Assessment on Our Own Terms

This presentation was originally given at the 2007 NASM Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah by Mark Wait, Vanderbilt University, and Samuel Hope, NASM National Office
“Idealism increases in direct proportion to one’s distance from the problem.”

- John Galsworthy
“I often find that theories are like exquisitely beautiful machines that explode the moment they are all switched on. The virus of life immediately infects the systems and proves far too polymorphous to be contained in its structure.”

-Michael FitzGerald
“He uses statistics the way a drunken man uses lamp posts - for support rather than illumination.”

-Andrew Lang
“When a single boy too often cries “wolf” in the absence of wolves, we disregard his speech. When it becomes the habit of many to cry “wolf” in the absence of wolves, our system of speaking itself is undermined.”

-Nicholas Woltersdorf
“Change the water. Keep the baby.”

-Nancy Smith Fichter
By Way of Introduction
Achievement and Quality: Higher Education in the Arts can be found online at: http://aqresources.arts-accredit.org
By Way of Introduction

A Premise:

The possibility of improvement does not negate the fact of past achievement or current expertise.
Another Premise:

There can be a difference in (a) levels of expert knowledge and (b) ability to communicate that knowledge to the public.
A Distinction:
Musical Logic
and
Speech Logic
By Way of Introduction

I. Principles of artistic evaluation.

II. How do we apply these principles in the various forms of evaluation we use?

III. Why these principles and the way we use them are essential for the progress of the discipline.

IV. How do we explain our principles, achievements, and methods to others?

V. How do we debate when necessary?
Our Purpose

To present elements of a framework for thought and action.
By Way of Introduction

Our Purpose
To present elements of a framework for thought and action.

Our Goal
Keep assessment on our terms - The terms useful to and productive for the music profession.
I. Principles of Artistic Evaluation
I. Principles of Artistic Evaluation

“Art is not a thing, it is a way.”

-Elbert Hubbard
Our Focus:

Artistic Work, especially evaluations of application of the artistic mode of thought, of artistic ways of working.
Artistic Work:
Making design or "compositional" choices in the creation or presentation of a work.
Artistic Work:
Making design or “compositional” choices in the creation or presentation of a work.
Making creative, situation-specific choices…
Artistic Work:

Making design or “compositional” choices in the creation or presentation of a work.

Making creative, situation-specific choices…

Not simply applying science-based technical systems designed to work exactly the same way all the time.
Principles Set 1: Parts/Wholes/Goals
Evaluations of parts alone are not sufficient.
Evaluations of parts alone are not sufficient.

The parts have value primarily in relation to a particular whole.
Intent sets the goal for the whole.
Intent sets the goal for the whole.

Goals are individual, even unique.
Evaluation requires knowledge and skill to understand:

- Many specific goals
- Use of elements to reach each goal
The parts/wholes/goals relationship in the arts means:
The parts/wholes/goals relationship in the arts means:

Individual evaluation trumps standardized assessment.
Principles Set 2: Technique
Technique is essential,
Technique is essential, and must be maintained.
Principles Set 2: Technique

Technique
Technique

Goes beyond physical ability to encompass interpretative knowledge and skills.
Technical accuracy can be evaluated in yes/no terms,
Technical accuracy can be evaluated in yes/no terms, but comprehensive artistic technique is best evaluated in terms of specific goals.
Technical accuracy can be evaluated in yes/no terms, but comprehensive artistic technique is best evaluated in terms of specific goals.

Technical Mastery, though essential, is not enough for artistry.
Principles Set 3: Structural Frameworks and Systems
Structural Frameworks
Structural Frameworks

Compositional forms, for example.
Common Frameworks,
Principles Set 3- Structural Frameworks and Systems

Common Frameworks,
but widely varying applications of them.
Framework is not a scientific law, chemical formula or technical machine.
Principles Set 3- Structural Frameworks and Systems
Principles Set 3 - Structural Frameworks and Systems

Systems

tonal harmony, for example.
Frameworks and systems are means and forms – not ends.
Frameworks and systems are means and forms – not ends.

