

Message from the Committee Chair Assessment as an Art and a Science



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Welcome to the October issue of *DataVersed*. It's hard to believe that the 2019 fall semester is now more than half over. By now many of you are steeped in the world of student assessment. Hopefully this month's assessment reading can offer some encouragement and inspire some thought.

In this issue, we consider how assessment—despite its frequent emphasis on data and statistics—can often be as much of an art as it is a science. Certain disciplines seem naturally to suggest specific assessment approaches, while other fields invite more nontraditional strategies. In the latter case, innovative approaches to assessment may be the key to meaningfully setting course goals and measuring student achievement.

In this Issue of *DataVersed* ...

- ✓ Music Appreciation Assessment
- ✓ Professional Development Opportunities in General Education Competencies

The remarkable range of viable assessment approaches can be easily seen by simply looking at the differing methods of course level assessment used across the various FSW departments. This range should also serve as a reminder that assessment is dynamic and ever-evolving, a process that sometimes in itself warrants creative thinking and a fresh approach.

In this month's *DataVersed*, D'ariel Barnard gives us a look at one innovative approach to assessment in her account of Professor Ron Doiron's music appreciation course. In D'ariel's article, we see how a theory of assessment based on Professor Doiron's knowledge of the field helped shape a successful approach to measuring learning in a domain notoriously difficult to assess.

REMINDER:

Student Opinion Surveys
open for Full/B term on
November 12. They close at
11:59 p.m. on November 29.

If you or your department have similar experiences crafting creative assessment strategies, be sure and share them with the Learning Assessment Committee or the Office of Academic Assessment and Accountability & Effectiveness. They may end up in a future issue of *DataVersed*.

Good luck to everyone as we enter the final half of the semester!

Music Appreciation Assessment: A Collaborative Exploratory Analysis

Teaching inevitably includes assessment but not in the way that ice cream inevitably includes calories, more in the way that ice cream inevitably includes air pockets due to its structural build. And air pockets are calorie-free! The structural build of teaching includes a constant feedback process between professor and student. For example, upon encountering confused faces when introducing a new topic with the same metaphor that worked so well last year, a professor may do some quick thinking and try out a new metaphor on the spot. When it works and a classroom of brows unfurrow, the professor may decide to keep that metaphor handy as a frontrunner for next semester. These frequent, almost unconscious efforts of continuous classroom improvement can easily become unrecognized or disconnected from assessment. Fortunately, the Learning Assessment Committee and the Office of Academic Assessment are dedicated in supporting and promoting a positive culture of assessment, and are excited to share this spotlight of ongoing assessment in a Music Appreciation class.



D'ariel Barnard
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Now you might ask, how do you do assessment in a field like music? The answer is the same way you conduct it in any other field: start with the end in mind. What do you want your students to know at the end of the class? These are your learning outcomes. In a Music Appreciation course, the outcomes range from “Recognize basic musical concepts” and “...the history of Western music” to “Engage with the course material on a personal level.” The latter may seem particularly challenging to measure, but Music Professor, Dr. Ron Doiron, who has taught countless FSW musicians and music-appreciators, was confident it could be done. He asked his students to write down responses to two questions on the very first day of class and again on the last day of the class. Both times, he asked the same questions: “What is Music?” and “What is your experience of Music?”

Unsurprisingly, there was an increase (11%) in the number of students who included a standardized definition: “Music is organized sound.” Additionally, a further exploratory analysis of themes in the student responses revealed a concise way to showcase the overall growth that students demonstrate in a Music Appreciation class. You can see in the Radar plot below (Figure 1) that the theme with the most change was History. In a class of 35 students, no one mentioned music’s historical context on the first day, whereas at the end of the class, History was mentioned more than any other category!

In fact, looking at the overall “Pre” shape and the overall “Post” shape in the Radar plot, on the next page, you see very little overlap, meaning that most students are completely changing how they describe music by the end of the class. We can then take this one step further and combine similar themes into two broad categories: Academic vs Personal. On the first day of class, there were 28 Academic descriptions of music and 55 Personal descriptions of music. The bar graph of Thematically Combined Changes (Figure 2) shows almost a mirror reversal by the last day of class with 50 Academic descriptions and 22 Personal descriptions of music. “That is exactly what we want!” remarked Dr. Doiron when he saw the visual validation in bar graph form, noting that he and his colleagues aim to share a “factual, academic perspective of music.”

