

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC

Advisory Statement

Rationales for Private Instruction in Music Degrees

Private instruction has a long tradition in music. Most students entering higher education as music majors have spent many years studying performance with a private instructor. Regular interaction between students and private teachers is a feature of professional preparation in music worldwide.

Private study is embedded in historical and current practice because it is the most effective way to deliver instruction in instrumental or vocal performance. The reasons are logical and centered in the nature of music and music study.

Each piece of music takes a certain amount of time to perform. Pieces can be as brief as a minute or occupy most of an hour. It is impossible to provide instruction about a piece of music without interaction between student and teacher over lengthy time spans. It does not work, for example, for a teacher to have a tape of a student performance for critique, the equivalent of grading papers in a word- or math-based discipline. It is necessary to stop and start within a particular piece, constantly adjusting relationships between parts and the whole. Work on each piece takes much longer than the piece takes in performance.

Music students at the college level study large numbers of compositions, many of considerable length. Attempting to address this material in groups of students would shorten the attention given to the works prepared by each student. In addition, students study different pieces of music. Different students are at different stages of development, or need to address different portions of the repertory. Together, these factors show fundamentally that performance, rehearsal, and critique cannot be taught effectively or efficiently in groups unless the length of the group lesson is sufficient to give the same personal attention to each student available in a private lesson.

Music is a highly competitive field. Students majoring in music know this, and expect intense private instruction consistent with the nature of musical performance and the necessity of preparation for performances. When an institution decides to diminish the presence or length of private instruction, it diminishes its chances of attracting and keeping outstanding music students.

Individual instruction has a long and honored place in higher education. The tutorial systems in English universities, the dissertation advisor, the professor leading independent study are all examples. Students eligible to enter music programs at the collegiate level should be sufficiently advanced in their major instrument or voice to justify this type of instruction, particularly if they are enrolled in programs intended to prepare professional musicians. The norm for such students is one hour of private instruction per week, or the equivalent.

The above advisory statement provides a rationale for standards and normative practice, and is not an accreditation standards statement. NASM standards on performance are published in the *NASM Handbook*. Further explanations are found in the NASM document *An Advisory for Music Faculty and Administrators: NASM Standards—Performance*.