In artistic applications, they too are goal driven.
Effective artistic evaluation requires the sophisticated ability to consider integration of goals, wholes, parts, frameworks, systems, technical means.
Principles Set 4-
Art works differently from other modes of thought.
Principles Set 4- Art works differently from other modes of thought.
Principles Set 4 - Art works differently from other modes of thought.
Principles Set 4 - Art works differently from other modes of thought.

Art

Discovery

by individual creation.
Principles Set 4- Art works differently from other modes of thought.

Science
Principles Set 4: Art works differently from other modes of thought.
Principles Set 4- Art works differently from other modes of thought.

Science

Discovery

by empirically-based research.
Principles Set 4 - Art works differently from other modes of thought.

Science - Universal Answer

Art - Unique Answer
Principles Set 4- Art works differently from other modes of thought.

For the Arts:

The kinds of evaluations used in the sciences are not enough.
Principles Set 4: Art works differently from other modes of thought.

Science: One answer is correct or best.
Principles Set 4- Art works differently from other modes of thought.

Science: One answer is correct or best.

Art: Many answers are correct.
Science: One answer is correct or best.

Art: Many answers are correct.

There are many superlatives but no single best.
Principles Summary
Principles Summary

Wholes Trump Parts
Goals Trump Rules
Goals drive applications of conceptual and technical means.
Sophistication: knowledge, skills, experience - underlies both achievement and full recognition of achievement.
Principles Summary

An Important Wrinkle:
The Level of our Students
We are not starting at the beginning,
We are not starting at the beginning, thus,
We are not starting at the beginning, thus, many of our evaluations need to address high levels of complexity.
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

“A writer is somebody for whom writing is harder than it is for other people.”

-Thomas Mann
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Our Focus:

Artistic work, especially evaluations of:
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Our Focus:

Artistic work, especially evaluations of:

educational goals,
Our Focus:

Artistic work, especially evaluations of:

educational goals,

set and described in many ways.
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

NASM standards are frameworks,
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

NASM standards are frameworks, not blueprints.
Goal setting becomes more precise as we move from NASM standards, to institutional expectations, to individual artistic objectives and decisions.
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

The more sophisticated the application of music logic,
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

The more sophisticated the application of music logic, the harder it is to express them in speech logic or math logic.
Failure to express music logic in words or numbers is not an indicator of failure to express music logic in music.
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Quality - in terms of the individual artist:

- Basic professional-level knowledge and skills
- Personal vision evident in work
- Conceptual acuity and creative virtuosity at multiple levels of complexity
- Imagination and ability to channel it go reach artistic goals
- Technical virtuosity
- Conceptual and technical command of integration and synthesis
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Important Elements and Conditions of Institutional Quality:

- Meet NASM standards and beyond
- Purposes carefully crafted and regularly fulfilled
- Clear focus and sustained effort
- Realistic analyses and thoughtful decision-making connected to the pursuit of excellence in the art form
- High levels continuously pursued and raised overtime in terms of personnel, teaching and learning, areas of work defined by purposes
- Supportive, challenging environment
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Self-evaluation is critical for artistic work.
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

External evaluations are constant.
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Common Assessment Mechanisms
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Common Assessment Mechanisms

Juries
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Common Assessment Mechanisms

- Juries
- Competitions
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Common Assessment Mechanisms

Juries
Competitions
Auditions
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Common Assessment Mechanisms

Juries
Competitions
Auditions
Public performances
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Common Assessment Mechanisms

- Juries
- Competitions
- Auditions
- Public performances
- Peer criticism
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Common Assessment Mechanisms

Juries
Competitions
Auditions
Public performances
Peer criticism
Private lessons
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Common Assessment Mechanisms

- Juries
- Competitions
- Auditions
- Public performances
- Peer criticism
- Private lessons
- Rehearsals
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Common Assessment Mechanisms

Juries
Competitions
Auditions
Public performances
Peer criticism
Private lessons
Rehearsals

Self-evaluation against superlative work.
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Common Assessment Mechanisms

