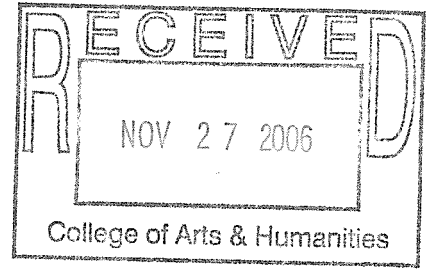


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IPESL Grant Application
(Initiative to Promote Excellence in Student Learning)
Minnesota State University, Mankato



PROPOSAL COVER PAGE

Title of Project: Critical Thinking in the Process of Writing Music

Name: Karen Boubel

Are you full-time faculty in 2006-2007?
(fixed-term faculty are not eligible to apply) **Yes** **No**

Do you plan to return to MSU in 2007-2008? **Yes** **No**

e-mail: karen.boubel@mnsu.edu

Campus Address: PAC, Office 231
Campus Phone: 389-1723

College: Arts and Humanities

Department: Music

Spring Semester Schedule:
List times when available to participate in Learning Communities and workshops.

Mondays: 9:00 – 12:00 _____

Tuesdays: _____

Wednesdays: 9:00 – 12:00 _____

Thursdays: 3:00 – 4:30 _____

Fridays: 11:00 – 2:00 _____

Karen A Boubel
Signature of Applicant

John G. Lind
Signature of Department Chair/Director/Supervisor

Jane F. Early (Sae)
Signature of College Dean/Vice President

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IPSEL GRANT PROPOSAL

1. **Title of Project:** "Critical Thinking in the Process of Writing Music"
2. **Purpose of the Project:**

The purpose of the project is to strengthen the role of critical thinking as students approach the process of writing music.

Need and significance: Students who are writing music often move directly to using their music skills to put pencil to music paper (or mouse to music software). There is a serious lack of critical thinking at this point and a misunderstanding that a composer should immediately jump in and apply skills to the "task" of writing.

Goal 1: Before the composing begins, students ask themselves a set of questions systematically that better insures their readiness to be open-minded, inquisitive, considerate, reflective, creative and self-confident. The composers must first engage their personal dispositions. (acknowledged step one in critical thinking literature)

Goal 2: The next challenge involves the lack of questioning and coming to sound judgments while students are writing. It is time to call upon skills, but these skills are more than technical abilities. The student composers must develop "self-regulatory judgment." (American Philosophical Association's Delphi Report, 1990) They must be in a circulatory process of analyzing, evaluating, changing, and reflecting. They revisit their conceptualizations.

Goal 3: Self-assessment of the completed compositions.

Affected Student Population: All students majoring/minoring in music for four consecutive semesters while taking Music Theory I, II, III, and IV (approximately 60 per semester). Students taking the more advanced, repeatable, Music Composition (approximately 9 per semester). Current students who are minoring in music have great breadth in their majors, such as: Math Education, Nursing, Theatre, History, International Relations, Human Performance, Law Enforcement.

The definition of critical thinking as it relates to this project: The process of asking oneself a set of key conceptual questions before writing begins; applying skills and continuous evaluation during the writing; self-assessment and reflection when the composition is first completed.

3. Description of project:

I will be developing new instructional materials, pedagogies and support mechanisms to infuse critical thinking into all the composing that students do in their semesters of Music Theory and Music Composition. The repeating and adapting of critical thinking skills as the students mature personally and musically should yield long-term habits of questioning, considering evidence, understanding context, and enhance the key concepts that students form as they compose.

To support students in their critical thinking, I will develop:

- Sets of questions for students to ask themselves during Goals 1-3 of the project. The questions will vary according to the level of the respective course.
- Sets of readings to show how successful composers ask key questions and continuously think critically during the creative process of writing music. For instance, some composers of the past wrote letters and journals that are available for study. We have many letters of Bach; sketchbooks and agitated writings of Beethoven; creative musings of Wagner; intellectual writings of Leonard Bernstein; journals, published writings, autobiographies, web sites and blogs of current composers. Students can "get inside the heads" of successful composers.
- Guidelines for on-going journal writing as each student approaches the process of critical thinking for a new composition; the journal will represent all stages of the entire process.

4. Assessing the Results of the Completed Project:

Although I do not know the content at this time, I will be administering and scoring a common assessment twice during the spring; I will use the results to improve the materials and how they are used.

I will individually interview all composition students at midterm to see how the critical thinking process is being used and accepted; I will then improve any communication or materials as needed.

I will evaluate the quality of the compositions and the composing process.

Each music student builds a student portfolio of their work and performances over the eight semesters; I will study the improvement and/or changes in their compositions over time.

Students' comments during discussions about the readings will show what insights were discovered about the critical thinking process of successful composers, current and past.

Each student composer will keep a journal that I will read and consider these reflective comments about the process and the results.

I will also make improvements based upon written comments on student evaluations.

5. Disseminating the Project and its Results:

I will present the project and its results at the Department of Music Retreat in August 2007.

Whenever possible, I would gladly make a presentation at a College or university event/seminar.

I would be interested in working with a team of peers in this IPSEL program to make a presentation at a state-wide, regional or national conference.

I would look for a disciplinary conference, i.e. College Music Society, Society for Music Theory, for a presentation.

I would contact other music faculty in the state for their interest in a campus visit/presentation.

I would take part at the IPSEL website when appropriate.

6. Support of Department/University Goals:

Infusing critical thinking into the music writing of students supports the first goal of the Department of Music:

"To offer quality undergraduate and graduate programs that offer opportunities for students to continue to develop their skills as listeners, performers, teachers, directors and music professionals."

This IPSEL proposal also supports Objective #1 in MSU's Strategic Priority #5 to Enhance Academic Excellence in Undergraduate Studies:

"Assess and improve out academic programs."

