

Assessment Cycle 2025 - 2026

Program: Bachelor of Music (BM) (242)

Division: College: Arts and Sciences

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Northwestern Mission. Northwestern State University is a responsive, student-oriented institution committed to acquiring, creating, and disseminating knowledge through innovative teaching, research, and service. With its certificate, undergraduate, and graduate programs, Northwestern State University prepares its increasingly diverse student population to contribute to an inclusive global community with a steadfast dedication to improving our region, state, and nation.

College of Arts and Sciences' Mission. College of Arts and Sciences' Mission. The College of Arts & Sciences, the largest college at Northwestern State University, is a diverse community of scholars, teachers, and students, working collaboratively to acquire, create, and disseminate knowledge through transformational, high-impact experiential learning practices, research, and service. The College strives to produce graduates who are productive members of society equipped with the capability to promote economic and social development and improve the overall quality of life in the region. The College provides an unequalled undergraduate education in the social and behavioral sciences, English, communication, journalism, media arts, biological and physical sciences, and the creative and performing arts, and at the graduate level in the creative and performing arts, English, TESOL, and Homeland Security. Uniquely, the College houses the Louisiana Scholars' College (the State's designated Honors College), the Louisiana Folklife Center, and the Creole Center, demonstrating its commitment to community service, research, and preservation of Louisiana's precious resources.

Department of Music Mission. The Music Department is part of the **Dear School of Creative and Performing Arts** at Northwestern State University and is dedicated to the development of students for roles in academic, leadership, professional, performing, education, and research careers in the challenging fields of music, music business, music performance, and music education. Utilizing transformational, high-impact experiential learning practices, courses in core musical fundamentals, performances, research, and service, the department produces graduates equipped to be productive members of society and professionals in the arts in which they will help develop and improve the overall quality of life locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. The department delivers the Bachelor of Music degree with concentrations in Performance, Sacred Music, and Music Business, and works collaboratively with the School of Education to offer the Bachelor of Music Education degree. The department also offers the Master of Music

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degree with concentrations in performance and music education.

Purpose (optional): The bachelor program will prepare students for lives as artistic professionals and educators who are responsive to the artistic demands of the profession.

Methodology: The assessment process for the BM program is as follows:

- (1) Data from assessment tools (both direct – indirect, quantitative, and qualitative) are collected and returned to the program coordinator.
- (2) The program coordinator will analyze the data to determine whether students have met measurable outcomes.
- (3) Results from the assessment will be discussed with the program faculty.
- (4) Individual meetings will be held with faculty teaching core Music courses if required (show cause).
- (5) The Program Coordinator, in consultation with the BM faculty and curriculum committee, will propose changes to measurable outcomes, assessment tools for the next assessment period and, where needed, curricula and program changes.

Student Learning Outcomes:

SLO 1. Students will be able to demonstrate excellence as solo and ensemble performers at a level to provide a basis for a professional career as a musician.

Course Map: Tied to the Objectives:

Applied Study:

MUSIC 1710 – Major Study

MUSIC 3710 – Major Study

MUSIC 4720 – Recital

Ensembles:

MUSIC 1310 – Band

MUSIC 1320 – Men's Chorus

MUSIC 1330 – Chamber Choir

MUSIC 1340 – Orchestra

MUSIC 1380 – Women's Chorus

Measure 1.1. (Direct – knowledge):

Details/Description: Students will demonstrate excellence through performance before

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a jury of 2-5 faculty each semester, auditions for ensembles at least once a year, and qualifying juries to assess whether they are ready for upper-class applied study. For Performance Majors, a Senior Recital is required, for which a Preview hearing performance in front of the student's Recital Committee must be passed.

Acceptable Target: A rubric for each of these juries is used to evaluate the student and is kept on file. Qualifying jury results are filed and noted in the CAPA offices. Acceptable target is 90% passing the Qualifying Jury and Senior Recital.

Ideal Target: Ideal target is 100% passing Qualifying Jury and Senior Recital.

