

1-1-2004

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### Recommended Citation

Matthews, Theodore K. (2004) "Music Theory and the Liberal Arts," *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*. Vol. 18, Article 6.

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## Music Theory and the Liberal Arts □

Theodore K. Matthews

**M**usic theory, as an academic discipline, exists in distinctly different environments at liberal arts institutions and schools of music. This study attempts to profile both kinds of institutions in order to compare how their different environments may affect the teaching of music theory. The study focuses primarily on music theory programs in small private liberal arts colleges insofar as the study began, partly, as an attempt to explore the readiness of their graduates to compete with graduates of conservatories either in graduate programs or in other professional pursuits. While music theory programs remain the primary topic, the study also examines briefly music history offerings and general requirements as a way to explore the respective environments more comprehensively.

Web searches provided information concerning conservatories for this study. Both web searches and an e-mail survey provided data concerning liberal arts institutions insofar as they remain the primary focus of the study. The survey, which asked questions about general requirements as well as theory programs, was submitted to fifty-five small, private liberal arts colleges during the summer of 2003. Thirteen colleges responded and data provided by them supplemented information acquired by means of web searches.

Before proceeding to the results of these searches, however, some general observations of how liberal arts institutions compare with conservatories may prove to be instructive. Most observations are the author's, and it was also, to a certain extent, his contemplation of them that led to this study. Hopefully, they provide some insight into the alternative environments. In general, the information gathered by the various searches supports the observations.

The first observation has to do with the kind of student who applies for admission to either kind of institution. Students who apply to a school of music generally aspire to a professional career in music. Conservatories exist to prepare students for such an eventuality, and their curriculum is so designed. Fewer students applying to small, private liberal arts colleges enter with the assumption that they will become professionals in music. Many students entering liberal arts institutions do not have a clear sense of

what they want their future professional life to be, and they proceed on the assumption that they will find their path as they study. Other students change their professional aspirations once exposed to the variety of academic pursuits that liberal arts institutions require of them. Many students know, and accept, that their chosen major will have little, if anything, to do with their future professional life. Liberal arts institutions may recognize their responsibility to prepare students for life and a professional future, but they do not consider their programs to be vocational. Their music curricula do not presume that all music majors aspire to a professional career in music. Many students elect music as a major program of study out of academic interest only, and any liberal arts institution must respect the interests of these students as well as those who may choose to pursue music professionally.

Some students at liberal arts institutions declare music as a major in their first year, but, typically, they do not need to declare a major until their junior year, and many students wait that long. The music programs must, therefore, be flexible enough to accommodate students who choose to begin their music studies in their first year as well as students who choose not to begin their music studies in their first year. The programs must also be able to accommodate students who may begin their music studies in their first year but choose to experiment with other disciplines before returning later to music as a major course of study. Flexibility of this sort is not typical of conservatories.

Music programs at liberal arts institutions also recognize that they exist as only one of the humanities under the broader umbrella of the liberal arts. Many music courses, especially at the beginning level, serve as electives for non-majors as well as aspiring majors. Whereas prerequisite courses are common, barrier exams are not all that common, and students who will not major in music may also elect upper-level courses. Music professors, theory professors included, have, therefore, an obligation to maintain a perspective on the subject matter that recognizes its context within liberal studies, and they certainly need to recognize that the academic interests of their students are diverse and that only some of them may have professional aspirations in music. No matter how the institution chooses to accommodate this diversity, however, the instruction must be solid enough to serve the needs of those students who may aspire to music professions.

Schools of music generally offer a varied menu of music degrees. They may offer incidentally an AB degree with a concentration in music, but their focus remains clearly on the professional degree, and all students take the same theory courses. Liberal arts institutions, in general, do not offer any music degrees. They offer only the Bachelor of Arts degree which may allow for a major concentration in music. The balance of music courses as opposed to non-music courses, consequently, differs for each type of institution. All conservatories require studies outside of music, although they generally do not refer to these studies as the “liberal arts” component of their curriculum. They usually refer to them either as their General Education or their Core Curriculum requirement. This requirement, for music school students, is, on average, about half of that required of liberal arts students. Conversely, therefore, the number of semester hours devoted to music studies in liberal arts institutions can be half of those available to music school students. In other words, music courses comprise most of the curriculum in conservatories whereas non-music courses comprise most of the curriculum in liberal arts institutions where music majors are concerned. Since liberal arts institutions offer fewer courses within their major disciplines, the theory programs within music major programs must generally accommodate satisfactory amounts of material over shorter periods of time.

