



Council for Christian Colleges & Universities

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC CENTER

Nashville, Tennessee

MARCH 2017 EVALUATION STUDENT ACADEMIC PROGRAMS COMMISSION



*Authored by Bill Hackett, Deb Harless, & Kathy Storm
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SAPC Commission Members

Dr. Kathleen Storm

Associate Provost for Faculty Development
Whitworth University (WA)

Dr. William Hackett

Provost
Southeastern University (FL)

Debra Harless

Executive Vice President and Provost
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Wheaton College (IL)

Mr. Ken Gilson

Dean of Academic Records & Institutional
Research
Biola University (CA)

CCCU Contemporary Music Center in Nashville:

Student Academic Programs Commission Review, March 2017

Review team: Deb Harless, Provost, Bethel University
Bill Hackett, Provost, Southeastern University
Kathy Storm, Associate Provost, Whitworth University

I. Introduction: Overview of SAPC visit

1. The program seems to have a very committed staff who love what they do and those with whom they work—both fellow staff, students, and alumni. Several of the staff that have been with the program since its early years. The program is its 32nd semester in operation. The first 18 semesters of the program took place at the Martha's Vineyard facility and focused on songwriting. Then, with the need and desire to change the location, the Contemporary Music Center (CMC) moved to its current location in Nashville and revised its program and developed three tracks—an Artist Track, a Business Track, and a Technical Track.
2. The program works to continually revise itself in order to remain contemporary. The SAPC team felt that the program is on a par with a well thought out apprenticeship program for students interested in going into the three various areas of the music industry as expressed through the three tracks.
3. Currently the CMC staff is considering two new tracks—a Players track and a Producers track. Both of these seem very appropriate for the current market.

II. Program Mission and History

1. Mission

The mission of the Contemporary Music Center is to equip students for careers in the music industry as Christ-followers. This supports the overall mission of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities to support Christ-centered higher education as an agent of redemptive change in our world.

2. Objectives

The objectives and goals of the CMC are to help students:

- a. Identify their natural gifting and encourage them to, “get into what you’re good at and out of what you’re not.”
- b. Process their success; the most gifted are often the most challenged. It is anti-culture to pursue less of me and more of Christ.
- c. Process their failure; understanding that the measure of disappointment in life is the distance between dreams and reality and that God may have called them to be a foot rather than a hand (1 Corinthians 12:21).

3. Observations

- a. The program certainly displays a model of relevance and success over the years since its inception.
- b. The staff and program are highly regarded by alumni and current students. It is seen as a life changing experience.

4. Commendations

- a. Both alumni and students expressed their appreciation for the hands-on experiences they are obtaining in all three tracks. Experiential learning seems to be a vital mainstay of the program.
- b. Students expressed their appreciation for the opportunities to connect with those in the industry and their opportunity to network with professionals and alumni in the Nashville area.

5. Recommendations

- a. We encourage the CMC staff to not be discouraged by the continual challenge and effort it takes to

stay contemporary and relevant. The semester-by-semester evaluation that already occurs on the part of the staff is certainly a tool to make this happen.

- b. We encourage the staff to continue to stay true to the mission and to work to avoid mission drift.
- c. The staff should always work to mentor and train up those that can replace them if and when they leave.
- d. We strongly recommend establishing an Advisory Board that can offer good counsel and oversight to the program and that would also be committed to give and raise financial support that could advance the program. This Board could be made up of both those in the Nashville area and in other parts of the country. One could use alumni on the Board who truly love the program, and it is very evident that there is a great appreciation for CMC on the part of the alumni that were interviewed by the SAPC team. One could also use CCCU faculty as well.

III. Program Leadership

1. Observations

- a. Warren Pettit is a strategic and gifted leader. After moving the program from Martha's Vineyard to Nashville, he has established a very clear and strategic focus for the program. It seeks to prepare students to serve effectively in a variety of professional capacities within the music industry. The program has developed an expertise in preparing students for careers related to all aspects of the production of live musical events. Under his leadership the program has created three tracks of study (i.e., business, artist, and technical) that provide outstanding real world experience for students and that lead to significant employment opportunities for program alumni.
- b. Warren has built a highly effective team. The faculty bring significant expertise and industry experience to each of the tracks. The staff are highly capable members of the team and significantly contribute to the nature of the student experience. Warren has led and mentored the faculty and staff in ways that have resulted in extraordinarily high morale and commitment to the mission of the program.
- c. Current students and alumni consistently speak to Warren's significant impact in their lives. Alumni referenced specific things they'd learned from Warren's lectures and the ways he has spoken into their lives.

