

Assessment Cycle 2025 – 2026

Program: Master of Music (MM) (542)

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 unequaled 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 Department of Teaching, Learning, and Counseling to offer the Bachelor of Music Education degree. The department also offers the Master of Music degree with concentrations in performance and music education.

Assessment Cycle 2025 – 2026

Purpose (optional): The master's 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 MM 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 (Graduate Program Coord.) will analyze the data to determine whether students have met measurable outcomes; coordinator communicates with Graduate Faculty in the program on a regular basis to discuss findings.

(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 MM 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 the ability to conduct research, comprehend scholarly readings, and apply this knowledge in a scholarly document.

Course Map: Tied to Course Objectives:

MUS/MUED 5900 - Research Methods in Music

MUS 5150 - Pedagogy

MUS/MUED 5400 - Special Problems

MUS 5970 - Performance Document

Measure 1.1. (Direct – knowledge): Research Paper (Student Artifact)

Completion of these courses demonstrates acquisition of these abilities. Completion of the scholarly document is the actual product resulting from this learning.

Acceptable Target: The final document must be approved by a committee of the Music Graduate Faculty of at least 3 members and then submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School. Acceptable Target is 93% of students receiving approval of their final document.

Ideal Target: Ideal target is 97% of students receiving approval of their final document.

Implementation Plan (timeline): Every semester

Assessment Cycle 2025 – 2026

Key/Responsible Personnel: Graduate Music Faculty/Major Professors for each student submitted a final document.

Findings: The target was **met**.

Analysis:

In AC 2024-25, the target was **met**. All students scheduled to complete their final scholarly document did so (7 out of 7 students). With Applied Faculty/Major Professors also acting as Advisor, there was more frequent communication and accountability between the graduate student and the professor they see most often. This communication, in addition to faculty access to advising materials and information via the Coordinator of Graduate Advising/Help Sheet Moodle Shell and link, allowed for regular discussion regarding class schedule planning, final proposal/final document planning, and course rotations. Regular access and communication proved quite helpful for each graduate student. Additionally, each faculty member in the Music Department has renewed or applied for Graduate Faculty status. The ability to divide the committee work more equally among music faculty has also been very helpful.

Based on information gathered from analysis of the AC 2024-25 data, faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2025-2026 to drive the cycle of improvement. The Coordinator of Graduate Advising created in-house fillable templates for Title Page, Signature Page, and Abstract so that students preparing Proposals and/or Final Documents were able to create uniform spacing and formatting on all of these documents. These templates were included on the Help Sheet. This helped to streamline the preparation of the Final Projects/Documents for students in their last two semesters of the MM. In an effort to help faculty become more independent and comfortable with the advising process, the Coordinator of Graduate Advising added a "Frequently Asked Questions" section to the end of the Help Sheet. This allowed for faculty to find answers to common questions more easily. She also experimented with creating a "Graduate Student Survival Sheet" to help Graduate Students find answers to their common questions, especially in their second year. The Professor of MUED 5900 experimented with including an exam that covers important information in the Guidelines for Theses, etc. Manual (available on the Graduate School website) as part of the grade for the class so that students can commit this information to memory in their first semester. We are finding that many graduate students are forgetting the vital information learned in this class by the 3rd and 4th semesters. The Department Chair explored ways to ensure that each student's graduate committee can be determined and solidified at the end of the first semester of study.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026 the target was **met**. All students in the final semester of their graduate music degree successfully completed their final scholarly document (7 out of 7 students). The addition of in-house templates for the Title Page, Signature Page, and Abstract proved to be helpful in the formatting process for each

Assessment Cycle 2025 – 2026

student and major professor. Additionally, the major professors had fewer questions regarding guidelines and formatting, which indicates that either the students are retaining this information better or faculty are finding the Graduate Faculty Help Sheet helpful throughout this process. It is also likely that both of those statements are true, which was the goal of the Coordinator of Graduate Advising the previous year. Also, in the MUED 5900 Introduction to Research Class, the professor strongly encouraged the students to being discussion with their major professors concerning their topics for the final scholarly document. The discussion of this topic in the first semester of their degree allows for them to stay focused on the final scholarly document throughout the four semesters, which keeps them from forgetting most of the guidelines and formatting requirements they learn in the Research class that first semester.