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester

Key/Responsible Personnel: Music Faculty

Supporting Materials: Jury comment/grading form; Jury repertoire form; Qualifying Jury Assessment form; Recital checklist; Recital Grading Sheet; Recital Preview Hearing Form; Voice Jury Form; Voice Qualifying Jury Form; Voice Recital Preview Hearing Form

Findings: Target was **not met**.

Analysis:

In AC 2024-25, the target was **not met**. Based on the analysis of the 2024-25 results, we observed the following. The passing rate for all Qualifying Juries was 83% (25 out of 30 total Qualifying Juries attempted). All but one recital attempt was successfully passed (15 out of 16 total, 94%). The one recital that was not successfully passed was due to a student's extenuating circumstances. The student received an Incomplete and will complete the recital in the Fall. For all Qualifying Juries and Recitals attempted, 87% successfully passed. This is an increase over the previous year, but it was not at an ideal passing rate. The Qualifying Jury was attempted at the end of the music students' sophomore year. This sophomore class was in their 1st year of high school when the COVID pandemic caused shutdowns of schools. As we experienced and learned during the pandemic, virtual learning in music created a pause in student musician development in that the individual instruction on instruments and the ensemble experience of live music was completely stopped for nearly a year. This represents an important time in the development of young musicians. The drop in passing rate for the Qualifying Jury was likely reflective of these students entering college with deficiencies in their musical fundamentals due to this gap in their development. We are likely still seeing some of the effects of these students being at an important developmental phase in their music education when COVID closed their schools. However, it was encouraging to see improvement, as this helped us to know that our approaches to remediating fundamentals where possible was likely helping these students. In addition, it was highly likely that music educators in the high schools were being effective in getting these students back on track. The passing rate for Conducting II final

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projects was 95% (20 out of 21 total students). The passing rate for all pedagogy/skill assessments in Methods/Pedagogy courses was 100% (16 students total). The Conducting and Methods/Pedagogy classes included daily assessment of progress in conducting, pedagogy, and classroom management. The small class size and close monitoring by the professor proved successful in these upper-level classes.

Based on the analysis of the 2024-25 results, the faculty made the following changes in AC 2025-26 to drive the cycle of improvement. Faculty assessed students' individual needs for practice plans and performance suggestions to address individual weaknesses and areas for improvement. Faculty suggested additional pedagogical resources through guest artists (virtual and live) and online resources. MUS 1500 was restructured to include elements that help students prepare for all careers in music (writing a bio, having a headshot taken, critiquing performances of peers and professionals, providing constructive feedback in defined areas for critique, and speaking from the stage). Discussions of these skills and career-readiness elements took place in MUS 1500. With these discussions and preparedness exercises in the freshman through junior levels, those students who choose to take the Career Preparedness elective course (MUS 4740 Career Seminar for Musicians) in their senior year will be ready for more in-depth discussions and projects, further preparing these students for a career in music. In addition, discussions of physical and mental wellness were provided in master classes, studio classes, and a campus-wide full yoga class each semester.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-26, the target was **not met**. However, the passing rate for all Qualifying Juries attempted increased to 92% (24 out of 26 total, 92%). Several of these Qualifying Juries were second attempts, all of which passed. All Recitals were passed (17/17 total = 100%). This was also an increase in the number of Recitals attempted from the previous year (16 total attempted last academic year). For all Qualifying Juries and Recitals attempted, 95% successfully passed. While this is not far from the ideal target of 100%, the faculty consistently worked to individualize lesson plans and practice assignments for each student. If a student was struggling, the applied faculty addressed any issues that may be affecting student success through individualized progress plans. The focus on finding resources for physical and mental well-being showed signs of helping students to succeed, as well. Faculty made use of the campus resources (Counseling Services) and were also seeking out additional resources through music educator networks. The Qualifying Jury was attempted at the end of the music students' sophomore year. The fact that two of the Qualifying Juries that were successfully passed were 2nd attempts for the students was encouraging in that it demonstrated that these students and their applied teachers were able to address weaknesses using the techniques described above (a practice plan focused on the student's individual needs and resources to help students with physical and mental well-being), and that those techniques were successful.

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Decision or Recommendation.

In 2025-26, the target was **not met**.