2. Commendations

- a. Several alumni noted how Warren helps them to keep their moral compass in challenging situations. They continue to seek him out for mentoring and wise counsel.
- b. It is clear that there's a culture of generosity within the program that is a reflection of Warren's leadership. This generous spirit is part of the fabric of the program and is reflected in how the staff and students interact, the ways students support one another in their work, the availability of the facility to alumni, and the ways the alumni support the program.

3. Recommendations

Warren is a remarkable leader. It will be important to continue to articulate the mission, key objectives, and core values of the program to ensure that they define the nature of the program into the future.

IV. Academic and Experiential Learning

1. Observations

- a. The program objectives are clearly stated. The courses and experiential learning opportunities are strategically and thoroughly designed in ways to help students meet the program objectives.
- b. The program provides extraordinary hands-on learning opportunities in which students develop the knowledge, skills, and personal capacities necessary to succeed in various professions within the

music industry. Experiential learning is the primary method of learning in this program. Students are expected to function in key roles within the business, artist, or technology track throughout the semester as students write and perform original songs, manage the business aspects of the artists in the program, and provide all of the technical support for weekly concerts that are open to the public. Students are expected to complete a significant amount of work on a weekly basis. The program culminates with a several-day tour in which students perform original compositions, organize and implement the tour, and perform all of the functions necessary to complete a successful tour.

- c. The faculty bring significant professional expertise to mentoring students through the experiential learning experiences that are at the heart of this program.
- d. The faculty are well connected to the changing needs of the contemporary music industry through their extensive professional networks. Alumni from the program are employed throughout the music industry and maintain strong connections to the program. They provide opportunities for students and offer input into the program.
- e. The program is very nimble in its ability to integrate marketplace feedback into the curriculum in order to prepare students who will be outstanding professionals.
- f. It is clear from the student and alumni feedback that the program challenges and supports them in wrestling with what it means to live out their faith.

2. Commendations

- a. This program provides an educational experience that cannot be replicated on our campuses. Students are prepared for places of meaningful service in the music industry through engaging them in a demanding and marketplace oriented program in a location that is at the center of the contemporary music touring industry.
- b. Students are also invited to think about what it looks like to live a life of integrity that is anchored in their personal faith commitment.
- c. There is a significant number of alumni who are well employed in the music industry in Nashville. Alumni are now in positions to hire other alumni. The CMC is becoming known for the talent and character of its students. The generous spirit that characterizes the program is visible in how program faculty and staff and alumni support and care for one another.
- d. The alumni are very articulate about how the program impacted the trajectory of their lives, including their careers. They are highly loyal to the staff, the program, and the new groups of students.

3. Recommendations

- a. While the program outcomes are clearly stated, it would be helpful for the staff to review the objectives for each course and to map how those course objectives contribute to the overall program objectives.
- b. It would also be helpful to map how the experiential learning activities and other requirements for each course map to the course objectives.
- c. We recommend that course objectives are framed as “Intended Learning Outcomes” to match the language used by the Southern Association of Schools’ Commission on Colleges as the regional accreditor for colleges and universities in this area. We also recommend that the intended learning outcomes for each course focus on the knowledge, skills, and personal capacities and competencies that the students will demonstrate by the end of the course.
- d. It could be very beneficial for CCCU faculty institutes to be made available to the faculty in this program. Given that Natalie and Brian come out of the professional music world, they may find the CCCU faculty oriented programs particularly interesting in their professional development.
- e. The focus on faith development is specifically addressed in the Faith, Music, and Culture course. It is also woven throughout the program and in the relationships between the staff and students. It

could be helpful to ask students to write a reflection at some point during the program on how the program is impacting their understanding of what it means to live their faith in the remarkable and challenging world of the contemporary music industry.

