FAQ: BA, MAJOR in POPULAR MUSIC STUDIES

Don Wright Faculty of Music
The University of Western Ontario

[Please note that the terms major and module are used interchangeably in this document.]

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1. What faculty and facilities do you have?

Western’s Faculty of Music has three faculty specialists in popular music studies. The Popular Music Program is serviced by Western’s Interdisciplinary Media Centre, and the center houses two project rooms reserved to music students and a classroom with 25 fully equipped digital audio workstations for students to learn desktop music production and post-production. (All workstations feature Mac computers, and software at the center includes Logic, Final Cut, and Soundtrack Pro.) Western also provides access to a tracking and production studio that is housed entirely in the Faculty of Music.

2. What courses are in the module?

Like other majors at Western, the module in Popular Music Studies consists of 6.0 full-year courses or the equivalent in half-year courses:

MAJOR IN POPULAR MUSIC STUDIES http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2017/pg577.html

Admission Requirements

Recommendation of the Faculty on the basis of an interview. Completion of first-year requirements, including a mark of at least 60% in each of the following courses: Music 1649A/B, Music 1650A/B, Music 1710F/G, Music 1730A/B, and 1.0 course from: English 1020E, English 1022E, English 1027F/G, English 1028F/G, English 1035E, English 1036E, Film Studies 1020E, Film Studies 1022, the former CLC 1020.

Module

6.0 courses:

0.5 course from: Music 2700A/B, Music 2701A/B, Music 2702A/B.

0.5 course Music 2736A/B.

0.5 course from: Music 3730A/B, Music 3731A/B, Music 3737A/B.


1.0 courses from: English 2017, Film Studies 2152F/G, Film Studies 2158F/G, Film Studies 2200F/G, Film Studies 2270F/G, Sociology 2106A/B, the former CLC 2205F/G, the former CLC 2273F/G, the former Film Studies 2253E.

3. May this major be combined with other majors or minors at Western?

The major in Popular Music Studies may be taken on its own or in combination with another major or minor (eg, Media, Information and Technoculture, Film Studies, Comparative Literature and Culture, Chemistry, French, etc.). We strongly encourage students to combine Popular Music Studies with another subject thereby giving students access to other faculty scholars several of whom also specialize in popular music. A full list of majors and minors at Western and their admission requirements may be found in the Academic Calendar. Please note that like other majors at Western the module in Popular Music Studies occupies just six courses out of a total of twenty courses for an undergraduate degree.
4. Would you describe the admission process?

Students who apply for admission to the module will be sent a questionnaire to complete. Applicants also may choose to submit a portfolio of work in popular music (songs written, recorded performances, etc.). Students will then be invited to attend an interview and bring along a pre-recorded single-take MP4 audio/video file of the student performing with hands and face clearly visible. The MP4 file must be on USB memory stick, and the student should also bring the file on another device as backup such as a smart phone or iPad. It’s a good idea also to have your pre-recorded performance available to view on Vimeo or YouTube.

The Faculty of Music’s Theory Placement Test should be completed online before the interview. If you prefer, you may write the Theory placement test on campus on your interview day. The Theory Placement Test contains written questions at the level of the Royal Conservatory’s Grade III harmony (intervals, clefs, rhythmic notation, transposition of melodies, chords, chord progressions, harmonic analysis, and simple forms), as well as questions which test basic aural ability, that is, recognition of intervals, chords, and simple melodic and chord progressions.

5. For the on-campus interview, on which instrument(s) may I prepare the MP4 audio/video file on USB memory stick?

Musicians interested in the major in Popular Music Studies may, for their interview, prepare the single-take MP4 audio/video file on guitar (acoustic or electric), electric bass, keyboard, drums, or as a singer (please contact us if you play an instrument not listed). Requirements for specific instruments are given here.

6. Do I need to follow the MP4 file preparation requirements strictly?

Yes. And prepare for the single-take recording thoroughly as you would for a public performance. Please note that guitarists may use effects pedals for their solo, but we require the accompaniment to be played with no effects, except for a small amount of reverb.

7. If I fall short on the Theory Placement Test, may I still be admitted?

Entry to all our programs is competitive, so it is best for you to do as well you can on each aspect of the admission process. If needed, we suggest that you find a theory teacher to help you prepare for the test. However, the test is a diagnostic one, and as long the other aspects of the interview/interview are acceptable to us and you have the necessary high-school average for entry to Western and you are offered admission, then you may take our summer correspondence course to achieve the appropriate level in Theory.

8. If I am applying as a vocalist or on an instrument other than keyboard/piano, what level of piano is expected?

The ability to play the piano is not a requirement for entry to the BA, Major in Popular Music Studies. If you are not a pianist, we will not ask you to play the piano for us at the interview.

