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# Revising Music Theory Curricula in Response to Varied Student Backgrounds: A Survey

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REVISING MUSIC THEORY CURRICULA IN RESPONSE TO  
VARIED STUDENT BACKGROUNDS: A SURVEY

by

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A THESIS

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REVISING MUSIC THEORY CURRICULA IN RESPONSE TO  
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University of Nebraska, 2013

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This study examines the relationship between undergraduate music theory curricula and the widely varied backgrounds in written theory and aural skills brought to post-secondary institutions by entering students. A survey of Midwestern, large, public universities that offer a bachelor's degree in music forms the basis for my discussion of how the curricula meet students' needs. This analysis gives rise to specific proposals for music theory programs and curricula at these schools which, if implemented, can increase success rates of students.

To

Palmino, Rosina, and Andrew

Thank you for all your support

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As a student and an educator I have observed that incoming undergraduate music majors bring with them wildly divergent backgrounds in music theory and aural skills. These differences result from the varying levels and kinds of music instruction that each individual received before entering a collegiate institution. The many types of theory instruction that students can obtain before entering a higher education setting include, but are not limited to:

- Enrolling in a beginning music theory course offered at their high school
- Enrolling in an advanced placement music theory course offered at their high school
- Receiving exposure to musicianship skills provided by their band instructor, choir director or private music teacher
- Having no experience with music theory let alone with any sort of music notation since the students may have learned to play or sing by rote

The various experience levels of incoming freshmen generate complications for music theory faculty as they develop their curricula, to say the least.

In my own experience as an undergraduate student and then as a teaching assistant at another institution, I have found that a large portion of incoming students have little to no experience in music theory and aural skills. My research will show that there are different kinds of students, most of whom have little exposure to music theory. I survey the various experiences instructors have had with these students and what their curricula do about it (or don't do about it). The insight gained from analyzing the results of this survey will give rise to specific suggestions for theory programs and curricula that, if implemented, will improve the chances of success for students of all stripes. Amendments made to a university's curriculum may result in fewer frustrated music students. Discouragement in musicianship courses is typically a result of either not comprehending the material or a consequence of not being challenged by the course content. It is essential that students not be deterred from pursuing their passion in music due to the aggravations and lack of confidence brought about during their musicianship courses.

Almost without exception, bachelor's degrees in music (history, theory, business, performance, composition, education, and so on) require the successful completion of a music theory and aural skills sequence. While it may be worthwhile to assess how a theory department constructs its curriculum and accounts for students' diverse backgrounds, it is also imperative to recognize that different institutions' musicianship programs—and, more importantly, student bodies—will vary significantly. One such difference is the way each program deals with entering students who lack or have very minimal experience with written theory. For instance, some may choose to offer a fundamentals course (typically covering scale types, key signatures, interval and triad



spelling, and other rudiments) in which students must enroll in their first semester. Other institutions may decide to offer a fundamentals course to students over the summer or sometime before the start of the fall semester. Some institutions may ask students to learn this basic material on their own before the start of the fall semester. Finally, departments may start their theory curriculum with these basics, assuming that entering freshmen have no previous knowledge of written theory. In short, there are numerous ways for the theory faculty to structure just this one aspect of their programs, let alone their entire curricula. Due to these differences among the structure of each theory and aural skills curriculum, I decided to limit the scope of my research to a relatively homogenous group of schools. I assessed large, public, Midwest collegiate institutions that offer a degree in music.

After realizing that other scholars who have completed similar research used procedures that provided statistical evidence, I decided to create a survey to be completed by theory coordinators and faculty at the universities under consideration. The data collected can fit into two overarching categories: the background and knowledge of incoming students, and the configuration of each university's theory curriculum. For the most part, the results confirmed my preconceived notions. The nature of the survey, the specific questions, and the results will be described in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

One may ask why instructors at the collegiate level should make adjustments to their curriculum when a main concern is students' backgrounds before entering their institutions. While it may be beneficial to expose students to music theory and aural skills at a younger age, practically speaking, however, it seems less likely that secondary

schools could make revisions in their programs in order to include music theory instruction. In many instances, junior and senior high schools are fortunate to have any type of music instruction or ensemble(s) since the arts are typically one of the first components to be eliminated due to budget cuts or deficiencies in funding. Although a similar concern exists in terms of funding allotment at universities, the faculty is able to make some minor adjustments to its curriculum more easily than a secondary school. In addition, there isn't a precedent for teaching a theory class at many secondary schools, where as schools and departments of music are built to do this.

A common interest for professors and students is the students' success in theory coursework. After assessing strengths and weaknesses of the various curricula described by survey respondents, I will make recommendations that theory coordinators could potentially implement to increase their students' success rates in these courses. Revisions might be made to the diagnostic exam taken by entering freshmen, the resources available to students with no previous background in music theory or aural skills could be augmented, the opportunities available to those students with an advanced background, and the reassessment of classroom dynamics. Questions of concern in relation to the diagnostic exam include: when is it offered, should students have an opportunity to take it more than once, what study resources are available to the students, and so forth. Departments struggle to determine if it is more beneficial for the students and instructors to offer a fundamentals course for those students with minimal exposure to theory or to teach fundamentals at the beginning of Theory I. These are only some of the many areas of the curricula that are evaluated.

The structure and components of music theory and aural skills curricula is an area of great interest to many music theorists. While there is much literature published in this subject, no scholar has quite probed the areas I will discuss. A similar survey to the one I have created (although it examined any university that offered a music degree) was created by Richard Nelson in 2000.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Mary Wennerstrom, a highly recognized music theorist, focused her research in 1989 on one particular university's theory curriculum, Indiana University.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Barbara Murphy, the theory coordinator at the University of Tennessee, evaluated the design of undergraduate music theory placement exams in 1999.<sup>3</sup> More recently, Gary Karpinski has completed extensive research and has offered innovative philosophies regarding the teaching of aural skills at the collegiate level.<sup>4</sup> Michael Rogers, Isabel Baker, Anthony Kosar, Teresa Davidian, Rusty Jones, Martin Bergee, and several other theorists have also published literature regarding musicianship curricula. Advancements in technology and pedagogy concepts continue, potentially rendering less relevant many of these scholars' conclusions. My work serves in part as an update to this line of inquiry.

First, I will examine the work of these scholars and reflect on their relationships to my investigations. Next, I will discuss in detail my research process, describing the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Nelson, "The College Music Theory Undergraduate Core Curriculum Survey," *Journal of the College Music Society* 42, (2002): 60-71.

<sup>2</sup> Mary H. Wennerstrom, "The Undergraduate Core Music Curriculum at Indiana University," *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 3, no. 2 (1989): 153-176.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Murphy, "The Evaluation and Design of an Undergraduate Music Theory Placement Exam," *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 13, (1999): 41-64.

<sup>4</sup> Gary S. Karpinski, *Aural Skills Acquisition: The Development of Listening, Reading, and Performing Skills in College Musicians* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

survey's questions as well as the process of collecting data. Then, I will summarize the data discussing commonalities among the many theory curricula. This appropriately leads to consideration of the ways various programs are meeting—or failing to meet—students' needs. Most importantly, I will propose possible programmatic and curricular changes that theorists could potentially implement so as to increase student success rates.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There continues to be a growing emphasis on the teaching and learning of music theory. A landmark in the development of music theory pedagogy occurred in 1985 with the establishment of the Center for Music Theory Pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma, which began publication of the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* in 1986. The main purpose of the journal is to share vital and creative contributions made by music theory teachers. Articles in JMTP as well as other literature focus on the philosophy of teaching musicianship skills and on the musicianship curriculum. The publications that specifically discuss theory and aural skills curricula do not highlight concerns among theory faculty as they design a curriculum bearing in mind the diverse backgrounds of incoming freshmen.

Michael Rogers's book, *Teaching Approaches in Music Theory, Second Edition: An Overview of Pedagogical Philosophies*<sup>5</sup> is a significant contribution to theory pedagogy. The author evaluates teaching styles, techniques, and approaches used in

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Rogers, *Teaching Approaches in Music Theory, Second Edition: An Overview of Pedagogical Philosophies* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004).

theory courses. Although the main focus of the book is the instruction of music theory at the college-level, it is an invaluable tool used by individuals teaching any level of music theory or aural skills. The content is divided into three main parts: (1) *Background*, which encompasses general ideas and themes prominent in music theory, (2) *Thinking and Listening*, which discusses approaches to teaching various areas of music theory and aural skills, and (3) *Achieving Teaching Success*, which examines teaching techniques as well as the evaluation and design of a curriculum.<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 7, Evaluation and Curriculum Design, Rogers alerts the reader of concerns and matters to consider when designing a music theory curriculum. Theory coordinators at programs that have large enrollments need to decide on how to divide the different sections of a course based on the diverse backgrounds of learners. Rogers states that multiple sections of a course, tracked according to strengths and weaknesses of the students, allow the professor to regulate the pacing of the course based on students' needs. A curriculum that has mixed sections may allow weaker students to be challenged in a setting with stronger peers—or, on the other hand, it may embarrass and frustrate the weaker students. Another concern with the structuring of theory courses is whether to offer a separate fundamentals course or to begin the freshmen theory curriculum with the fundamentals.<sup>7</sup> Although Rogers devotes a chapter of his book stating the difficulties that may occur when designing a music theory curriculum, in future chapters of this thesis, I will expound on several of the topics briefly mentioned by Rogers in much more detail. Furthermore, the data from my survey will provide concrete evidence regarding some of the issues proposed by Rogers.

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<sup>6</sup> Rogers, *Teaching Approaches*, xvii.

<sup>7</sup> Rogers, *Teaching Approaches*, 166-177.

Whereas Rogers provides a general overview of aural skills instruction in the larger context of undergraduate theory instruction, Gary Karpinski offers a more extensive examination of aural skills pedagogy. He is the coordinator of music theory at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and a leading scholar in theory pedagogy in general and in aural skills instruction specifically. Karpinski's book, *Aural Skills Acquisition: The Development of Listening, Reading, and Performing Skills in College-Level Musicians*, focuses on the use of experimental research and music psychology to examine the ways in which college-level musicians acquire the skills of listening, reading, and performing. He references particular textbooks that allude to effective techniques and examines the teaching and assimilation of a wide range of aural skills from the very basic to the most complex. His philosophy stresses the importance of proper aural skills instruction so that students can develop basic skills. Once students have mastered the fundamentals it will be much easier for them to learn more complicated topics.<sup>8</sup>

Karpinski used his research in music perception and cognition as well as his numerous years of teaching experience to develop his own aural skills curriculum, encapsulated in the *Manual for Ear Training and Sight Singing* and the *Anthology for Sight Singing*, published in 2006.<sup>9</sup> The manual provides methods to hear, listen, and understand elements of tonal music by integrating aural skills with concepts of written theory, while the anthology provides over 1200 musical excerpts drawn from literature

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<sup>8</sup> Karpinski, *Aural Skills Acquisition*.

<sup>9</sup> Gary S. Karpinski, *Manual for Ear Training and Sight Singing* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006); Karpinski and Richard Kram, *Sight Singing and Ear Training* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).

adapted for sight singing. These texts provide a new approach to the teaching and learning of aural skills with the main focus that any student can become extremely proficient at listening and performing music. Whereas Karpinski's foremost contributions to music theory pedagogy focus on the methodology and approaches to the instruction of aural skills, my research will present concerns that arise in relation to the overall coordination of the aural skills curriculum.

As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis, some programs choose to offer a fundamentals course for those students whose theory skills are not up to par with the program's expectations of an incoming freshman student. Isabel Baker and Anthony Kosar developed an experimental remedial theory course at Westminster Choir College, which was conducted by a music theory instructor, a theory graduate teaching assistant, and a reading skills specialist to determine successful teaching and learning strategies. The primary goal of their teaching model was focused on instruction-based on thinking and study skills as well as providing strategies that could be used in other courses.<sup>10</sup> Some of the course's strategies and procedures included presenting material by describing the mental steps used to understand the topic, relating the topic to other concepts covered in the course or other music courses, providing drills with immediate evaluation and reinforcement, using manuscript paper that had larger staves, using an overhead projector instead of a blackboard, and allowing the students two chances to take the final exam.<sup>11</sup> The authors concluded that teaching remedial theory requires different

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<sup>10</sup> Isabel Baker and Anthony Kosar, "Remedial Theory Courses for Underprepared Students: An Experimental Program to Develop Successful Teaching and Learning Strategies," *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 6 (1992): 98.

<sup>11</sup> Baker and Kosar, "Remedial Theory Courses," 100-104.



methods than a typical college course. Student feedback and instructor observations showed that remedial theory courses should involve a lab session to help students develop study skills and that assignments should be supplemented with drill and practice exercises tailored to each individual's needs.<sup>12</sup> The authors surveyed one particular course, a remedial theory course, whereas I will focus on fundamental courses as well as the courses that make up the core curriculum.

As interest in music theory pedagogy was beginning to develop in the early 1980s, Ellis Kohs demonstrated the need for music theory scholars to address the problems of classroom teaching. In "Current Needs and Problems in the Teaching of Undergraduate Music Theory," Kohs discusses some of the necessary concerns that he believes required attention: the need to define music theory; the purpose of music theory undergraduate instruction; the curricular insulation of music theory from performance, composition, and history; the inclusion of counterpoint in the curriculum; and the use of programmed instruction.<sup>13</sup> Since several developments have been made in the field of music theory pedagogy, current concerns and issues will be different from those of the 1980s.