V. Student Development and Community Life

1. Observations

- a. There is a widely-recognized ethos of independence and individual responsibility on the part of the students that permeates the program. Apartment-style living contributes to this sense of independence.
- b. Visits with musicians are examples of efforts made to introduce students to the culture of the entertainment industry and help keep students from becoming an insular community.
- c. Even with the ethos of independence, there are also regular efforts made to build community (e.g., weekly community meetings).
- d. Materials, some provided by the CMC and some by the CCCU, offer clear and informative statements of policy, orientation to the program, and guidelines promoting safety in areas such as emergencies, sexual harassment, etc.

2. Commendations

- a. Students value the ethos of personal responsibility that governs the program, and see that independence as appropriate to their upper division status and to the transitional nature of this professional experience. They also recognize that it is independence within limits; as one alumnus said, “They wouldn’t let us burn ourselves.”
- b. Residence life staff, both formal (John) and informal (Jenny), provide a very helpful ethos of health and support. They also offer the benefit of years of experience with the program and can anticipate stages of student need over the course of the semester. It is clear that having people trained in student development who are not themselves musicians offers students a healthy, nonjudgmental place to go with personal concerns.
- c. Just as the program is known for offering independence, it is also known for safety in times of failure. This ethos, conveyed by Warren and throughout the staff, makes it possible in a very competitive industry to face limitations and learn from them.

3. Recommendations

- a. While most students value the independence of their environment, it seems that there are occasional students for whom the adjustment is a precipitous one. There was a time when peer leadership roles were used to foster an additional layer of support. It is possible that there could again be some advantage to a peer leader or two—particularly since John is not living on site (and even though he’s not too far away). The peer leader may be able to help informally keep building community and may become aware of potential issues before they would reach a staff person.
- b. While assessment results generally reveal high marks for the CMC in virtually every area, there is slightly less recognition that students have been helped relating to different people than is the case in other Best Semester programs. Possible experiences that could enhance this include: more regular (and required) work experiences off-site or a required service-learning experience.

VI. Christian Faith Integration and Christian Formation

a. Observations

- a. Students and staff all affirm that Christian faith is integrated throughout the various features of the CMC program—through classes and community gatherings. There is widespread affirmation that this integration is meaningful and important, especially when entering an industry where there may be multiple challenges to faith and values.

- b. As alumni articulated, faith integration takes the form of vocational discussions, emphasis on qualities of character, commitment to service and aspirations of excellence.

b. Commendations

- a. Discussions of faith are meaningful and real--inviting in conversations of value. The discussion observed by the SAPC team did not succumb to jargon or authoritarianism or barriers that would be alienating. For example, while Warren's course included presentation on matters of relevance to faith, the discussion was winsome and inclusive.
- b. It is impressive that faith is clearly presented as a natural and important part of each facet of life and experience, rather than as a stand-alone, Sunday-only commitment. This example is an important one and a valuable message, especially given the challenges faced by people of faith entering the entertainment industry.
- c. The gentle and natural conversations about faith in the classroom are probably especially effective given the range of institutions and backgrounds represented by students in the program.
- d. It is clear that the faith that anchors the program also serves as a moral reference point for alumni of the program. One alumnus in particular cited Warren as her moral anchor in a challenging professional world. That kind of lingering impact is a particularly impressive feature of the people and program at CMC.

c. Recommendations

- a. Faith discussions are a recognized feature of classes, but according to the student surveys for a small number of students, faith does not carry over as easily into community life. The relative independence of choice related to matters of faith outside of class makes sense to a large degree, and is appreciated by most—the emphasis on personal responsibility forces internalization of value. Yet some students describe the lack of structure as challenging; it is such a dramatic change from some from their home institutions. It seems worth discussing whether there are ways of offering additional support for building a faith community without sacrificing independence. (It may be, for example, that students could be offered opportunities for a peer-led small group experience. Again, this is where a peer leader could help give initiative to something that some students want and would find helpful.) During such a brief semester and given busy schedules, this simply may not happen easily without a bit of support.
- b. Faith and learning as a general concept means different things on different campuses, and students may have fairly vague notions about what this looks like. It could be helpful if there were an explicit framework described from the start so that students know what is meant by faith-learning integration at CMC. For example, alumni offered a potential framework that students may find clarifying: vocation/purpose in life, qualities of character, service, commitment to excellence, and keeping doors open to relationships.
- c. It is possible that some of the transfer of faith to matters of professional life could be enhanced through a regular mentoring program. While staff are already working extremely hard and are unlikely to have time for more mentoring than they're doing (which is considerable), it may be that the extensive Nashville alumni network could be of some service playing mentoring roles----even if that needs to take the form of small group rather than individual mentoring.

