

**ACADEMIC AUDIT EVALUATION
AND NARRATIVE REPORT**

RELATING TO THE

**MUSIC TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM
OF
NASHVILLE STATE TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE**

DATE OF AUDIT VISIT: MARCH 28, 2005

A. INTRODUCTION

Three academic auditors from Northeast State Community College, Southwest Tennessee Community College, and the Tennessee Board of Regents audited the Music Technology Program at Nashville State Technical Community College on Monday, March 28, 2005. The auditors received a very warm welcome and had the opportunity to meet with selected school administrators, students, and faculty in a plenary session, with students and faculty in three separate sessions, and with faculty and administrators in the exit interview and summary session.

The Music Technology Program at Nashville State is very young and has had only three graduating classes since its inception. There are currently two full-time faculty members, eight adjunct faculty, and approximately one-hundred and fifty students in the program. To accommodate an expected growth in student enrollment and number of course offerings, there are plans to hire a third full-time faculty member by fall semester 2005. A one-year Technical Certificate is offered, and students are required to take ten required courses from a selection of thirteen.

As stated in the program's own self-study report, the mission of this program "is to provide a well-rounded curriculum of music related technical, creative, and business courses designed to prepare students for a variety of employment opportunities within the music industry." The emphasis of this program is "hands-on" training in the technical, business, and songwriting aspects of the music business. "Real-world" experience is the chief criteria for the hiring of new faculty members; most of the faculty are working professionals within the music business and are, therefore, capable of communicating this practical knowledge to their students. As several students noted in their interviews, a certificate from this program might not guarantee a job, but it will certainly be an invaluable bargaining tool in today's highly competitive music business, especially in the city of Nashville. There was a consensus among the students interviewed that this program is adequately preparing them for a career in the music business.

Following the conclusion of the interviews, the audit team had an opportunity to tour the music lab and classroom areas. The team was impressed with the academic and practical accomplishments within a very limited space for the program.

B. OVERALL PERFORMANCE

As mentioned above, the Music Technology Program has a clear idea about its learning objectives in that the faculty wants students to have "hands-on" and "real-world" experiences in their courses. Evidence of this lies in the music labs and the teaching studio, which are both designed to facilitate these kinds of experiences. Other evidence is in the selection of faculty, who are required to have a proven track record in the music field, either in songwriting or in production (or both). It is a department made up of working professionals with a commitment to developing the kinds of practical skills in their students that will lead, hopefully, to gainful employment in the music industry. Although no concrete evidence of job placement was provided, the student interviews yielded positive indications that job placement success is a realistic expectation. In fact, students expressed concern over any course content that did not seem directly related to on-the-job skills.

The curriculum, consisting of thirteen courses (ten of which are required, depending on the area of concentration), is organized around the needs of the music industry and is modified when needed to meet changes in the industry. (For example, there is currently a greater emphasis on digital applications in the recording field).

As mentioned earlier, teaching and learning are both oriented toward practical, "hands-on" skills that will enable students to effectively enter the job market and perform at a professional level. Information obtained in the student interviews indicated rather clearly that the course objectives and teaching methods were satisfactory and meeting needs and expectations of most students. Faculty concern about some aspects of the syllabi and teaching methods being "over the heads" of their students was not borne out in the student interviews.

The audit team agrees that while the program's definition of student assessment in this program should be based on answering the question "When you plug it in, does it work?" (page 11 of the Self Study) there was no evidence presented that gave a clear indication that assessment was in line with the program objectives. One particular weakness lies in the area of student evaluation of courses and instructors. Students were confused about how the results of these once-a-semester standardized evaluations are used, and the faculty members themselves were uncertain as well.

Quality assurance seems to grow out of the program's mission to provide students with "hands-on" experience that will enable them to function effectively in the music business. Evidence of this, while not actually reviewed by the audit team, lies in the existence of an advisory committee, composed of "industry professionals, working graduates, and some faculty members" (page 2 Self Study), and feedback from graduates of the program and their employers. Again, no data substantiating these last claims was presented to the audit team.

C. OVERALL JUDGMENT OF THE PROGRAM'S APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES

While the auditors agreed that the initial impression given by the Self Study report was rather "fuzzy" when it came to applications of principles, the interviews corrected many of these views, particularly with regard to collaboration. The faculty interviews gave a very clear impression that the Music Technology faculty work together well, although not on a formal basis, and these impressions were borne out in the student interviews as well. There seems to be a commitment to learn from best practice, in that the faculty, being working professionals, are in an ideal position to update their knowledge of the ever-changing music industry and, therefore, able to incorporate this knowledge into their curriculum. The faculty all seem focused on making continuous improvement a priority, with the goal of making sure their students are equipped with relevant and up-to-date skills in the music industry. The weakness is that there seems to be no formal or systematic procedure for guaranteeing these things get done (i.e. no regular meetings or peer reviews). And the purpose of the current institutional evaluation instrument and procedure is not clearly understood by both faculty and students. Another weakness of both the Self Study and the interviews was the lack of documentation provided as evidence for many of the assertions made about the quality and successes of

the program. This information, in addition to the testimonials given on the day of the visit, would have made the report much stronger.