Whereas the research I have described thus far focuses primarily on the methods of teaching and learning musicianship concepts, I will next turn attention to scholarship that concentrates on musicianship curricula. Mary Wennerstrom and Nico Schüler focus their research on one particular institution's theory curriculum. Wennerstrom highlights

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<sup>12</sup> Baker and Kosar, "Remedial Theory Courses," 109.

<sup>13</sup> Ellis B. Kohs, "Current Needs and Problems in the Teaching of Undergraduate Music Theory," *Music Theory Spectrum* 2, (1980): 135-142.

concerns and revisions to Indiana University's theory program; Schüler discusses changes made to Texas State University's curriculum in 2011.

Mary Wennerstrom, the current associate dean and former chair of the department of music theory at Indiana University, has explored the development of the post-secondary music theory curriculum as one of her main research areas. Wennerstrom's article, "The Undergraduate Core Music Curriculum at Indiana University," details two major developmental stages of Indiana's theory curriculum.<sup>14</sup> During the 1950s, the program integrated melody, counterpoint, harmony, and form from the beginning of the curriculum. Wennerstrom realized that there were several issues influencing the structure of the program. The learning goals of the new curriculum were much higher than before, creating a need for a pre-curricular rudiments course. Students with some background in fundamentals could test out of it. An off-semester sequence was developed to accommodate students who might start the theory curriculum proper in the spring semester. Honors sections were created to better serve those students with an advanced background in theory but still needed to review some concepts. Separate courses in sight singing and keyboarding were established. Further innovations to the curriculum were initiated in the fall of 1974. The last aural skills course and written theory course in the theory sequence were re-designed so as to focus on music of the twentieth century. The exercises completed in written theory courses were broadened to include more writing: both composing music and writing English prose about music.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Wennerstrom, "Undergraduate Music Curriculum," 153-176.

<sup>15</sup> Wennerstrom, "Undergraduate Music Curriculum," 155-161.

Despite these innovations, Wennerstrom perceived weaknesses that still existed with the program (at the time she wrote this article in 1989). One of the more urgent areas of concern was the inadequate preparation of incoming college students. While she mentions that higher admission criterion, better advising, and the administration of musicianship tests to incoming students could help solve this issue, Wennerstrom believed that the ideal solution to this concern was to improve pre-college music preparation.<sup>16</sup>

Nico Schüler highlighted his experience with revisions of the music theory curriculum at Texas State University.<sup>17</sup> The music program allows for degrees in education, sound recording technology, jazz, and several other fields attracting students with diverse musical backgrounds, including many that lacked any exposure to music theory or aural skills prior to enrolling in college. To address this problem, specific changes were made to the curriculum in 2011. A remedial theory course was implemented. The aural skills content was strengthened through the adoption of an ear-training textbook that included music technology, which enables students to work at home. Other changes included the coordination of concepts between aural skills and written theory and the procedure in which teaching was evaluated.<sup>18</sup> Wennerstrom's and

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<sup>16</sup> Wennerstrom, "The Undergraduate Music Curriculum," 163-164.

<sup>17</sup> Nico Schüler, "Teaching Approaches to Music Theory in the United States: Towards a Stronger Undergraduate Core Curriculum," In *On Methods of Music Theory and (Ethno)-Musicology: From Interdisciplinary Research to Teaching* (Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 2005), 189-202.

<sup>18</sup> Schüler, "Teaching Approaches to Music Theory," 191-199.

Schüler's research provide examples of the kinds of curricular issues that I will shed light upon across multiple institutions.

Richard Nelson's interest in ineffective aspects of music theory instruction resulted in the creation of a survey that assessed undergraduate music theory curricula in 2000.<sup>19</sup> The survey was posted on the Cleveland Institute of Music internet site and was advertised through College Music Society mailings. Two hundred and forty-eight institutions responded. The survey asked questions about the theory faculty, placement exams, and curriculum. Data showed that most schools required two years of music theory and two years of aural skills instruction as a part of the music major. About half of the schools required a form course and one-third of the respondents required eighteenth-century counterpoint. Almost all schools reviewed fundamentals in the first semester of theory and only 25 institutions offered an accelerated music theory course. Nelson discussed in great detail two of the common trends among the curricula that would seem to raise concerns: the lack of emphasis placed upon keyboard harmony—especially since many schools do not require this type of instruction at all—as well as the declining rate of instruction of counterpoint.<sup>20</sup> Although the survey yielded a summary of tendencies cutting across a variety of curricula, the survey and its execution had flaws, as noted by the author. According to Nelson, some of the limitations of the survey included questions left unanswered by participants, selection of multiple responses to the same question, and in some instances completion of the survey by two faculty members from the same

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<sup>19</sup> Nelson, "The College Music Theory Undergraduate Core Curriculum Survey," 60-71.

<sup>20</sup> Nelson, "The College Music Theory Undergraduate Core Curriculum Survey," 60-64.

institution.<sup>21</sup> The survey for the present project, which I describe in the next chapter, is designed to mitigate these data-collection problems while focusing on specific curricular information in a particular cross-section of music schools.

In 1999, Barbara Murphy assessed the theory placement exam<sup>22</sup> used at the University of Tennessee–Knoxville. “The exams were evaluated to determine how they were performing as indicators of student knowledge and student success in theory classes. Each item was evaluated to determine if it was separating those who knew the information from those who didn’t. A macro entitled ‘Item Analysis from Multiple Choice Tests’ was used.”<sup>23</sup> The results were used to create a new exam, which would place incoming students into the appropriate course based on their previous backgrounds in theory. Murphy’s article, “The Evaluation and Design of an Undergraduate Music Theory Placement Exam,” articulated that a revised exam should consist of 50 items instead of 20 and that the items in each topic area of the exam should be more homogeneous. At the end of the exam students should be provided with a score as well as a recommendation of which course to enroll in.<sup>24</sup> The importance of creating an exam that accurately assesses the students’ background is that each individual is provided with the proper recommendations. Murphy believes that many additional revisions can be made to the exam. Items should be randomized to prevent cheating. The exam makeup

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<sup>21</sup> Nelson, “The College Music Theory Undergraduate Core Curriculum Survey,” 60.

<sup>22</sup> Murphy’s use of the term “placement exam” is equivalent to that which I will later refer to later as the diagnostic exam—the exam or part of an exam that assesses the entering freshmen’s knowledge of fundamentals.

<sup>23</sup> Murphy, “Evaluation and Design,” 47.

<sup>24</sup> Murphy, “Evaluation and Design,” 41-64.

should be altered in a way that would allow a student to move on to another objective based on their mastery or non-mastery of the previous question.<sup>25</sup> While Murphy's main focus is the placement exam's accurate measurement of students' background in theory, I will concentrate on utilizing results from the exam so that faculty can potentially restructure their musicianship curriculum.

Rusty Jones and Martin Bergee highlight elements of pre-college experiences that contribute to the success of students in first-year music theory courses.<sup>26</sup> They found that success in a first-semester theory course was strongly associated with high school class rank and with the ACT-math score. On the other hand, they determined that students' success in first-year music theory coursework is not dependent on their instrumental medium.<sup>27</sup> Jones and Bergee agree with one of the suspicions that prompted my interest in this topic: that many students entering a collegiate institution are accepted on the basis of their performance background, and as a result are overwhelmed by the challenges presented in a rigorous music theory course.<sup>28</sup> Jones and Bergee are mainly concerned with non-theory-related pre-college experiences that may affect a first-year student's success in theory courses, whereas I will discuss how theory instructors concern themselves with the various pre-college backgrounds of incoming students.

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<sup>25</sup> Murphy, "Evaluation and Design," 51-54.

<sup>26</sup> Rusty M. Jones and Martin Bergee, "Elements Associated with Success in the First-Year Music Theory and Aural Skills Curriculum," *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 22 (2008): 93-116.

<sup>27</sup> Jones and Bergee, "Elements Associated with Success," 100-104.

<sup>28</sup> Jones and Bergee, "Elements Associated with Success," 105.

David Mancini takes on the issue of the inclusion of counterpoint in the undergraduate music theory curriculum. (This was also a matter of concern presented by Kohs and Nelson.) Mancini argues that there are three issues that arise when attempting to incorporate the instruction of counterpoint into the undergraduate music theory curriculum. The first is chronology—when to introduce the topic; the next is content—what material should be included; the final concern is relevance—how to relate counterpoint to other areas of theory, such as harmony and analysis. Mancini explores arguments for and against the inclusion of species counterpoint as a part of the musicianship program. The author concludes that the integration of harmony and species counterpoint is an appropriate strategy for incorporating this topic in an undergraduate theory curriculum.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Ken Stephenson, the music theory coordinator at the University of Oklahoma, argues that beginning students should learn counterpoint before proceeding to harmony since this will result in an abbreviated amount of time spent on harmony. Stephenson claims that teaching counterpoint allows students to appreciate the structure of a melodic line and its interdependence with the harmony. The instruction of two-voice harmony allows the students to deal with problems such as parallels and awkward leaps in the context of two voices before applying these concepts to four voices.<sup>30</sup>

To summarize the existing literature on undergraduate music-theory curricular design, it is apparent that while there is some work being done in this area, none directly

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<sup>29</sup> David L. Mancini, “Using Species Counterpoint in the Undergraduate Music Theory Curriculum,” *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 3, no. 2 (1989): 205-221.

<sup>30</sup> Ken Stephenson, “A Species-Counterpoint Method Leading to Tonal Four-Part Writing,” *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 9 (1995): 95-99.

addresses the problem of how the various curricula account for the different pre-college experiences of students in written theory and aural skills. Some scholars focused their attention on the methodology, pedagogical, and teaching aspects of music theory. Others only assessed the needs and structure of the theory curriculum of a particular school. Furthermore, one particular survey assessed the curricular design of all universities that offer a music degree. In order for individuals to excel in their coursework it is essential that they be placed in the appropriate level, which is Murphy's concern in discussing the design of the placement exam. Several theorists have chosen to explore elements from students' high school backgrounds that are associated with their success in first-year coursework. Other literature discusses the various topics that should be covered in the music theory sequence such as counterpoint. It is also worth noting that much of this scholarship is somewhat dated; up-to-date research may illuminate new trends in the field.

This thesis intends to focus attention on the ways in which the theory faculty concerns itself with the various backgrounds in written theory and aural skills of the incoming freshmen. I address some of the concerns that may exist among the current curricula and suggest potential changes that could be implemented by theory coordinators to improve the students' success in a way not done in any other current scholarship.



### CHAPTER 3: SURVEYING CURRENT CURRICULAR PRACTICES

In this thesis I will make suggestions regarding the structure of various university curricula. To do so, it is critical that the current state of the incoming freshmen and the curricula be surveyed and explored. The purpose of the survey is to identify foundational issues of curricula so that I can offer meaningful ideas for improvement. Preparing the survey involved many stages. Deciding on which university's theory curricula to examine, creating a survey, collecting and analyzing the data were some of the main steps.

First, I had to consider which theory curricula to assess. Is it best to focus on the program of a single university, or those of all universities that offer music degrees, or something in between? Since I already had intimate knowledge of the undergraduate music theory curriculum at the University of Nebraska, I decided to examine universities of similar size in this region. I sent the survey to large,<sup>31</sup> public, Midwest institutions that offer a music degree. Figure 1 provides a comprehensive list of the 29 universities that fit

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<sup>31</sup> Large institutions are those that consist of 16,000-42,000 undergraduate students.

these criteria. A request to complete the survey was sent to the head of the theory program as identified on the institution's website.

<b>Collegiate Institution</b>	<b>City, State</b>	<b>Number of Undergraduates</b>
Ball State University	Muncie, IN	18,000
Bowling Green State University	Bowling Green OH	15,000
Central Michigan University	Mount Pleasant, MI	22,000
DePaul University	Chicago, IL	16,000
Eastern Michigan University	Ypsilanti, MI	19,000
Illinois State University	Normal, IL	19,000
Indiana University	Bloomington, IN	32,000
Iowa State University	Ames, IA	24,000
Kansas State University	Manhattan, KS	19,000
Kent State University	Kent, OH	22,000
Miami University	Oxford, OH	15,000
Michigan State University	East Lansing, MI	37,000
Northern Illinois University	DeKalb, IL	17,000
Oakland University	Rochester, MI	16,000
Ohio State University	Columbus, Ohio	42,000
Ohio University	Athens, OH	22,000
Southern Illinois University-Carbondale	Carbondale, IL	15,000
University of Akron	Akron, OH	23,000
University of Cincinnati	Cincinnati, OH	23,000
University of Illinois	Urbana-Champaign, IL	32,000
University of Iowa	Iowa City, IA	21,000
University of Kansas	Lawrence, KS	19,000
University of Michigan	Ann Arbor, MI	27,000
University of Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN	34,000
University of Missouri	Columbia, MO	26,000
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	Lincoln, NE	19,000
University of Wisconsin-Madison	Madison, WI	30,000
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	Milwaukee, WI	25,000
Wayne State University	Detroit, MI	21,000
Western Michigan University	Kalamazoo, MI	21,000

**Figure 1.** Public Midwest Collegiate Institutions that Offer a Bachelor's Degree in Music

Some of the many categories and questions included in my survey are listed below:

- *Class Size:* I inquired about the number of undergraduate music majors in the program as well as the approximate enrollment of a typical section of written theory and of aural skills.
- *The Diagnostic Exam:* I requested information regarding the date the exam was offered and the number of opportunities students had to retake the exam. I also inquired whether or not the exam would be a part of the admissions process. Other questions concerned the tools students were provided to prepare for the exam as well as the manner in which the results would impact the students' placement into written theory and aural skills courses.
- *The Placement Exam:*<sup>32</sup> Inquiries made about the placement exam were similar to those made regarding the diagnostic exam.
- *Curricular Design:* I asked about the availability of fundamental courses and the availability of advanced sections. The number of courses that are part of the core theory curriculum<sup>33</sup> and the requirement of enrolling in additional courses such as Form and Counterpoint were of interest.
- *Success Rates:* Coordinators were asked about the percentage of students who did not pass written theory or aural skills in their first semester and the percentage of those who dropped the music major after their first year.