VII. Program Assessment

1. Observations

- a. The data from student responses on the CCCU Program Evaluation are quite positive. The results compare very favorably with other CCCU BestSemester programs.
- b. The data from student responses on the program's internal evaluation is also quite positive. Students are very positive about the CMC staff, and most notably their professional expertise and

their positive impact on students' lives. Students also emphasize the program's remarkable hands-on learning experiences that allow them to explore their gifts, abilities, faith, and calling.

- c. The staff meets during the summer to review the student evaluations and to make changes based on the data.
- d. The program demonstrates its effectiveness in preparing students for meaningful careers in the contemporary music industry through the success of its students in engaging in satisfying careers within the contemporary music industry.
- e. In addition to the formal assessments of the program, the clear success of alumni within the contemporary music industry in Nashville is strong evidence of the program's success in preparing students to serve effectively and with excellence in the marketplace.

2. Commendations

- a. CMC students have been successful in developing careers in a number of areas within the highly competitive contemporary music industry.
- b. The program is developing a strong network of alumni who seek to employ other CMC students and to build connections for them within the industry.

3. Recommendations

- a. Alumni are clearly connected to the program long after their semester as students. It would be helpful to gather more regular data from alumni who are 1, 5, and 10 years out from the program.
- b. Based on the program evaluation data, there is opportunity to help students to engage more with others who are different from themselves. The program may want to focus more on encouraging students to become involved in service-learning opportunities that are currently available to them.

VIII. Program Health and Sustainability

1. Observations

- a. The CMC staff are giving considerable attention to the long-term health and sustainability of the program. As bright, creative and thoughtful people, they are considering multiple possibilities for enhancing the program's viability.
- b. Major areas of challenge or decision for the future include:
 - 1) Housing. While apartments are currently available across the street, the long-term reliability of such an arrangement is uncertain. In addition, costs of the current arrangement are high, and apartments are beginning to show wear.
 - 2) Storage/practice space. Currently space is rented off-site to provide storage space for equipment—and there is no place to set up and practice staging the culminating tour events.
 - 3) Curriculum. Because the credits of the CMC curriculum, much of which is internship or experienced-based, may not transfer easily toward a traditional major, the courses may be categorized as electives, which doesn't adequately reflect the value of the intensive learning experience that takes place over the course of the semester.
 - 4) Marketing. Although the CMC has tried many creative approaches to marketing, they are doing so with minimal time and resource, and the reach of their efforts has so far been limited.
- c. While in many key respects the CMC is very strong—including quality of the staff, strength of the student educational experience and location of the program—the recruitment of students is an ongoing challenge. It is hard to translate the novel opportunities of the CMC program into the traditional curricula of home institutions. While there are several "partner" programs that send students regularly, the majority of institutions remain largely unaware of the unique apprenticeship opportunities for students in music, communications, business, technology, and related fields.

2. Commendations

- a. The CMC staff deserves kudos for the current strength of the student experience—educational, professional, and personal—that they are providing. Certainly, the number one reason to be hopeful for the program’s future health is its current high level of quality. The staff are bright, caring and deeply connected to the music industry, and students receive invaluable experience that is both practical and challenging.
- b. The ethos of the CMC work environment is healthy and high quality. Every program is as strong as its staff members, who in this case are highly qualified, supportive of each other and hard-working (each person plays several critical roles). At the same time, staff members feel well supported by Warren, whose generosity and flexibility are strong contributors to staff morale.
- c. CMC staff members are thinking creatively and well about the future of the program. This is a group of professional people who are clear about the challenges and active in problem-solving. They are remarkably inventive, resourceful and open to making changes that seem advisable. While the great strength of the educational program for students was evident from the start, perhaps the most surprising feature of the program is its equally strong educational support and personal care for alumni. If student support for the CMC was warm and enthusiastic, alumni appreciation was at least as impressive. The continuing education opportunities, availability of equipment and facilities, ongoing personal support and mentoring, events and career resources make the CMC a home base for alumni in the area. The CMC is also described by alumni as a moral reference point, offering a place for perspective on faith and its implication for life in the entertainment industry.
- d. The move to Nashville has turned out remarkably well for the CMC. The program is flourishing, and the network of available professional opportunities and connections with alumni are impressive.

