A COMPARISON OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC METHODS COURSE CONTENT AT NASM-ACCREDED INSTITUTIONS

Michael P. Hewitt
University of Maryland
mphewitt@umd.edu

Karen Koner
University of Maryland
kmkoner@umd.edu

The Society for Music Teacher Education recently called for a critical examination of the music teacher education curriculum for the purpose of examining assumptions on which the music teacher education curriculum is founded. This is to be done by “analyzing current curricular practices and proposing new avenues for consideration” (SMTE, 2009). The current study sought to examine the curricular content of undergraduate instrumental methods courses and to determine the priority given by instructors to the curricular components in these classes.

We developed a questionnaire based on the findings from a content analysis of instrumental methods class syllabi (Hewitt & Koner, 2009). Demographic information and information concerning the background and education of the instructor along with the institution comprised the first part of the questionnaire while the second asked about the required and recommended textbooks used along with the nature of assignments given to students. In the final section participants rated the priority given in instrumental methods classes, which were gleaned from the original content analysis. Ratings were also sought concerning priorities given to each of the National Standards for Music Education.

The questionnaire was distributed to instrumental music methods class instructors at schools accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) (N = 630) who offered an instrumental methods class as part of the undergraduate music education curriculum (N=521). Completed, usable responses were received from 52.59% (n= 274) of participants who taught at least one instrumental methods class during the 2011-2012 school year. Responders included Assistant Professors (32.9%), Associate Professors (27.8) and Professors (26.0) or Other (4.5) faculty. Instructors reported their highest earned degree as Ph.D. (43.1), DMA (27.1), Master’s (23.6), or Other (6.3) and the primary instructional area as music education (60.1), conducting (19.1), applied (15.1), or other (15.1).

Results indicated the most popular required texts were Cooper’s (2004) Teaching Band and Orchestra (21.1), Colwell & Hewitt’s (2011) The Teaching of Instrumental Music, 4th ed.(18.8) and the Teaching Music Through Performance in Band and Orchestra series (16.1). The most popular assignments were class discussions (95.1), lesson plan development (84.2), and K-12 observations (77.4). Least popular were observations of university faculty (16.9), portfolio development (41.7), and band/orchestra handbook development (54.1). Topics receiving highest priority (on a 0-7 scale) in methods classes were rehearsal techniques (5.58), lesson planning (5.47), instrumental pedagogy (5.28), classroom management (5.24) and assessment (5.20), while world music (1.92) general music methods (1.94), and arranging and orchestration (2.32) were rated lowest. Priority given to the National Standards ranged (0-7) from a mean of 5.80 for performing on instruments to 3.64 for composing.

A MANOVA examining differences in participant rank and the content area for instructor’s highest degree on priorities given to curricular topics was statistically significant for multiple topics. Of note, instructors whose highest degree was earned in an applied area rated
child development, assessment, rote teaching, and composition lower in priority than those who earned a degree in music education. Additional findings along with implications for music teacher education are explored and discussed.