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<sup>32</sup> The diagnostic exam is the exam (or part of an exam); which assesses the entering freshmen's knowledge of fundamentals. The placement exam is an exam (or part of an exam) that students can take to be exempt from enrolling in particular written theory or aural skills courses. See Murphy, "Evaluation and Design."

<sup>33</sup> The core curriculum refers collectively to the music theory courses that every undergraduate major is required to take such as Theory I, Aural Skills II, and so on.

The complete survey with questions and answer choices is listed in Appendix B. The types of survey questions used to obtain different types of data included: yes/no, multiple-choice, fill in the blank, and open-ended.

The final set of 70 questions became the basis for the survey. These questions were inputted into Survey Monkey, an online survey service. I chose to use Survey Monkey because it was affordable and user friendly. This questionnaire tool allowed me to use “skip logic” in order to route respondents through the survey based on their answer choice selections. For example, if a respondent answers no to the question “Do you offer a written theory fundamentals course?” the survey can be configured so that it will skip over all the questions that relate to the written theory fundamentals course. Unfortunately, there were a few instances in which this was not possible due to the grouping of questions and the lack of sophistication of the service. In an effort to ensure that the survey’s formatting was clear and simple to respondents, I asked my advisor and several colleagues to test the survey and offer feedback before sending it to respondents.

An email (shown in Appendix A) was sent out to theory coordinators or theory faculty at each target university. It included a brief description of my project, the purpose of the survey, and the link that respondents should use to access the survey. The correspondence also invited professors to provide any further information regarding their theory curriculum, such as course syllabi. To promote and encourage individuals to answer the questions, responses were completely anonymous.

I was very appreciative that respondents took about 20-30 minutes to complete my survey. As I had anticipated, however, there was a struggle associated with the process of collecting data. After about a week there were only eight responses. At this

time I sent out another email, emphasizing my appreciation for the professor's help in my research and asking if they would take the time to complete my survey, if they had not already done so. While this resulted in a few more responses, my response rate was still less than I had hoped. About three weeks after my original correspondence to the various instructors, my advisor, Dr. Stanley Kleppinger, contacted individuals he knew personally at specific universities asking if they could first find out if their colleague had completed the survey and if they hadn't, would they respond to it themselves.

Out of the 29 individuals contacted, a total of 17 responded and none provided any additional information.<sup>34</sup> Although 17 individuals completed the survey, several respondents left some of the questions blank. Although I was not completely satisfied with the number of respondents, I believe that substantial and vital information was obtained. I was not made aware of any technical difficulties in accessing or completing the survey.

After sifting through responses, it became evident that there were flaws with the construction of the survey as well as shortcomings in the responses by the theory coordinators. These deficiencies are not any different in nature from those found in the survey created by Richard Nelson.<sup>35</sup> While the goal of allocating for anonymous responses was to create a higher response rate it also created other problems. I had no way of accounting for who had or hadn't completed the survey. Therefore, when I sent

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<sup>34</sup> A few professors such as Dr. Jay Hook at Indiana University, Dr. Gretchen Foley at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Dr. Melissa Hoag at Oakland University, contacted me to let me know that they were more than happy to complete the survey. I was appreciative of this gesture.

<sup>35</sup> Nelson, "The College Music Theory Undergraduate Core Curriculum Survey."

out my second email I had to send it to everyone, even those who may have already responded. In addition, it made it more difficult to create correlations between individuals' responses. While the open-ended questions were designed to generate detailed and thorough responses, some of the respondents chose to skip these questions. A handful of questions were left blank especially those towards the end of the survey, which consisted of open-ended questions and questions that required respondents to provide statistical information. Some respondents seemed ill-equipped with the necessary information to answer certain questions such as those that required statistics.

As with any aspect of music theory, professors and schools use the same terminology to refer to different things. This created a problem when trying to distinguish, for instance, between a diagnostic exam and a placement exam. I noticed from one individual's responses that he or she did not understand the way I was differentiating between the two exams. Similarly, some programs title their fundamentals course Theory I whereas the phrasing of my questions/answers insinuated that the fundamentals course was not part of the numbered theory sequence. However, one respondent was very precise in detailing this information so that it would not inaccurately reflect the data. In a few instances, the language of my questions or answer choices did not properly articulate what I was truly inquiring about. For example, one of the questions asked, "When do the students receive their scores?" The purpose for asking this question was to find out when students are notified of the ramifications that their score has on their theory and aural skills coursework. Since many institutions don't provide students their actual score—only the name of the course in which they should enroll as a result of the exam—respondents stated that they didn't provide scores to the students in

their answer instead of stating when the students were notified of which course to enroll in. This didn't provide me with the information I was hoping to obtain. In hindsight, I may rephrase the question as follows: when are the students notified on which course to enroll in based on their scores on the diagnostic exam? In retrospect, several areas that I did not explore in the survey could have been helpful. I could have made inquiries regarding the number of theory professors and whether theory courses are taught by only theory faculty or by other faculty members including performers, composers, historians, and so forth.

Despite the weaknesses in my survey tool, I observed certain commonalities in the responses. I explore these in the next chapter and then suggest innovative ideas in terms of curriculum design and theory instruction that coordinators could potentially implement, which ideally would allow students' to be more successful in music theory.

## CHAPTER 4: SUMMARIZING RESULTS AND DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

The information obtained from the survey responses assists in making connections and drawing conclusions regarding music theory curricula. While each university's program is slightly different, there are commonalities among them. In this chapter I will address strengths and potential weaknesses that exist within various components of written theory and aural skills instruction based on the data collected.

### SUCCESS RATES

Data showed that some universities have a relatively high rate of unsuccessful students in these courses. The average response to the survey's questions about student success in first-year courses suggest that up to about 25% of students don't pass the first semester of written theory and up to about 20% of students don't pass the first semester of aural skills. It is certainly undesirable 25 of every 100 students to be unsuccessful in the first semester of written theory—A more acceptable rate of unsuccessful students may lie between 5-10%. As the course material becomes more rigorous, this issue intensifies—up to 35% of students in certain programs don't pass the entire aural skills or



written theory curriculum. Struggling through one or more of these courses can cause students to become discouraged and frustrated. Some individuals will take extra pains to pass these required courses and complete the music degree, but others will become disheartened and decide to no longer complete a degree in music. For one reason or another, as many as 20% of college undergraduates drop the music major after the first year; certainly some of this attrition can be attributed to difficulties in theory and aural skills courses. I assert that it is possible to improve rates of academic success in these courses by altering certain aspects of their curriculum. I will discuss concerns among universities that contribute to students' success rates in theory courses, including the diagnostic exam, class size, use of computer-assisted instruction, availability of resources for students with minimal written theory and aural skills background, opportunities for students with an exceptional theory background, and so forth.

#### MINIMUM GRADE REQUIREMENTS

Although the rate of students not succeeding in written theory and aural skills courses seems quite high, the standards for success are set fairly low at some institutions. The minimum passing grade requirements for written theory and aural skills courses range from C to D. A great number of schools allow D as a passing grade. In my opinion students who earn such a low grade do not have a full understanding of the previous semester's coursework. A low grade indicates that students are not mastering the material and are not ready to continue onto the next level of theory or aural skills. Several professors expressed their concern about this problem and are hoping to raise minimum grade requirements. One instructor for instance, stated that his institution's passing grade is a C- but wished that it would be at least a C. In addition, some institutions have

different requirements for certain music degrees. For example, one curriculum allows music majors to pass theory courses with a D with the exception of music education students, who must obtain at least a C-. Another institution requires those working toward a bachelor of music degree to receive a D and those aiming for a bachelor of arts with a major in music to obtain a C-. If music theory and aural skills are foundational courses necessary for any music major, why are higher standards set for some music degrees over others? Should the standard be set at a C- for all music majors? Is it appropriate to even consider raising the minimum grade requirements to pass theory and aural skills courses if there is already a large percentage of students not achieving the minimum standards?

It is also worth noting that one university's curriculum, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, requires students to achieve a C- average in each of the course components—dictation and sight singing—in order to receive an overall passing grade (C or higher) in aural skills. Since students have different strengths and weaknesses in these components of aural skills, this system is effective in ensuring a student's mastery of the material. Without this safeguard, a student could excel in dictation work, for instance, helping to build a passing average grade in the course without demonstrating adequate skill in sight singing.

#### THE DIAGNOSTIC EXAM

Students can begin experiencing struggles in their written theory and/or aural skills courses from the first day of their freshmen year if they are not placed in the appropriate course based on their familiarity with these skills. Every institution represented in the survey requires some type of diagnostic exam that assesses the incoming students' knowledge of written theory or aural skills. This confirms my

hypothesis that entering freshmen have various backgrounds in musicianship skills: professors universally see the need to assess the skills of incoming individual students. About 60% of schools require students to take a written theory and an aural skills diagnostic exam, 40% require only a written theory exam, and none of the programs require only an aural skills exam. Do those institutions that do not require students to take an aural skills diagnostic exam assume that all entering freshmen have no previous aural skills experience? Do those schools' curricula therefore start with fundamentals? Even some of those institutions that offer an aural skills exam may begin their first aural skills class with the basics, since the data shows that only a handful of curricula offer an aural skills fundamentals course.

Only about 25% of the undergraduate programs use the diagnostic exam as a factor in determining admission to the program. Those programs that do not consider the students' score as a factor in determining admission alleviate some pressure felt by high school students who are applying to music programs without any prior experience in music theory or aural skills. However, if more universities required a successful score on the diagnostic exam for admission to their music program, pre-college students who plan to pursue a major in music might seek out more preparatory instruction in music theory and aural skills. Would this encourage high schools to offer a theory course, or band instructors/choir directors to incorporate theory and aural skills in the classroom, or private teachers to integrate theory into students' lessons? Conversely, it would not be reasonable to require this exam for admission out of fairness to those students who do not have access to any of these resources.

Whether the diagnostic exam is used as part of admission to the program or simply for placement into the appropriate musicianship course(s), it is appropriate to ask whether students are adequately prepared for the content and format of diagnostic exams so as to fully demonstrate their knowledge and skills. For example, a high school junior can properly prepare for success on the diagnostic exam by learning the necessary content if he or she knows the topics to be assessed on the exam. A large portion of the theory departments responding to the survey (67%) do not provide students with any assistance in preparing for the diagnostic exam. Out of the five schools that do furnish some guidance, all provide a list of textbooks to consult and three provide a list of topics covered. Two of the schools also provide sample questions and a sample exam. In addition, one professor stated that the students could contact a course instructor or one of the department's tutors for extra guidance.

Some of the areas of concern regarding the diagnostic exam include the date when it is offered and the number of times students are allowed to retake it. About 50% of programs ask students to take the diagnostic exam on audition day. The others require that students take it either online during the summer, during orientation sessions (either during the summer or just before classes begin) or on the first day of classes. Should the students be given a second chance to take the diagnostic exam? About 40% of the institutions allow students to retake the exam(s). Would students' scores improve if they were given another opportunity to take the exam? If they are given this opportunity, it usually occurs either on the next audition day, during orientation, or at the start of the semester. The students may perform better once they realize what content is covered, what types of questions are asked, the format of the exam, and so forth. Of course, those

students who have no previous knowledge of written theory or aural skills are not likely to succeed in either attempt. But those who may have just needed to review some concepts or to see the format of the exam to relieve some stress may benefit from this opportunity. (On the other hand, it might be argued that giving students a second chance gives them an unfair advantage—a student who knows the material ought to be successful on the diagnostic exam the first time.)

Another concern with the diagnostic exam is whether the material tested on the exam properly assesses the students' readiness to be placed into particular courses. As mentioned earlier, aural skills has at least two components: a written portion and a singing portion. Karpinski emphasizes the notion that aural skills requires students to perform and read (sing and sight sing) as well as listen (dictation).<sup>36</sup> Do the curricula that offer diagnostic exams in aural skills accurately assess students' ability levels in both components. Of those aural-skills diagnostic exams represented in the survey, none require individuals to complete both a written and a singing component. About 90% ask individuals to complete only a written portion and 10% require students to complete only a singing portion. Does this assessment provide an accurate portrayal of the student's ability levels in aural skills by assessing only one component?