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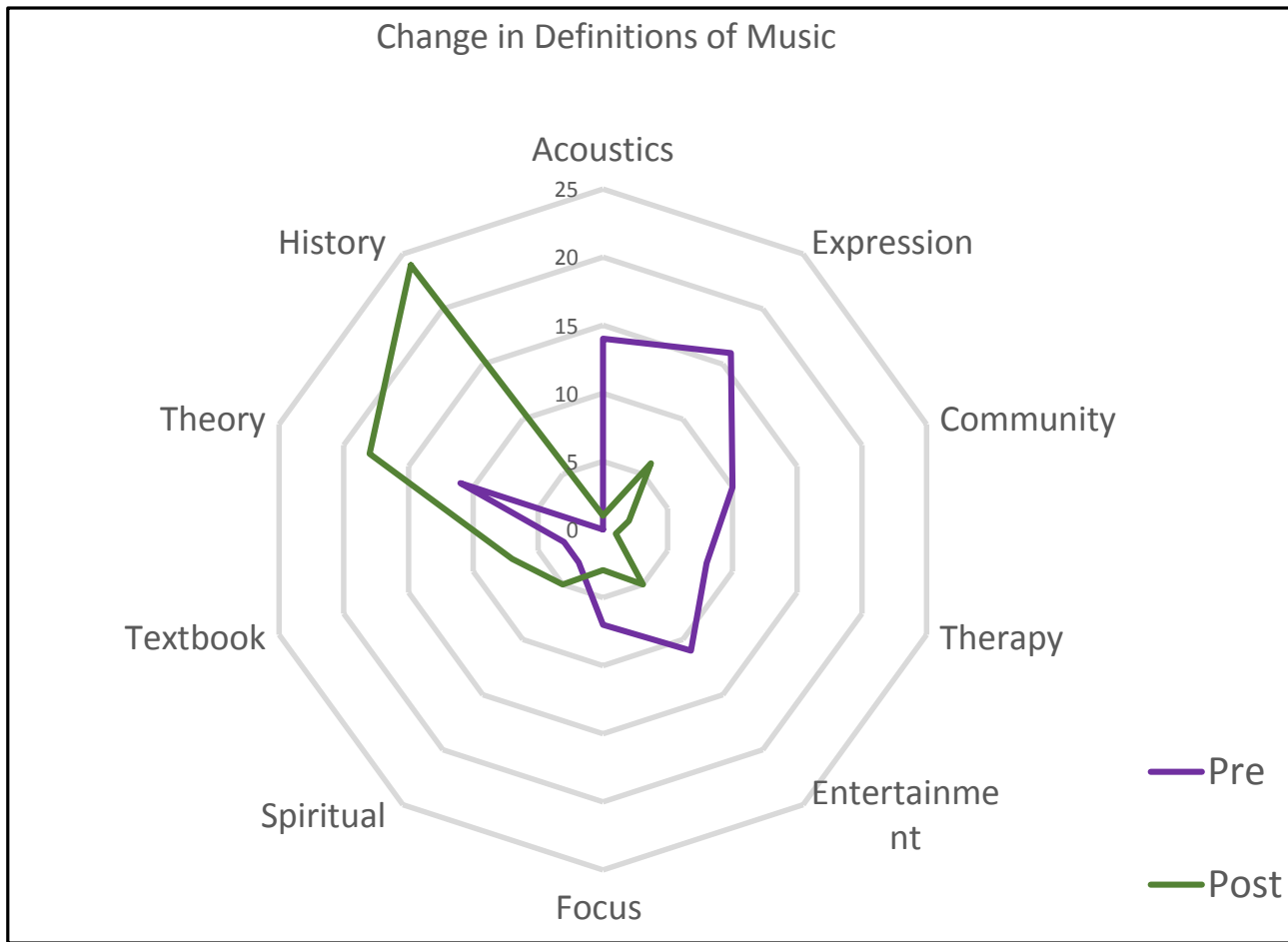


Figure 1: Radar plot depicting the changing 'shape' of student understanding of music by way of comparing the change in student response from pre-test to post-test of the question "What is music?"

But we cannot forget that third outcome of personal engagement. Dr. Doiron described one assignment he uses to further student achievement of that outcome: "I give a listening challenge to my students. I ask them to pick a single composer from the baroque or classical era. Mozart, Haydn, and Handel are given as suggestions. I challenge them to listen to any work of that composer for a whole week but only music by that composer for the whole week.

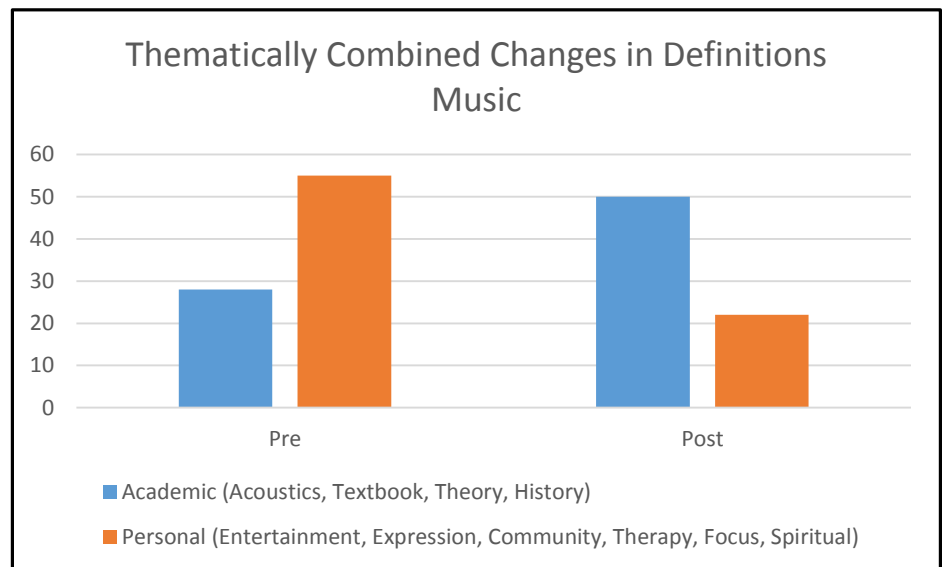


Figure 2: Comparison of thematic changes in student descriptions of music over the course of a semester.

