

Music Study, Mobility, and Accountability Project

Thinking about Joint Course and Curriculum Collaboration

The Music Study, Mobility, and Accountability Project addressed many issues associated with course work and curricula as it considered exchange programs, evaluation and quality assurance, and institutional characteristics. Joint course or curriculum collaboration takes the concept of exchange to a level well beyond giving individuals working in one institution opportunities to study or teach in another. This brief analysis explores the potential for joint efforts in the creation and the operation of educational programs and/or their component parts. It is understood that such joint collaboration is an intensive enterprise requiring sustained commitments over significant periods of time. The following issues are presented to assist consideration and possible formulation of such ventures by interested institutions.

Scope of Joint Collaboration

Institutions create educational programs for many purposes. These range from special studies and events offered over a few days to full curricula that contain many courses and take several years to complete.

Considerations about joint development ultimately lead to decisions about scope - how big and how complex is our effort to be? Several points on the range of possibilities are:

- Comparison of local courses or curricula with what other institutions do without specific interchange with other institutions.
- Exchanges of ideas and information about courses and curricula with other institutions.
- Cooperation on the development of short-term studies: focused programmes of several days, a series of master classes with a unified objective, a festival with a study component, and so forth.
- Cooperation on the development of term-length courses or programmes of study to be used within one or more curricula.
- Cooperation on the development of part or all of a curriculum, the content and sequence of courses, and expectations for an overall result.

Short Studies and Individual Courses

Given the specific curricular and content differences among institutions within Europe and the United States and between European and US institutions, co-operating institutions usually begin by working to create short studies or individual courses in common. It is much easier to find specific bodies of content that are common within curricula than to find or develop common overall curricular patterns. Even easier is negotiating agreement on a specific educational objective that is small in scope.

Curricular Influences and Considerations

Whatever scope of joint programmatic development is considered, institutional curricula exert a major influence. Short studies, and especially courses, are usually developed, operated, and evaluated in relationship to one or more curricula. The following sections on curricula provide an orientation for everything from reviewing the courses and programs of other institutions to considering joint programmatic development, and for considering all scopes and levels of common action in between.

Curricula and Career Entry

The major purpose of any professionally oriented curriculum is to organize study that produces competencies necessary for professional practice in one or more music specializations. With regard to professional performance and composition, international expectations for career entry are well known, partly because of the wide availability of recordings and scores. With regard to the preparation of professional music theorists, historians, musicologists, ethnomusicologists, and other scholars, specific standards for career entry are well understood within the various national systems. In Europe, these music professionals are typically prepared in university programs, while performers, composers, and teachers are prepared in music schools and conservatories. In the United States, this European pattern does exist, but it is less common. In most cases, professionals in many music specializations are educated and trained together in the same institution.

With regard to the preparation of music teachers, expectations are understood nationally. Some music teachers work privately, others in specialized music schools or programs within the community, and others are faculty in primary and secondary schools concerned with general education. Again, in Europe, some music teacher preparation programs are not housed in professional music conservatories. It is important to understand these basic differences when considering joint course or curriculum collaborations.

The European Association of Conservatoires (AEC) has made an overview of music teacher training systems (for both classroom music teachers and instrumental/vocal teachers) in all European countries as part of the 'European Forum for Music Education and Training – EFMET' project, which can be found at www.aecinfo.org/bologna/teacherdescription.

Basic Curricular Issues

Individual instruction plays a central role in the preparation of music professionals. It is a continuing feature of all music curricula associated with performance and composition. This means that specific curriculum content and instruction in these areas can be tailored to specific individuals consistent with overall requirements for graduation.

In the United States, baccalaureate students enrolled in higher music education are normally expected to do college level work in the liberal arts and sciences. Normally, this is not the case in Europe.

There are also differences in curricular expectations with regard to the development of specific musicianship skills, types of competence in theoretical subjects and analysis, and knowledge of music history. All these are usually included, but the weight given to subjects and aspects of them can be quite different from institution to institution.

Basic Structures of the Undergraduate Curriculum

In Europe

Europe has been characterized by a diverse landscape for higher education, with European countries having different systems. This diversity created difficulties in relation to the mobility of students and professionals due to recognition problems, and it also gave a confusing picture of higher education in Europe to the outside world. In order to make higher education in Europe more comparable, transparent, and competitive, the ‘Bologna Declaration’ was signed by the European ministers for education in 1999, proposing several far-reaching reforms in higher education, such as the implementation of a two-cycle structure (Bachelor/Master), and the use of credit points and a European approach to quality assurance. Virtually all European countries are now going through this process of change initiated by ‘Bologna’. As a result, with the implementation of the Bachelor and Master system in each European country, the higher education structures in Europe will be more comparable to the US system. However, this does not mean that the systems will be the same in all European countries. For example, there will be differences in the duration in years of the two cycles, with some countries using 3 + 2 systems and other countries using 4 + 2 or 4 + 1 systems. Substantial differences in the actual content of the studies will also remain, although the development has started of European-wide descriptions for learning outcomes for the first and second study cycles in music, which could assist institutions in agreeing on European level what a ‘Bachelor of Music’ or a ‘Master of Music’ should lead to in terms of competencies, without having to agree on how these competencies should be reached. More information about the ‘Bologna Process’ can be found on the AEC website (www.aecinfo.org/bologna).

