

College of Musical Arts -- Theory Core
Summary of Assessment Accomplishments
2007-2008 Academic Year

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General comments (Ongoing and experimental assessment activities):

The 2007-2008 theory core assessment continued the pre-enrollment activities as reported in 2005, 2006 and 2007. Prospective student theory placement exam scores in the Fall 2007 were not as high as Fall 2006. Therefore, enrolment of our remedial class, MuCT113, returned to levels more similar to 2005 (see below).

Number of students who scored low and were placed in MuCT113:

In Fall 2004	47
In Fall 2005	27
In Fall 2006	19
In Fall 2007	31

Our 2006-2007 report focused primarily on the use of a new textbook in our four-semester theory curriculum (see “Primary New Assessment Activity for 2007”). As stated under “Actions Taken” of that report, we returned to a previous textbook for 2007-2008. It will be interesting to see if there is a notable difference when 2007-2008 student outcomes are compared with the data that we collected in previous years with the other textbook. Initially, it appears that student analytical skills have returned to their higher levels as was noted as a problem in our 2006-2007 report (see “Inferences from Assessment”). We will continue to evaluate capstone projects (analysis and composition) especially since they allow us to easily assess our primary learning outcomes as mentioned in our 2004-2005 report.

As mentioned in our previous reports, we have started gathering data on other groups of students from Basic Musicianship and also Accelerated Fundamentals, MuCT115 (a mid-level remedial course). This will allow us to compare the two groups of remedial students and study the different effects that our two introductory courses have on student learning as students continue through the four-semester theory curriculum.

In the Fall of 2007, we decided to track the progress of students who took Basic Musicianship (MuCT113) and Accelerated Fundamentals (MuCT115) as they compared to students who were placed directly into Theory I (MuCT151). Student placement into these courses is based on the theory placement exam as follows:

Students who scored 4 or 5 on the placement exam were placed in Theory I.

Students who scored 2 or 3 on the placement exam were placed in Theory I AND Accelerated Fundamentals.

Students who scored 0 or 1 on the placement exam were placed in Basic Musicianship I

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II in academic year 2006-2007 arriving at Theory I in the following year.

For Fall 2007, there were 59 students who were placed directly into Theory I, 23 were placed in Accelerated Fundamentals AND Theory I while 9 students arrived in Theory I after taking Basic Musicianship in the previous academic year. During Theory I, the performance of these three groups of students was assessed carefully as described below.

Additionally, we decided to place most of the MuCT115 (Accelerated Fundamentals) students into one section of Theory I. Instructors in MuCT151 (Theory I) have wondered if this might allow them to tailor the “MuCT115” section of Theory I to more effectively meet the needs of these students. Since students take MuCT115 and MuCT151 concurrently, there can be significant overlapping of concepts and skill development between the two classes. Perhaps a section filled with students taking these two courses might progress differently than other sections comprised of students only taking MuCT151, Theory I (or those who had a year of Basic Musicianship before taking Theory I). More details of these experiments are provided below.

Primary New Assessment Activity for 2007-2008:

Evaluating the “MuCT115” section of Theory I & Comparing the “Three Groups” of Theory I students:

Incoming students can take the theory placement exam twice (once during their audition day and once during O-Reg). When students who are required to take MuCT115 (Accelerated Fundamentals) were identified, they were placed into a particular section of Theory I. For this report, this section of Theory I will be known as the “MuCT115” section of Theory I. As the semester progressed, the performance of these students was evaluated in relation to certain learning outcomes used in our four-semester theory sequence (see below). We decided to use three class exams (roughly occurring during weeks five, ten, and fifteen) to compare the learning achievements of these students.

Learning Outcomes (MuCT151, 152, 251, 252):

1. Competence. To possess a repertoire of skills and a body of knowledge appropriate to the discipline.
2. Independence. To demonstrate independence of thought and action in music performance and scholarship.
3. Discrimination. To be able to make informed aesthetic judgments about music compositions and performances.
4. Analysis. To understand the styles and structures of music and relate this knowledge to its performance.
5. Communication. To apply technical vocabulary to communicate with a community of other professionals.
6. Creativity. To apply musical knowledge to novel situations as well as develop

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personal interpretation of the repertoire.