3. Recommendations

- a. With regard to facilities (residence life, storage, practice/set-up space) issues, we would recommend that the staff prepare a formal proposal for CCCU consideration of a plan to maximize stewardship, stability and student experience for the long-term. There seems to be good arguments for making some changes in this area.
- b. With regard to curriculum, we recommend working with two or three partner institutions to create a couple of models for incorporating CMC credits into minors. There are a few examples already available in fairly nontraditional fields. However, in addition, if a model could be developed for a minor including CMC credits within traditional fields (e.g., communications), that could be a helpful foundation on which to build new partnerships.
- c. There is a marketing challenge for stateside programs such as CMC that are not effectively advertised through traditional international program channels. It is important for the CMC to market directly to campuses—whether it is through offering concert tours featuring program alumni, (continue) bringing university faculty to the CMC, or highlighting CMC talent at conferences (e.g., the Forum). Support for marketing efforts will be essential to the program’s long-term strength and important to universities whose students can be well served by CMC programs. If the CMC feels they could market themselves better in some areas, they should submit a proposal to the CCCU for any changes they would like to see.
- d. One way to bridge the gap between the CMC and universities would be to develop an advisory board, that could include faculty members from CCCU institutions as well as CMC alumni and any other interested parties. A board could assist with curriculum issues, financial support, marketing strategies and long-term planning.
- e. In addition, an alumni advisory board (or alumni members of the board mentioned above) could serve to provide ongoing perspective and support, whether it is to assist with alumni-specific programs or aid with long-term planning.

- f. Finally, perhaps the greatest strength of the program, as mentioned above, is the highly-qualified and committed team of staff members, some of whom have been with the program for many years. While there appears to be great willingness to provide professional development when it is requested, the more that professional development can be made a regular and expected part of the routine for staff, the better that generally is over the long term—especially in relatively isolated, stand-alone roles. So, we recommend regular professional development opportunities for program staff.

IX. Concluding Reflections

1. This is a very strong, hands-on educational experience. The competencies and skills learned, the networking with professionals in the field, and the day-to-day, hands-on opportunities truly prepare students for the work place.
2. All members of the staff are extremely knowledgeable about their area and of the music industry. All seem to be very passionate, practical and caring.
3. Meeting with the CMC alumni was a very impressive time. Alumni saw the program as an opportunity to get one's feet wet in what the music industry would be like. They felt the networking and connections are a big plus to the program. They also felt the CMC program opens to students the breadth of opportunities that are available in the music industry. The alumni see CMC offering a real community of support and a freedom for students to discover who they really are and what vocation is best suited their passion.
4. Those with whom the SAPC team met had a tremendous appreciation for how the CMC program has and continues to impact their lives. One alumnus stated, "Every day after CMC, the CMC becomes more valuable." The alumni see the CMC staff as family, friends and mentors that continually speak into their lives. The alumni stated the CMC staff have a strong servant spirit and are extremely generous making themselves, the equipment and the facility continually available to serve them. The alumni stated that the CMC staff have created an atmosphere of a close-knit family between themselves and all CMC alumni.
5. Because the CMC staff are doing such an outstanding job in preparing students for the workplace and for life, we recommend that in order to provide longevity to such an outstanding program that the CMC staff continually give thought to long term perpetuation and strengthening of the program.
6. We recommend inviting faculty from CCCU schools to visit CMC to see what occurs at the site.
7. We recommend marketing to a broader group of students who might not be musicians but want to be in the business and hands-on experience. The CMC program could certainly fit communication majors, business majors, and worship majors in addition to those seeking to enter the music industry.
8. It would be good for the CCCU office to encourage the member colleges to have the CMC tour come to their campuses.
9. Overall this has been a very interesting and informative time for the SAPC team. It is exciting to see what is happening in the lives of the CMC students and alumni. The CMC staff is truly amazing and truly impactful in educating and equipping people in a very challenging industry. We on the team have a great respect and appreciation for what goes on through the CMC staff and program. This is a tremendous program and kudos to the CMC team for what they do.