

An Approach to Evaluating College Applied Study

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Each semester the applied teacher at the college level is faced with the responsibility of evaluating the performance of his students for the purposes of assigning a grade. The conscientious teacher will probably want this grade to reflect the student's performance in the lessons through the semester, as a way of limiting the subjectivity of the result, applying consistent criteria throughout her studio and over the years a student is in the studio, and, perhaps most important of all, communicating clear expectations to the student.

Generally this is an easy task, since applied students, especially those whose major is in the applied area, are by and large a well-motivated and hard working group of people. After all, if this had not been true from the beginning, they probably would not have been accepted into the applied study program in the first place.

However, from time to time one encounters a student who has not performed at the expected level or to the standards for the studio or institution. There may be various reasons for this unrelated to music (illness, schedule conflicts, busyness, lack of motivation, poor practice habits, emotional problems, etc). One always wants to take these things into consideration when evaluating a student's progress.

On the other hand, if the grade is to reflect the actual studio performance of the student, these factors cannot enter into the evaluation itself. The teacher always has the ability to exercise his discretion when it comes time to assign the final grade. This is the appropriate time at which those often-important "external factors" can and should be considered. The point is, however, that, for the evaluation and grading process to have any meaning, there be no automatic grades of "A", no "grade entitlements".

The evaluation process proposed in this document reflects what actually happens in the course of a semester's lessons. This is its only basis.

Opinions will differ widely about these issues, but these considerations are the starting point for this document.

An "evaluation process", then, is a process that is utilized to determine an evaluation; this evaluation is only one factor used in determining a grade.

Intended Audience

This document is intended primarily for teachers of applied music at the college level, and secondarily for those who teach applied music in other settings. At a tertiary level the document is addressed to college administrators and department heads, academic instructors, and those interested in establishing guidelines for student evaluation in general.

Though the criteria discussed are rather specific to the issues relevant to individual applied instruction, some generalizations could be drawn about the kinds of issues that must be dealt with when trying to derive objective evaluation criteria for student performance, and about the processes used to derive them. Those generalizations, however, are beyond the scope of this document.

Some of the issues raised in the questionnaire are specific to the departmental policies of Meredith College.

Lexicographical conventions and definitions

Important terms are presented for the first time in **boldface**, followed by their definition.

It's important to note that the term **performance** is generally used in the human resources sense, meaning the student's actions in response to the assignments and expressed expectations of the teacher, and not in the usual sense of "musical presentation before an audience", except where the context makes it clear that this second usage is intended.

The evaluation process

A **process** is a set of repeatable steps that are taken within an organization to produce a product, to achieve desired result, or to respond to an event. In this case, the **evaluation process** is the series of actions taken by the teacher and the student to produce a signed-off evaluation.

The evaluation process takes place primarily at the beginning and the end of a semester of applied study. The teacher and the student are the ones who carry out the process.

The main product of the evaluation is a completed **evaluation questionnaire**. This questionnaire documents how and to what degree the student has responded to the assignments and expectations of the teacher throughout the course of a semester, through a series of statements that describe the teacher's expectations of the student's performance.

The completed evaluation will then be used as part of the process (not discussed here) by which a grade is determined, and/or for other purposes.

The process steps

In summary, the evaluation process consists of the following steps:

1. At the beginning of the semester, the teacher gives the student a syllabus that contains in summary form the issues addressed by the evaluation questionnaire, and informs the student of what is entailed in the evaluation process. This

- establishes a set of clear and understandable general expectations for the student to measure herself against during the course of the semester.
2. Immediately before the end of the semester the teacher completes an evaluation questionnaire. The questionnaire addresses specific aspects of the semester's work. It is described below.
 3. The teacher scores the evaluation questionnaire using criteria detailed below.
 4. The teacher gives the student a copy of the evaluation and schedules a consultation with the student to discuss the results.
 5. The student and the teacher discuss the results of the questionnaire in a consultation meeting. This meeting does not take place during a lesson.
 6. The student states that he has read and understood the evaluation results by signing it. During the meeting the student may add a comment to the evaluation if she wishes.
 7. The teacher places the completed evaluation in her records for that student. Alternatively, the results can be filed with the student's permanent records.

Origins of the process

In its general outline, and in its use of a questionnaire as the principal instrument of evaluation, the evaluation process resembles and is largely inspired by the formal employee performance review process used by many large industrial corporations.

