Music Department

Program Assessment Report

September 23, 2005

**Introduction**

The primary objective of the Music Department, as part of Westmont College, is to develop accomplished musicians with genuinely Christian insight at an advanced level. Although the Music Department works toward that objective in many ways unique to the arts, it does so always as part of the total college community and, therefore, in harmony with the rest of the college community. The Music Department recognizes its responsibility to be of service to music students, the general college community, and the entire Christian community.

**History**

The following information comes from our report to the Program review from the summer of 2004:

1. In the *Futures Project Self-Study Report* the Music Department completed in August 1999, the music faculty proposes, as part of the “Christian Orientation Standard,” under the heading “Virtues,” a rationale for the following desired student learning outcomes:

   The discipline required for excellent musical performance offers significant opportunities for the practice of Christian virtues. Courage, self-control, faith, patience, and hope are required in abundance of those who undertake to master an instrument, as progress may take place only over long periods of time and through prolonged effort. Faith, hope, and patience are exercised by the composition student who struggles to create a worthy piece of music.

   Music students must give much time and energy to composition, practice, rehearsal, and performance. Prudence is essential to budgeting time for these activities and to maintaining good health and adequate physical and mental energy. As in any communal endeavor, students in ensembles are required to practice self-control and love for one another. Failings in either of these areas adversely affect group morale and quality of performance.

   The practice of these virtues is integral to the Christian life to an extent that an enumeration of the ways in which they are cultivated in the broader college experience might be interminable.
While we strongly desire these virtues for our students, the extent to which they are developed in them through their study of music is difficult to assess. One method that has proved successful in our ensembles in the past is self-assessment, in which students are asked to write about how they are progressing individually in these areas through their involvement in ensembles. In addition, we have noted that music students’ self-assessment as part of the recently-developed senior interview process has proved very enlightening and encouraging, and feel this method might be employed generally to assess the development of Christian virtues in our students.

For these reasons, we have decided that during their senior year, each of our students will be required to submit a written self-assessment of their development during their time at Westmont in the areas courage, self-control, faith, patience, hope, and love through their private practice of an instrument, voice, or composition, as well as through their involvement in music ensembles. Completion of this self-assessment will be required for graduation.

2. As part of the “Critical and Interdisciplinary Thinking Standard” of the Futures Project report, the music faculty notes:

The music curriculum offers students opportunities to develop critical thinking skills in many contexts. As students interpret a piece of music, they must carefully examine the score to determine the composer’s intent, employing musical terminology. They learn to analyze music with regard to melody, harmony, rhythm, dynamics, and timbre, and are required to examine vocal and choral music with regard to the structure, stress, syntax, and semantics of the text.

Later, the music faculty states:

[Students] are taught to evaluate music from an historical perspective, in order to understand how it may reflect the personality of the artist who composed it, as well as the time and place in which, the circumstances under which, and the purpose for which it was composed.

While these sorts of analysis and evaluation are taught by an example in private lessons and ensemble rehearsals, perhaps the best arenas for the concrete assessment of students’ growth in these areas are music history, music analysis, and conducting classes, in which assignments are given that require students to record their judgments concerning these matters. Besides grading these assignments and returning them to the students, representative samples will be copied and filed in a departmental archive, as evidence that our students are developing the capacity for critical thinking in the area of music literature.
3. As part of the same standard,

Music performance provides a number of opportunities for students to collaborate with students and faculty in other disciplines in order to solve problems and make decisions. Student composers must work closely with performers seeking to interpret their pieces; the final result reflects this collaboration.

Video records of student performances and our student composers’ recitals offer graphic testimony that students have developed the collaborative skills necessary for performance of classic repertoire and new student works. These recordings will be kept on file as evidence of our students’ development as collaborative problem solvers and performers.

4. We would like to inculcate in our students an appreciation for the intrinsic value of music, as a gift from God to be returned to God, rather than as a tool for self-indulgence, self-glorification, or emotional manipulation.

Students come to Westmont well equipped to make judgments concerning worship music based upon emotion; the music faculty hopes to enable them to examine such music critically, in order to balance emotional responses with historical research and intellectually informed assessments to develop tastes for service music of depth and variety. We hope that our students leave us knowing that while having opinions about worship music is good, having reasoned opinions about excellence throughout a wide range of such music is better.

Additionally, the music faculty recognizes that within the myriad types of fine music available for use in worship, types and styles exist that are more appropriate--and less appropriate--to particular settings. An important goal for the music faculty is that our students will become competent to comment with significant depth of insight and understanding on the comparative fit of various types of music to assorted worship situations.

For these reasons, we have decided that during their senior year, each of our students will be required to submit a written self-assessment of their development during their time at Westmont in the area of diverse worship music, addressing types and styles, and ‘fit’ within assorted settings.