- Juries
- Competitions
- Auditions
- Public performances
- Peer criticism
- Private lessons
- Rehearsals

Self-evaluation against superlative work.
Coursework examinations
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Common Assessment Mechanisms

Juries
Competitions
Auditions
Public performances
Peer criticism
Private lessons
Rehearsals

Self-evaluation against superlative work.
Coursework examinations
Journalistic criticism
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Common Assessment Mechanisms

Juries
Competitions
Auditions
Public performances
Peer criticism
Private lessons
Rehearsals

Self-evaluation against superlative work.
Coursework examinations
Journalistic criticism
Project assessments
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Common Assessment Mechanisms

- Juries
- Competitions
- Auditions
- Public performances
- Peer criticism
- Private lessons
- Rehearsals

- Self-evaluation against superlative work.
- Coursework examinations
- Journalistic criticism
- Project assessments
- Summary exams
## II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

### Common Assessment Mechanisms

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Juries</th>
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<td>Competitions</td>
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<td>Private lessons</td>
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II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Student Achievement Goals – Indicators/Evidence Analysis

Competence in basic arts techniques:
- Entrance, continuation, and graduation requirements
- Achievement tests
- Course evaluations
- Class or laboratory examinations
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Student Achievement Goals – Indicators/Evidence Analysis

Basic understanding of the history of the art form in Western and other civilizations:

- Course requirements
- Syllabus content
- Class examinations
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Student Achievement Goals – Indicators/Evidence Analysis

Basic general education at the college level, including the ability to understand distinctions and commonalities regarding work in artistic, scientific, and humanistic domains:

• Transcript analysis
• Curricular requirements
• Syllabus review
• Achievement tests
• Class and laboratory examinations
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Student Achievement Goals – Indicators/Evidence Analysis

Entry-level competence in the major field of study:
• Juried Examinations
• Placement records

Ability to enter graduate study in the major field:
• Graduate school acceptances
• Records of completion of graduate work
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Student Achievement Goals – Indicators/Evidence Analysis

A coherent set of artistic/intellectual goals evident in each student's work and the ability to achieve these goals as an independent professional:

- Assessment of student projects
- Content of final papers
- Faculty and peer assessment of final projects
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Student Achievement Goals – Indicators/Evidence Analysis

Ability to form and defend defined judgments:
• Project assessments
• Master class evaluations

Ability to communicate in spoken and written language:
• Syllabus review
• Project assessments
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

Student Achievement Goals – Indicators/Evidence Analysis

Ability to communicate ideas in a specific art form in professional circumstances:

- Internship reports
- Employee ratings of performance
- Employment records
Different mechanisms tell us different things.
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

A return to parts and wholes.
II. Applying Principles in Evaluation

A different concept:

No pure correlation between discrete knowledge and technical skills,

THE PARTS

and artistry,

THE WHOLE
Much of arts evaluation is about things that are extremely hard to evaluate.
If anyone is truly interested in “outcomes,” our outcomes prove the validity of our approaches to evaluation.
III. Why the Principles and Applications are Essential
III. Why the Principles and Applications are Essential

“I like the way I do it better than I like the way you don’t do it.”

-Dwight L. Moody
III. Why the Principles and Applications are Essential

Change for changes sake is foolish and wasteful.
III. Why the Principles and Applications are Essential

Not all change is for the better. What are the prospects for real improvement.
It is imprudent to replace what works with what simply sounds good.
Ramifications and unintended consequences can do tremendous damage.
Our Challenge:
To resist change from evaluation on our terms to evaluation on other terms centered on:
Our Challenge:
To resist change from evaluation on our terms to evaluation on other terms centered on:

• The general rather than the individual
III. Why the Principles and Applications are Essential

Our Challenge:
To resist change from evaluation on our terms to evaluation on other terms centered on:

- The general rather than the individual
- Blueprints rather than frameworks
Our Challenge:
To resist change from evaluation on our terms to evaluation on other terms centered on:

- The general rather than the individual
- Blueprints rather than frameworks
- The technical and science-based over the artistic, the universal over the specific
III. Why the Principles and Applications are Essential

