Writing in the Discipline: Bachelor of Music in Music Education

Identified Courses at the Sophomore Level:
MUS 205 Music History and Literature I
MUS 206 Music History and Literature II

This two-semester survey is required of all music majors and is typically completed in sequence during the second year of study at Rhode Island College. Assignments are designed toward familiarizing students with various forms of written communication in the field of music. These forms include the following:

Comparative Analysis
The purpose of this assignment is to write about interpretive approaches toward music of the distant past. Students are given several recordings of the same piece and are asked to write a comparative analysis in the form of an essay. They are encouraged to begin by providing a historical context about the composer and the work in question (utilizing course materials). Then in the body of the essay, students describe similarities and differences among the interpretations, commenting on musical parameters such as tempo, articulation, accidentals, ornamentation, vocal technique, and instrumentation. To conclude the essay, students reflect on which version they found most convincing and whether, in their opinion, the performers achieved a historically informed performance. The assignment is assessed on the clarity of the writing, attention to musical detail, and use of appropriate terminology.

Stylistic Analysis
Students are asked to write a stylistic analysis of a piece of texted music from the early seventeenth century. A score, recording, and supplementary material will be provided. In order to situate the composer and the piece in a historical context, students will be introduced to Grove Online, an important resource for music research available from Adams Library. In addition to historical methods, the assignment allows students to synthesize knowledge acquired in the music theory curriculum, since the assigned piece will exhibit clear tonal patterns typical of the common practice period (e.g., an ostinato bass line). Students will be expected to analyze the piece’s form and phrase structure, the relationship between text and music, as well aspects of texture, harmony, and instrumentation.

Research Paper 1
This paper is assigned at the end of the first semester, after students have practiced the types of analytical writing described above. It is intended to strengthen research skills in the field of music generally and music history in particular. Students are invited to develop a research project around one of the composers discussed in class. The paper will examine details of the composer’s biography that are most relevant for understanding his/her music, including information about teachers, students, patrons, religious/cultural background, travels, instruments played, professional positions or institutional affiliations, performance contexts, major historical events, etc. In addition to course materials, students are asked to consult at least three outside sources of scholarly merit. They are also expected to locate a score and recording of at least one significant work and to provide analytical commentary in the body of their paper.
A main goal of this assignment is developing research skills that can be applied to various career paths in the field of music. Students will learn the basics of the Library of Congress system and how to find musical materials (e.g., “M” for music scores, “ML” for books about music history and literature, and “MT” for instructional and analytical material). Class time will also be devoted to accessing scholarly literature and streaming resources available online. Students will learn how to use databases available through Adams Library, including JSTOR, Naxos Music Library, and Opera in Video. Citation styles will be discussed, and students will be expected to cite sources properly in their final papers.

**Interpretation of Primary Sources**

In the second semester of study, students continue to refine the materials and methods of written discourse in the field of music. This assignment focuses on the integration of primary sources into the writing process. Students are provided a packet of readings on a familiar composer, containing perspectives from his/her contemporaries on matters related to musical practice and aesthetics. Students are then asked to write a critical essay, connecting their reading of the primary sources with pieces of music that have been covered in class or that they may have performed in lessons and ensembles. The instructor will offer strategies on how to approach primary sources, with an aim toward selecting quotations for inclusion in the essay. The act of synthesis will be stressed, so that students learn to craft their own interpretation around the primary source material.

**Program Note or Concert Review**

The goal of this assignment is to practice forms of writing associated with the concert experience. Students will learn successful techniques of music writing for the general public, in which the prose should be engaging and accessible. They will learn how to integrate historical and cultural information into the program note or concert review, while still focusing on music as a sonic event.