5. Students in music courses naturally become acquainted with a variety of devotional resources as they explore fine creative poetry intended for worship music through participation in Westmont ensembles, private lessons (primarily voice and composition), music survey and history classes, and our church music course. Resources gleaned during these studies may provide a significant contribution to broadening our students’ devotional experiences.
Specific opportunities for personal reflection are available during times of concerted devotion and prayer during classes and ensembles, and faculty and student devotionals, along with the singing and playing of hymns in classes, provide additional samples of devotional resources, both textual and musical.

For these reasons, we have decided that during their senior year, each of our students will be required to submit a written self-assessment of their development during their time at Westmont in the area of devotional resources for both individual and corporate use.

**Program Review Committee Feedback**

The following feedback is in response to our Summer 2004 Proposal:

1. You have clearly rooted your assessment plan in the College’s Student Learning Standards for Christian Orientation and Critical-Interdisciplinary Thinking. The proposal is also a natural continuation of your 1999 department self-study.

2. Assessment methods are clearly identified and should provide students with a valuable exercise of self-reflection on their educational experiences. You have also proposed to use assessment methods that will be easily archived for future use and reference.

3. Most of your assessment efforts are directed towards seniors as they are preparing to complete your program. The Committee recommends that you also use some of the same assessment methods on your freshmen students. This will provide valuable “baseline” information from which you can infer your students’ development during their time at Westmont.

4. The Department needs to give serious consideration as to what exactly you will be looking for in the videotape and self-assessment reports. What specific behaviors and self-descriptions will be used as evidence that the Standard is being met?

5. The Department will want to think carefully about how each of the self-assessment tasks is presented and described to your students. If the task is too open-ended, students may not understand what is expected of them. How can these assignments be made sufficiently concrete so that they are in fact addressing the issues upon which you want them to reflect?

6. You are relying heavily on self-assessment tools throughout your plan. The Committee does not want to discourage you from using this valuable methodology. However, since you have the opportunity to work with many
of your students in one-on-one and small class settings, the Committee encourages you to consider means by which you would be able to validate the accuracy of your students’ self assessments.

**The Music Department Assessment Strategy**

The music department has been in constant program assessment for nearly three years. In 2003, we had a 3-day consultation team arrive which was headed by the Dean of Music from Yale University, Dr. Robert Blocker. In close consultation with the President, Provost, and music department faculty, we embarked on a search to hire an endowed chair position to help develop and implement our goals. In 2005 we hired Michael Shasberger as the Adams Chair of Music and Worship and have since been in constant evaluation of our program, our goals, and our vision for the coming five years. Our weekly department meetings have been saturated with brainstorming our program and our goals. We are now in the process of hiring a full-time tenure track position in strings.

Assessment in the music curriculum begins on the first day of classes and often even before the first day of classes!

We measure the development of any student’s virtues by observation over a period of time. Our plan is to follow the committee’s advice and start early in the student’s career and track carefully the growth of our students in the areas of courage, self-control, faith, patience, and hope. It takes great courage for a person to stand up and sing to any group of people, especially one’s peers and professors. Though most obviously in solo situations, this is also true to a greater or lesser degree in collaborative ensemble situations as well. Our Tuesday recitals will be video-recorded to give evidence to the visible level of nervousness in presentation.

It takes courage for the composer, the performer, and the historian to let go of pre-conceived notions with regard to music. Most students, along with most people, have little understanding about the music outside their own cultural milieu. Particularly evidential in this area is tracking the composition major from early work through graduation. The growth of the performer’s repertoire towards more sophisticated music is an obvious result of achieving this outcome.

Our students must exercise self-control as part of the rehearsal discipline in chamber groups and large ensembles. Individual practice is required in private lessons as well as ensembles. In some of these areas students are required to keep accurate records of practice times, struggles, and areas of growth.

We see our students achieving the desired outcomes in the virtues of faith, hope, and patience as they attempt to master a difficult piece of music, as they become
leaders in a variety of worship settings on campus, and particularly as they participate in the daily classroom setting.

Because of the integral role music has played in Christian worship, the music curriculum provides ample opportunity for students to become acquainted with scripture, biblical scholarship, Christian doctrine, and church history, especially through music history and survey classes, as well as through ensembles and music theory courses. Choral ensembles and private vocal lessons, as well as projects in composing vocal music, require students to become familiar with scripture and doctrine through the close examination of Christian texts. In-class devotionals, as well as hymn singing and playing, in some instances provide a means to achieve this outcome, while our church music course provides a unique opportunity to examine biblical scholarship as we interpret scriptural directives regarding music in worship. Our performance programs, as well as the recordings of those performances will perhaps best demonstrate our achievement in these outcomes.

All students entering the choral program are required to schedule an audition, which is met with THREE of our full-time faculty. Each student entering the vocal music program, either for private study or choral ensemble participation, is individually evaluated on five criteria:

1) Experience: through a student-submitted summary of their singing experience including years of private study, ensemble history and solo performance background.
2) Solo Performance Proficiency: through a presentation of solo song from literature of the student's choice.
3) Sightsinging: through the use of a standardized instrument of sight-singing examples in a 10-measure vocal line that measures diatonic sightsinging, chromatic alterations and various rhythmic devices.
4) Tonal retention: through the measurement of the student's ability to accurately repeat short melodic fragments that are played to them on the piano.
5) Vocal range and flexibility: through the application of individually selected vocalises designed for each student.