Based on the analysis of the 2025-26 results, the faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-27 to drive the cycle of improvement. Several faculty have applied for an Elevate U internal grant to do two things: collect data for retention from in the first two years of college, and present strategies/techniques for practice effectiveness. The focus is to teach freshman and sophomore music majors how to structure and execute an effective practice plan on their own. Many freshman and sophomore students struggle with understanding how to plan and execute their personal practice time. While this skill is addressed in private lessons throughout the department, the intent of this grant is to create a cohort that will be guided through specific practice skills and techniques as a cohort. With data collected in this project, it is our hope that in the process of this initiative, we can identify any at-risk students more quickly. In addition, faculty will create individual practice plans to best address each student's individual needs and weaknesses. Faculty will also seek and use resources to assist in guiding students for their physical and mental well-being. Small chamber music opportunities will also be provided and encouraged through performances in Studio Classes and MUS 1500.

These changes will improve the students' ability to demonstrate excellence as solo and ensemble performers at a level to provide a basis for a professional career as a musician, conductor, and educator thereby continuing to push the cycle of improvement forward.

SLO 2: Demonstrate specific knowledge in music theory and aural skills at a level to provide a basis for a professional career as a musician.

Course Map: Tied to the Objectives:

Music Theory:

MUSIC 1150 – Music Theory I

MUSIC 1160 – Music Theory II

MUSIC 2150 – Music Theory III

MUSIC 2160 – Music Theory IV

Aural Skills:

MUSIC 1151 – Aural Skills I

MUSIC 1161 – Aural Skills II

MUSIC 2151 – Aural Skills III

MUSIC 2161 – Aural Skills IV

Measure 2.1. (Direct – Skill / Ability):

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Students will demonstrate knowledge through ongoing assessment and cumulative final exams which require the student to demonstrate competence in these areas before continuing to the next level. Completion of all 4 levels satisfies the requirement.

Acceptable Target: These courses serve as pre-requisites for several upper level required courses. Having this knowledge and these skills is essential to progressing towards the completion of the degree. Acceptable target: 90% of students passing final exam and final composition project (in MUS 2160), working toward completion of the cycle of these courses.

Ideal Target: Ideal target is 93% passing final exam and final composition project (in MUS 2160).

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester/ongoing

Key/Responsible Personnel: Music Faculty

Findings: The target was **met**.

Analysis:

In AC 2024-25, the target was **met** for both the final project (93%) and the final exam (93%). The department participated in tutoring initiatives again during this year. However, a greater effort was made to meet students at the places (common areas in the Music building and Varnado Hall dormitory) and during hours that worked best for them (evenings). Students seemed, for the most part, to be reaching out when they needed help. An effort was also made by the Department Chair to involve graduate students in tutoring students in the undergraduate theory classes. The option for the Research/Analysis paper in place of the final composition project remained. While no students chose this option, having the choice in place allowed students to present their capstone project in the Music Theory courses in the manner that was most comfortable for them.

These changes impacted the students' ability to demonstrate knowledge through ongoing assessment and cumulative final exams which required the student to demonstrate competence in these areas before continuing to the next level. These changes also provided flexibility and allowed the professor to assess students through varying styles of learning and communicating, providing a more student-oriented assessment process for this important professional skill.

Based on the analysis of the 2024-25 results, the faculty made the following changes in AC 2025-26 to drive the cycle of improvement. The Department Chair and Theory Coordinator assessed the outcomes and effectiveness of offering the MUS 1700 X1N lab course in conjunction with the MUS 1150 Music Theory class for those students who were at a developmental level in music theory. After the data was analyzed, the decision was made to no longer continue the MUS 1700 X1N lab course. The

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department returned to offering two courses in the fall: MUS 1000 (Introduction to Music Theory) and MUS 1150 (Music Theory I). Students were placed in the appropriate class after they took the Music Theory Diagnostic exam (placement exam) at Freshman Connection or before beginning classes in August.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026 the target was **met** in the average score for the final project and final exam (93%). The final project had a 91% passing rate, while the final exam had a 95% passing rate. The return to the previous system of having the MUS 1000 Introduction to Theory course (in lieu of the MUS 1700 X1N lab course) was successful. The Theory Professor was concerned that those students enrolled in the MUS 1000 class for the Fall semester would struggle to get back on track for the four-year degree plan. However, there are double the number of students enrolled in the MUS 1160 Theory II course this summer, indicating that these students are able to get on the four-year rotation.

