubric in their classes, and norming sessions followed at the end of the semester. Between the Fall of 2007 and the Spring of 2009, data was gathered to determine the validity of the assessment rubric. Three post-pilot “norming” sessions have occurred to analyze the validity of the assignment rubric across all sections. Not all adjunct instructors participated in every session, but all adjunct instructors except one, teaching MUS 101 during that time period, had participated in at least one session.

The norming sessions were conducted in the following manner:

1. One paper from each grade category (A, B, C, D, F) was brought to each session by each instructor participating. Where there were no example papers in a certain category, none were presented.
2. The names of both the student AND instructor were removed from the papers prior to submission. The music coordinator held the original papers submitted by each instructor.
3. Each instructor was asked to grade each paper according to the assessment rubric. The norming graders signed the papers they graded.
4. When all papers were graded, the grades of the “normed” papers were compared to each other, and discussed. The grades given by the instructor on the original papers were compared to the normed grades by the music coordinator and this process yielded the data below.

Norming session #1 (January, 2008): Four instructors participated/ twenty papers normed. Out of the twenty point scale established by the rubric only two papers showed two or more points of difference between norming session participants. A one point difference between graders was common, showing up on fifteen out of twenty papers normed. This resulted in a letter grade change between norming participants on approximately forty percent of the submitted papers.

During discussion of the grading discrepancies, it was clear that some instructors had included papers from early in the semester, and it had been their policy to “grade more easily and comment more heavily” on the first critique. It was decided that we should only use the final critique for subsequent norming sessions as two out of the four instructors had incorporated earlier critique exercises into their classes as “assignments” rather than “exams.”

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Norming session #2 (Summer 2008): The four instructors who participated in the last session and one new instructor participated. Twenty three final critique papers were graded. One instructor had no “A” paper, another had no “D” paper and another had no “F” papers to use as examples. A one point difference between the original grade and at least one norming grader showed up on twenty out of twenty-three papers. This resulted in a potential change of grade on ten out of twenty-three papers. A two point difference between the original grade and a norming grade occurred on six of the papers.

Most of the discrepancies in this session occurred between the instructors who had been through the previous norming session, and the newer instructor. Discussion revealed that the newer instructor did not quite realize the level of rigor intended by the rubric, but this instructor suggested that the other papers showed that it could be achieved. Some modifications were made to this section of MUS 101 by the instructor, and it was decided that, for purposes of consistency, the five instructors who participated in this session should also participate in the next session.

Norming session #3 (Spring 2009): The five instructors from norming session #2 participated. Twenty-four papers were normed. One instructor had no “A” paper. A one point difference between graders and the original occurred on forty percent of the papers (10 out of 24). This resulted in a letter grade change on three papers (12%). A two point difference between a grader’s grade and the original instructor’s grade occurred on only two papers (less than 10%).

Discussion revealed good reasons for the points awarded for each of the rubric categories, even when discrepancies between graders occurred. This indicates that categories on the rubric may need to be made more clear.

Overall Assessment:

The least amount of discrepancy occurred between graders in awarding grades of “B” and “C.” In all of the norming sessions, graders agreed on a grade of “B” eighty-five percent of the time, and they agreed on the grade of “C” eighty-eight percent of the time. The greatest discrepancy between normed grades occurred in the “A,” “D” and “F” categories. This data has been used to get a sense of the validity of the common assessment rubric across all sections of MUS 101. The norming sessions have proved very valuable as a source of data, and they will be continuing, periodically, as a tool designed to keep the MUS 101 course curriculum consistent across all sections. There has been no external validation of the common assessment to date. However, three out of five instructors active in the norming sessions have begun to use a similar assessment strategy and rubric in courses they teach elsewhere.

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