It differs, however, in several important respects from corporate reviews:

- The student and the teacher work together to identify the student's goals and aspirations. In the corporate setting, career planning is primarily seen as an extension of corporate interests.
- Any question on the questionnaire can be eliminated from consideration if it does not apply to the specific student. This is seldom the case in corporate performance reviews.
- In spite of official corporate pronouncements, performance reviews are a primary tool in determining retention and compensation. The evaluation process described here is deliberately separated from the grading process. Whether the results are used to determine a grade is completely at the instructor's discretion.

The Evaluation Questionnaire

The evaluation questionnaire consists of three sections. The first two sections are lists of statements that describe the applied teacher's expectations for student performance during a semester of applied study. These statements are evaluated by the teacher and assigned values such as "Always exceeds expectations", "Meets expectations", and "Does not meet expectations", each of which contributes to a numeric score. See below for further details.

The first section applies to Performance majors, and to those in non-Performance degree programs, such as B.A. or Music Education programs. The second section applies only to majors in Performance beyond their first year.

The questionnaire does not address expectations for secondary instrument study, or for non-major instrument study.

The third section details the specific materials covered in the lessons during the semester. Each item is rated according to the level of mastery of the material observed by the teacher during the semester. Public performance, particularly those required for the major (degree recitals excepted), are also noted and similarly evaluated.

Customizing the questionnaire

The questionnaire is customizable in the following ways:

- The teacher can add up to five additional expectation statements to each section of the questionnaire. These statements are then evaluated along with the other statements.
- Any statement that in the teacher's view does not apply to the student, or for some other reason she does not wish to include in the evaluation, can be removed from consideration by marking it "does not apply". The aggregate scoring will be adjusted accordingly.

The questionnaire is detailed section by section in the sections that follow.

Section 1: B.A. and Music Education Major Expectations

The statements in this section apply to major instrument applied study, regardless of degree program.

1. The student attends lessons regularly.
2. The student arrives on time for lessons.
3. The student brings all currently assigned materials with her to the lesson.
4. The student communicates to the teacher how much he practiced during the week past.
5. The student shows appropriate time management skills by practicing the required number of hours during the week.
6. The student prepares technical work as assigned to a reasonable degree of preparation.
7. The student's playing shows evidence of consistent technical work.
8. The student applies techniques discussed in lessons to the specific context in which they were introduced.
9. The student applies techniques discussed in lessons beyond the specific context in which they were introduced.

10. The student is proactive in arranging rehearsals with her accompanist outside the lesson, and communicates the rehearsal schedule to the teacher.
11. The student shows evidence of sufficient preparation of repertoire in each lesson.
12. The student makes appropriate progress in artistic development for his level.
13. The student performs on studio recital when asked by the teacher to do so.
14. The student meets departmental requirements for studio recital performance.
15. The student performs on student recital when asked by the teacher to do so.
16. The student meets departmental requirements for student recital performance.
17. The student engages with the teacher and other students when assigned to read and discuss articles as part of the studio recital class, or other activities planned for this time, such as masterclasses.
18. The student attends studio and student recitals as required by the department.
19. The student obtains copies of required music in a timely manner.
20. The student communicates with the teacher when difficulties mastering specific technical or repertoire issues are encountered.
21. The student asks questions and in general engages in active dialog with the teacher during lessons.
22. The student appears enthusiastic and engaged about her applied study.
23. The student shows an interest in the repertoire and brings ideas for repertoire he would like to study or technical work she would like to do to the lessons on several occasions during the semester.
24. The student shows openness and a sufficient degree of emotional maturity about being instructed. The student is teachable.
25. The student shows maturity and good judgment when communicating disagreement with specific techniques, directions, or assignments given by the instructor.
26. The student listens to recordings of the repertoire he is studying, comments about these recordings to the instructor, and asks questions about them.
27. The student shows interest in the wider musical world, attending performances by vocalists, chamber music, orchestras, bands, and so on, and communicates this to the teacher during the lesson.
28. The student turns in recital reports as required by the department.
29. The student is proactive in arranging makeup lessons for those she missed due to her illness, tours, or other lesson interruptions.
30. The student initiates planning for key required performances, such as recitals, well in advance.
31. through 35 – Space is provided for statements to be added by the individual instructor

Section 2: Performance Major Expectations

The statements in this section do not apply to first year performance major candidates. The expectations listed here are above and beyond those listed in “Section 1: B.A. and Music Education Major Expectations”.

1. The student keeps the instructor informed about all performance engagements outside of those specifically assigned by the teacher.
2. The student seeks out performance opportunities within the College and in the general community.
3. The student responds positively to performance opportunities presented by the teacher and by other faculty.
4. The student shows evidence of a high level of self-motivation.
5. With her consistent mastery of assigned repertoire and technical material, the student shows a highly disciplined approach to practice work.
6. The student is able to balance the demands of his other coursework while consistently maintaining applied study as his first priority.
7. The student often practices more than the required number of hours during the week.
8. The student proposes works to be learned for concerto/aria and other competitions well in advance of the events.
9. The student seeks out avenues for enrichment studies, including masterclasses, workshops, summer programs, competitions, and so on, and then communicates these to the teacher.
10. through 14 – Space is provided for the instructor to provide additional statements.