Decision or Recommendation.

In AC 2025-2026, the target was **met**.

Based on information gathered from analysis of the AC 2025-26 data, faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-27 to drive the cycle of improvement. The Theory Professor is considering adding a textbook requirement for the aural skills courses which would supplement classroom work with dictation exercises to be done outside of class time. Additionally, the Theory Professor is planning to pilot several materials with the MUS 2151 classes for possible adoption by all courses. This initiative is in the early stages and will not affect any theory curriculum plans for the upcoming year.

These changes will improve the students' ability to demonstrate specific knowledge in music theory and aural skills at a level to provide a basis for a professional career as a musician, thereby continuing to push the cycle of improvement forward.

SLO 3: Demonstrate specific knowledge of music history and demonstrate the ability to write and speak effectively about the art of music.

Course Map: Tied to Objectives:

Music History:

MUSIC 2030 – Music History/Literature I

MUSIC 2040 – Music History/Literature II

MUSIC 3030 – Music History/Literature III

MUSIC 3040 – Music History/Literature IV

Measure 3.1. (Direct – knowledge)

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In each of the Music History courses, students are required to write research papers. In-class essay questions on exams require students to demonstrate competence in these areas before continuing to the next level. Completion of all 4 levels satisfies the requirement.

Acceptable Target: Students choose subjects, submit proposed topics, submit rough drafts, and (after receiving feedback) submit final drafts. Some are chosen to make presentations at the University's Research Day. Acceptable target is 60% of students receiving a passing grade on the research portion of their grade in the course.

Ideal Target: Ideal target is 70% receiving a passing grade on the research paper portion of their grade.

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester/ongoing

Key/Responsible Personnel: Music Faculty

Findings: The target was **met**.

Analysis: In AC 2024-2025, the target was **met**. The passing rate for Music History II was 93% (a drop of 5%), and the passing rate for Music History IV was 90% (a drop of 6%). While these drops are not alarming, the Music History professor monitored the Music History II cohort in the Fall 2025 semester to assure they were improving. These changes applied in AY 2024-25 improved the students' ability to demonstrate specific knowledge of music history and demonstrate the ability to write and speak effectively about the art of music, thereby continuing to push the cycle of improvement forward.

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-25 results, faculty made the following changes in AC 2025-2026 to drive the cycle of improvement. The Musicology professor tested each class more often to more frequently assess the mastery and rate of improvement. In addition, shorter research/writing assignments were utilized, as these have proven to be successful in measuring student abilities to write and more frequently address any issues. The test format was restructured to include more writing as an approach to incorporate assessment in testing situations.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026 the target was **met**. However, the passing rates dropped significantly in one class. The passing rate for Music History II was 74% (a drop of 19%), while the passing rate for Music History IV was 94% (a drop of 2%). The drop of 19% in the Music History II course is a concern, and the Music History professor has indicated that this particular class of students had significant academic weaknesses (difficulty reading and retaining concepts, inability to form abstract concepts, did not use tutoring service opportunities, were not adequately prepared for exams, had poor study skills, often attempted to cheat using electronic devices). This is a cohort of students we will watch closely in the next level of Music

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History.

Decision or Recommendation.

In AC 2025-2026, the target was **met**.

Based on information gathered from analysis of the AC 2025-26 data, faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-27 to drive the cycle of improvement. The Music History professor plans to add the use of a new textbook in Music History III (to specifically address the weaknesses in this year's Music History II course). This new textbook will offer a simplified outline of music history. She also plans to restructure the Music History III course to assist this cohort of students with comprehension and retention of the information. Writing assignments will be short and incorporated into exams to more frequently assess students' writing skills.

These changes will improve the students' ability to demonstrate specific knowledge of music history and demonstrate the ability to write and speak effectively about the art of music, thereby continuing to push the cycle of improvement forward.

SLO 4. Gain keyboard proficiency sufficient to assist in their professional career as a musician.

