

Secondary (7-12) General Music Courses

Access to non-performance (general) music classes is mandated for all students in grades 7-12. This has produced a plethora of music classes designed to involve the general student at this level in hands-on musical activities. These courses, based on the Wisconsin Music Standards, are planned to engage and interest the student who has elected not to become involved in the music performance groups. The term, “nonperformance,” refers to courses that do not have public performance as a primary objective of the course.

Ideally, these courses should help the student develop both a degree of performing skills (procedural understanding) and content knowledge (declarative understanding). Therefore, in addition to performance, student outcomes should include knowledge of music’s structure, elements, historical style, etc. as well as some experience in improvising or composing rhythms and melodies. The most successful strategy is to use all three learning modes in music – performing, creating (producing), and responding (aurally analyzing and evaluating) to teach *about* music

Theory/Composition -- This course is ideally suited for both performance and non-performance students. If it is taught with a keyboard/computer interface in a lab situation, students of quite disparate abilities can be included in the same class.

Music Appreciation/History -- This course is usually taught by the lecture and lesson (sit and ‘git’) method, and therein lies its major problem. The teacher must be innovative in devising active learning approaches (‘hands-on’), both for instruction and for student engagement.

Autoharps/Dulcimers -- These instruments require only a small degree of skill to achieve a satisfying performance. Melody, harmony, notation, rhythm, form, ethnic music, expression, and improvisation are examples of outcomes that can be achieved through such a course.

Handbells -- These are attractive instruments. They often generate enthusiasm among students who have not responded to other musical offerings. In addition to the outcomes listed above, historical and stylistic understandings can be developed readily in such a class.

Guitars/Electric Bass -- Rock and other contemporary musics make this area especially interesting for students. Knowledge of chord structure, improvisation, and composing are usual outcomes of this course. A broadening of instruction will give the students an understanding of contemporary music history and an ability to improvise in a variety of styles.

Electronic Keyboards -- The purpose of this course is to give the student some independent facility in music through developing a degree of keyboard skill, a basic understanding of musical theory, and an ability to compose and improvise simple tunes/songs.

New Ideas in Listening -- This course introduces the student to listening beyond the physical (tapping the foot to the music) and emotional to the intellectual level. Students learn such points

as the role of repetition, reprise, and sequence as unifying factors; recognize tension and release as aspects of drama; and develop the ability to listen and hear in depth. Knowledge of historical style, musical form, and meaning and value in music are other outcomes. As with other non-performance courses, hands-on activities, including creating music, are important both for educational and motivational reasons.

Percussion -- This course can be a multicultural experience with students exploring the various percussion media which world cultures have used for communication, ritual, and entertainment. Steel drums, tabula, the American Indian drum, and the highly sophisticated techniques of African, Asian Indian, and Japanese drummers may be examined and used to introduce both the general and the performance student to what may seem at first to be a simple medium.

These are only examples of courses that could fulfill the 7-12 non-performance (general) course requirement of standard j. Others are, of course, possible. As mentioned earlier, they should be based the Music Standards. The most important consideration in designing such a course is to enhance the student's interest in music and to help the student become an independent, self-motivated learner. Experiences, activities, and outcomes that do not forward these principles should be examined with a view to discarding them as non-essential and perhaps counter-productive.