Section 3: Lesson Material Evaluations

Each item of technical study and repertoire studied during the applied lessons is listed in a table. The following statements are evaluated for each item. Not all statements will apply to every item. The evaluation criteria are the same as for sections 1 and 2 of the questionnaire.

1. The student understood the technical demands of this material, and showed evidence of having worked on it consistently.
2. The student completed work on this material to a degree that was satisfactory with respect to her level.
3. The student showed evidence of having worked on this material in depth, achieving a high degree of understanding of it.
4. The student showed satisfactory progress on this sight-reading or supplemental material.
5. The student applied the teacher's suggestions for how to tackle the technical and musical challenges of this material.
6. This material was performed at a studio or student recital.
7. This material was performed for a final jury.
8. This material was performed on a recital, masterclass, or at some other performance venue.
9. The student brought her accompaniment to her lesson for this material.
10. Work on this material showed evidence of musical and artistic growth.
11. through 15 – Space is provided for the instructor to provide additional statements.

Scoring the Questionnaire

Each expectation in sections 1 and 2 of the questionnaire, and each item in section 3, are followed by the following list of evaluative statements. These statements are followed here by their scoring value.

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Consistently exceeds expectations | (score: +3) |
| Often exceeds expectations | (score: +2) |
| Sometimes exceeds expectations | (score: +1) |
| Meets expectations | (score: 0) |
| Sometimes does not meet expectations | (score: -1) |
| Often does not meet expectations | (score: -2) |
| Consistently does not meet expectations | (score: -3) |
| Does not apply | (no score) |

The final statement above removes the expectation or item from the questionnaire and adjusts the aggregate scoring accordingly.

Each item in section 3 is weighted at three times the value of the scores in the other sections. This reflects the primacy of actual performance of lesson assignments over more subjective considerations.

Interpreting the score

The score is calculated as a simple sum of all of the values of the evaluative statements, weighted as indicated above. The maximum and minimum score will vary, depending on which portions of the questionnaire have been completed, which statements have been assigned a “does not apply” evaluation, as well as which optional additional statements have been supplied by the teacher.

In general, a score close to zero indicates that the student is meeting expectations, one significantly above zero indicates that the student is exceeding expectations, and one significantly below zero indicates that the student is not meeting expectations.

The score is also converted into a percentage, using the lowest possible score and the highest possible score as the range over which the percentage has meaning. The degree to which the student scores above or below 50% is the degree to which the student meets, or does not meet, expectations, respectively. This allows scores from different students, as well as scores from the same student over time and changing expectations, to be compared. Judging meaningfulness of a given comparison is beyond the scope of this document.

A simple rule of thumb for interpreting an aggregate score for the questionnaire as a percentage of the whole questionnaire is the following:

| | |
|------------|-----------------------------------|
| 84% - 100% | Consistently exceeds expectations |
|------------|-----------------------------------|

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 68% - 83% | Often exceeds expectations |
| 51% - 67% | Sometimes exceeds expectations |
| 50% | Meets expectations |
| 33% - 49% | Sometimes does not meet expectations |
| 16% - 32% | Often does not meet expectations |
| 0% - 15% | Consistently does not meet expectations |

These percentages cannot, however, be used as grades unless they are scaled according to the teacher's grading scale. The questionnaire does not provide a means of doing this, since grading scales differ widely.

Moreover, is it not suggested that the score be used to directly determine the student's grade. Doing so is not a goal of the evaluation process.

Implementation

The evaluation questionnaire is implemented using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that provides for automatic scoring as the teacher fills out the questionnaire. The questionnaire is then printed out and used to present the results to the student for sign-off.

Limitations of this work

TBD

To Do List

1. Include a section in the questionnaire specific to music majors studying instruments other than their major.
2. Include a section specific to non-music majors or other students taking private lessons either in the college setting, or outside of it. Perhaps include a generalized "student goals and aspirations" section, to be used to weight or adjust the scoring criteria
3. Include the length and frequency of lessons as a factor in the scoring criteria.
4. Expand the evaluation process to include a mid-term evaluation.
5. Study the literature and other sources to determine how evaluation of applied study is approached in other academic settings. Expand this paper into a monograph on the subject through a research grant obtained for that purpose.