The exams were designed to evaluate as many of the learning outcomes as possible. However, competence, independence, discrimination, analysis, and creativity were more easily assessed using this format.

Methods and Procedures for both assessment activities:

These two assessment activities occurred concurrently using these same three exams. Because the exams were given at different times during the semester, we were able to evaluate the progress of the students. The inferences and conclusions of the two activities are listed separately below.

Inferences from Assessments (comparing the three groups of students):

Exam scores for each group of students were compared with the following results:

	<u>Exam #1</u>	<u>Exam #2</u>	<u>Final Exam</u>
Theory I only students:	78%	79%	76%
“MuCT115” students:	68%	68%	65%
Basic Musicianship students:	71%	65%	56%

On exam #1, the Basic Musicianship students performed at or slightly above the level of the “MuCT115” students, who initially tested higher on the theory placement exam but did not have the advantage of preparatory courses at BGSU. Apparently, two semesters of Basic Musicianship (MuCT113 & MuCT114) gave the Basic Musicianship students a slight edge in text performance over the “MuCT115” students.

On exam #2, the Theory I only students and the “MuCT115” students continued at the same level of performance as on exam #1. Thus, they were able to keep up with the new content. In contrast, the performance of the Basic Musicianship students slipped somewhat. The slight advantage they held over the “MuCT115” students on exam #1 disappeared, probably because there was less review content on exam #2.

On exam #3 (final exam), the performance of the Theory I only students and the “MuCT115” students slipped somewhat. However, the performance of the Basic Musicianship students fell considerably.

Conclusions & Recommendations (comparing the three groups of students):

Accelerated Fundamentals is serving the “MuCT115” students adequately. While it does not enable them to gain on the Theory I only students, it helps them at least keep pace.

Basic Musicianship does not appear to serve the Basic Musicianship students well enough when they are taking Theory I. Two semesters of Basic Musicianship gives them a slight advantage for less than half a semester of Theory I. To extend this advantage throughout the semester, perhaps they need extra class time concurrent with Theory I throughout.

Inferences from Assessments (“MuCT115” section of Theory I):

Below are the test results for the four sections of Theory I. Section 2 was dominated by the “MuCT115” students.

	<u>Exam #1</u>	<u>Exam #2</u>	<u>Final Exam</u>
Section 1 (mostly Theory I only)	81%	82%	81%
Section 2 (mostly “MuCT115”)	68%	70%	67%
Section 3 (includes many Basic Music)	73%	71%	73%
Section 4	76%	78%	76%

Section 2’s average stayed a consistent 12-14 percentage points below that of section 1. In contrast, project grades did not display any sizable discrepancies. For more information about analysis and composition projects, see our 2006 assessment report.

Conclusions & Recommendations (comparing the three groups of students):

The tracked sections were different in other less-quantifiable ways. It was difficult to keep all four sections on the same schedule of lesson plans. Sections 2 & 3 always required more time to achieve mastery, had more questions, and needed more review. A flatter distribution of “MuCT115” and Basic Musicianship students among sections would have allowed the extra questions and review times to be evenly distributed as well. This tracking created a situation where the “MuCT115” and Basic Musicianship students never got enough of what they needed to get ahead in the course. They could do no more than maintain the position. It is a wonder that these sections didn’t fall further and further behind as the semester progressed.

Actions taken:

Our theory curriculum features a tracked design, with students in different tracks required to take different courses. The addition of tracking within one of these courses at minimum provides no advantage but probably is a detriment to learning for some sections. As a result of this experiment, we will not purposely track students (i.e., a “MuCT115” section) within a section of our theory courses. Mainstreaming appears to be the best solution for the future.