

WHEATON COLLEGE MUSIC DEPARTMENT

Music Department Writing Statement

February, 2006

Situated at the intersections of art, literature, history, and culture, music can be viewed from multiple perspectives. Documents about music span a corresponding variety of genres, necessitating a broad range of writing skills. Indeed, writing about music requires not only the technical vocabulary to discuss its compositional elements, but also the poetry to express its emotional content. The Music Department's curriculum is structured to help majors master the typical modes of writing about music as well as appropriate prose styles and vocabularies.

Beginning students of music, typically those in our larger 100 and 200 level courses, learn the vocabularies of the various subfields of musical study. Theory students learn to read and write the notes, scales, and chords that comprise the language of written music. Students in our introductory history and literature courses learn to describe the characteristics of varied musical genres and to identify historical and cultural influences shaping their development. Reading assignments in these courses span a range of genres, varying with the subject material, but each models for students written usage of relevant terms and concepts and exemplifies typical writing genres that students will master in upper-level courses. Library assignments and class instruction help students learn to locate appropriate research materials. Written exercises such as concert and event reports, journals, and informal writings help students learn to articulately employ their new musical vocabularies. Faculty comments and peer review provide feedback to students.

Students advancing in their study of music enroll in a variety of lecture seminars, smaller classes typically at the 200 level. Theory students at this level broaden their knowledge of the grammars and larger structures of written music and become more sophisticated in their ability to write in this language. History and literature students deepen their knowledge of musical genres and are introduced to the research techniques of musicologists and ethnomusicologists. Knowledge of library and electronic resources is expanded. Class syllabi for these courses include best practice examples of documents such as program/liner notes, ethnographies, interviews/oral histories, and annotated biographies. Structural and stylistic features of these documents are discussed in class. As appropriate, in-class exercises help students practice related writing skills. Major written assignments require students to demonstrate competence in writing in these genres. At this level, faculty evaluations of student writing become more extensive and comprehensive, in the form of written comments as well as private conferences.

Upper-level seminars in history, literature, and theory engage in more advanced scholarship and require students to expand their repertoire of scholarly writing to include book reviews, research papers, and essays on music analysis and criticism. At least one writing assignment in each of these courses features submission of multiple drafts, with extensive instructor comments and written comments for final papers. For music majors, writing instruction culminates with the Senior Seminar, in which major research papers are presented before classmates and a panel of faculty.