Decision or Recommendation: In AC 2025-2026, the target was **met**.

Based on the analysis of the 2025-2026 results, the faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027 to drive the cycle of improvement. The Department Chair will expand the role of the Coordinator of Graduate Advising into two roles: Coordinator of Graduate Studies and Coordinator of Graduate Student Research. This change will divide the work of Coordinator between two people. The former will focus on organization and communication (between both students and faculty) regarding music graduate student admission and navigating the requirements throughout the degree. The later will teach the MUED 5900 class and focus on guiding students through the research requirements throughout the degree. The professor of the MUED 5900 course will restructure the course to include in-class writing assignments and an exam focused on the Guidelines Manual for Research Documents, which outlines the research requirements and expectations for the graduate degrees. She will also create an assignment that will serve as a “Survival Guide” for the Master of Music degree once it is completed. Students will then have this document which they can refer to after the first semester of study.

These changes will improve the student’s ability to conduct research, comprehend scholarly readings, and apply this knowledge in their preparation of a scholarly document, thereby continuing to push the cycle of improvement forward.

SLO 2: Demonstrate professional competency in such disciplines as performance or music education.

Course Map: Tied to Course Objectives:

MUS 5700, 5710 - Applied Study
MUS 5230 - Advanced Conducting

Assessment Cycle 2025 – 2026

MUED 5000 - Seminar in Music Education
MUS 5720 - Recital

Measure 2.1. (Direct – Skill / Ability): Capstone Experience

Students will be evaluated on one significant capstone experience as it pertains to their chosen concentration. Examples include solo recital, conducting recital, or significant written projects.

Acceptable Target: Because these are Capstone experiences, they are evaluated and approved under the supervision of the Major Professor with the approval of the student's graduate committee. Acceptable target is 93% of students passing the final recital, as this is the capstone event for the courses listed.

Ideal Target: Ideal target is 97% of students passing the final recital.

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester

Key/Responsible Personnel: Graduate Music Faculty and Major Professor for each student giving a final recital.

Findings: The target was **met**.

Analysis: In AC 2024-25 the target was met. 100% of students scheduled to complete their final degree recital successfully passed. With more attention directed to being accountable to an overall degree timeline, the final project and recital became a more visible goal which succeeded in encouraging students to perform more often in small settings. Many students are beginning to give elective recitals and more actively participate in chamber music opportunities. These performance opportunities allow the faculty to identify any deficiencies in performing and address concerns early and quickly.

Opportunities for graduate students to lead chamber music groups (their own or assisting in coaching undergraduate groups) was encouraged. Opportunities for graduate students to perform with faculty chamber groups was explored, as well. An attempt was made to offer additional master classes (virtual and in-person) to all students, with some having a focus of preparing graduate students for performing at a professional level. Each student's major professor/advisor received updated information (Graduate Faculty Help Sheet and links) and guidance from the Department Chair and Coordinator of Graduate Advising as they gained more confidence in the Advisor role. The major professor/advisor continued to have more involvement in the student's overall degree timeline which allows for earlier and more frequent discussions regarding planning and overall wellness in preparing a full professional-level recital in the final semester.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026 the target was **met**. All students that attempted their final recital passed (7 out of 7). The number of master classes in the individual studios increased this year, allowing for more frequent and varying feedback outside of their usual weekly lessons. These sorts of opportunities create a realistic performing environment, as students tend to get more nervous to play for someone new. The best way to become better at performing is to experience these nerves more

Assessment Cycle 2025 – 2026

frequently so that your mind knows what to expect and can help the body to manage the adrenaline that is natural with performance. Graduate students were also involved in coaching undergraduate student chamber groups, as well as guiding Studio Class or Technique Classes at times. These leadership opportunities foster confidence, which also helps with managing nerves when performing.

Decision or Recommendation: In AC 2025-2026, the target was **met**.