9. If I do not live close enough to Western to interview in person, may I send an MP4 file or YouTube link of my performance?

Yes. If you do not live close enough to Western, the pre-recorded single-take MP4 file of your performance may be attached to us in an email or you may email us the link to streaming video of your interview via YouTube or Vimeo, etc. The single-take recording must have no effects or pitch correction applied. Guitarists, however, may use effects pedals for their solo, but we require the accompaniment to be played with no effects, except for a small amount of reverb.
10. What is the difference between your two programs in Popular Music? Is the first year the same in both programs?

Students who pursue the Popular Music stream of the BMus Honors in Music History enter the Faculty through the interview process as a classical musician and receive weekly lessons on their classical instrument and perform in ensembles, as well as take traditional classical theory and general integrated musicianship (ie, this program is for students who want to study both classical and popular music but are trained primarily in classical music).

The BMus degree begins in first year with a range of music courses common to all students in BMus programs.

Students who pursue the BA with a Major in Popular Music Studies enter the Faculty through the interview process as a popular musician, and the program is intended for popular musicians with no training in classical music. Students in the BA program are required to take Music Theory I and II. A summer theory course (M0601) is available for students who want to prepare for their first year music theory studies.

Performance opportunities are informal, mainly occurring in songwriting and recording production courses, and in composition and other music specialization courses available as electives. Please note that this is not a performance program and no lessons on instruments are provided.

The BA Major begins in second year and occupies years 2-4 of the degree. The first year is a general year somewhat different from the first year of the BMus programs.

11. Within the BA, Major in Popular Music Studies, how much emphasis is put on the historical and theoretical aspects of popular music, as opposed to creative work and performance?

We have two streams of courses in the program: creative (desktop music production and songwriting) and historical/cultural/theoretical (genres, periods, etc). Both streams are important to the development of the complete musician so that knowledge complements practice. Please note that this is not a performance program and no lessons on instruments are provided.

The program trains creative musicians who have a broad understanding of music within society. Courses are offered in desktop music production (which includes aspects of arranging) and songwriting, as well as the analysis of songs, recordings, pop styles, artists, and the place of popular music in contemporary culture. Students in the program will have an opportunity to write, arrange, record, and produce their own songs in the courses in desktop music production and songwriting. Note that some courses are offered in alternate years.

12. Are lessons on instruments or in voice part of the program?

No, they are not. But students may take private lessons at their own expense if they wish.

13. Will the program allow me to specialize in a specific style of music or will I be expected to study music I don’t particularly like?

We define popular music broadly, and our courses cover styles from the late 1800s to the present. We expose students to a wide variety of genres to enable them to understand how popular music developed. Students also may take courses in jazz, musical theatre, world music, electroacoustic music, composition, music theory, and IP copyright.

14. Do you provide rehearsal space for rock bands?

No. The Faculty of Music does not have sufficiently soundproofed rooms for rock bands and amplifiers are not permitted in the practice rooms. Students must make their own arrangements for rehearsal space.

15. If I am accepted into the program while in my final year of high school, do I have to re-apply at the end of first year to enter the module?

No, but you must submit an Intent to Register form towards the end of first year. Although students enter the module in their second year of study at Western, applicants who pass the interview when applying for admission to the University will be guaranteed a place in the module, as long as they complete first-year requirements at Western
with a mark of at least 60% in each of the following courses: Music 1649a/b (Music Theory I), Music 1650a/b (Music Theory II), Music 1710f/g (Music History: Introduction); Music 1730A/B (Introduction to Popular Music and Culture), and 1.0 course from: English 1020E (Understanding Literature Today), English 1022E (Enriched Introduction to English Literature), English 1027F/G (The Storyteller’s Art I: Introduction to Narrative), English 1028F/G (The Storyteller's Art II: Topics in Narrative), Film Studies 1020E (An Introduction to Film), and Film Studies 1022 (Introduction to Film Studies).

16. What high-school average is required for admission to Popular Music Studies at Western?

The minimum average is 80%.

17. How do I apply to the BA, Major in Popular Music Studies?

New applicants to the University should apply through the Ontario Universities’ Application Centre (OUAC) by selecting "MN:BA Music" (click Select Programs >By University >The University of Western Ontario >MN:BA Music >Subject of Major Interest >Popular Music Studies).

Students already enrolled at Western who wish to transfer to the program should contact the office of the Associate Dean (Academic) in January to arrange an interview in advance of the Intent to Register period.

18. When do I find out if I have been admitted to the program?

Music completes all interviews by the end of April, and we endeavor to let people know the results of their application as soon as we can. Students usually receive an informal letter from us in advance of formal notification by the University (only the Registrar’s Office may make an offer of admission).