D. OVERALL MATURITY ASSESSMENT

The Music Technology Program's maturity in the fields of learning objectives and curriculum is best characterized as mature, based in large part on both the Self Study report and the audit interviews. Teaching and learning methods are at the emergent level, because there seems to be some doubt among the faculty about the effectiveness of the course syllabi and teaching methods (although the interviewed students would disagree). Firefighting best describes quality assurance and learning assessment, since little evidence was given to document these areas, and there seems to be no formal procedure in place for assessing these areas on a departmental or institution-wide basis. The distinct impression taken away from the audit team visit is that coordination between the program and the institutional administration is not clearly evident. This is not intended to be a negative statement; during the interviews the audit team sensed a strong feeling of collegiality within the institution, but few obvious coordinated efforts seem to be in place to insure these things are getting done in an organized way.

D. CONCLUSIONS

One overall impression, gathered from reading the Self Study report and from the actual on-site visit, is that some of the faculty are somewhat unsure of the underlying motives and purposes of the Academic Audit process. The audit team received the impression that Academic Audit was perceived by some as a judgmental process in the same manner as a SACS audit, rather than as an honest and open-ended learning experience for both auditors and auditees. For instance, the Self Study report seemed to be written from two points of view. The first part of the report presented a very clear exposition of the program's mission and ways of getting things done, while the second half seemed to be providing information and recommendations that were somewhat at variance with the program's earlier stated intentions or mission. The auditors feel that the simple question given on page 11 ("When you plug it in, does it work?") is more in line with the true intentions of the program's faculty. The faculty became much more relaxed as the day progressed and the purpose of the Audit was made clearer. The idea, therefore, was that the Audit's purpose was not to be an interrogation but a two-way conversation.

COMMENDATIONS: The Self Study report began with a very clear and concise overview of the purposes and mission of the Music Technology program and gave an excellent feel for the program's strengths and weaknesses. Another commendation is the very positive impressions the students have of the program and its faculty. In the interviews, students couldn't say enough positive things about the quality and relevance of the program and the high level of integrity and professionalism represented by the faculty. The only consistently negative comment related to the lack of individual lab space for students, and this really testifies to the students' positive enthusiasm for the program and their desire to learn even more. The faculty interviews also revealed the spirit of collegiality that exists within the program. And, the team liked

the question, "When you plug it in, does it work?" as a guideline to making sure the students are achieving success in class.

AFFIRMATIONS: The audit team agrees with faculty members that there needs to be a more systematic plan implemented for syllabus revision and periodic meetings. And, in a field that changes constantly, there is agreement that keeping up with industry trends, employment needs, and equipment is a special challenge to this program. The interviews with both students and faculty affirmed, however, that there exists a very serious commitment to do this. The audit team also affirms that that the current policy of hiring faculty members who have "real-world" experience should continue to be a priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Since the audit team believes this program has far more strengths than weaknesses, our recommendations are quite simple and not as far-reaching as those indicated in the Self Study report. First, there needs to be consideration given to a less informal method of faculty meetings on a periodic basis to coordinate efforts and to discuss best practices. One meeting at the beginning and one at the end of each semester should be sufficient, and documentation needs to be provided (i.e. minutes) of what was discussed at these meetings. Second, there needs to be consideration given to the ways in which student evaluations are implemented and used. What processes guarantee that the faculty benefit from the evaluation results, and how can students be made to feel like they are a part of the process and that their input is being taken seriously? In order for these things to be accomplished, there needs to be consideration given to the issue of the audit process and its continuation as an instrument of self-examination and ongoing improvement to the teaching and learning processes.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND IMPRESSIONS: The audit team came away from the visit with a very positive impression of the Music Technology Program, especially when the opportunity was given to compare initial impressions from the Self Study report with those made after the visit. The bottom line is that the Music Technology Program is already committed to the basic principle of the audit process--a continuous examination of the processes whereby students learn in a coherent curriculum designed to meet their needs ("When you plug it in, does it work?"). By following the recommendations given above, the program can only be improved and better integrated into the mission of the entire campus.