All students entering the music theory program are met with an evaluation test and this evaluation is an ongoing process through all sequences of the curriculum. An accurate assessment tool in this evaluation is establishing a baseline for their ability to hear a stepwise diatonic melody and write it down without the use of an instrument. The remainder of the evaluation serves to measure their ability to identify the general categories of the graphic music symbols such as clefs, notes, accidentals, intervals, etc. As students interpret a piece of music, they must carefully examine the score to determine the composer's intent, employing musical terminology. They learn to analyze music with regard to melody, harmony, rhythm, dynamics, and timbre, and are required to examine vocal and choral music with regard to the structure, stress, syntax, and
semantics of the text. Musical and textual analysis may employ a variety of forms and techniques, as music and text are examined from the micro to macro levels. On a monthly basis, music theory students are required to demonstrate their growth in sight-reading music by singing melodies with only the aid of a single starting pitch. Assessment is ongoing and the desired outcomes are measured by periodic testing.

All graduating music majors are also required to take a piano proficiency examination:

**Piano Proficiency Requirements**

All music majors, including music education majors, are required to exhibit a basic proficiency at the piano by completing the following requirements:

1. Play two-octave scales and arpeggios in the major and minor keys (including three forms of the minor scales), both hands together, with correct fingering, at the tempo quarter note = 60.

2. Play a prepared, approved composition at the level of the following:
   - Anna Magdalena Bach Notebook (intermediate to advanced selections)
   - Clementi - Sonatinas
   - Beethoven - Dances
   - Schumann - Album for the Young, Op. 68 (nos. 12 ff.)
   - Scenes from Childhood, Op. 15
   - Kabalevsky - 15 Children's Pieces, Op. 27 (nos. 7-15)

3. Harmonize a simple melody in a major key, and one in a minor key using tonic, dominant and sub-dominant triads.

4. Transpose a melody up or down a major second and a minor second.

5. Sight-read a four-part chorale or hymn, and a piano piece at the level of the following:
   - Anna Magdalena Bach Notebook (beginning level selections)
   - Schumann - Album for the Young, Op. 68 (nos. 1-11)
   - Bartok - For Children (beginning level selections)
   - Kabalevsky - 15 Children's Pieces, Op. 27 (beginning level selections)
   - Kodaly - Children's Dances

The proficiency exam will be given on the last day of juries at the end of each semester, or at another time agreed upon by the student and the examination committee. All prospective Music majors must take the exam at the end of their
first semester. All students who have declared music as their major must take
the exam every semester until the proficiency requirements have been met.

All students taking private lessons are required to demonstrate fulfillment of this
particular outcome through jury exams:

**Jury Exams**

Private lesson jury exams will be conducted during finals week each semester.
These jury exams are the equivalent of final examinations for private instruction.
The jury will consist of three or more music faculty members. The exam will last
from seven to ten minutes.

All students taking private lessons will be required to perform before the faculty
jury. Beginning students who are not (or not intending to become) music majors
or music minors may be excused from performing before the jury with permission
(in writing) of their instructor (forms for this purpose will be available in the music
department office). Students who have performed a junior or senior recital will be
exempt from the jury for that semester.

Performance recitals are effective means of assessment:

**Junior and Senior Recitals**

1. Students in the performance track are required to perform a junior and a
   senior recital. Other music majors may audition to perform a junior or senior
   recital.

2. Normally, a junior will perform a half recital in cooperation with another
   student. The length of a joint recital should be approximately 75 minutes. A
   senior will perform a full-length recital, approximately 60-70 minutes in length.

**Colloquia and Weekly Recitals**

Recitals are an important way to develop performance and listening skills, gain
exposure to a broad range of music and support each other as Christian
musicians. Colloquia provide opportunities for music faculty and students to
meet on a regular basis to explore issues of common interest. All private
students are expected to perform periodically in the colloquia/recitals.

As we review recordings of video and audio data we make a number of
evaluations based upon the performance medium for which we are assessing.
For piano and instrumental performance we evaluate musicianship (accuracy of
pitch and rhythm, tempo, phrasing, dynamics), artistry (tone quality,
interpretation, sense of style, presentation, poise), and technical aspects
(memory, fingering, touch, hand/arm technique). These particular elements of
evaluation will certainly vary from the type of performance instrument being assessed, e.g., for the voice student we would add diction, for the violin we would consider bowing techniques, etc.

**The Next Step**

The music department is dedicated to achieving the outcomes we have set as standards for our students. We intend to be deliberate about our desire to measure these achievements and hope to continue to sharpen our procedures for providing evidence. Across the board, we have already begun the task of establishing baselines with our new ensembles and first year students. Whether through self-assessment forms, senior interviews, mid-term evaluations, or audio and video recordings, our desire is to be as close as possible to understanding the level at which our students are developing as musicians.