

National Association of Schools of Music

An Advisory for Music Faculty and Administrators: NASM Standards – History and Repertory

The *NASM Handbook* contains the following standard for all professional undergraduate degrees in music—all degrees carrying the title Bachelor of Music, and all undergraduate degrees concerned with teacher preparation that lead to certification as a specialist music teacher, either as part of the baccalaureate degree, or immediately after in a master’s program.

NASM Handbook, Section VIII.B.4.:

4. History and Repertory

Students must acquire basic knowledge of music history and repertoires through the present time, including study and experience of musical language and achievement in addition to that of the primary culture encompassing the area of specializations (see Section III.L.)

This Advisory addresses issues beyond those considered in the document entitled *Notes for Music Faculty and Administrators: Standards for Composition/Improvisation and History/Repertory in Undergraduate Professional Degrees in Music* (December 1999; revised December 2010). This Advisory and the *Notes* can be read in conjunction or separately.

Seeking Breadth and Depth

The major purpose of this standard is to promote the study of music in its many compositional, cultural, historical, and presentational manifestations. In-depth attention to the musical expressions of one or more of the world’s cultures is often desirable, useful, and productive as a career or curricular goal. However, here, reflecting a basic common competency, the standards seek sufficient breadth to enable musical understandings beyond the individual’s home culture, present time, or specialty.

Content Choices

The standard points to the expansive body of content built by composers, performers, scholars, and other practitioners; history, repertory, and cultures are not circumscribed with labels such as Western or non-Western. Based on these two facts and their indications about vastness and openness, the standards encourage a wide variety of institutional choices about content, as long as the principle of breadth is respected. Therefore, there may be content differences among areas of specialization within an institution as well as differences in content choices among institutions.

Basic Level

The standard calls for competence at a basic or introductory level developed through academic studies, performance, exposure to a variety of live or recorded performances, and other means. The most appropriate way to assure meeting this standard is to begin with the music unit’s goals for knowledge, skills, breadth, and depth at a basic level, and then determine how various requirements and experiences will fulfill those goals. This ends-before-means priority seems to produce a better result than the reverse.

(continued)

Multiple Approaches

NASM does not promote a particular approach to this history and repertory standard. It does not require or even suggest that separate classes be offered for various components of the whole. Institutions work toward basic competencies in a variety of ways. They are placing their efforts in survey music history classes, ethnomusicological studies and courses, ensembles, concert attendance requirements, music education methods courses, musicianship and theory sequences, applied music repertory, composition and improvisation experiences, etc., or in various mixtures of these.

Local Efforts and Evolving Contexts

Electronics and transportation have improved and advanced communication and cultural interchange among the peoples of the world. Future professional musicians and teachers will work in evolving local, regional, national, and global contexts different from those of their predecessors. Although the professional life of each musician is normally focused on one or two aspects of the field, understanding basics about the whole normally facilitates and enriches work with various parts. Clearly, the whole of music history and repertory includes all cultural traditions. The Association takes no position concerning values that should be held about various musics of the world any more than it expresses a preference for one composer over another or one musical work over another. Such valuing is individual and institutional matters. As is the case with all content, institutions and teachers are expected to bring a wide range of perspectives, aspirations, and values to their work with curricula, course work, and students. However, the establishment of this standard by the NASM membership indicates that acquaintance with a breadth of musical material is a common need.

In establishing this standard, members of the Association understood that the development of competency in individuals produces the basis for enriching other competencies, for the development of artistic and intellectual freedom, and for the advancement of individual work. Because of its basic and contained goal, this standard neither discourages nor prevents an institution, curricular program, or individual from maintaining a focus on a particular musical tradition. It does not ask for a change of goals about focus, but rather articulates goals for breadth of background knowledge.

Approaching the Standard

As is the case with all NASM standards, the purpose is to emphasize the development of student capabilities, not set bureaucratic requirements for the operation of music units. Since accreditation is based in large part on the mission, goals, and objectives developed by each institution, perhaps the best place to start is by determining present goals and objectives for student competence in history and repertory—in other words, starting with the *what* and the *why* before proceeding to the *how*. Often, when *what* and *why* questions are answered thoroughly, the *how* questions answer themselves.

**Music units with further concerns about the intent of these standards
are invited to contact the [NASM National Office staff](#):**

Telephone: 703-437-0700 — Facsimile: 703-437-6312

Email: info@arts-accredit.org