For those individuals or institutions interested in knowing more about the system for professional music training in a certain European country, information is available in the ‘Overview by Country of Professional Music Training Systems in Europe’, which has been produced for this project and which lists for each European country information on the number of institutions, number of students, funding mechanisms, curricula, two-cycle systems, qualifications, entry requirements, use of credit points, quality assurance, and academic calendars. This overview can be found at www.aecinfo.org/bologna/gendescription.

In the United States

The professional undergraduate degree—the Bachelor of Music—normally requires four years of full-time study. From two-thirds to three-quarters of the time is devoted to studies in music. The remaining portion is devoted to general education.

Within the music component, each student has a major field of study—performance, composition, theory, music history, music teaching, etc.; requirements in general musicianship including conducting and ensemble; theory and analysis, including harmony, composition, and improvisation; history and repertory; and technology. Within these categories, different specializations require different emphases. For example, a composition major will do more work in composition and theory than most majors in performance. However, US professional undergraduate degrees have a fundamental body of knowledge and skills that all students are expected to obtain across all the areas that have been mentioned.

At the graduate level, curricular requirements are extremely varied among institutions. At the Master’s level, specific curricular requirements in the major and supportive courses in music through the major occupy approximately at least two-thirds of the curricular time. The remaining time is devoted to curricular requirements or electives as determined by the institution. At the doctoral level, curricula are even less standardized. Many doctoral programs are individually designed.

Specific Schools and Their Curricula

Within overall frameworks, specific schools in Europe and the United States develop specific curricular requirements; their faculties then produce specific courses of study that match curricular content to requirements. Therefore, the existence of common characteristics does not mean that there is automatic commonality among the ways individual institutions pursue common educational objectives. Institutions often find their own ways to let shared content shape the development of procedure and method. In considering joint curriculum or course development, institutions must work at a level of detail far beyond generic descriptions of content and practice.

Some schools have specific missions with regard to content and/or technique. Some are focused on only one or two music specializations. These institutions may be so unique in their approach that there is not a great deal of commonality with the educational practices of other institutions. Those interested in joint course or curriculum development will need to determine the degree of affinity between what they are doing or what they intend to do with the practices and intentions of potential partners. Joint searches for innovative approaches can be productive if clear goals for the search are understood in common.

Technological Possibilities

Advances in communication and computer technologies have expanded possibilities for joint programmatic development. Exchanges of materials are much simpler. Communication costs are lower. The availability of information is greater. These and other advances have made joint teaching possible on a worldwide scale. These possibilities include all sorts of traditional distance learning, but they also include possibilities for team teaching and master classes in real time involving institutions on separate continents.

The following questions may be useful to one or more institutions considering the use of technology to develop or deliver jointly developed programs of study of any length or at any level.

- What are the specific goals for student learning, for example, in terms of music as a discipline, specializations in music, technology as method or machine, problem solving, other disciplines?
- To what extent are delivery systems logically matched to specific goals? Delivery systems include the relationships of such elements as programmes or course content, interactive technologies, teaching techniques, schedules, patterns of interaction between teacher and student, and evaluation mechanisms.
- What technical competence and equipment requirements must participants meet? How will these requirements be monitored for entering students? What level of technical support will be needed?
- How will students interact with the programmes regarding expectations, questions, and evaluations?

Innovation

It is useful to make distinctions between innovations with regard to content and innovations with regard to content delivery and teaching methodology. While innovation can certainly embrace both, it is critical to ensure that there is common understanding about the specific areas where innovation is expected.

Goals for Joint Development

Institutions can discuss joint development with a number of different purposes in mind, for example:

- To assure themselves that an individual school's approaches to curricula and coursework are compatible with that of one or more other schools, even though there may be differences.
- To obtain international perspectives on the extent to which local curricula or course work is consistent with evolving professional needs.
- To produce ideas to be used for developing short studies, courses, or curricula in individual schools.
- To develop a joint programmes of study that will be taught separately in each institution.
- To produce a joint programmes of study to be team-taught by electronic means or through faculty exchanges.

When Considering Joint Programmatic Development

- Determine specific scope and purposes for the project;
- Develop a clear summary understanding of the content that the joint programmes of study will address, the level of engagement with that content expected from students, and the results necessary for successful completion of the programmes of study in each institution. Content includes such areas as disciplinary competence, technique and technology, aspirations for the development of problem solving abilities, the degree of focus on specializations, and the influence of teaching methodology on content. This understanding among all potential partners provides the basis for understanding the extent to which commonality already exists.
- If commonality is deemed sufficient, or not an issue, develop a clear understanding of the advantages and challenges of any particular common effort. For example, to what extent will language, schedules, or calendars be a barrier?
- If the advantages are deemed strong, and it appears that challenges can be met, consider tangible and intangible resources essential to the success of the project. Tangible resources include finances, facilities, and time. Intangible resources include will, commitment, and the ability to sustain the effort to conclusion.
- If you decide to proceed, allocate sufficient time to negotiate your way to fulfilment of artistic and educational goals and to develop the attendant resources.
- Periodically, as development proceeds, ask yourselves what educational and artistic results are expected and how will we know we have met our goal? To what extent is the knowledge and skill development we are seeking examinable by one or both partners? If applicable, to what extent can results be expressed quantitatively or qualitatively? To what extent does the experience itself constitute the learning that is expected?
- Be sure that you can sustain the programmes over its projected operational time period, and consider how fail-safe the programmes is if one partner has to withdraw.