Course Map: Tied to the Objectives:

Class Piano:

MUSIC 1800 – Piano Class I

MUSIC 1810 – Piano Class II

MUSIC 1820 – Piano Class III

MUSIC 1830 – Piano Class IV

Applied Study in Piano:

MUSIC 1700A – Minor Study (piano)

MUSIC 1710A – Major Study (piano)

MUSIC 3710A – Major Study (piano)

Measure 4.1. (Direct – knowledge)

Proficiency is demonstrated at the conclusion of each semester of keyboard study (prescribed proficiencies for each level). Cumulative proficiency is administered and required at the completion of the 4th semester - MUS 1830. Skills achieved include playing accompaniments, score-reading, improvisation, transposition, scales major and minor, and melodic harmonization.

Acceptable Target: Students must complete keyboard proficiency exams in all these areas before they are granted a passing grade in the final course in the sequence. If they

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do not pass the proficiency exams, they simply re-take the course. Acceptable target is 90% of students passing each proficiency level.

Ideal Target: Ideal target is 95% of students passing each proficiency level.

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester/ongoing. To be assessed at the end of each academic year.

Key/Responsible Personnel: Head of Keyboard Area/Music Faculty/Department Chair

Findings: The target was **met**.

Analysis: In AC 2024-25, the target was **met**. An ideal target of 100% of the total students passed all levels of the proficiency exams. This was an increase of 9% from the previous year. All 38 students enrolled successfully passed the proficiency exams.

Based on the analysis of the 2024-25 results, faculty made the following changes in AC 2025-26 to drive the cycle of improvement. The Piano faculty experimented with only requiring hands separate (instead of hands together) for scales. This was in-line with many of the top university pedagogy programs in the country. Our current Coordinator of the Group Piano/Piano Pedagogy area has now been teaching at NSU for several years, and he proposed that the scores for each area of the proficiency exam simply be calculated arithmetically. Students could, in theory, fail one or two elements of the entire proficiency exam series but still pass the overall exam. The exception would be the Final Proficiency Exam, in which students can fail no more than a single element. The reason for this proposed change was that students end up having to re-do a lot of elements to proceed. Since the categories were similar for every exam (Score Reading, solo repertoire, harmonization, etc.), their time was more well-served by looking forward to the material on the next exam to improve that area.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026 the target was met. One hundred percent (100%) of students passed all proficiency exams. Classroom time was not used for students to re-do elements of the proficiency exams they did not previously pass, and this has proven to be effective. Students were able to move forward with material instead. Classroom time was limited and best used for active instruction as much as possible. The 3-Exam schedule was successful, as well, because it allowed for the ability to cover more material (more repertoire pieces, score reading examples, etc.). Students benefit from moving through material quickly both for motivation and improvement of skills, such as sight reading and keyboard technique, which improved primarily through practicing their repertoire pieces. Hands-separate scales have also been a success. For class piano, they primarily reinforced concepts from music theory and helped students to feel comfortable playing in a key (rather than scales being part of a technical exercise).

Decision or Recommendation.

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In AC 2025-2026, the target was **met**.

Based on information gathered from analysis of the AC 2025-26 data, faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-27 to drive the cycle of improvement. Project-based learning will be implemented into the Class Piano sequence (and may become the Final Exam for Class Piano IV). One implementation of this type of learning style is the use of a Composition Project, which utilizes and reinforces concepts covered in class. For example, instead of simply playing their Primary Chord Patterns for the Exam, they will also implement these into a composition where they write out their composition with lead-sheet notation as well as fully-realized notation. They would then be required to use accompanying patterns (e.g., waltz bass, Alberti bass, broken chords, etc.) and modulate from one key to the other, using their primary chord patterns in each key. Once completed, the students will perform their compositions for each other as part of the exam. The intention of this type of project is for students to connect the knowledge they are learning in class in an actionable way to see its relevance to a common skill in accompanying. A project like this is helpful in guiding students to use their knowledge in an actual self-directed (and teacher-guided) project.

The changes outlined will improve the students' ability to gain keyboard proficiency sufficient to assist in their professional career as a musician, thereby continuing to push the cycle of improvement forward.

Comprehensive Summary of Key Evidence of Improvements Based on Analysis of Results.