For the program note, students are instructed to choose a multi-movement work from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. They may choose to write about a selection from class, in which case they will become familiar with the work in its entirety (not just an excerpted movement). Students may also write a program note on a piece they are learning in private lessons or performing on a recital, provided it is a multi-movement instrumental piece, song cycle, or the equivalent. In preparing to write the program note, students will read samples by professional program annotators. They will be reminded that a program note is intended to convey information that would benefit an educated listener in a live concert setting. Generally this would include relevant historical information that might enhance the listening experience. The program note should also contain commentary about each movement, especially information about the form and any unusual or striking features that are discernible on first listening.

For the concert review, students will begin by consulting examples from professional reviewers contained in the *New York Times, Boston Musical Intelligencer*, and similar publications. Students will then select a concert to attend that features music from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. They will prepare for the concert experience by researching the music on the program, attending a preconcert lecture if one is offered, and reading the program notes.
carefully. After the concert, students will craft a review that combines historical insight about the music in question with descriptions of the live event. Students may share personal responses to the music, critique the quality of the performance, evaluate the use of historical performance practices (where applicable), describe the performers’ gestures and interactions, or comment on audience behavior and reaction.

**Research Paper 2**
At the end of the second semester, students will be given another opportunity to research a topic of personal interest, generally drawn from the twentieth-century repertoire of American music. They will be expected to apply research methodologies learned throughout the year and to produce a thesis-driven account that is well written, well organized, and displays evidence of bibliographic research.

**Identified Course at the Senior Level:**
**MUS 492 Senior Recital (music education)**

In this course, candidates prepare and perform a public recital in their primary applied performance area (e.g., trumpet, voice, violin, etc.). In addition to the performance itself, students must complete the following written items on time to receive a passing grade (recital courses are graded S/U).

1) Recital Reservation Request Form (due 3rd Friday of the semester)
2) Press release (due eight weeks before the recital)
3) Recital program (due two weeks before the recital)
4) Program notes and translations (due two weeks before the recital)

**Recital Reservation Request Form**
This document is available on the “Student Recitals” link from [http://www.ric.edu/mtd](http://www.ric.edu/mtd). It must be printed and filled out by the student after consultation with the instructor. Signatures of the recital committee members and the accompanist must be obtained, and the completed form must be returned to the instructor by the third Friday of the semester.

**Press Release**
A press release of professional quality must be submitted electronically to the instructor eight weeks before the recital date. Length should be 200-300 words and ONE PAGE MAXIMUM. Use online sources of help such as [http://necmusic.edu/pdf/careerservices/Career_Services_Spreading_the_News.pdf](http://necmusic.edu/pdf/careerservices/Career_Services_Spreading_the_News.pdf). Accuracy of content, spelling, grammar, sentence structure, and appealing format are all important. Once approved, the press release must be submitted to at least three local news outlets (including the RIC Office of College Communications and Marketing) by the student.

**Recital Program**
Using the template available on the “Student Recitals” link from [http://www.ric.edu/mtd](http://www.ric.edu/mtd), the student must prepare the recital program, including composer and composition dates. Formatting of the template must be followed. After the applied instructor has checked the program for
accuracy, the student must submit it to the recital instructor two weeks before the recital. The instructor will make a final proofreading and forward it to the department secretary for printing. Students must get the printed programs from the department secretary the day before the recital.

**Program Notes and Translations**

Using guidelines such as those available at [http://facstaff.uww.edu/allsenj/MSO/NOTES/WritingNotes.htm](http://facstaff.uww.edu/allsenj/MSO/NOTES/WritingNotes.htm) and [http://www.gettysburg.edu/library/resources/db/guides/music/prognotesguide.dot](http://www.gettysburg.edu/library/resources/db/guides/music/prognotesguide.dot), the student must prepare program notes for his/her recital repertoire and submit them electronically to the instructor two weeks before the recital. Students must use the template available on the “Student Recitals” link from [http://www.ric.edu/mtd](http://www.ric.edu/mtd). Notes should be limited to approximately 150-200 words per selection and will be assessed on accuracy of content, spelling, grammar, sentence structure, and style. In addition, vocal performers must prepare and submit English translations for all songs performed. The instructor may require revisions, and the final version must be printed, copied, and stapled by the student.