Based on the analysis of the 2025-2026 results, the faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027 to drive the cycle of improvement. The Department Chair and Coordinators have submitted a proposal to develop a Graduate Chamber Music Fellowship (depending on funding) which will consist of select incoming graduate students. These students will have expanded leadership opportunities in performing and coaching chamber music. Those opportunities will include managing the Music Business end of performing, as well. These experiences will develop skills needed for freelance musicians in the professional world. Also, faculty will encourage all graduate students to increase the time they spend leading a group, either through educational discussions or performance coaching.

These changes will improve the students' ability to perform a full recital at a professional level, as well as help to prepare a student to do the same, thereby continuing to push the cycle of improvement forward.

SLO 3: Demonstrate the potential to solve current problems in various aspects of music or music education. (Classroom Assessment)

Course Map: Tied to Course Objectives:

MUED 5010 - Foundations of Music Education

MUED 5020 - Current Issues and Trends in Music Education

MUS 5150 - Pedagogy

MUS 5390 - Performance Literature

Measure 3.1. (Direct – knowledge)

Students make presentations in class, research, write papers, lead discussions, and facilitate dialogue on a variety of pertinent issues.

Acceptable Target: Students will be assigned culminating or final projects which ask them to research and offer solutions to a specific problem. Acceptable target is 90% of students receiving a passing grade of B or better of the final presentation and/or project for the above courses, as the presentation and/or project are culminating assignments that apply the knowledge gained throughout the above courses. The implementation of

Assessment Cycle 2025 – 2026

the knowledge gained is paramount, and the presentation and/or final project allows the student to showcase and implement this knowledge.

Ideal Target: Ideal target is 95% of students receiving a grade of B or better on the final presentation/project.

Implementation Plan (timeline): Each semester/ongoing

Key/Responsible Personnel: Graduate Music Faculty

Supporting Document: MUED 5010 Syllabus

Findings: The target was **met**.

Analysis: In AC 2024-25 the target was met. 100% of students who submitted final projects/research papers successfully passed this capstone project. The music education professor was proactive in frequently communicating with the College of Education and, in turn, the graduate music education students. The addition of more frequent contact and communication with their advisor/major professor, as well as having several benchmarks in place in multiple classes has helped faculty more effectively and responsively assess students' progress in this area. These changes have had a direct impact on the student's ability to seek out, analyze, and creatively solve current issues in music/music education thereby continuing to push the cycle of improvement forward.

Based on information gathered from analysis of the AC 2024-25 data, faculty implemented the following changes in AC 2025-26 to drive the cycle of improvement. The Music Department submitted the response to deferrals on the Final Plan Approval from NASM for the MM:Mued degree. Final Approval was granted, which now designates NSU as a Distance Learning Campus. This allows for any course to be offered as a distance-learning course, which helps us to be more responsive to the needs of potential graduate students who also work full-time. This designation also provides the opportunity for virtual classes to be offered to our resident students where appropriate and helpful. Music faculty were encouraged to remain active or to re-energize their professional activity, where needed, by seeking out opportunities for regional and national performances, presentations, and/or publication submissions. These activities are vital, as they serve several purposes: they are a valuable tool in recruiting potential graduate students to NSU because they increase the exposure of our wonderful music faculty, they feed the creativity and artistry of the music faculty, making them even more effective in teaching graduate students, and they increase exposure of NSU to the larger music/music education communities.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026 the target was **met**. Faculty were able to advertise the MM:Mued online option at conferences in Texas and Louisiana. As a result, our first student in this pathway has enrolled to begin this summer. Music Faculty have also increased the number of conference proposals, presentations, and performances this year. The addition of a second Music Education Faculty member this past year has also allowed the two professors in this area to divide the responsibilities, allowing each of them to focus on their areas of expertise in teaching and in research.

Assessment Cycle 2025 – 2026

Decision or Recommendation: In AC 2025-2026, the target was **met**.

Based on the analysis of the 2025-2026 results, the faculty will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027 to drive the cycle of improvement. Advising of all undergraduate Music Education students will be divided equally between the two Music Education faculty. This will allow the advising workload for this degree to be back in alignment with expected loads for each of those professors, which gives the senior Music Education faculty member the time to focus on the MUED graduate students more freely. This professor has also been awarded an Endowed Professorship that will fund several things: advanced Orff training (a strong asset for a MM:Mued program, as has the ability to draw more students to the program), guest artists to give clinics and masterclasses for the MUED students, travel to present at a MUED conference, and instruments/equipment to enhance the MUED experience in several classes.

