

Music

PAUL E. THOMS

Music Appreciation Without Trombone 101

An important trend in music education has strong curriculum implications for secondary schools: the development of new nonperformance courses and the restructuring of performance classes. Two factors have brought about this movement: (1) a unit in the arts as a prerequisite to high school graduation in 25 states, and (2) a required unit in the arts for admission to state colleges and universities. In this trend, music educators see the expansion of the arts to larger numbers of students.

Many academically gifted students are reluctant to participate in an arts course because they fear that their degree of creativity might be subject to a grade. Students who are contenders for honors at graduation are unwilling to risk their grade-point average by taking a visual arts course or a performance ensemble when they doubt

their musical or artistic ability. These students are more at ease in traditional, academically oriented courses—the “appreciation” or “historical” classes with which they are familiar.

Other students have limited interest in any academic orientation and have neither a background nor an interest in orchestra, chorus, or band.

In both cases, students are asking for and getting instruction in instruments they can enjoy socially through such courses as Class Guitar or Class Piano. These instruments seem to be less threatening and are practical and useful as a lifetime recreation.

Other popular alternatives are music survey courses, which incorporate lecture and discussion with direct music experiences through in-class performances and attendance at concerts. Computer music courses also offer an opportunity for students to use a familiar tool creatively. The variety of available software allows this approach to

be tailored to the background and needs of students.

Music performance groups are being restructured to comply with some state requirements that stipulate that these groups may satisfy the arts requirement if they include strong elements of music history and appreciation as well as music theory, form, and analysis. Certainly these are logical components of any well-developed course of study for a performance group. Thus, new high school graduation and college admission requirements are strengthening these offerings and making them more appealing to students who have limited performance experience.

Educators are using their own creativity and innovation—the tools of the musician—to meet today's new challenges. □

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JOURNAL OF CURRICULUM AND SUPERVISION
ASCD
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Alexandria, VA 22314-2798

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