#### STUDENTS WITH MINIMAL EXPERIENCE IN THEORY AND AURAL SKILLS

Students are informed on which course(s) they should enroll in, depending on the university's curriculum based on their scores on the diagnostic exams. There are two common approaches to the inclusion of fundamentals in the theory program: one offers a

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<sup>36</sup> Karpinski, *Aural Skills Acquisition*, 3.

stand-alone fundamentals course and the other teaches fundamentals as a part of Theory I.<sup>37</sup> Sixty percent of the programs represented in the survey offer a written theory fundamentals course. A fundamentals course requires students to spend a semester mastering the elementary concepts before moving on to more difficult material. The curricula that incorporate fundamentals into Theory I typically dedicate a number of weeks to teaching elementary topics. As a result faculty have less time to spend on other concepts since fundamentals consume a large portion of the semester. Some instructors may try to move more quickly through fundamentals to ensure time for the other more complex topics throughout the first semester, but this can be detrimental to students who need time to develop these basic skills. One survey respondent expressed a desire for a fundamentals course before Theory I because some of the entering students have no background and others need more time to process the material. This respondent is concerned that the fundamentals topics seem to be currently consuming the first-semester theory course. The fundamentals course would free up the theory curriculum to either accelerate the pacing of topics, spend more time on certain topics, or build upon the curriculum with more enrichment activities.

Some curricula have a fundamentals course as a prerequisite to the written theory core proper while others do not. Those that do have a fundamentals course use a diagnostic exam to determine whether students need the fundamentals course or are prepared to enroll in the first core theory course. In programs that students are instructed to enroll in a fundamentals course based on their diagnostic exam score, they might end

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<sup>37</sup> Throughout this thesis, “Theory I” refers to the first course of the core theory curriculum. Of course, various universities refer to this course using different course titles.

up at a perceived disadvantage because this may put the student behind in beginning the theory sequence. Since only 20% of the programs offer the written theory fundamentals course before the start of the fall semester, and if their students must wait until the fall to complete a fundamentals course, the problem of scheduling their entrance into Theory I (and subsequent theory courses) emerge. Thirty percent of programs surveyed offer Theory I in the spring. Will those who do not begin the theory sequence at the start of their fall semester be discouraged since they need to wait until their sophomore year to begin the theory track? One solution, offered by an institution represented in the survey, requires those students who do not score well on the diagnostic exam to take a written theory fundamentals course online during the summer implying that the diagnostic is taken earlier in the summer. Another school informs students that they must learn the material on their own and retake the exam before they can enroll in Theory I. In other programs, fundamentals are integrated among the first semester of the core theory course. This can lead to contrasting problems such as the expedient exposure of fundamentals to ensure that enough time is spent on the other topics needing to be covered in the first semester.

Three of the 15 respondents<sup>38</sup> stated that they offer an aural skills fundamentals course at their institution. None of them offer this course before the start of the fall semester. It seems that since a large number of programs begin their instruction of aural skills at the most elementary level, very few theory coordinators assume that incoming students will have extensive training in aural skills.

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<sup>38</sup> While there were 17 total respondents to the survey, there were a varying number of respondents to each individual question since some individuals chose to leave some questions blank.

Once students are placed into an appropriate written theory course and an appropriate aural skills course based on their current skill level, it may be beneficial to the students that they have other resources available to them outside of the classroom. Two of the 15 respondents stated that they do not offer any services outside of class time to those in need of extra assistance. The vast majority of the remaining institutions provide individual tutoring. A small number additionally offer group-tutoring sessions and review sessions outside the classroom. One respondent stated that he provides extra help on an *ad hoc* basis; another described a theory-tutoring center staffed by graduate students twice a week. Since music theory courses are those in which some students will struggle, and all music students need to pass these courses to complete the degree program, should more robust services be readily available to students?

#### STUDENTS WITH EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE IN THEORY AND AURAL SKILLS

A large majority of the curricula represented in the survey recommend that students who excel on the diagnostic exam should enroll in Theory I. Only a few universities offer an advanced section of Theory I. About 35% of surveyed programs provide students with the opportunity to take a placement exam. This exam can allow students to opt out of one or more semesters of written theory or aural skills. One potential advantage to an advanced course is that this course may fill in any holes that students may have in their knowledge of written theory or aural skills while providing additional challenge and motivation. While certain first-year students may have a strong background in music theory, there are certain concepts that they may need to review or that weren't covered in previous study.



This may sometimes be the case with entering freshmen that have taken the Advanced Placement Music Theory course at their high school. A little under half of the programs surveyed require entering students with AP credit<sup>39</sup> to also take the diagnostic exam. Other programs allow the student to enroll in Theory I, or automatically place the student into Theory II. An exceptional score on the AP exam doesn't necessarily imply that the student is prepared to enroll in Theory I or II, depending on the department. One respondent noted that, although the student must take a placement exam, the institution must accept the AP score over the score on the placement exam. The results of the placement exam are only advisory and the professor must accept the AP credit whether or not the student is actually ready for more advanced coursework. Something else to consider in regards to the AP exam is how well it correlates with the program's actual course material.

By virtue of a high score on the diagnostic exam, placement exam, or AP exam, a student may be exempt from one or more semesters of music theory or aural skills. Of the 13 respondents that completed this question, eight allow these individuals to take fewer total credits of music theory. Three institutions require that upper division music theory electives be taken to make up the credits. (One respondent noted that this requirement varies depending on the student's specific degree plan.) Many instructors stated that, while they would like to offer upper level undergraduate courses, they do not have enough faculty members available to do so.

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<sup>39</sup> Many schools award college credit to students who score at a certain level on the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) exam in music theory. This standardized test measures pre-college students performance in written theory and aural skills.

Students who already possess a background in written theory or aural skills may be interested in developing this knowledge by seeking out additional resources outside of the classroom. Of the 15 respondents that completed this survey question, three affirmed that students were not provided with any opportunities to pursue their interest in theory outside of the classroom. Many of the institutions that encourage participation beyond the standard theory requirements allow students to complete an independent study or take upper level courses. A handful of programs offer honors courses or the ability to complete an undergraduate degree in music theory. Several respondents noted that while they would like to make some of these options accessible to the students, staffing issues make doing so difficult.

#### CURRICULAR DESIGN

One concern regarding curricular design is the minimum number of semesters of music theory and aural skills required for music degrees. A large majority of the programs surveyed require students to enroll in four semesters of written theory and four semesters of aural skills. One institution's bachelor of arts program only demands three semesters. A few faculty coordinators insist on more than four semesters: one requires five semesters of aural skills and five semesters of written theory, and another institution requires six semesters of written theory. Counterpoint, Form and Analysis, Twentieth-Century Techniques, Styles and Forms, and Twentieth-Century Western Art Music are some of the courses that students are required to take as part of various core curricula. Ambiguity exists over what is the appropriate number of semesters of music theory instruction for a student receiving a degree in music. Many instructors contend that they do not have enough time to cover all topics thoroughly. Some institutions barely cover

twentieth-century music theory concepts. One respondent noted that she would require six semesters of theory with a semester of Form and Analysis and a semester of Twentieth-Century Analysis. Her perspective is that the curriculum moves too quickly through fundamentals and tonal analysis—post-1900 analysis is squeezed into the last six weeks of sophomore theory.

At some institutions, aural skills and written theory are taught as a single course, reflecting the mutual dependence of these subjects. Five of the 15 curricula represented in this particular survey question incorporate both areas into one course. When music theory and aural skills are covered in one course it is hypothetically easier for the instructor to connect the different concepts of music, theory and aural skills into a single understanding. One professor noted that he would prefer to have these skills taught as two separate courses so he could focus on students needs, especially in aural skills. If they are taught separately, it is necessary to confirm that the theory course correlates with the aural skills course and vice versa. One of the major developments made to Indiana University's theory curriculum during the 1950s was the separation of aural skills from written theory to ensure that students were learning these necessary skills. Music skills such as sight singing and keyboarding were divided into separate courses, but the content of these courses was coordinated and students were expected to take them simultaneously.<sup>40</sup>

#### CLASS SIZE

Class size is another important factor that may impact students' success in music theory courses. In order for the students to effectively master the material in written

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<sup>40</sup> Wennerstrom, "The Undergraduate Music Curriculum," 158-160.

theory and aural skills, a high degree of in- class student-instructor interaction is necessary. However, there may be instances where the classroom atmosphere doesn't allow for as much individual attention from the instructor since the class size is rather large. At times it may be more difficult or intimidating for students to ask questions. Ten of the 17 schools represented in the survey have a written theory class size of 11-20, five schools have a class size of 21-30, and two programs report a class size of 31-40. The class size of aural-skills sections also varies among universities. One program has less than ten students in typical aural-skills sections, twelve programs have a class size of 11-20, three have a class size of 21-30, and one has 61-70 students per section. Since class size affects the manner in which students learn and a majority of programs already have fewer than 20 students per class, an even smaller class size would be helpful for the mastery of skills in written theory and aural skills.

#### SOFTWARE

Due to growing advancements in technology, various computer-assisted instruction tools have been more readily available for use by instructors and students. The use of software in aural skills courses has become more common since it provides a way for students to practice and measure their own skills outside of the classroom. The different types of software also allow the professor to assign homework and monitor students' progress. Some of the many programs or websites available include MacGamut, SmartMusic, Teoría, musictheory.net, and so forth. Eleven of the 15 universities assessed use software in their aural skills courses. MacGamut is the most commonly used among the various curricula. It is used for dictation assignments and recommended to the students as a resource that they can use for additional practice. In addition to MacGamut,

one institution also integrates SmartMusic into its curriculum. The program allows the instructor to create assignments that include singing melodies and clapping rhythms. It seems that many institutions, on the other hand, do not incorporate ways for students to practice singing on their own time in a manner in which they receive instant feedback.

Class size, software availability, the structure of the diagnostic exam, the availability of a fundamentals course, and other factors mentioned above influence students' performance in their written theory and aural skills courses. Although various universities have differences among their curricula, there are commonalities among those that I assessed. In the next chapter I will suggest feasible recommendations to some of the concerns that have been highlighted.

## CHAPTER 5: REVISIONS TO THE THEORY CURRICULA

While many music theory programs are successful and rigorous, the previous chapter has highlighted some of the potential pitfalls facing new college students in these curricula. Coordinators of theory programs are naturally interested in the success of their students. (Success might fairly be defined as the successful mastery of material and the successful preservation of students' interest and self-esteem.) The suggestions offered below, made in light of the observations noted in the previous chapter, may mitigate some of the struggles that students face. Most of these recommendations stand independent of one another, and theory instructors and coordinators may find that not every idea is appropriate to their institution. One size most certainly does not fit all.

### MINIMUM GRADE REQUIREMENTS

There are concerns among theory coordinators in relation to minimum grade requirements. Although there are already a large number of students struggling in these courses, the minimum standard to pass these courses may be too low. In order to ensure that students are truly mastering these courses' content, it is important that the minimum passing grade is set at an appropriate level. One can argue that a lower standard will

foster one type of success—students can more successfully complete the program if grade minimums are lower. Though students may be embarrassed or frustrated to learn that they have to re-attempt courses, certainly it is to their long-term benefit as musicians and music educators that they have truly mastered musicianship concepts and skills.

Therefore, I propose that theory coordinators consider raising the minimum passing grade required of students necessary to pass the course and to be able to take the next required course in the sequence. The appropriate minimum grade is determined based on the minimum skills students need to learn in order to keep learning new material and concepts. This minimum grade should also place students in position where they are prepared to complete upper level work in music theory if necessary or desired. This standard should be the same in all levels of written theory and aural skills courses.

While at some universities this requirement varies based on each specific degree, it should be set the same for all music degrees. Professional musicians, whether they are performers, theorists, musicologists, or educators, must have a complete understanding of theory concepts. One curriculum allows music majors to pass theory courses with a D, except that those completing a music education degree must obtain at least a C-. A respondent expressed his concern with this current grade policy, stating that he would like to see everyone pass with the same standard, with a C-. These are core courses that almost every music major is required to take and the expectations should be the same for all students. This commonality is essential since almost all music students will use the knowledge obtained from written theory and aural skills coursework in their professional career, although it may be in different ways.

One particular institution focused attention on the minimum grade requirements in aural skills classes. Some students may perform exceptionally well on singing but very poorly on dictation exams and can still manage to earn the minimum grade requirement. Faculty members were concerned that students may not have been mastering all the components of aural skills even though they may have received a passing grade in the course. Coordinators may consider implementing a grading scheme that requires minimum performance standards in both dictation and singing skills, rather than simply averaging various components of the course. This will help ensure that students are mastering both the singing portion and dictation aspect of aural skills. Such a grading scheme is already in place at one of the universities I have surveyed. Application of this grading scheme may be applied to other areas of the curriculum. For example, it might be appropriate to set minimum performance standards in the various components of written theory. This may require students to master both the part-writing and the analysis portion of written theory.

#### THE DIAGNOSTIC EXAM

Every institution represented in the survey requires incoming students to take a written theory diagnostic exam. Even if Theory I begins coursework with fundamentals, it is necessary for faculty members to assess the various ability levels of incoming students. One institution actually uses the results of the diagnostic exam to divide the students into heterogeneous sections. The theory coordinator uses the scores to place students in one of several sections. She aims to distribute the high, mid-range and low results evenly, so that all sections are populated with similar numbers and ranges of results. Mixed sections can embarrass and frustrate weaker students or they can motivate



weaker students since they are placed in a setting with stronger peers.<sup>41</sup> For those that offer fundamentals courses the exam is essential since the scores on the exam should be used to place students accordingly. No matter how the theory curriculum is structured, each university may choose to have students take a diagnostic exam since it provides useful information to the theory coordinators. Although this is not a new suggestion, I reiterate the contention that a diagnostic exam should be administered to emphasize its importance. The different types and the various times to offer the diagnostic exam will be discussed later in this chapter.

