

Music Study, Mobility, and Accountability Project

Overview of Professional Music Education and Training in the United States

The structure of professional music education and training in the United States is complex. It includes a number of usual educational pathways, but it also enables unique or individual approaches. In general, the US system of higher education allows for mobility among institutions and geographic areas. The common credit hour system used by each institution produces records of student achievement that may be honored by all institutions.

Most students with career interests in music choose to complete the Bachelor of Music degree in their undergraduate years. This degree requires that at least two-thirds of a four-year program be concentrated in music studies. The Bachelor of Music requires acquisition of a common body of knowledge and skills, irrespective of whether the major specialization is performance, composition, music theory, music history, music education, pedagogy, music therapy or some other field.

Some students may choose the Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree. Where less than half of the program requirements are in the field of music. Students choosing this option receive a broader general education in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences, but if they continue to prepare for the music profession, they must acquire at a later time those elements of the common body of music knowledge and skills they did not gain.

The Bachelor of Music is the first professional degree in music. The Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science are liberal arts degrees in music. Professional and liberal arts degrees serve different purposes. Both are respected. Both require at least 120 semester hours. Each is held by outstanding musicians and scholars.

At the graduate level, the most common first degree awarded to professional musicians is the Master of Music. Programs are focused almost entirely on music performance and study. The Master of Arts and Master of Science are also awarded, but normally indicate the presence of generalized programs or a focus on scholarly or scientifically oriented studies in music. Masters degrees require at least 30 semester hours.

The professional doctorate in music in the United States is normally titled Doctor of Musical Arts, and is usually awarded in performance or composition. The scholarly doctorate is titled Doctor of Philosophy, and is usually awarded in musicology, music theory, and music education. Doctoral programs vary from institution to institution in their structures, specifications, and requirements.

A significant number of US institutions offer diplomas in music. These may be awarded at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Normally diploma programs focus entirely on performance or composition with few or no academic requirements.

Admission to renowned undergraduate programs and to graduate programs is competitive. Degree and diploma programs at all levels are offered in independent conservatories and in schools and departments of music that are parts of comprehensive colleges and universities. The US has a large investment in music programs, faculties, and facilities dedicated to the preparation of professional

musicians. After decades of work throughout the twentieth century, opportunities for excellent instruction are spread geographically throughout the nation.

Common practice and NASM accreditation standards provide an overall framework within which each institution creates its specific programs. The basic structures for degrees and programs are the same, but individual programs are different, and institutions vary extensively in the sets of specific programs and degrees they offer.

Further Information

For further details about curricular program structures, see the [Handbook](#) of NASM.

For details about the programs of specific institutions, see the [list of NASM members](#) for access to the web sites of individual schools of music and conservatories.

For details about the size and scope of professional music training in the US, see the music section of the [Higher Education Arts Data Services](#) project (there is a cost for obtaining this data), and the annual set of overview statistics produced by the [College Music Society](#) with assistance from NASM (this data is free).

For additional details about US approaches, structures, and practices, see the NASM web site: <http://nasm.arts-accredit.org>.