Our Challenge:
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- The general rather than the individual
- Blueprints rather than frameworks
- The technical and science-based over the artistic, the universal over the specific
- Numbers and images they produce
- Standardization for the purposes of comparison
What happens if these terms are forced upon us?
The Consequences of Assessment on Other Terms
Alien evaluation environment
The Consequences of Assessment on Other Terms

Time requisitioned
Expertise basis shifts from music to assessment
The Consequences of Assessment on Other Terms

Loss of local curriculum control and individual goal-setting
Reduced productivity
“An [uninformed] idealist is one who, in noticing that a rose smells better than a cabbage concludes that it will also make better soup.”

-H.L. Mencken
IV. How do we explain our principles, achievements and methods to others?
“In politics, the loser is the one who lets himself be swayed by the other’s arguments and who judges his own actions through his adversary's eyes.”

-Karel Kosili
How should our field work on this problem?
There is no silver bullet.
IV. How to Explain

Creating explanations is an artistic project.
IV. How to Explain

We must all develop the ability to produce site and situation specific responses and answers.
IV. How to Explain

A prerequisite for effectiveness:
IV. How to Explain

A prerequisite for effectiveness:

You must believe and communicate that “our terms” are better than any “other terms” that we know of.
IV. How to Explain

Who is the audience?

What is their orientation?
IV. How to Explain

They must prove us wrong or inadequate,
IV. How to Explain

They must prove us wrong or inadequate,
or,
IV. How to Explain

They must prove us wrong or inadequate, or, they want to understand what we do, and connect it to something larger.
IV. How to Explain

What do they want or need to be satisfied?
What do they want or need to be satisfied?
Don’t provide more than necessary.
IV. How to Explain

What values will be used to interpret information.
IV. How to Explain

What level of complexity is appropriate?
If you don’t know the game, you can’t really play.
What is the next question likely to be?
What ideas and tools do we have?
Undergraduate competencies in music specializations:

- Go to http://aqresources.arts-accredit.org
- Click on Evaluating Elements and Conditions in Institutions
- Click on Basic Competency Index by Discipline and Specialization-Undergraduate
- Click on Music
Basic Competency Index By Discipline and Specialization -- Undergraduate Degrees

Music

A list of specializations for baccalaureate degrees in music follows, with each linked to a parallel downloadable PDF enumerating detailed competencies for that specialization. In this way, users of these resources may download only the specific information of interest.

Please note: 'The list of competencies are derived from accreditation standards for the professional and liberal arts undergraduate degrees in music.

Essential Note: Competencies provided for each specialization are excerpts from the Handbook for the arts discipline specified. Items in each set of competencies indicate the content and nature of the competencies expected of those graduating with the specified degree, or recommendations for competency development.

Only the Handbook in its entirety contains all standards and guidelines applicable to and used by all phases of NASAD, NASD, NAST, or NAST membership reviews.

In the competencies texts for each specialization, "H." indicates the location of the excerpted text in the Handbook; the term "(All)" indicates standards applicable to all professional or liberal arts undergraduate degrees in the specified field including the specialization; "(Area of Specialization)" indicates specific standards for that major.

MUSIC (professional undergraduate)
(Review or print the Table of Contents excerpt from the NASM Handbook 2007-2008)

- Performance
- Music Theory
- Composition
- Music History and Literature
- Sacred Music
- Jazz Studies
- Pedagogy
- Music Therapy
- Teacher Preparation - Music Education

MUSIC (liberal arts undergraduate)
(Review or print the Table of Contents excerpt from the NASM Handbook 2007-2008)

- General
IV. How to Explain

What aspects or elements of student work can be discussed in terms of the results of instruction?
What aspects or elements can you identify that cannot be discussed easily in terms of their direct correlation with various other forms of instruction?
IV. How to Explain

What elements and conditions of instruction contribute most directly to the level of student achievement?
IV. How to Explain

How do we determine that the elements and conditions of instruction that contribute most directly to the level of student achievement are working?
IV. How to Explain