Professors have varying opinions on whether or not to use the diagnostic exam as part of the admissions process. Some argue that since many students do not have the opportunity to learn these skills before entering college it would be unfair to require success on the exam in order to be admitted to the program. I believe that if institutions slowly began instituting this requirement or if they offered additional scholarships<sup>42</sup> to those with a high score it may alter students' pre-college theory experience. For example, universities could state that beginning in a certain upcoming academic year, the diagnostic exam will be used as a part of admission decisions. Students may choose to go out of their way to obtain a tutor or they may enroll in a theory course if it is offered at their high school where they may not have otherwise. Also, it may encourage students to begin looking at requirements for college at an earlier age—perhaps their sophomore or junior year of high school. Knowing that this is going to be a requirement, band and choir directors and private music teachers may have additional incentive to incorporate theory

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<sup>41</sup> Rogers, *Teaching Approaches*, 170.

<sup>42</sup> Offering additional scholarships to those who receive a high score on the diagnostic exam(s) may be difficult to implement.

concepts into their curricula. Therefore, I believe that slowly moving towards requiring the diagnostic exam as part of the admissions process or offering those who excel on the exam additional scholarships will be beneficial for music students. Those students who have a true dedication and have completed the proper investigation to prepare themselves for success as a music major at the university level may stand out among the others. However, programs should not deny those students who are excellent performers with high grades but have no background in theory.

Some professors provide students with assistance such as textbook titles, a list of topics, and a few sample exam questions to prepare for the diagnostic exam. This may alleviate some of the students' stress and provide students' with a direction of study since they know what to expect on the test and which topics to review. Professors may argue that providing too much information may be giving students an unfair advantage. In my opinion, it will be evident if the student knows or doesn't know the material with or without the extra resources.

Various schools surveyed offer their diagnostic exams at different times in the admission process: on audition day, online during the summer, during orientation (during the summer or just before the start of the school year), and/or on the first day of classes. Those institutions that use the exam as a part of admissions typically ask students to take it on audition day. I suggest that the programs that don't use it as part of admissions might consider requiring students to take this exam at a time other than audition day. By choosing a day other than audition day it will be less stressful for the students since they may already be inundated with stress from their audition. Since this may require an additional trip to campus, some students—especially those that live far away—may

decide to apply to those universities in which they can complete all the application and audition requirements in a single visit. This may be a good reason to offer the exam during orientation or on the first day of classes. However, taking the exam before the first day of classes will allow students to understand what their theory and aural skills coursework will consist of based on their score on the exam, even if they do not see their exact score. For example, students will be informed if they will need to enroll in a fundamentals course or if they may have the opportunity to take an honors course, and so forth. On the other hand, allowing students to take the exam during orientation or on the first day of classes narrows down the number of tests the theory coordinators need to administer and grade. It seems that the appropriate time to offer the diagnostic exam to students depends on some of the other aspects such as the timing of orientation of that institution's theory curricula.

Although all the institutions I assessed offer a written theory diagnostic exam, only a small portion require an aural skills diagnostic exam. Of those that demand either exam, some use it to place students into the appropriate course, but others use the exam simply to get a sense of the various ability levels of the incoming students since these programs begin their curricula with fundamentals. As mentioned earlier, the exam may be used to divide students into heterogeneous sections. It may be suitable for those that use the aural skills exam to place students into either an aural skills fundamentals course or into Aural Skills I to test both sight singing and dictation. Only one of the universities tests singing skills but doesn't assess dictation skills, and the others test dictation skills but not test singing. It may be beneficial to both the students and the professors to ensure that students have the skills necessary in both components of aural skills. Some

professors may argue that they do not have the time to listen to each student complete a sight-singing diagnostic exam. Professors can administer the dictation portion first, and if students do poorly there is no need to have them take the singing portion—they will need to enroll in the fundamentals course (assuming that the school has a fundamentals course). The teaching assistants can also administer this portion of the exam.

SmartMusic, a musical performance assessment program, provides another vehicle for evaluating students' sight singing. Coordinators can set up a computer in a classroom with a few melodies and rhythms for students to sing and clap. (Coordinators can arrange for graduate students or music staff to check students' IDs, to confirm there is no cheating, and to assist the student with any program questions or concerns.) SmartMusic may also be helpful in the aural skills curriculum itself, as I will describe below.

#### STUDENTS WITH MINIMAL EXPERIENCE IN WRITTEN THEORY AND AURAL SKILLS

There are various ways in which institutions structure their theory curricula to properly place those students who do not have any background or experience in written theory. Some will offer a fundamentals course while others will teach these fundamentals at the beginning of Theory I. Teaching the basics at the start of Theory I ensures that all students have a full understanding of the fundamentals unless they take a placement exam to place out of Theory I. Some professors find value in separating those students who have already developed these fundamental skills. As noted by a respondent to the survey, a separate course allows the instructor to spend more time on other topics, to move more quickly, or to provide additional exercises. In addition, if those students who have already mastered these fundamentals are learning them again in Theory I they may be

underwhelmed during the first several weeks of the first semester which may cause the student to become disinterested in the course thinking that they already are proficient with the material being taught in the course. In my opinion, a fundamentals course can be extremely beneficial to certain students. One professor noted that fundamentals topics consume most of Theory I. A fundamentals course would allow the curriculum to accelerate the pacing of topics, spend more time on certain topics, and build upon enrichment activities.

The argument against a fundamentals course would be that it would put some students behind in the core theory sequence. A solution for this concern is to offer a fundamentals course over the summer before the start of the fall semester. This would allow these students to begin the theory track with the other incoming students in the fall. Some coordinators might feel that they will not be able to find an instructor who is willing to teach this course over the summer. If this is a concern, the coordinator may consider asking a teaching assistant or a graduate student to fulfill this role. Another way to offer a fundamentals course over the summer would be to create an interactive online course. This would solve the issue of who is going to teach the course and alleviate the pressure on the students of needing to arrive on campus earlier than anticipated.

I believe the instruction of aural skills should begin with the fundamentals.<sup>43</sup> Since learning aural skills is more focused on learning strategies for listening and singing it is imperative for the student to learn these appropriate strategies including basic sight-singing and ear-training skills. Once these strategies are mastered, it will become easier for the student to tackle the material, as it becomes more challenging. Instead of worrying

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<sup>43</sup> There doesn't seem to be a general consensus regarding aural skills fundamentals among theory coordinators. Refer to Question #12 of the survey (Appendix A).

about what strategies or poor habits the students have learned, everyone will start learning the basics unless the student opts to take a placement exam and is advised to enroll into Aural Skills II. Karpinski's research stresses the importance of learning how to apply basic skills before the material progresses in difficulty.<sup>44</sup>

Since success rates are low, another way to address the problem is to provide students with extra assistance if they need it. For example, the theory coordinator may compile a list of available tutors for freshmen and sophomore theory courses. The theory coordinator may ask exceptional upperclassmen if they wish to be included on a tutors list, which would provide which course(s) the student is capable of tutoring and a contact method. The theory professors can make this list accessible to students. In addition, it is at the discretion of the instructor whether he or she wishes to coordinate review time in class or outside of class. It may make sense to delegate this task to graduate students or upper classmen who are looking to gain some experience in music theory.

#### STUDENTS WITH EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE IN WRITTEN THEORY AND AURAL SKILLS

Most institutions do not require students who have received an excellent score on the AP Music Theory exam take the diagnostic exam and/or placement exam as appropriate depending on which courses the student wishes to place out. Some programs automatically place the student into Theory I or Theory II. There is some question in some instructors' minds, however, as to whether an exceptional score on the AP exam necessarily means that the student is ready for Theory I or Theory II. While the student may have achieved mastery on the exam, he or she could have struggled with a few topics throughout the course, or there may have been topics barely touched on by the

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<sup>44</sup> Karpinski, *Aural Skills Acquisition*.

instructor. Strongly encouraging a student with AP credit to take the diagnostic exam may ensure accurate advising as to which course to enroll in. A professor noted her concern that although students were required to take the diagnostic exam, the course placement recommendations were only viewed as suggestions by students and at times were not followed. In such circumstances, students choosing to ignore the suggestions implied by the diagnostic exam results may only be hurting themselves in the long run. In addition, if a student's score indicates placement into Theory II then it may be to the student's and professor's best interest that the student take the placement exam. If university policy states that the department is mandated to award credits for an exceptional score on the exam, then the theory coordinator may consider allotting the student music elective credits instead of music theory credits.

Those who are awarded credit for theory courses either because of AP credit or because they successfully completed the placement exam can be strongly advised to make up those credits by taking additional theory courses. Students who have a previous theory background should continue to expand that knowledge by taking upper level courses or completing an independent study. Some may view this as a punishment for working ahead as high-school students. It may offer a way for students with an advanced background in theory to continue to foster their interests. Some programs stated that although they would like to offer upper level courses, it is not possible since they are understaffed. In addition, if there is another institution in the area, the student can inquire about taking an upper level theory course through their department. In my own experience as an undergraduate student at the University of Rochester I took upper level courses through the theory department. Since I was very interested in sonata theory and

the University of Rochester didn't offer any upper level courses on that topic, I took a graduate-level seminar at the Eastman School of Music to further explore those interests.

The lack of staffing also inhibits some programs from offering additional resources for students who have a special aptitude and interest in music theory. One professor expressed concern that his curriculum needs to find better ways to deal with honors-level students and the need for better preparation for those interested in continuing with upper-level and graduate music theory. Professors may not have the time to complete an independent study with students. However, if there is more than one student interested, the professor could potentially have an independent study with a few students at the same time. In addition, students could potentially set up an independent study with a teaching assistant on a topic that relates to the TA's research interest or thesis/dissertation research. While a program may not have enough staffing for another theory course to be offered, a student may be able to contract with their current professor to complete extra, more challenging assignments and a larger project at the end of the course. The professor may be able to offer the student honors credit. One particular program that currently offers this option allows the student to receive honors credit. Another way to get undergraduate students involved in theory is to form a theory "club," led by a professor, a graduate student, or even an upperclassman. The club can meet monthly to discuss topics including the latest research in music theory, theory conferences, preparing for graduate work in music theory, and so forth. This allows the students to create relationships among themselves and with the theory faculty. Faculty may even encourage juniors or seniors to attend a music theory conference. While a national music theory conference may sound intimidating to an undergraduate, smaller



regional conferences may be a better option for such a student. The availability of these opportunities may foster interest and further learning for those students with an extensive background in theory.

#### CURRICULAR DESIGN

While the two subjects of written theory and aural skills are interdependent, there is debate on whether to teach them as two separate courses or include them in one course. Karpinski advocates for an integrated curriculum in which the subjects are taught as different courses but the subjects and materials among those courses are coordinated.<sup>45</sup>

One reason to separate the two courses is for evaluation purposes. If the student excels in written theory but struggles in aural skills, receiving one grade is not a proper assessment of that individual's skills. In many instances students may have to retake an aural skills course and if the student had mastered the written theory material then he may well be bored and unmotivated if the two subjects are taught as one course. Other schools of thought will argue that the two subjects should be incorporated into one course since it will be easier to develop a particular concept in both the written and aural aspect.

Regardless of whether music theory and aural skills are consolidated under one course title, it seems that a crucial goal is to ensure concepts taught in written theory are directly reinforced in aural skills. For example, if a student were to learn the notion of major scales in written theory whether it is in the same class period if one course is offered or the next class period if two separate courses are offered, it will benefit the student to simultaneously understand major scales from a written theory perspective and from an aural perspective. Theory coordinators should consider coordinating the instruction of

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<sup>45</sup> Gary Karpinski, "Lessons from the Past," *Music Theory Online* 6, no.3 (August 2000).

written theory and aural skills whether the subjects are taught in separate courses or in the same course.

### SOFTWARE

Students may practice aural skills on their own time using their voice, their ears, and the piano (or any instrument, for that matter). But certain software can make it easier for students to test themselves in terms of dictation since it provides exercises that the students can dictate. Computer-assisted instruction can be efficient in providing students practice using these skills as well as providing instant feedback. Many institutions already make use of MacGamut, which is software that allows students to practice dictation and professors can also ask students to complete certain exercises using the software as a class assignment. Unfortunately, students may find ways to cheat on these homework assignments. The software only provides a certain number of hearings per exercise, but students may use a recording device to record the dictation example. They may also simply ask or bribe a colleague to complete the assignment. But for those that use it appropriately, MacGamut provides instant feedback for the students. I propose that similar computer-assisted instruction might be useful for practice with and assessment of singing. SmartMusic, typically used by band directors since they can create assignments and monitor students' progress, it can also be used to assess singing. One institution has recently instituted this into its curriculum. The program allows the instructor to assign melodies and rhythms for the student to complete. Professors can decide to set limits on the number of attempts or allow students to have unlimited attempts to complete each exercise. By allowing unlimited attempts, the students have the opportunity to use techniques used in class to master each example. The software provides instant feedback

to the students, showing in musical notation which notes and rhythms are incorrect. Since the software program allows instructors to assign assignments as frequently as they wish it ensures consistent practice of the students. The instant feedback may also be a motivator for the students to use the program on their own time to practice their singing skills. Some institutions that don't make use of SmartMusic could choose to monitor students' progress by assigning them exercises and asking them to submit a video recording of themselves. The instructor may have the students submit these recordings for homework assignment grades. While this method encourages students to practice it does not provide them with instant feedback. SmartMusic and MacGamut can be implemented as a part of the aural skills curriculum to promote the practice of dictation and sight singing skills learned in the classroom.