It is clear also that the balance of academic courses, as opposed to applied courses, differs for each kind of institution. For the purposes of this study, the adjective “academic” refers to courses where students acquire their learning primarily through reading or writing or a combination of both. The adjective “applied” refers to courses where instruction focuses primarily on skill development. This study recognizes all music theory courses as academic courses. However, for the beginning theory sequence that all schools require, this study explored also the relative balance of academic and applied theory (i.e., the part devoted to aural and keyboard skills).

Schools of music, in general, require fewer academic courses than do liberal arts institutions. Students within the conservatory will, on average, take three academic courses per semester including both music and non-music courses with most of the rest of their work devoted to applied instruction. Liberal arts students, on the other hand, typically take four and, sometimes, five academic courses including both music and non-music courses. Applied instruction

at liberal arts institutions often adds hours beyond what would be a normal academic load for students who do not major in music. It is not unusual for some applied activities to be offered without credit, and all of this is consistent with the academic emphasis of liberal arts programs.

Liberal arts institutions tend also to approach applied theory differently than do schools of music. Aural and keyboard skills have an important place within the introductory theory sequence, normally referred to as Theory 1, 2, 3, etc., of both kinds of institutions. Instructors at liberal arts institutions, however, most often integrate applied theory into the courses of the introductory academic theory sequence. They partition class time devoted to skill development as they see fit. Music schools more commonly parcel out aural and keyboard skills into separate courses thus regulating more precisely the amount of time devoted to them. Also, class time devoted to applied theory tends to be higher in professional schools than in liberal arts institutions.

The balance of historical as opposed to theoretical courses within programs of music also varies depending on the kind of institution a student attends. Liberal arts institutions, in general, tend to value a balanced approach to historical as opposed to theoretical studies. Music schools, on the other hand, appear to place a higher value on theoretical studies when one compares the number of hours required in each discipline. The number of credit hours required in historical studies tends to be much lower than those required in theoretical studies.

#### EXAMPLE 1

The general observations above provide a context for the information gathered for this study. Example 1 contains information gathered by means of a web search of ten randomly selected schools of music. For reasons of consistency, the example represents all academic credit as semester hours for all institutions even if they function with quarter or unit credits. Performance degree programs provided the models for comparison, but the core theory requirements, in most cases, were the same for all degree programs at each institution.

**Example 1: Music School Statistics**

- 1. Boston University School of Music:**  
General Ed. Req.: 30 hrs (23% of 132 required for graduation)  
Theory Req.: 6 semesters for 22 hrs. (6 hrs. are in applied theory courses for 50% of first four semesters)  
Music History Req.: 12 hrs. (55% of theory req.)
- 2. University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music:**  
General Ed. Req.: 18 sem. hrs. (13.4% of 134 required for graduation)  
Theory Req.: 2 yr. intro. for 16 semester hrs. (4 hrs. are in applied theory courses for 25% of the total) plus Form and Orchestration for additional 6.6 sem. hrs. - Music History Req.: 8 sem. hrs. (35% of theory req.)
- 3. University of Colorado School of Music:**  
General Ed. Req.: 30 hrs. (24% of 123 required for graduation)  
Theory Req.: 4 semesters for 16 hrs. (8 hrs. are in applied theory courses for 50% of the total) plus two electives for an additional 6 hrs. - Music History Req.: 12 hrs. (54% of theory req.)
- 4. University of Georgia School of Music:**  
General Ed. Req.: 42 hrs. (35% of 120 required for graduation)  
Theory Req.: 4 semesters for 16 hrs (4 hrs. are in applied theory courses for 25% of the total) plus two electives for an additional 6 hrs. - Music History Req.: 9 hrs. (41% of theory req.)
- 5. University of Illinois School of Music:**  
General Ed. Req.: 43 hrs. (33% of 130 required for graduation)  
65% of total) plus two courses for an additional 6 hrs. Theory Req.: 4 semesters for 23 hrs. (15 hrs. are in applied music courses for - Music History Req.: 12 hrs (40% of theory req.)
- 6. Indiana University School of Music:**  
General Ed. Req.: 24 hrs. (20% of 120 required for graduation)  
Theory Req.: 5 semesters for 19 hrs (4 hrs. are in applied theory courses for 25% of first four semesters) plus one elective for an additional 3 hrs.- Music History Req.: 8 hrs. (40% of theory req.)
- 7. University of Louisville School of Music:**  
General Ed. Req.: 34 hrs. (26% of 133 required for graduation)  
Theory Req.: 4 semesters for 16 hrs. (no separate applied courses) plus 2 electives for an additional 8 hrs. - Music History Req.: 12 hrs (50% if theory req.)
- 8. University of Michigan School of Music:**  
General Ed. Req.: 30 hrs. (25% of 120 required for graduation)  
Theory Req.: 4 semesters for 16 hrs. (4 hrs. are in applied music courses for 25% of the total) plus one elective for an additional 3 hrs. - Music History Req.: 12 hrs. (63% of theory req.)

