BCCM Class Piano Self-Assessment Guide

All BCCM undergraduate students are required to demonstrate piano proficiency to graduate, either by passing the Piano Proficiency Exam or enrolling in the class piano sequence (MUS 120A, 120B, 220A, and 220B) and passing MUS 220B.

If you have some piano experience but don't feel prepared to pass the Piano Proficiency Exam, the following descriptions of what is covered in each course can help you determine which course is right for you.

After enrolling in a class, you should know if the class is right for you by the end of the first week of the semester. If you believe you have been misplaced, please ask your instructor which class is appropriate for your level of experience.

Brief Description of Material Covered in the Class Piano Sequence:

MUS 120A

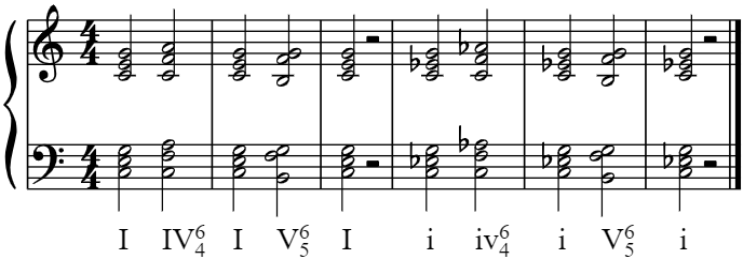
This course is intended for beginners or students with very little knowledge of keyboard harmony. In this course, the following are covered:

- Basic piano technique
    - Finger numbers, hand position, effortless tone production
    - Later in the semester, legato (overlapping) pedaling is taught. This is also reviewed in MUS 120B.
- Basic reading skills at the piano, with an emphasis on intervallic reading
- Major and minor Five-Finger Patterns as an introduction to scales
- Major, minor, diminished, and augmented chords in root position in all keys
- Inversions of major and minor triads
- Primary chord progressions (I-IV-I-V7-I) in all major keys with legato pedaling
- The following major scales in two octaves, hands together: C, G, D, A, E, B, F, G♭, D♭ (note that scale fingerings will be reviewed in MUS 120B)
- Transposing simple melodies
- Playing and analyzing simple pieces at the piano, using both lead style notation and Roman numerals/figured bass symbols
- Harmonizing simple melodies with primary chords
- Practicing techniques for polishing elementary-level pieces
    - By the end of the semester, students will be able to play repertoire at the level of Leopold Mozart's Minuet in F Major, recordings of which can easily be found on YouTube.

MUS 120B

This course is intended for students with some experience at the piano, who feel confident in all or most of the skills listed for MUS 120A above. In this course, the following are covered:

- All major and harmonic minor scales, two octaves, hands together
    - We begin by reviewing the major scales covered in MUS 120A (see above) – if you've learned at least some of these scales, this review should bring you up to speed. If, however, you have never played major scales at the piano, then you are likely not yet ready for MUS 120B.
    - Over the course of the semester, we cover the remaining major scales and learn all harmonic minor scales at a slow tempo.
- Major and minor arpeggios will be introduced, two octaves, hands together
- Primary chord progressions (I-IV-I-V7-I) in all major and minor keys (see below)
    - Major keys will be reviewed the first week of classes and we will quickly move into minor keys. If you've never played simple chord progressions in different keys, you may not yet be ready for MUS 120B.



    - Later in the semester, we will begin working on the following progression involving secondary chords (see below), transposing it to several keys.

- Seventh chords and inversions
- Transposing simple pieces using intervallic reading
- Harmonizing simple melodies with primary (I, IV, V) and secondary (ii, iii, vi) chords
- Strengthening sight-reading skills
- Practicing techniques for polishing late-elementary-level piano pieces
    - By the end of the semester, students will be playing repertoire at the level of Dennis Alexander's *Full Moon Rising*, a recording of which can easily be found on YouTube.

MUS 220A

This course is intended for students with some experience at the piano who feel confident in the skills listed for MUS 120B above. In this course, the following are covered:

- Review of all major and harmonic minor scales and arpeggios, two octaves, hands together, with an emphasis on fluidity.
    - If your fingering is a little rusty, fear not! We will thoroughly review fingering patterns. That being said, this should not be your first time playing major and harmonic minor scales, hands together.
- Chord progressions in all major and minor keys
    - Primary chord progressions will briefly be reviewed. We will then quickly move into the following progression involving secondary chords (see below), transposing it to all major and minor keys:

- Developing aural recall skills (playing simple vocal warm-ups by ear)
- Introduction to open-score reading
    - We will start with two-part vocal and instrumental score-reading exercises and play three-part exercises by the end of the semester
    - Transposing instruments (such as B♭ clarinet and E♭ alto sax) will be introduced.
- Review of seventh chords (dominant sevenths, major sevenths, minor sevenths, half-diminished, fully diminished)
- Chord progressions and harmonization exercises involving secondary dominant chords (V7/V, V7/IV, etc)
- Harmonizing melodies using diatonic harmony and secondary dominants
- Simple improvisation exercises designed to reinforce concepts covered in class
- Practicing techniques for polishing early-intermediate-level repertoire
    - At the end of the semester, students will be able to play solo repertoire at the level of Harold Arlen's *Over the Rainbow*, arranged by E.L. Lancaster, a recording of which can easily be found on YouTube.

MUS 220B

This course is intended for students with substantial experience at the piano who feel confident in the skills listed for MUS 220A above. In this course, the following are covered:

- Review of all major and minor scales and arpeggios, two octaves, hands together, with an emphasis on fluidity and finer points of technique
- Open-score reading, using both choral and instrumental scores
    - We will begin with two and three-part exercises and move up to four-part score reading exercises, including a short excerpt from the Mozart Requiem and a Schubert String Quartet.
    - Transposing instruments and reading in alto clef will be reviewed
- Chord progressions in all keys
    - We begin by reviewing chord progressions involving diatonic chords that were covered in previous semesters (see above). Later in the course, we play and transpose progressions involving Neapolitan and Augmented sixth chords and modulations.
- Harmonization and improvisation exercises using diatonic and chromatic harmony (secondary dominants, Neapolitan and Augmented sixth chords)
- Basic accompanying skills, including how to simplify a complex score
- Modes
- Practicing techniques for polishing intermediate-level repertoire
    - By the end of the semester, students will be able to play repertoire at the level of Robert Vandall's *Dorian Tarantella* and *Lydian Nocturne*. Recordings of each can easily be found on YouTube.

If you have any questions about class piano placement, or if you'd like to set up an in-person assessment with Dr. Grodin, please feel free to email him at samuel.grodin@csulb.edu.