

# Effect of Evaluating a Recitals Course

## *Increasing Self-Efficacy in Undergraduate Music Majors*

### INTRODUCTION

Course evaluations are a major part of curriculum development at the university level. It is up to each institution to decide how to use the information they collect. At some universities the information is made available to all students to help them decide whether or not to take a course while others use them to decide tenure for professors. This study explores evaluation “non-traditional” courses. Is it possible to evaluate a course that doesn’t meet all together? Without clear student and lecturer roles, what can we infer from this data? This report seeks to discover whether or not the student’s feeling of efficacy will increase with the knowledge that they will fill out an evaluation at the end of the semester.

The literature on this subject covers many different aspects of course evaluation administration. Some explore the method of distribution and how that can affect the results.<sup>1</sup> Others involve researchers creating a course evaluation.<sup>2</sup> A Swedish study was performed in order to gain more knowledge about the students’

perception of course evaluations at the university.<sup>3</sup> A study by DiClementi found that a student’s classroom behavior and overall experience are positively affected by student input in the course.<sup>4</sup>

This project was completed in the fall of 2008 as part of an introductory research course. The hope is that this data will help provide administrators with the information they need to bring this specific course to its full potential. The data has already been distributed to the instructor as well as other faculty members who have expressed interest in the course. There are many people trying to understand the best way to accomplish the objectives of the course and help undergraduate students to realize its purpose as well.

### BACKGROUND/METHODS

All University of Kansas undergraduate students pursuing a Bachelor’s degree of Music or Fine Arts with a music emphasis take four semesters of a performance laboratory course. The course is listed in the University of Kansas undergraduate catalog as REC (recitals) 100. It is

referred to this way colloquially and throughout this report. While the requirements for the course have changed over time, these are the current guidelines.

The REC 100 course meets on Tuesday/Thursday at 10:00A.M. Anyone from the department can apply to perform during these class periods. Students in the course must attend ten of these “student recitals.” In addition, students must attend eight concerts outside of this class time. These happen almost exclusively in the evenings. Four of those eight must be KU ensemble concerts. The other four should be faculty or visiting artist recitals. Students are provided a list of these types of performances with corresponding dates and times. The list is updated on Blackboard throughout the semester.

Since all degree programs in the music department have a performance aspect to them, all music students participate in the university’s ensembles. Students are not allowed to receive credit for concerts in which their ensemble performs. Credit can be given for professional performances at the discretion of the course supervisor. Attendance is taken using recital monitors who are employed by the department. In addition to other responsibilities, they distribute slips of paper for students to fill out and return at the end of the concert. At this time, the course is taken for zero credit but has also been a half credit. Students receive an S (satisfactory) if they complete the requirements or a U (unsatisfactory) if they fail to complete the requirements.

David Bushouse is the current instructor of the course. He helped to provide background information about this course at KU. Historically, the course was not always required and was held in the afternoons. Professor Bushouse believes that the morning time on Tuesday/Thursday

has helped to increase attendance. Though it was not required, there have been a variety of techniques used to increase attendance. Also, for awhile, attendance was linked to a student’s applied lesson grade. Previously, standard KU course evaluations were distributed but this practice has been eliminated in recent years. According to Professor Bushouse, administrators in the Department of Music & Dance felt that the questions did not glean the desired information regarding the course.

The unique design of the course has been speculated as the reason for a lack of course evaluation. There are two reasons for this: getting that many people together could pose to be tricky and students might have trouble evaluating the instructor. Most of the questions on KU’s evaluation are focused on the students’ interaction with the teacher. However, it is quite possible to complete all four semesters of REC 100 and only see the teacher on the first day when the syllabus is handed out. Traditionally his role is to decide whether or not a concert outside of KU can be counted for credit and submit final grades.

This study was conducted by two undergraduate music majors due to negative perceptions voiced by large numbers of students about the course. Lacking ways to express specific frustrations or new ideas, we supplied a survey to serve as an alternative course evaluation. The website, [surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com) was used to format and distribute the survey. We used the standard course evaluation provided by KU as a base for our questions. We received permission from the department chair to distribute the link through an e-mail to all undergraduate music majors.

There were three components to the survey: a) Demographics b) Pilot Survey and c) Research Questions. The demographics section included

questions about major and year in school as well as the number of semesters they completed the course and number of semesters incomplete. The pilot survey was comprised of questions based on KU's evaluations and questions specific to the course that could potentially be reinstated for the department to gather information about the course in subsequent semesters. The final section asked about the facilitation of the course and whether or not the subject continued to attend concerts after completing all four semesters of the course. Additionally, students were offered two opportunities to comment about their experience or thoughts regarding the course.