**9. Northwestern University School of Music:**

General Ed. Req.: 48 sem. hrs. (36% of 132 required for graduation)  
Theory Req.: 4 semesters for 20 hrs. (12 hrs. are in applied theory courses for 60% of the total) - Music History Req.: 16 sem. hrs. (80% of theory req.)

**10. Wheaton Conservatory:**

General Ed. Req.: 34 hrs (27% of 125 required for graduation)  
Theory Req. 5 semesters for 15 hrs. (5 hrs. are in applied theory courses for 33% of the total) History Req.: 17-18 hrs. (20% more than theory req.)

The programs of these institutions were searched primarily for the answers to three questions: 1) What are the General Education requirements of each institution and what percentage does that requirement represent of the hours required for graduation? 2) How much music theory does each school require of all students and, of that requirement, how much is applied theory? 3) How much music history do the programs require and how does that compare to the measure of theory requirements.

Northwestern and Cincinnati represent two extremes where general education requirements are concerned. Northwestern requires that 36% of the hours it requires for graduation be in general education. No other institution in this study required as high a percentage. Cincinnati, by contrast, requires that only 13.4% of the hours required for graduation be devoted to general education. That proved to be the smallest proportion of all of the institutions in this study. On average, the institutions explored here require that 29.9% of their academic credit be devoted to general education coursework.

The numbers clearly indicate that conservatories, in general, require fewer academic hours in music history than they do in music theory. Only Wheaton Conservatory, in this study, requires more hours in music history (i.e. 20% more) than music theory. Northwestern also was high in its music history requirement insofar as the number of hours required there represent 80% of those required in music theory. The average number of hours required in music history at these ten music schools represents 58% of those required in music theory. The percentage of hours required in music history as compared to those required in music theory reduces to 40% if Wheaton and Northwestern are not part of the calculation. Most conservatories, therefore, require students to devote less than half the number of hours they require in music theory to music

history.

All of the conservatories in this study required a least a four-semester introductory sequence in music theory. Most of these institutions listed applied theory as separate courses taken as co-requisites with the required introductory sequence. Only The University of Louisville School of Music did not. The academic credit for the applied courses represented from 25% to 66% of the total academic credit allotted to the introductory courses. Four of these institutions (Northwestern, University of Illinois, University of Colorado and Boston University) required that 50% or more of the academic credit during the introductory sequence be devoted to applied theory. The average number of semester hours devoted to applied theory for the ten institutions in this study represent 40% of the average total for the introductory sequences in music theory.

All but one of these institutions require one or two additional semesters of theory instruction beyond the initial four. Only Northwestern did not. Most programs require an additional two for a total of six semesters required of all students pursuing a music degree. The additional courses may be prescribed, or they may be elected from required options such as Form and Analysis, Orchestration, Counterpoint and Composition. The average number of semesters required in music theory at these institutions is 5.8.

## EXAMPLE 2

Example 2 contains information about liberal arts institutions that was gathered by web searches and a survey. Again, for reasons of consistency, the example presents all academic credit for all institutions as semester hours even if they function with quarter or unit credits. The thirteen institutions represented here are small having undergraduate enrollments ranging from 800 (Hollins College) to 2200 (Colgate and Middlebury). All offer a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in music. None offers a music degree.