These changes will improve the student's ability to seek out, analyze, and creatively solve current issues in music/music education thereby continuing to push the cycle of improvement forward.

Comprehensive summary of key evidence of improvements based on analysis of results.

Based on the results of AC 2024-2025, the following were implemented in AC 2025-2026:

- In Measure 1.1, the Coordinator of Graduate Advising created in-house fillable templates for Title Page, Signature Page, and Abstract so that students preparing Proposals and/or Final Documents will be able to create uniform spacing on all of these documents. These templates were included on the Help Sheet. The Coordinator of Graduate Advising added a "Frequently Asked Questions" section to the end of the Help Sheet in hopes that it allow for faculty to find answers to common questions more easily. The Coordinator of Graduate Advising also experimented with creating a "Graduate Student Survival Sheet" to help Graduate Students find answers to their common questions, especially in their second year. The Professor of MUED 5900 (Intro to Music Research) included an exam that covered important information in the Guidelines for Theses, etc. Manual (available on the Graduate School website) as part of the grade for the class so that students can commit this information to memory in their first semester. The Department Chair explored ways to ensure that each student's graduate committee can be determined and solidified at the end of the first semester of study.
- In Measure 2.1, more opportunities for graduate students to perform with faculty

Assessment Cycle 2025 – 2026

chamber groups was explored. Additional master classes (virtual and in-person) were offered to all students, with some having a focus of preparing graduate students for performing at a professional level).

- In Measure 3.1, each student's major professor/advisor received updated information (Graduate Faculty Help Sheet and links) and guidance from the Department Chair and Coordinator of Graduate Advising as they gain more confidence in the Advisor role. The Music Department submitted the response to several deferrals on the Final Plan Approval from NASM for the MM:Mued degree. Final Approval was granted, which now designates NSU as a Distance Learning Campus. Music faculty were encouraged to remain active or to re-energize their professional activity, where needed, by seeking out opportunities for regional and national performances, presentations, and/or publication submissions.

Plan of action moving forward.

In order to drive continuous improvement, the following will be implemented in AC 2026-2027:

- In Measure 1.1, the Department Chair will expand the role of the Coordinator of Graduate Advising into two roles: Coordinator of Graduate Studies and Coordinator of Graduate Student Research. This change will divide the work of Coordinator between two people. The former will focus on organization and communication (between both students and faculty) regarding music graduate student admission and navigating the requirements throughout the degree. The later will teach the MUED 5900 class and focus on guiding students through the research requirements throughout the degree. The professor of the MUED 5900 course will restructure the course to include in-class writing assignments and an exam focused on the Guidelines Manual for Research Documents, which outlines the research requirements and expectations for the graduate degrees. She will also create an assignment that will serve as a "Survival Guide" for the Master of Music degree once it is completed. Students will then have this document which they can refer to after the first semester of study.
- In measure 2.1, the Department Chair and Graduate Coordinators submitted a proposal to develop a Graduate Chamber Music Fellowship (depending on funding) which will consist of select incoming graduate students. These students will have expanded leadership opportunities in performing and coaching chamber music. Those opportunities will include managing the Music Business end of performing, as well. These experiences will develop skills needed for freelance musicians in the professional world. Also, faculty will encourage all graduate

Assessment Cycle 2025 – 2026

students to increase the time they spend leading a group, either through educational discussions or performance coaching.

- Advising of all undergraduate Music Education students will be divided equally between the two Music Education faculty. This will allow the advising workload for this degree to be back in alignment with expected loads for each of those professors, which gives the senior Music Education faculty member the time to focus on the MUED graduate students more freely. This professor has also been awarded an Endowed Professorship that will fund several things: advanced Orff training (a strong asset for a MM:Mued program, as has the ability to draw more students to the program), guest artists to give clinics and masterclasses for the MUED students, travel to present at a MUED conference, and instruments/equipment to enhance the MUED experience in several classes.