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Many students tell me they feel calmer during and after that week. One student came to me and said he was struggling in one of his science classes, getting C's, and the listening challenge had him focused on his classwork on that class in a whole new way and he started getting A's. He had chosen Mozart, by the way, for anyone else looking for study tips." And in the "Evidence of Music Appreciation" chart below (Figure 3), we can see a variety of ways in which a whole new group of Music-Appreciators have personally engaged with and been changed by taking a Music Appreciation course.

Hopefully, this music assessment example has helped feature some of the work our faculty are doing every day in the classroom as well as demystify some of the challenges in assessing other humanities and arts classes especially with General Education assessment this year focusing on our **CREATIVE Competency** of

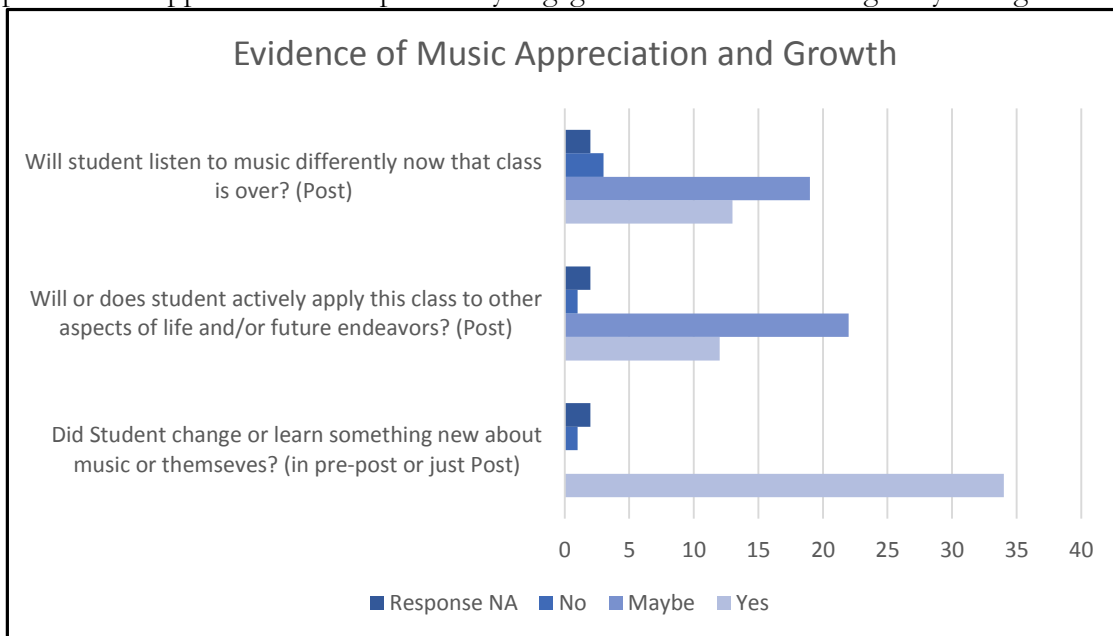


Figure 3: Comparison of students' personal engagement at end of term.

Analyze ("Analyze and create individual and collaborative works of art, literature, and performance"). Note that workshops are happening in the TLC on October 25th if you want to provide or receive more illuminations of our General Education competencies. Lastly, don't forget the final step of assessment: Celebrate your achievements. I highly suggest going out for ice cream!

Gen Ed Competencies Professional Development

For October's Professional Development Friday, October 25, the Learning Assessment Committee is partnering with the Office of Academic Assessment and Accountability & Effectiveness to present two professional development sessions for faculty. The purpose of these sessions is to educate faculty on the general education competencies and to help faculty choose assignments to submit for annual review on those competencies.

On October 25, 8:45 a.m., in AA 216, a panel will discuss the general education competency "Analyze"; later that day, at 10:30 a.m., in AA 216, a panel will convene and discuss the competency "Research." Attending faculty will be able to discuss their experiences submitting assignments for review, and share strategies for determining the best assignment when selecting submissions for general education review by the Office of Assessment and Accountability.

All faculty are encouraged to participate, but the sessions will be especially helpful for those submitting review assignments in the 2019-2020 academic year. In the spring semester of 2020, a set of follow-up professional development events will be held to discuss and review the general education assessment process of 2019-2020. Look for these spring events to be announced in the pages of an upcoming issue of *DataVersed*.

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