**1. Agnes Scott College (1000 undergraduates)**

Min. and max. sem. hrs in a major: 32 and 52 (25%-40% of 130 req. for graduation) Theory Req.: 3 semesters for 12 hrs. (40% of class time devoted to applied theory) - Music History Req.: 4 semesters for 16 hrs. (133% of theory requirement)

**2. Centre College (1000 undergraduates)**

Min and max. sem. hrs. in a major: 41 and 42 (37%-38% of 111 req. for graduation) - Theory Req.: 3 semesters for 12 hrs. (25% of class time devoted to applied theory) - Music History Req.: 1 semester for 4 hrs. (33% of theory requirement)

**3. Colgate (2200 undergraduates)**

Min. and max. sem. hrs. in a major: 36 and 72 (28%-56% of 128 req. for graduation) - Theory Req.: 2 semesters for 8 hrs (25% of class time devoted to applied theory) - Music History Req.: 2 semesters for 8 hrs. (100% of theory requirement)

**4. Connecticut College (1800 undergraduates)**

Min. and max. sem. hrs. in a major: 32 and 64 (25%-50% of 128 req. for graduation) - Theory Req.: 5 semesters for 20 hrs. (40% of class time devoted to applied theory) - Music History Req.: 4 semesters for 16 hrs (80% of theory requirement)

**5. Davidson College (1600 undergraduates)**

Min. and max. sem. hrs. in a major: 30 and 60 (23%-47% of 128 req. for graduation) - Theory Req.: 3 semesters for 9 hrs. (0% of class time devoted to applied theory) - Music History Req.: 4 semesters for 12 hrs. (133% of theory requirement)

**6. Earlham College (1200 undergraduates)**

Min. and max. sem. hrs. in a major: 34 and 58 (28%-48% of 122 req. for graduation) - Theory Req.: 3 semesters for 9 hrs. (10% of class time devoted to applied theory) - Music History Req.: 4 semesters for 12 hrs (133% of theory requirement)

**7. Franklin and Marshall (1860 undergraduates)**

Min. and max. sem. hrs. in a major: 40 and 56 (31%-44% of 128 req. for graduation) - Theory Req.: 4 semesters for 20 hrs. (4 hrs. in applied theory courses during first two semesters for 33% of class time) - Music History Req.: 3 semesters for 12 hrs. (60% of theory requirement)

**8. Grinnell College (1400 undergraduates)**

Min. and max. sem. hrs. in a major: 32 and 48 (26%-39% of 124 req. for graduation) - Theory Req.: 2 semesters for 10 hrs. (2 hrs. in applied theory for 20% of the total) - Music History Req.: 3 semesters for 12 hrs. (120% of theory requirement)

**9. Hollins College (800 undergraduates)**

Min. and max. sem. hrs. in a major: 32 and 52 (25%-41% of 128 req. for graduation) - Theory Req.: 4 semesters for 16 hrs. (15% of class time devoted to applied theory) - Music History Req.: 2 semesters for 8 hrs. (50% of theory requirement)

**10. Macalester College (1800 undergraduates)**

Min. and max. sem. hrs. in a major: 44 and 60 (34%-47% of 128 req. for graduation) - Theory Req.: 4 semesters for 16 hrs. (25% of class time devoted to applied theory) - Music History Req.: 4 semesters for 16 hrs. (100% of theory requirement)

**11. Middlebury College (2200 undergraduates)**

Min and max. sem. hrs. in a major: 40 and 72 (28%-50% of 144 req. for graduation) - Theory Req.: 4 semesters for 16 hrs. (30% of class time devoted to applied theory) - Music History Req.: 3 semesters for 12 hrs. (75% of theory requirement)

**12. Mount Holyoke College (2100 undergraduates)**

Min. and max. sem. hrs. in a major: 32 and 68 (25%-53% of 128 req. for graduation) - Theory Req.: 4 semesters for 16 hrs. (25% of class time devoted to applied theory) - Music History Req.: 3 semesters for 12 hrs. (75% of theory requirement)

**13. Swarthmore (1350 undergraduates)**

Min. and max. sem. hrs in a major: 40 and 48 (31%-38% of 128 req. for graduation) - Theory Req.: 5 semesters for 20 hrs. (33% of class time devoted to applied theory for first four semesters) - Music History Req.: 4 semesters for 16 hrs. (80% of theory requirement)

