

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC

Characteristics of NASM Standards

- NASM understands that the highest standards in the field of music are set by the specific works of excellence in the various specializations of musical endeavor: we have standards because we have art, not art because we have standards.
- The NASM standards text represents a synthesis of current thought about education and professional training in music. The text has been approved by over 585 institutional members of NASM following broad consultation in the field, and therefore represents a national consensus.
- The standards are used in the peer review process of NASM accreditation and for many other purposes by the music and education professions.
- The standards are also intended to provide the public at large with a comprehensive document outlining the attributes of education and training programs in music.
- These attributes are presented as a framework within which each institution develops the specifics of its unique program. *In no case should “standards” be construed as indicating standardization.*
- The standards deal with disciplinary content, student competencies and institutional conditions for education and training.
- The standards are expressed in terms of competencies and functions, not in terms of methods, techniques, or approaches. For example, with regard to instructional programs, the standards address common bodies of knowledge and skills rather than common bodies of process or procedure.
- Under this principle, music schools and departments are expected to create their own methods, approaches, and techniques. To use a golf analogy, “the standards establish par; they do not require a specific club, shoe, glove, ball, tee, or umbrella choices or endorse the methods of any particular golf professional.”
- The standards are thresholds. They are not goals for ultimates in and of themselves, but establish the conditions and foundations for reaching for the ultimate in each educational institution. Standards are the basis from which NASM serves each institution’s efforts to move farther beyond the threshold each day.
- NASM standards are applied consistent with mission, goals, size, scope, and curricular offerings. Most often, there are no standard answers regarding compliance with the standards, even for similar sizes and types of institutions. Each music school or department will have a specific set of answers regarding compliance with the standards based on

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specific aspirations, approaches, and conditions. This diversity is a healthy reflection of creativity at work in pursuing common national goals for education and training as outlined in the standards.

- The standards promote respect for essential relationships between the parts and wholes of programs in schools. Examples are the critical relationships between operational matters such as governance and resource allocations on curriculum, instruction, and student achievement. And, the relationships of various musical specializations such as performance, composition, history, analysis through the development of student competencies.
- The standards are written to accommodate and encourage the development of new programs, ideas, methods, and organizational structures.
- By focusing on *what* rather than *how* and by encouraging creative applications, the standards both reflect and promote institutional commitments to student learning and disciplinary excellence.
- The standards encourage music schools and departments to look at their instructional programs not only in terms of what they produce at graduation, but for the foundations they establish for lifelong artistic and intellectual maturity.

For further information:

- *NASM Handbook*, Standards and Guidelines for Accredited Institutional Membership
- *NASM Sourcebook for Futures Planning — Supplement IV, Creating Your Self-Study*, Part III, “NASM Standards, Institutional Conclusions”

To pose questions or obtain more information about NASM, please contact:

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC

11250 Roger Bacon Drive, Suite 21
Reston, VA 20190

Telephone: 703-437-0700 — Fax: 703-437-6312

E-mail: info@arts-accredit.org

Web Site: <http://nasm.arts-accredit.org>