My aspirations are that these recommendations can provide ideas for improvement and that professors will chose to implement them. The revisions include:

- The minimum passing grade required in written theory and aural skills courses should be increased. The grade should also be universal across all music degree programs.
- The theory coordinator may choose to require all incoming music students to take the written theory diagnostic exam.
- The diagnostic exam may possibly become a part of the admissions process in the future.
- The aural skills diagnostic exam can test both dictation skills and sight singing skills.

- The curriculum may include a written theory fundamentals course instead of including these concepts as a part of Theory I. The department may also consider offering this course over the summer on campus or through an online program.
- The theory department may choose to provide students with assistance to prepare for the diagnostic exam. This may include a list of textbooks to consult but coordinators should consider against providing a sample exam.
- The professors will highly encourage those students who received an exceptional score on the AP Music Theory exam to take the diagnostic exam or the placement exam, as appropriate.
- Those individuals who were awarded theory credit either because of AP credit or because they were able to place out of theory courses should be encouraged to make up those credits by taking additional theory courses.
- The professors will encourage students to take advantage of extra opportunities available to those with an extensive experience in theory. These may include: small group independent studies with a professor or a teaching assistant, a contract with a professor to receive honors credit, and a theory club.
- Written theory and aural skills should be correlated, whether they are taught as one course or as separate courses.
- The use of software like MacGamut and SmartMusic to foster the practicing of aural skills strategies.

The motive behind these suggestions is to increase success rates in written theory and aural skills courses, which in turn will decrease the number of students who drop the music major because of their lack of success or frustration with these course.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Students come to collegiate music programs with various experience levels in written theory and aural skills. Students' exposure ranges from little or no knowledge to extensive training. Institutions handle this matter in various ways. Although each department has its own curricular standards, there are commonalities among them. I surveyed large, Midwest, public universities to collect data regarding their curricula. After summarizing how programs concerned themselves with the different ability levels of incoming students, I proposed recommendations for revision to the curricula. These suggestions include specific improvements to diagnostic exams, raising minimum grade standards, prioritizing smaller class sizes, offering a fundamentals course, and the correlation of aural skills with written theory. I believe that implementation of these suggestions will result in higher success rates in written theory and aural skills courses, and students will become less frustrated with theory.

My preliminary survey and suggestions leave open several areas for future research. While commonalities were noted among these specific institutions, it would be interesting to see whether similar tendencies exist among small, private universities or among conservatories. If the survey were to be re-created in the future, it would be

beneficial to group individual respondents' answers together so more correlations could be made. There are other areas of concern that were not explored in the survey but that may be important to a student's success. For example, I surveyed the kinds of software used in aural skills courses, but exploring the impact of technology and software currently used in written theory courses may also prove useful. Another potential area of research is students' curricular exposure to twentieth-century theories and music. Structure of assignments is another avenue for further study: the types of assignments may vary throughout the many institutions and may have various impacts upon students' success or failure in the program. For example, are the students completing mostly drill and practice examples, or do they have the opportunity to complete practice exercises as well as plenty of chances to apply the concepts learned? These are some of the many topics that theory coordinators may be concerned with when evaluating their curricula and that constitute opportunities for future research.

The incorporation of the revisions proposed will allow for the curricula to account for the various pre-college backgrounds of incoming students. The implementation of the suggestions I provide will, I believe, result in higher success rates. In an ideal curriculum, every music student will not only be successful in written theory and aural skills coursework but they will also enjoy, appreciate, and understand the importance of mastering music theory concepts.

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## APPENDIX A

EMAIL SENT TO THEORY COORDINATORS  
ASKING THEM TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am completing my Masters degree in Music Theory at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln under the supervision of Dr. Stanley Kleppinger and Dr. Gretchen Foley. I am working on my thesis in which I explore undergraduate theory curricula. I hope that you can provide some assistance by completing the attached survey, which will take about 20-30 minutes to complete. In addition, any further information that you may provide that offers details regarding your Music Theory curriculum would be much appreciated. This may include but is not limited to: a breakdown of the theory curriculum as well as a copy of various course syllabi including Theory I, Aural Skills I, any honors sections (if applicable), and fundamentals (written theory and aural skills) course(s).

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions please contact myself at [avezza88@gmail.com](mailto:avezza88@gmail.com) or Dr. Kleppinger at [skleppinger2@unl.edu](mailto:skleppinger2@unl.edu).

Sincerely,  
Anna Vezza

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/musictheory13>

## APPENDIX B

## SURVEY QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(The number of respondents is listed next to each question and answer choices.  
The answers are provided in italics for the free response questions).

1. How many undergraduate students are enrolled in the School or Department of Music? *17 respondents*
  - 0-50 *0*
  - 51-100 *1*
  - 101-250 *8*
  - 251-500 *6*
  - 501-750 *2*
  - 751-1,000 *0*
  - Over 1,000 *0*
  
2. How many students are typically enrolled in each section of a written theory class? (If there is more than one section provide the enrollment in each individual section). *17 respondents*
  - Less than 10 *0*
  - 11-20 *10*
  - 21-30 *5*
  - 31-40 *2*
  - 41-50 *0*
  - 51-60 *0*
  - 61-70 *0*
  - 71-80 *0*
  - 81-90 *0*
  - 91-100 *0*
  - More than 100 *0*
  
3. How many students are typically enrolled in each section of an aural skills class? (If there is more than one section provide the enrollment in each individual section). *17 respondents*
  - Less than 10 *1*
  - 11-20 *12*
  - 21-30 *3*
  - 31-40 *0*
  - 41-50 *0*
  - 51-60 *0*
  - 61-70 *1*

- 71-80 0
  - 81-90 0
  - 91-100 0
  - More than 100 0
4. Do you require incoming freshmen to take a theory and/or aural skills diagnostic exam either as a part of the audition process or upon arrival at your institution?  
*17 respondents*
- Both written theory and aural skills. 10
  - Just written theory. 7
  - Just aural skills. 0
  - Neither. 0
5. Are those students who received a threshold score on the AP Music Theory exam also required to take the diagnostic exam? *16 respondents*
- Yes. 7
  - No, they are required to take the placement exam, which exempts students out of particular courses. 0
  - No, they are automatically placed into Theory I. 1
  - No, they are placed into an honors section, an accelerated Theory I. 0
  - No, they are automatically placed into Theory II. 4
  - No, they are automatically placed into Theory III. 0
  - Other (please specify). 4
    - *I haven't heard of the AP Music Theory Exam. All incoming prospective majors must take the diagnostic exam.*
    - *All students receive a baseline Theory and Aural Skills evaluation, but those with AP and others with prior study are welcome to test for proficiency and placement.*
    - *Our diagnostic is also a placement exam. It can place students out of fundamentals (which is only required for those who don't read music, essentially) or it can place students out of the first full semester of theory. Beyond that, they need to contact me for exempting out of higher levels of theory.*
    - *They are asked to take a different placement exam, but the results are advisory only. We are required to accept AP credit whether the student is actually ready for more advanced work or not.*
6. Is the diagnostic exam used as a factor in determining admission to the program?  
*17 respondents*
- Yes 4
  - No 3
7. When is the diagnostic exam offered to students? *17 respondents*
- On audition day. 7
  - Online during the summer. 2
  - During orientation, which occurs during the summer. 1

- During orientation, which occurs just before the start of classes. 1
  - On the first day of class. 2
  - Other (please specify). 4
    - *Audition day and orientation.*
    - *Auditions include baseline aural skills evaluation (pitch matching, singing). The theory rudiments test is taken online in the spring (and the score is considered in admissions).*
    - *First on audition day, then (for those who don't pass) again during orientation.*
    - *Students can take it on audition day or at the beginning of the semester.*
8. When do students receive their scores? 17 respondents
- With their acceptance letter. 4
  - During orientation, which occurs during the summer. 3
  - During orientation, which occurs just before the start of classes. 1
  - The first day of classes. 1
  - Other (please specify). 8
    - *Students do not receive scores. We use the scores to place students in one of several sections. We aim to distribute the high, mid-range and low results evenly, so that all sections are populated with similar numbers and ranges of results.*
    - *I do not know.*
    - *They are admitted or not, but I doubt we share the scores.*
    - *They don't receive a score. They are simply notified if they need remedial theory (fundamentals).*
    - *As soon as possible after the test (with recommendations for study for those who do not pass).*
    - *Students are not told their scores, just whether they have passed or failed and what that means for their enrollment.*
    - *As soon as they have completed the exam online.*
    - *Scores are available immediately upon completing the online diagnostic exam. Placements are made in the week before fall classes begin.*
9. Do incoming students have the opportunity to retake either the written theory or aural skills diagnostic exam(s)? 17 respondents
- Just written theory. 3
  - Just aural skills. 0
  - Both. 4
  - No. 10
10. When are they given the opportunity to retake the exam(s)? 8 respondents
- *Yes, but only once.*
  - *When the exam is offered again before a subsequent semester.*
  - *Before the first week of the fall semester.*

- *Orientation week.*
- *If they take it during their audition, and have studied theory or aural skills in the meantime before their arrival they can take it again at the beginning of the semester.*
- *They either show up to the next audition day (we have one right before school starts for last-minute applicants, which is when most of them take it) or they schedule an alternate time with me. They are only allowed to retake once.*
- *Freshman orientation week.*
- *By the next audition date.*

11. What portions of your curriculum are reflected in the written theory diagnostic exam? (Check all that apply). *16 respondents*

- |                                       |           |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| ▪ Clefs and Naming Pitches            | <i>16</i> |
| ▪ Key Signatures and Time Signatures  | <i>16</i> |
| ▪ Scales                              | <i>16</i> |
| ▪ Intervals                           | <i>15</i> |
| ▪ Triads                              | <i>14</i> |
| ▪ Seventh Chords: Five Types          | <i>7</i>  |
| ▪ Part Writing                        | <i>1</i>  |
| ▪ Non-Chord Tones                     | <i>1</i>  |
| ▪ Secondary Function                  | <i>1</i>  |
| ▪ Modulations                         | <i>1</i>  |
| ▪ Other (please specify).             | <i>3</i>  |
| • <i>Rhythm and meter.</i>            |           |
| • <i>Rhythms, some aural skills.</i>  |           |
| • <i>Meter, notation conventions.</i> |           |

12. What portions of your curriculum are reflected in the aural skills diagnostic exam? (Check all that apply). *11 respondents*

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| ▪ Intervals   | <i>7</i> |
| ▪ Compound Intervals  | <i>2</i> |
| ▪ Scales  | <i>5</i> |
| ▪ Triad Quality   | <i>7</i> |
| ▪ Seventh Chords: Five Types                                    | <i>4</i> |
| ▪ Melodic Dictation   | <i>7</i> |
| ▪ Harmonic Dictation using Root Position Triads                 | <i>2</i> |
| ▪ Harmonic Dictation using Root Position Seventh Chords         | <i>2</i> |
| ▪ Harmonic Dictation using Triads in Various Inversions         | <i>1</i> |
| ▪ Harmonic Dictation using Seventh Chords in Various Inversions | <i>1</i> |
| ▪ Rhythmic Dictation using Divisions of the Beat                | <i>2</i> |
| ▪ Rhythmic Dictation using Subdivisions of the Beat             | <i>3</i> |
| ▪ Rhythmic Dictation using Ties and Dots                        | <i>2</i> |
| ▪ Rhythmic Dictation using Syncopation                          | <i>1</i> |
| ▪ Other (please specify).                                       | <i>7</i> |

- *Rhythmic dictation is addressed in part during the harmonic dictation, which contains distinctive rhythmic components*
- *Error detection in a given rhythmic passage (using beats and divisions of beats)*
- *A short musical excerpt from the symphonic repertoire in which we test their ability to hear cadences.*
- *Singing at sight, clapping rhythm at sight*
- *None*
- *Two-part dictation, rhythmic error detection, harmonic function (they hear a five chord progression and have to identify the chords in the progression that are tonic).*

13. Does the aural skills diagnostic exam include both a written portion (dictation) and a singing portion? *9 respondents*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ▪ Both a written and a singing portion. | 0 |
| ▪ Just a written portion.               | 8 |
| ▪ Just a singing portion.               | 1 |

14. Do you provide students with any assistance to prepare for the diagnostic exam(s)? *15 respondents*

- |       |    |
|-------|----|
| ▪ Yes | 5  |
| ▪ No  | 10 |

15. What type of assistance is provided for students to prepare for the diagnostic exam? (Check all that apply). *5 respondents*

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| ▪ List of textbooks to consult. | 5 |
| ▪ List of topics covered.       | 3 |
| ▪ Sample questions.             | 2 |
| ▪ Sample exam.                  | 2 |
| ▪ Other (please specify).       | 1 |
- *They are also told that they can contact me directly for more guidance and they can also contact one of our tutors.*

16. What impact does an exceptional score on the written theory diagnostic exam have on the student? *15 respondents*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ▪ The student is automatically placed into Theory I.  | 8 |
| ▪ The student is automatically placed into an honors section, an accelerated Theory I course. | 2 |
| ▪ Other (please specify).   | 5 |
- *The student is exempted from Theory I and invited to take further tests at the beginning of the semester to test out of additional semesters.*
  - *The student may be placed into Theory I, II, III, or IV.*
  - *The student is given the option of taking the "transfer theory test", which is originally designed to place students transferring 1 or more courses of theory or ear training from other colleges or*