Program faculty made several decisions after examining results of data analysis from AC 2024-2025 which resulted in improved student learning and program improvement in AC 2025 – 2026.

- Faculty assessed students' individual needs for practice plans and performance suggestions to address individual weaknesses and areas for improvement.
- Faculty suggested additional pedagogical resources through guest artists (virtual and live) and online resources.
- MUS 1500 was restructured to include elements that help students prepare for all careers in music (writing a bio, having a headshot taken, critiquing performances of peers and professionals, providing constructive feedback in defined areas for critique, and speaking from the stage). Discussions of these skills and career-readiness elements also took place in MUS 1500.
- Discussions of physical and mental wellness were provided in master classes, studio classes, and a campus-wide full yoga class each semester.

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- The decision was made to no longer continue the MUS 1700 X1N lab course. The department returned to offering two courses in the fall: MUS 1000 (Introduction to Music Theory) and MUS 1150 (Music Theory I). Students were placed in the appropriate class after taking a Music Theory Diagnostic exam (placement exam) at Freshman Connection or before beginning classes in August.
- The Musicology professor tested each class more often to more frequently assess the mastery and rate of improvement.
- Shorter research/writing assignments were utilized, as these have proven to be successful in measuring student abilities to write and more frequently address any issues.
- The test format was restructured to include more writing as an approach to incorporate assessment in testing situations.
- The Piano faculty experimented with only requiring hands separate (instead of hands together) for scales.
- Now that our current Coordinator of the Group Piano/Piano Pedagogy area has been teaching at NSU for several years, he proposed that the scores for each area of the proficiency exam simply be calculated arithmetically. The exception would be the Final Proficiency Exam, in which students can fail no more than a single element.

Plan of Action for Moving Forward:

Program faculty examined the evidence and results of data analysis from AC 2025-2026 and will take steps to continue to improve student learning in AC 2026-2027:

- Several faculty have applied for an Elevate U internal grant to do two things: collect data for retention from in the first two years of college, and present strategies/techniques for practice effectiveness. With data collected in this project, it is our hope that in the process of this initiative, we can identify any at-risk students more quickly.
- Faculty will create individual practice plans to best address each student's individual needs and weaknesses.
- Faculty will also seek and use resources to assist in guiding students for their

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physical and mental well-being.

- Small chamber music opportunities will also be provided and encouraged through performances in Studio Classes and MUS 1500.
- In the Instrumental Conducting course (MUS 3110), additional focus will be placed on reinforcement of understanding and demonstrating transposition of common band/orchestral instruments, as this is an area that needs improvement.
- Additionally, the Conducting faculty will look at establishing a conducting sequence that flows better through the Conducting I and Conducting II courses. In particular, there may be a more effective way to use Lab Ensembles to help with more consistent reinforcement of the conducting skills learned in class.
- In the MUED 4010 Secondary Methods course, faculty plan to have more teaching episodes that last for longer durations to help solidify and assess these skills.
- In the Level II Percussion Methods course (MUS 1930), the instructor plans to create lecture videos to be viewed outside of class time in lieu of in-class lectures so that class time can be used for more playing and teaching exercises.
- The Theory Professor is considering adding a textbook requirement for the aural skills courses which would supplement classroom work with dictation exercises to be done outside of class time.
- The Theory Professor is planning to pilot several materials with the MUS 2151 classes for possible adoption by all courses. This initiative is in the early stages and will not affect any theory curriculum plans for the upcoming year.
- The Music History professor plans to add the use of a new textbook in Music History III (to specifically address the weaknesses in this year's Music History II course). This new textbook will offer a simplified outline of music history.
- The Music History professor also plans to restructure the Music History III course to assist this cohort of students with comprehension and retention of the information.
- Writing assignments will be shortened and incorporated into exams to more frequently assess students' writing skills.
- Project-based learning will be implemented into the Class Piano sequence (and

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may become the Final Exam for Class Piano IV). The intention of this type of project is for students to connect the knowledge they are learning in class in an actionable way to see its relevance to a common skill in accompanying. A project like this is helpful in guiding students to use their knowledge in an actual self-directed (and teacher-guided) project.