What are the areas or levels about which most professionals in the field are likely to agree on the relative quality or value of the work?
IV. How to Explain

What are the areas or levels where there is likely to be disagreement about the relative quality and value of work?
IV. How to Explain

Outline Example

The _______ School/Department/etc… of Music

• How music works-the artistic mode of thought
• How our field defines achievement in the music disciplines we teach
• How we set goals for achievement
• How we evaluate student achievement
• How we evaluate faculty achievement

• How we evaluate our department/school
• How we consider external perceptions
• The competencies of students we accept
• The competencies expected of students we graduate
• Why our evaluation concepts work and support our purposes
V. How do we debate when necessary?
V. How do we debate when necessary?

“The real danger is not that computers will begin to think like men, but that men will begin to think like computers.”

-Sidney T. Harris
Choose debate conditions carefully.
V. How do we debate when necessary?

Probing Debate Questions
1. What empirical proof do you have that the assessment system and approach you are proposing will work better for our field than the system we use now?
2. What evidence can you provide that the world of higher education or our discipline is structured, operates, or is organized conceptually in ways that makes your proposed approach more effective than ours?
3. How can you prove to us that putting results in a form that you define as measurable will lead to improvement in student learning, or to advancement and innovation in our field?
4. What proof is there that all quality in every dimension of life can be engineered through the application of massive large-scale assessment systems, or that the larger and more centralized the assessment system, the higher the quality will become?
5. How is it possible to call for a deeply integrated system of standardization so that results can be compared, and at the same time call for innovation or a climate of innovation?
6. Do you believe that students carry a great deal of responsibility for what they learn?
7. Isn’t a model always a diminished version of the original?
8. Can you prove that if we fashion a program that specifically works for us, we will fall behind?
9. Can you prove that any numbers we collect about specific performance indicators can predict for anyone the level of quality of education an individual student will receive, or the success of that person after graduation?
Usually, music faculties and administrators are not in a position to ask these questions.
What are the philosophical and programmatic situations of your senior administrators at your institution?
Probing Debate Questions

The institutional accreditation issue.
Probing Debate Questions

Compliance, not debate.
Probing Debate Questions

When we can’t debate, what can we do?
What can we do?

1. Demonstrate and explain what we have in place and why it works.
What can we do?

1. Demonstrate and explain what we have in place and why it works.
   a. We have many forms of evaluations.
What can we do?

1. Demonstrate and explain what we have in place and why it works.
   a. We have many forms of evaluations.
   b. They are informed and disinterested in the personal sense.
What can we do?

1. Demonstrate and explain what we have in place and why it works.
   a. We have many forms of evaluations.
   b. They are informed and disinterested in the personal sense.
   c. Their purpose is improvement, not measurement for its own sake.
What can we do?

“The truth is more important than the facts”

-Frank Lloyd Wright
What can we do?

2. Counter assertions that professionals cannot conduct fair or objective assessments within their fields.
What can we do?

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   a. Music professionals are more qualified than assessment professionals.
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   a. Music professionals are more qualified than assessment professionals.
   b. Experts are internally driven to improve their fields.
What can we do?

2. Counter assertions that professionals cannot conduct fair or objective assessments within their fields.
   a. Music professionals are more qualified than assessment professionals.
   b. Experts are internally driven to improve their fields.
   c. Conflict of interest argument are usually not about quality.
A Few Final Points
A Few Final Points

“We have sunk to a depth where restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men.”

-George Orwell
What is obvious to us is not obvious to others.
We need to make what is obvious to us more other obvious to others.
We are not alone.
The outcomes ideologies have turned on their former friends.
A Few Final Points

We do not know where the drive for centralization of power will lead, or who will prevail.
Our job is to advocate, defend, and improve what is necessary for assessment in our field.
No one else can do it for us.
A Few Final Points

We dare not cede the information battleground to others.
Be positive, direct and clear.
Music and its nature must drive what we do.
Thank you for your attention and consideration.
For more information, go to: http://aqresources.arts-accredit.org.
“Always do what is right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.”

-Mark Twain