The average number of semester hours required for graduation at these thirteen institutions is 127.3 which is not significantly different than the average 126.5 hours required at the ten conservatories listed in Example 1. However, the average minimum number of hours students must take in a major discipline represents 28.1% of the average number of hours required to graduate, and the average maximum number of hours that students can take in a major discipline represents 44.8% of the average number of hours required for graduation. Students may, therefore, spend anywhere between 71.9% and 55.2% of their semester hours in coursework outside of their major as compared to conservatory students who must take, on average, only 29.9% of their semester hours in coursework outside of their major. The curricula for music majors at liberal arts institutions generally require that students take more than the minimum hours required. Even if the students take the maximum number of hours available in their major, the average (44.8% of their academic hours) that that would represent is significantly less than the average (70.1%) that students of music schools may take in courses within their major discipline of music.

The number of semesters required in music theory at these thirteen liberal arts institutions ranges from two (Colgate and Grinnell) to five (Connecticut and Swarthmore). Students at Grinnell, however, may, in lieu of a second semester of harmonic theory, elect Form

and Analysis, Composition or Electronic Music as their second semester of required theory. Presumably, therefore, some students could have only a one-semester introduction to the basic principles of harmonic theory. Five of the remaining institutions require four semesters of music theory and four require only three. The average number of semesters required at these institutions is, therefore, 3.5, which represents only 60% of the average 5.8 semesters required at schools of music.

The average number of semester hours required in music theory at these thirteen liberal arts institutions was 14.2. The average number of semester hours required in music theory at the ten conservatories in this study was 21.8. Liberal arts institutions, therefore, require, on average, only 65% of the average number of hours required at schools of music. Whether computed by semesters or by semester hours, therefore, liberal arts students spend less than two-thirds of their time studying music theory when compared to their conservatory counterparts.

Only Franklin and Marshall and Swarthmore offer applied theory in courses that are listed separately from their academic theory courses. All others teach applied theory as an integral part of their academic theory courses, although most isolate the time devoted to aural and keyboard skills as laboratory time. The amount of class time devoted to applied theory skills, according to the survey responses, ranges from 0% (Davidson) and 40% (Agnes Scott and Connecticut College). The average percentage of class time devoted to applied theory is 24.7%. The average improves to 26.8% if the calculation does not include the response from Davidson. (The survey response from Davidson of 0% of class time devoted to aural skills was interesting insofar as its web site lists two semesters of aural skills for no credit.) Either way, the percentage of class time devoted to applied skills represents less than that of music schools which devote an average 40% of academic credit for their introductory sequence to applied theory. The class time devoted to aural and keyboard skills at liberal arts institutions would represent an average of approximately three semester hours (24.7% of the average twelve hours of required theory). The average number of hours at music schools devoted to aural and keyboard skills, by contrast, appears to be approximately 8.7 (40% of the average 21.8 hours of required theory). Overall, therefore, students in liberal arts institutions spend, on average, less than half the amount of time that conservatory students spend on applied theory skills.

The number of semester hours required in music history at these thirteen liberal arts colleges ranges from four (Centre College) to sixteen (Agnes Scott, Connecticut, Macalester and Swarthmore) which represents from 33% to 133% of the hours required in music theory. Only three institutions (Centre, Franklin and Marshall, and Hollins) required in music history less than 75% of what they required in music theory. The average number of hours required in music history for the other nine is 14.7 as compared to an average 15.1 hours in music theory (97.4% of the hours required in music theory—roughly equal). The average number of hours required in music history for all thirteen institutions was twelve, which compares favorably with the number of hours required at music schools where the average was 11.8 hours. At the liberal arts institutions, those twelve hours represent 85% of the overall average of 14.2 hours required in music theory. The average of 11.8 hours at the conservatory, however, represents only 54% of the average of 21.8 hours required in music theory. While the amount of time devoted to music history may equate roughly at both kinds of institutions, it does appear that music schools require approximately half in music history what they require in music theory, and liberal arts institutions appear to favor, generally, a somewhat more balanced approach to the two disciplines.

Responses to the questions in the e-mail survey that inquired about the respective theory programs support the observations and conclusions above. Many of the survey questions, however, addressed issues other than those mentioned above. What follows are brief analysis of responses to some of those questions.