*universities The student is placed out of the fundamentals course (which for us is Theory I) and is placed into Theory II.*

- *Placement is dependent on the score and the student's background.*

17. What impact does an exceptional score on the aural skills diagnostic exam have on the student? *9 respondents*

- The student is automatically placed into Aural Skills I. 5
- The student is automatically placed into an honors section, an accelerated Aural Skills I course. 1
- Other (please specify). 3
  - *The student may be placed into a Theory I, II, III, or IV course.*
  - *The student is placed out of aural skills fundamentals (which for us is Aural Skills I) and is placed into Aural Skills II.*
  - *Placement is dependent on the score and student's background.*

18. What course of action is prescribed for students who are unsuccessful on the written theory diagnostic exam? *15 respondents*

- Student must enroll in a written theory fundamentals course. 6
- Student enrolls in Theory I. 5
- Student must learn the material and retake the exam before classes begin. 1
- Other (please specify). 3
  - *I am not sure.*
  - *The student enrolls in Theory I, which for us is our fundamentals course. (The vast majority of our students require fundamentals.)*
  - *Students can complete an online course over the summer, or enroll in a fundamentals course.*

19. Do you offer a written theory fundamentals course? *15 respondents*

- Yes 9
- No 6

20. Which textbook(s) does the written theory fundamentals course use? If other materials are used please specify. *8 respondents*

- *Clendinning/Marvin*
- *Varies from year to year. Current instructor draws from teoria.com*
- *Music First*
- *Our fundamentals course is part of our theory sequence—it is our Theory I course. We use the Laitz "Complete Musician," although it requires heavy supplementation in the fundamentals section.*
- *Course packets produced in-house*
- *Clendinning/Marvin*
- *In-house*
- *Varies by instructor*



21. Do you offer a written theory fundamentals course before the start of the Fall semester (For example: over the summer). *9 respondents*
- Yes 2
  - No 7
22. Do you offer an aural skills fundamentals course? *15 respondents*
- Yes 3
  - No 12
23. Which textbook(s) does your aural skills fundamentals course use? If other materials used, please specify. *3 respondents*
- *Theory and written are combined in fundamentals.*
  - *Aural skills fundamentals is Aural Skills I for us. There is no text.*
  - *In-house.*
24. Do you offer an aural skills fundamentals course before the start of the Fall semester (For example: over the summer). *3 respondents*
- Yes 0
  - No 3
25. Do you offer a placement exam which entering freshmen can take if they wish to place out a written theory course(s)? *15 respondents*
- Yes 12
  - No 3
26. Describe in detail the expectations required on the written theory placement exam and which courses students can place out of. *11 respondents*
- *They can test out of any semester of Theory. The tests are tailored to the syllabi of the respective courses.*
  - *Representative material from the four semesters of tonal theory is included on the tests. Students may test out of all four semesters.*
  - *Theory I: cadences, sequences, non-chord tones Theory II: diatonic modulation, secondary dominants Theory III: enharmonic modulation, augmented sixth chords, extended tertian chords Theory IV: post-tonal scales, set class, technique identification.*
  - *The placement exam includes the material covered on the final exam of the first term, although in a condensed form. It is possible for students to test out of the first 2 terms of theory, using another placement test that includes material from the final exam from the second theory course. This often is the case with students transferring to our school.*
  - *All students who pass the initial placement test enter Theory I, but students have the option of taking another test to place into Theory II.*
  - *May test out of up to 2 semesters.*
  - *Didn't we already do this? The written test includes fundamentals skills up to and including triads in inversion.*

- *Separate exemption exams are offered for each of the first four semesters of written theory, at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters.*
- *For first-semester theory, they take an exam that tests whether they know figured bass, instrumental transposition, RN analysis, and basic part writing.*
- *Must complete written, aural, and skills exams for the semester tested with B- or better average.*
- *The exam tests part-writing and analysis skills and is divided into sections corresponding to each of the four semesters of the undergraduate sequence. Section 1: triad ID and part-writing through cadential six-four. Section 2: basic phrase rhythm, part-writing through tonicization of V. Section 3: analysis of most tonal music, part-writing with modulations and chromatic chords. Section 4: basic post-tonal theory.*

27. What number or percentage of students place out of one or more semesters of written theory course(s)? *11 respondents*

- *Percentage: 5; 40; 1-2; less than 1; less than 5; ~5; 5-10; May 3-5 (not many); varies but generally no more than 30*
- *Number: 2; 1-4; 1 or 2 per term; less than 2-3; 10-20 students per year; 3 students place out of first semester out of 60; very rare*

28. Do you offer a placement exam which entering freshmen can take if they wish to place out of an aural skills course(s)? *15 respondents*

- *Yes* *9*
- *No* *6*

29. Describe in detail the expectations required on the aural skills placement exam and which courses students can place out of. *7 respondents*

- *Same as theory.*
- *Material representative of all four semesters of tonal aural skills is included on the test. Students may test out of all four semesters.*
- *We follow the same procedure as for theory placement exams: students must pass a condensed version of the final exam for each course they wish to test out of.*
- *Seriously, how is this question different than the earlier questions? It contains interval identification, triad quality identification, a rhythm error detection exercise, a rhythmic dictation (given pitches, notate the rhythm), a melodic dictation (given rhythm, notate the pitches), a two-part dictation, and a harmonic function identification question.*
- *Separate exemption exams are offered (every semester) for each course in the aural skills sequence.*
- *We basically give them the last hearing and last exam for Aural Skills I. Singing and rhythm through Ch. 5 in the Ottman, harmonic dictation featuring I, ii, ii6, IV, IV6, and V chords, and melodic dictation featuring skips within the tonic and dominant triads. Rhythmic dictation and performance: subdivided simple meter and un-subdivided compound*

*meter. We expect a very high level of performance in order for students to be placed out of any aural skills.*

- *Same as before.*

30. What number or percentage of students can place out of one or more semesters of aural skills course(s)? *7 respondents*

- *Percentage: 5; 1-2; less than 1; ~5; 10-15; not sure, very few*
- *Number: 2; 1-4; one or two per term; 20-30 students per year; 1 person placed out of aural skills this year. In general, they only place out of AS if they also place out of theory, and this usually only happens if they are transfer students.*

31. If the student is exempt from one or more semesters of music theory (either written theory or aural skills courses) the student will \_\_\_\_\_. *13 respondents*

- *Take fewer total credits.* 8
- *Make up the exemption by taking upper division music theory electives.* 3
- *Other (please specify).* 2
  - *It depends on the circumstances. (a) If students received high grades (4 or 5) on AP-Music Theory Exams prior to arriving at our school, they must make up the exemption with additional credits in other courses. (b) If students are transferring from schools, they receive full credit for the courses they tested out of.*
  - *It depends on the degree program*

32. The core curriculum requires music majors to enroll in at least \_\_\_\_\_ semesters of written theory. *15 respondents*

- *3* 0
- *4* 10
- *5* 2
- *6* 2
- *Other (please specify)* 1
  - *3 semesters for BA, 4 for all other degrees*

33. The core curriculum requires music majors to enroll in at least \_\_\_\_\_ semesters of aural skills. *15 respondents*

- *3* 0
- *4* 13
- *5* 1
- *6* 0
- *Other (please specify).* 1
  - *3 semesters for BA, 4 for all other degrees*

34. Are written theory and aural skills taken as one course or as separate courses?

15 respondents

- |                   |    |
|-------------------|----|
| ▪ One course      | 5  |
| ▪ Separate course | 10 |

35. Does a student have the same teacher for each core curriculum written theory course they are required to take? 15 respondents

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| ▪ Yes, they are guaranteed the same teacher for each semester.   | 0 |
| ▪ Students are randomly placed into various sections each semester and therefore, they may or may not have the same teacher each semester. | 1 |
| ▪ No, they have a different teacher each semester.   | 3 |
| ▪ It is up to the student whether they will have the same teacher or not since each student can choose which section to enroll in.         | 5 |
| ▪ Other (please specify).  | 6 |
- *Students usually have the same teacher for two semesters of freshman-level courses (Theory I-II, freshman level), and a different teacher for the next two semesters of sophomore-level courses (Theory III-IV).*
  - *They have one professor the first year, and a different professor the second year. And for both years, the professor teaches "lecture," and the TA teaches "section." Written theory and aural skills are distributed more or less equally between lecture and section.*
  - *Different professor for each year, but usually stay with the same TA for entire year.*
  - *Two instructors teach first year theory, two different instructors teach second year theory. Students may move between sections in the middle of their first or second year, although most stay with their instructor for the full year. But they will always have a different instructor for freshman and sophomore theory.*
  - *In the freshman year, there are only two teachers, so the student usually sticks with the same person for both semesters. (And aural skills and theory are taught by the same person.) For the sophomore year, there is only one theory teacher and only one aural skills teacher who is different from the theory teacher. The sophomore theory instructor teaches no freshman theory so the students are guaranteed at least one different teacher in theory. However the sophomore aural skills instructor also teaches freshman theory and aural skills, so there is a chance that a student might have the same aural skills teacher for four semesters if they took that person's section in their first year.*
  - *The first-year courses are divided into two lecture sections, but the second-year courses are not. Thus about half of the students may have the same instructor for two years, while the other half have two different instructors.*

36. Does the student have the same teacher for each core curriculum aural skills course they are required to take? *14 respondents*
- Yes, they are guaranteed the same teacher for each semester. 0
  - Students are randomly placed into various sections each semester and therefore, they may or may not have the same teacher each semester. 3
  - No, they have a different teacher each semester. 3
  - It is up to the student whether they will have the same teacher or not since each student can choose which section to enroll in. 5
  - Other (please specify). 3
    - *See above.*
    - *Same.*
    - *See above.*
37. In a particular semester does each student have the same teacher for written theory and aural skills? *15 respondents*
- Yes, the student can have the same teacher for written theory and aural skills. 1
  - No, the student has a different teach for written theory and aural skills. 2
  - It is up to the student whether they will have the same teacher or not since each student can choose which section to enroll in. 5
  - Other (please specify). 7
    - *The student will have the same teacher for written and aural.*
    - *Students have the same teacher for both subjects in the first term. The teaching staff changes somewhat in the second term; most students will have the same teachers for both theory and aural skills, but one-third to one-quarter do not.*
    - *See above.*
    - *Always.*
    - *In the freshman year, this is always the case. In the sophomore year, a different person teaches theory than teaches aural skills.*
    - *All combined written/aural.*
    - *Teaching assistants run the aural skills sections; faculty run the theory lecture sections.*
38. Are there other music theory courses that consist of a specific title, which all undergraduates are required to take? (For example: Form, Counterpoint, and so forth). *15 respondents*
- Yes 4
  - No 11
39. List and describe the other courses undergraduates are required to take. *4 respondents*
- *Students are required to take one upper division counterpoint class. Some degree tracks require one upper -level analysis course as well (e.g., 19th century)*
  - *Counterpoint (2 credits); Form and Analysis (2 credits)*

- *20th century techniques some students are required to take styles and forms*
- *Twentieth-Century Western Art Music*

40. Which written theory textbook(s) does your curriculum use? Indicate any other materials that are used. *14 respondents*

- *Clendinning/Marvin*
- *Aldwell Schachter, Bribitzer-Stull Anthology for Analysis and Performance (forthcoming)*
- *Clendinning/Marvin*
- *Tonal Harmony by Kostka and Payne, supplementary course packets created by the coordinators of freshman and sophomore theory*
- *Laitz, Complete musician; supplemental materials for counterpoint and 20th century*
- *Our own species counterpoint manual and course materials, but we supplement with section of Aldwell & Schachter for some of the more technical harmonic subjects.*
- *Ottman (sight singing)*
- *In-house materials*
- *Laitz, The Complete Musician*
- *Laitz, The Complete Musician (Plus various texts for the post-tonal class, selected independently by each instructor.)*
- *Kostka-Payne Burkhart Anthology Coursepacks for each semester with my own materials that supplement or disagree with the textbook*
- *In-house; Dover scores*
- *Aldwell and Schachter, Harmony and Voice Leading, 4th ed. (first through third semesters) Pearsall, Twentieth-Century Music Theory and Practice (fourth semester)*
- *Clendenning*

41. Specify if different professors teaching the same written theory course use different textbooks or course materials. Indicate if different written theory courses use different textbooks. *9 respondents*

- *No*
- *All professors use the same texts*
- *All sections of freshman theory use the same textbook and course packet. All sections of sophomore theory use the same textbook and course packet. While the same textbook is used in both freshman and sophomore theory, the course packets are different.*
- *No.*
- *Multiple sections use the same text, even if different instructors.*
- *All use Laitz, except for post-tonal class.*
- *We all use the same textbooks.*
- *Same by all teachers of the same course.*
- *All same.*