## **RESULTS DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to gather student opinions on the course and to examine the effect of a course evaluation on students' perception of this course. Just under 50% responded with agree or strongly agree when asked if they thought a course evaluation would affect the course. The responses to the final statement suggest that the implementation of a course evaluation would be a positive change to the course. The students' individual comments also suggest some common suggestions and difficulties in the implementation of the course.

Out of the 133 undergraduate students who participated in the study, ten percent responded that they received an "unsatisfactory" grade on the course at least once. Students provided comments that were similar in nature ranging from suggested improvements, specific issues they had encountered, purpose of the course, communication between students and instructor as well as their opinion about the use of a course evaluation. There were very few comments that

contradicted one another. Out of the sixty-nine comments collected, only three offered no complaints or suggestions. In the remaining sixty-six, no suggestion or complaint was voiced only once. Because multiple students agree upon potential changes for the betterment of the course it is important that they have a medium to express those ideas and that those ideas are heard by administrators.

When examining comments from people who disagreed that a course evaluation would improve the course, it is clear that most of them believe the administration does not value the input of students. Out of the eleven comments about course evaluations, eight were negative. It is important to note that this attitude is present among students and while it's not the majority of people, that perception is still present.

All of the questions on the pilot survey used the scale mentioned above going from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A numerical value was assigned to each of these. 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree. These numbers are used to calculate the mean and standard deviation. The highest standard deviation is 1.36 for the number of semesters enrolled. There were a couple individuals that received an unsatisfactory grade for several semesters. The mean for this question was 2.69 showing that most people taking the survey were in their third semester of the course or most likely sophomores.

Part of the course purpose is to instill the habit of concert attendance so that students will continue to attend even after completing all four semesters. The question asked, "If you have completed your required four semesters: Approximately how many times per semester do you attend recitals you are not required to attend?" The options given were

0-2, 3-5, 6-8, 8-10 and 11 or more. The mean is right in between 0-2 and 3-5. The standard deviation is 1.02. Fifty-three of the 133 people who took the survey answered this question. It is certain that some people didn't read the entire question and answered even though they were not done with REC 100. There are more answers for that question than there were upperclassmen and as it takes two years to complete, no freshmen or sophomores should have answered the question.

Overall this study suggests that there is a connection between student's perceptions of the course and the implementation of a course evaluation. It also suggests that there are ways that the course itself can be improved upon. The fact that students had opinions at all indicates the need

for a medium that students can use to express their feelings about this course.

A replication of this project could include some minor changes to questions in order to increase clarity and accurately represent the student voice. The evaluation could be longer and more specific. Comments indicated that some questions which were tricky to answer accurately. Also, the method of distribution is research-based and ensures privacy for all students. Students may be more inclined to fill out a course evaluation that will actually be submitted to the university rather than simply for research. As stated in the introduction, hopefully this data will be able help administrators decide what is best for this course and the music majors at the University of Kansas.

*Table 1. Means and standard deviations for each questionnaire item*

	Items	M	sd
3a	Semesters enrolled	2.69	1.36
4a	Semesters completed	2.68	1.19
4a	Semesters received an incomplete	0.31	0.81
1b	Course purpose being met	3.20	1.07
2b	Variety of events provided	3.72	0.95
3b	Related to my major	3.36	1.07
4b	Honest effort to learn	3.22	1.04
5b	Easy to complete	3.02	1.23
1c	Know who to contact about course	3.74	1.05
2c	Successful communication of requirements	3.78	0.84
4c	Course evaluation will effect the course	3.33	1.19

## END NOTES

1. Youmans, R.J., and B.D. Lee. "Fudging the numbers: distributing chocolate influences student evaluations of an undergraduate course." *Teaching of Psychology* 32.4 (2007): 245-247.
2. Gaspar, M.F. "A questionnaire for listening to students' voices in the assessment of teaching quality in a classical medical school." *Assesment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 33 (2008): 445-453.
3. Edstrom, K. "Doing course evaluation as if learning matters most." *Higher Education Research & Development* 27.2 (2008): 95-106.
4. DiClementi, J.D., and M.M Handelsman. "Empowering students: class-generated course rules." *Teaching of Psychology* 32.1 (2005): n.p..