### EXAMPLE 3

Questions one and two in Example 3 were asked in an attempt to probe somewhat the academic content in the courses that are a part of the required theory sequences. The responses to question one indicate that instructors spend slightly more time overall teaching part-writing skills than they do analytical skills. It is probable that the same balance exists in conservatories. All respondents indicated that they believed themselves to be primarily traditional in their approach to the subject matter as defined in question two. However, six of the thirteen institutions indicated that they believed that composition exercises not based on traditional principles of part-writing fell outside of the definition, and they entered composition

in the “other” column of question one as an important component of their program. Two institutions, Earlham and Centre, indicated that world music and popular music topics stood outside tradition as important components of their theory program. In spite of the overwhelming assertion on the part of the respondents that they consider themselves to be traditionalists, it appears as if some experimentation does take place, especially in the arena of “free” composition.

### Example 3: Content within the Required Sequence

1. On average, what percentage of instruction time does your department devote to the development of analytical or part-writing skills in your required theory sequence?  
Analytical skills:  
Part-writing skills:  
Other:
2. Do you consider the instruction in your required theory sequence to be primarily “traditional” (i.e. primarily devoted to tonal theory emphasizing part-writing, aural and analysis skills with some post-tonal theory introduced mostly near the end)?
3. Does your department introduce elements of reductive analysis in its required theory sequence? If so, do you consider it to be:
  - a. Fundamental to the subject matter?
  - b. Incidental to the subject matter?
4. Does your department introduce set theory into its required theory sequence? If so, do you consider it to be:
  - a. Fundamental to the subject matter?
  - b. Incidental to the subject matter?

Questions three and four of Example 3 represent an attempt to probe more deeply into the collective perception of traditional instruction. All but one of the thirteen respondents (91%) indicated that they introduced principles of reductive analysis into the subject matter of their beginning theory courses, and all but two of those believed them to be fundamental to their teaching of tonal theory. Nine of the respondents (69%) indicated, in question four, that they introduced set theory into their required theory sequence, and two of those indicated that it was fundamental to their theory program. The others believed it to be fundamental only to the teaching of some post-tonal music. In all probability, these statistics would have been dramatically lower just thirty years ago. Despite the prevailing sentiment of traditionalism, therefore, it appears as if the collective notion as to what constitutes tradition is evolving.

#### Example 4: Courses Outside of the Required Sequence

1. Does your department offer for undergraduates a semester-long course (or more) in post-tonal theory that is independent of the required sequence? If so, is it an elective only or do you require it of some majors? How many hours of academic credit does it offer?
2. Does your department offer for undergraduates a semester-long course (or more) in formal analysis that is independent of your required sequence? If so, is it an elective only or do you require it of some majors? How many hours of academic credit does it offer?
3. Does your department offer for undergraduates a semester-long course (or more) in orchestration that is independent of the required sequence? If so, is it an elective only or do you require it of some majors? How many hours of academic credit does it offer?
4. Please itemize any other upper-level theory electives that your department offers:

The questions in Example 4 ask about departmental offerings outside of a required introductory sequence. The survey asked specifically about upper-level courses in Post-Tonal Theory, Form, and Orchestration in questions one, two and three. Only three (Grinnell, Franklin and Marshall, and Mt. Holyoke) of the respondents (23%) indicated that they have an upper-level course in post-tonal theory, and only one of those (Mt. Holyoke) indicated that it was required of all music majors. Similarly, only three of the respondents (Agnes Scott, Colgate, and Grinnell) indicated that they offer an upper-level course in the analysis of form. None of those require it, but all indicated that it was a required option for some music majors. Most respondents indicated that they believe that topics related to post-tonal theory and form were covered adequately in their required introductory sequence. Nine of the institutions (69%) offer Orchestration, but only Agnes Scott considered it to be a required option for some majors. In response to item four of Example 4, five institutions (38%) indicated that they offer Composition as an upper level elective. Only three respondents (Davidson, Grinnell, and Franklin and Marshall) indicated that they offer Counterpoint, and, similarly, only three (Grinnell, Earlham, and Agnes Scott) indicated that they offer Electronic Music as an elective. Only one institution, Grinnell, offers all of these options. Overall, opportunities for upper-level instruction in theoretical topics appear to be more limited than at most schools of music where the topics mentioned here are not only more likely to be available but also more likely, especially in the case of form and

orchestration, to be required.