42. Do you offer an honors section of Theory I? *15 respondents*
- Yes 2
  - No 13
43. Does the honors section of written theory use the same textbook(s) and course materials as the regular Theory I course? *2 respondents*
- Yes 2
  - No 0
44. Describe the ways in which the honors section of written theory differs from the regular Theory I course. *1 respondent*
- *Some of the course materials are different. The honors section completes the regular theory curriculum in the first half of the term; the second half of the term is devoted to more in-depth work using the skills and knowledge gained thus far, with special projects that require more critical thinking, analysis, and writing.*
45. Which aural skills textbook(s) does your curriculum use? Indicate any other materials that are used. *12 respondents*
- *Damschroder Listen and Sing and MacGamut*
  - *"Music for Sight Singing" by Benjamin, Horvit, and Nelson. "MacGamut" ear-training software "SmartMusic" music education software*
  - *Clendinning Marvin; MacGamut*
  - *Berkowitz*
  - *Not sure- I don't teach aural skills. I know they used the Burkhart for a while, but I think they've stopped because of the price.*
  - *Laitz workbooks, plus course packets produced in-house.*
  - *Ottman Kazez MacGamut coursepackets*
  - *In-House*
  - *Ottman and Rogers, Music for Sight Singing, 8th ed.*
  - *Horvit/Nelson*
46. Specify if different professors use different textbooks or course materials. Indicate if different aural skills courses use different textbooks. *7 respondents*
- *No*
  - *All professors use the same text.*
  - *The sophomore-level aural skills classes do not use MacGamut.*
  - *Unified text among sections.*
  - *All use the Laitz workbooks.*
  - *We all use the same materials.*
  - *All use the same materials.*
47. Do you offer an honors section of Aural Skills I? *15 respondents*
- Yes 2
  - No 13

48. Does the honors section of aural skills use the same textbook(s) and course materials as the regular Aural Skills I? *2 respondents*
- Yes 2
  - No 0
49. Describe the ways in which the honors section of aural skills differs from the regular Aural Skills I course. *1 respondent*
- *More challenging exercises.*
50. About what percentage of the music discussed in written theory courses is solo piano repertoire? *14 respondents*
- 0-25% 4
  - 16-50% 8
  - 51-75% 2
  - 76-100% 0
51. Do your aural skills courses make use of software? *15 respondents*
- Yes 11
  - No 4
52. Specify what kind of software is used in aural skills courses and how it is used (in the classroom, for homework assignments, for testing). *10 respondents*
- *MacGamut*
  - *MacGamut for homework assignments and additional practice*
  - *"MacGamut" ear-training software (identification, dictation) - used for homework assignments. "SmartMusic" music education software (singing melodies, clapping rhythms) - used for homework assignments.*
  - *MacGamut*
  - *MacGamut*
  - *MacGamut-homework, practice*
  - *MacGamut Students have 10-12 assignments per semester.*
  - *MacGamut*
  - *MacGamut, assignments completed at home and submitted online*
  - *Online dictation*
53. What type of solmization system is used for singing? *14 respondents*
- Fixed Do 0
  - Moveable Do, La-Based Minor 2
  - Moveable Do, Do-Based Minor 8
  - Numbers 2
  - Letter Names 0
  - No System 0
  - Other (please specify). 2
    - *What we call "functional solfege"*
    - *Combination of moveable do and fixed do.*



54. Which best describes the distribution of written theory and aural skills courses among each semester? *15 respondents*
- Written theory courses coincide with aural skills courses each semester (For example: Theory I and Aural Skills I are offered in a semester) 12
  - The aural skills sequence begins a semester behind (For example: Theory II and Aural Skills I are offered in a semester). 1
  - Other (please specify). 2
    - *As mentioned above, they are mixed together in both lecture and section.*
    - *Aural and written skills integrated into the same course each semester.*
55. Do the theory courses and/or aural skills courses include a keyboard component? *15 respondents*
- Yes, as a part of written theory. 0
  - Yes, as a part of aural skills. 1
  - Yes, as a part of both written theory and aural skills. 0
  - Yes, as a part of written theory, and students are required to take a separate keyboard course offered through the piano department. 1
  - Yes, as a part of aural skills, and students are also required to take a separate keyboard course offered through the piano department. 0
  - Yes, as a part of both written theory and aural skills and students are also required to take a separate keyboard course offered through the piano department. 4
  - No, a separate keyboard course is offered through the piano department. 5
  - Other (please specify). 4
    - *Freshman level: as a part of written theory; also required to take separate KB course through piano dept. Sophomore level: as a part of aural skills; also required to take separate KB class through piano dept.*
    - *Students take class piano and some students take an upper-level keyboard skills class.*
    - *In the first year.*
    - *Our faculty try to include keyboard skills in the classes, but it is not officially part of the curriculum. There is a separate keyboard course, but it's useless.*
56. Does your curriculum offer off-semester written theory courses (For instance, if the typical student enrolls in Theory I in the Fall, is Theory I also offered in the Spring)? *15 respondents*
- Yes 5
  - No 8
  - Other (please specify). 2
    - *Summer only*
    - *Only for Theory II, which is offered in the spring for all students. This is offered again in the summer for those who need to retake it.*

57. Does your curriculum offer off-semester aural skills courses (For instance, if the typical student enrolls in Aural Skills I in the Fall, is Aural Skills I also offered in the Spring)? 15 respondents
- Yes 6
  - No 7
  - Other (please specify) 2
    - Summer
    - Only for Aural Skills II. Same situation as Theory II.
58. Which best describes the nature of your written theory courses? 15 respondents
- Students meet three times a week with a faculty member. 4
  - Students meet three times a week with a teaching assistant. 0
  - Students meet three times a week with a faculty member and another two times a week with a teaching assistant. 2
  - Other (please specify). 9
    - Faculty 2; TA 1
    - Students meet twice a week with faculty, once with TA.
    - They may take a course with a faculty member; they may take a course with a TA.
    - Classes are split into smaller sections taught by a faculty member or a graduate student.
    - Students meet twice a week with the professor (T, Th) and three times a week with the TA (MWF).
    - Two lectures with professor, three meeting with TA each week.
    - In Theory I, they meet twice a week with faculty and once with a graduate assistant. In Theory II-IV they meet three times a week with a faculty member and once with a graduate assistant.
    - Students meet three times a week with a faculty member but have the option of meeting for 2.5 additional hours with an advanced undergraduate teaching Supplemental Instruction sessions. This undergraduate is given lesson plans and extra drill materials, similar to a drill section taught by a teaching assistant. This is only offered for freshman theory.
    - Students meet five days per week with their instructor.
59. What is the minimum grade required of students to be able to take the next written theory course in the sequence? Provide a letter grade as well as the numerical equivalent. Does this grade requirement change among the various core curriculum written theory courses? 13 respondents
- D
  - C-
  - D = 60
  - C (73%) is the minimum grade. It is the same for all 4 semesters of theory.
  - If they are BM track, the minimum passing grade is D (60%). If they are BA track, the minimum passing grade is C- (70%).
  - C (2.0) no.

- C
- They are required to get a 1.0, which is a 60%. However, certain majors require a higher grade (music ed requires at least a 2.0 in all theory classes), so while students can technically move on, they will need to retake the class.
- D (60%) for all written theory courses
- We don't have letter grades. The grade required for passing is 2.0 (71%). This is required passing grade for all theory courses, though we wish it were 2.5 for aural skills.
- C- or 70% for all courses.
- D (60%)
- C

60. What is the minimum grade required of students to be able to take the next aural skills course in the sequence? Provide the letter grade as well as the numerical equivalent. Does this grade requirement change among the various core curriculum aural skills courses? 13 respondents

- D
- C-
- D (60%)
- C (73%) is the minimum grade. It is the same for all 4 terms of aural skills. At the freshman level there is an additional minimum: students must earn at least a C-minus (70%) in dictation exams and at least a C-minus (70%) in sight-singing audits in order to receive at least the minimum overall passing grade of C (73%) for the course.
- If they are BM track, the minimum passing grade is D (60%). If they are BA track, the minimum passing grade is C- (70%).
- C (2.0) no.
- C
- They are required to get a 1.0, which is a 60%. However, certain majors require a higher grade (music ed requires at least a 2.0 in all theory classes), so while students can technically move on, they will need to retake the class.
- C (70%) for all aural skills courses.
- 2.0
- C- or 70% for all courses
- D (60%)
- C

61. Is a student with a special aptitude and interest in music theory given the opportunity to pursue his or her interests? 15 respondents

- Yes 12
- No 3

62. Explain the opportunities offered for a student with special interest in music theory (For example: independent study, thesis, and so forth). *12 respondents*
- *Take grad courses.*
  - *Independent study; thesis*
  - *We offer honors sections of theory in the first semester. In subsequent semesters students may "contract" a theory course for honors credits. In this case, the student works on a substantial project, along the lines of an independent study. Any time after completion of the sophomore-level theory classes, students may switch their degree plan to a B.M. in music theory (from a B.M. in performance, a B.M.E. in music education, or a B.A. in music). This theory degree would require upper-level theory courses and a thesis.*
  - *We offer an undergraduate theory major and a minor. There are also independent study opportunities and thesis opportunities.*
  - *Upper level (400-) analysis as elective*
  - *For those who are interested (and good), we let them enrol in some grad courses. Those who want to do a BA in theory (and are accepted) do a thesis with prof.*
  - *Honors projects, independent studies when available (theory area is understaffed)*
  - *Independent Study*
  - *Independent studies, graduate-level classes, opportunity to be a tutor and to lead Supplemental Instruction sessions as described in a previous question (the student who is the SI leader also sits in on every meeting of freshman theory and aural skills)*
  - *Upper-division elective coursework, independent study, senior project*
  - *Independent study; graduate level analysis courses*
  - *Independent study, composition, research papers*
63. Are there services available for students who are struggling in theory and/or aural skills courses? *15 respondents*
- Yes *13*
  - No *2*
64. Which of the following services are offered for those struggling in music theory (Check all that apply). *13 respondents*
- Individual tutoring services *11*
  - Group tutoring services *3*
  - Review sessions outside of class *6*
  - Other (please specify). *4*
    - *Extra help is given on an ad-hoc basis by instructors. There is an undergraduate tutor as well.*
    - *Both the professors and the TAs are expected to help the student along.*
    - *We have a theory tutoring center staffed by grad students that meets twice a week for three hours a night.*

- *Learning community assistance.*

65. What is the approximate number or percentage of students who do not successfully complete the entire core curriculum written theory courses?

*9 respondents*

- Number: *not sure; hard to judge—when students leave the program we don't always know the reason; around 15/60*
- Percentage: *35; 10-20; 80; not sure; 25 perhaps; 25 (total guess); maybe 5; about 25 (if they make it to sophomore theory, they are usually fine); less than 5*

66. What is the approximate number or percentage of students who do not pass the first semester of written theory? *9 respondents*

- Number: *6-10; perhaps 15 students per year (5 fails and 10 drops) last semester, it was 15/60*
- Percentage: *10; 5-10; 6-10; most pass, I think, but about 10 % drop out of music; 10; 5-10 (including those who drop); 25; less than 5*

67. What is the approximate number or percentage of students who do not successfully complete the entire core curriculum aural skills courses?

*8 respondents*

- Number: *not sure; very hard to judge; same as theory 15/60*
- Percentage: *35; 10-20; 80; not sure; no idea; about 25; less than 5*

68. What is the approximate number or percentage of students who do not pass the first semester of aural skills? *8 respondents*

- Number: *not sure; maybe 15 per year (fails and drops); last semester, it was about 12/60*
- Percentage: *10; 5-10; not sure; 10; 5-10 (including drops and fails); 20; less than 5*

69. What is the approximate number or percentage of students who drop the music major after the first year? *10 respondents*

- Number: *not sure; 2 or 3; maybe 10 per year; maybe 5-7;*
- Percentage: *10; 5-15; 3-5; 20 perhaps; 20; 5; about 10; 15*

70. If you could change one thing about your theory curriculum what would it be and why? *13 respondents*

- *Smaller sections.*
- *Given that we just revamped our entire curriculum, the only thing I could wish for right now is another faculty member to augment our upper-division elective offerings.*
- *I would like to have a fundamentals class to precede Theory I. Some students have absolutely no background; other students need more time to process the material. Fundamentals topics consume most of the first term of Theory I; a fundamentals course would free up the theory curriculum to*

*either accelerate the pacing of topics, or spend more time on certain topics, or build upon the basic curriculum with more enrichment activities.*

- *I would like to change the minimum passing grade to C- for BM students so that everyone passed with the same standard.*
- *Minimize the disjunction between first-year and second-year curricula. They have been taught by different professors for over a decade now, and really, there is no continuity between them.*
- *To have it coordinated by a faculty dedicated to this cause (ie. someone who does not coordinate theory as the "n"th thing they do on faculty.*
- *We don't have the staffing to offer upper-level undergrad courses.*
- *I would add in a keyboard skills class that ran concurrently with the theory and aural skills, and reinforced the topics being discussed in those classes.*
- *I'd like better ways to deal with honors students, and better preparation for those interested in continuing with upper-level and graduate music theory.*
- *I would require six semesters, with a full semester of form and analysis and a full semester of 20th century analysis. Right now, we are too pressured to move quickly through fundamentals, and too pressured to move quickly through tonal analysis and advanced harmonic techniques. Additionally, we have no time for species within the regular curriculum; in order to have species CP, they must elect to take Counterpoint. I feel that our students don't really gain a full understanding of how tonal music works. Also, while we do squeeze in about 6 weeks of post-1900 analysis at the end of sophomore theory, it is really not enough. Students don't really retain any of what they learn (set theory, 12-tone techniques for instance), and while the exposure is good, music majors should get a chance to learn this material in more detail.*
- *Add more popular music to the curriculum.*
- *Decoupling aural skills from counterpoint/harmony/analysis would allow us to manage individual student needs better, especially in aural skills.*
- *Move more quickly and incorporate online components. The course needs to be more technologically engaging!*