

APU Enhanced Keyboard Proficiency Examination for Commercial Music Majors

Strong keyboard skills are essential for students pursuing a degree in commercial music. In addition to being the best way to work out harmonic ideas in composing and arranging, the keyboard is our primary interface with DAWs and other music technology tools that are the standard platforms of modern production. All students enrolled in the Bachelor of Music in Commercial Music degree program must pass both the Piano Proficiency Exam detailed in the section above as well as an additional Enhanced Keyboard Proficiency Exam.

There are two pathways to completion for the Enhanced Keyboard Proficiency Exam, one for the general student population, and one for students who have declared keyboard as their primary instrument:

Students may elect to take both the Piano Proficiency and the Enhanced Keyboard Proficiency exams on acceptance to the music program. Students who do not pass the exams must enroll in Class Piano every semester until they pass both proficiency exams. Successful completion of MUS 107 includes completion of the Enhanced Keyboard Proficiency Exam, satisfying this requirement.

Students who have declared keyboard as their primary performance instrument are not exempt from passing the exam, however they should plan to take the exam as part of their Applied Piano lessons, and do not need to enroll in Class Piano unless directed to do so by their applied instructor or program director.

The Enhanced Keyboard Proficiency Exam includes material from each of the following areas:

- I. Harmonic Execution: playing from chord charts in appropriate open and closed voicings in all keys. The emphasis is on accuracy of chord spelling and appropriate voicing, not speed: about six chords in 30 seconds is adequate for this part of the test.
 - A. Common 7th chords in triad/root voicing (e.g., CΔ7 as Em/C). This includes 7th (also with sus4), major 7th, min 7th, and half-dim 7th.
 - B. Common 9th chords in 7th chord/root voicing (e.g., Cm9 as EbΔ7/C). This includes 9th, min 9th, major 9th, 7th with “flat” 9th, and suspended 9ths.
 - C. Open voicing of common 11th and 13th chords, either “polychordal voicing” or in simple “color tones over structural tones” form, e.g., C9,13 as the notes “A” and “D” (either order) over the notes “Bb” and “E” (either order), assuming the root is present in the bass.
 - D. “Pop” voicing of common chord progressions, including chords with added second (e.g., C2 or C “add 9”), chords with suspended second (e.g., Csus2), 1st inversion of these (e.g., C2/E voiced as Csus2/E), 9th chords voiced without 3rd (e.g., CΔ9 without 3rd voiced as G/C), etc.
- II. Production at the Keyboard:
 - A. Drum Set: playing to a click from Logic Pro, sequence basic four bar drum parts in at least four common (but distinctly different) pop styles of the student’s choice, such as rock, swing shuffle or walk, bossa, funk, samba, gospel, country or country rock, folk, etc., drawn from sources such as the Essential Styles books, etc. Students may adjust tempo to their facility, but must produce something that could be used in a demo.
 - B. Bass Lines: play Rock, Swing-shuffle, walking, samba, funk, etc., in time with the drum tracks from part A, using a chord chart provided by the examiner.
 - C. Keyboard Parts: play appropriate pads and keyboard parts for those same drum parts and bass lines, again at tempos matching the student’s facility, using a chord chart provided by the examiner and appropriate

voicing methods from part I of this test, and keyboard techniques similar to those found in “The Pop Piano Book” by Mark Harrison.