### Example 5: Environment and Potential

1. Approximately, how many liberal arts undergraduates studying within your department have declared music as their major discipline?  
Approximately, what percentage of the students taking classes within your department does that represent?
2. Within the past five years, how many of your graduates do you know of that have chosen to:
  - a) Pursue graduate studies in music?
  - b) Pursue professional careers in music?

The questions in Example 5 represent an attempt to gain insight into the instructional environment for music in liberal arts institutions and into the potential of their graduates. The responses to question one indicate that these institutions may have anywhere between eight (Swarthmore) and thirty-five (Connecticut) declared music majors at any one time. The average was nineteen music majors. Seven of the respondents (54%) indicated that they believe that music majors represented less than 10% of the students they teach. The rest indicated that they believe music majors represented 10% to 20% of the students they teach. In stark contrast with conservatories, it is clear, therefore, that the vast majority of students matriculating in the music departments of liberal arts institutions are non-music majors. Nevertheless, five of the respondents (38%) submitted numbers indicating that some 20% to 30% of their music major graduates do proceed on to graduate programs or to other professional careers in music. The other institutions offered smaller statistics, but, whatever the number, it appears, based on these responses, that the programs are, as they exist, capable of producing successful professionals.

A clear and consistent image did not emerge from this study concerning the relative preparedness of liberal arts graduates and their potential to compete equally with their music school counterparts in graduate studies or other professional pursuits. The data suggest clearly that music school students have an advantage in applied disciplines, including applied theory, insofar as they spend more time with those disciplines. The advantage may diminish somewhat where academic theory is concerned. Preliminary data suggest that liberal arts students may spend, on average, more class

time during the course of a semester addressing issues of academic theory than their professional school counterparts during the introductory sequence. However, they also spend, on average, fewer semesters with it. Liberal arts students may have an advantage when it comes to historical studies insofar as they spend, on average, an equal or greater amount of time in them in an atmosphere that is more comprehensively academic. Liberal arts students, in general, may not have as many opportunities to experience instruction in upper-level theory courses, but, presumably, those students who are serious about pursuing graduate studies do take whatever is available to them, and they should be competently prepared to access whatever they may need. It appears, from the survey responses, that significant numbers of students trained in liberal arts institutions do succeed in graduate school as well as in other professional pursuits.

This study is, admittedly, incomplete. Web searches of institutions that did not respond to the survey suggest that the percentages emerging in the responses from those that did are representative. However, a pool of hard data from more than thirteen institutions will be needed to confirm that assertion. Questions addressing the content of liberal arts theory programs were not submitted to conservatories as well, and valid assessments of the relative degree of preparation of liberal arts students would require that those questions be asked. Syllabi need to be compared, and class time devoted to various topics ought to be contrasted. Alternative pedagogical approaches may compensate for the smaller amount of time required in the study of music theory at liberal arts institutions. It is not clear from this study whether that is, or is not, the case. Also, case studies of the graduates of both kinds of institutions and their success, or lack of same, in graduate programs or other professional pursuits would shed much light on student preparation. Researchers should, of course, continue to assess the contribution that the study of music theory makes to the success, or lack of it, encountered by students from all kinds of institutions. This study was limited to inquiries of small private liberal arts institutions and conservatories, but it could be instructive as well to examine theory programs as they exist in large liberal arts institutions.

One observation emerges, however, that may require some attention by liberal arts institutions collectively. The variation in the introductory theory requirements revealed in this study of liberal



arts programs was surprising and somewhat disconcerting. A degree of variation should probably exist between the programs of all institutions. All conservatories, however, seem to agree that it takes a minimum of four semesters to introduce their students adequately to the discipline of music theory, and most of them require upper-level courses in addition to the introductory sequence. The variation of one to five semesters for an introductory sequence without additional requirements, such as this study revealed in liberal arts programs, leads to a mixed image as to the relative preparedness of liberal arts graduates in music theory. Perhaps conversations ought to take place within the liberal arts community concerning a basic minimum standard where music theory is concerned. As far as this author is concerned, let the studies and the conversations proceed.