

IOWA

School of Music

D.M.A. Thesis —
Recording Project
Manual

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General Description

The **DMA Thesis: *Recording Project*** will consist of a high quality, professionally produced audiorecording of significant repertoire and an accompanying paper.

Developments in the production and distribution of digital recordings have increasingly led music departments and schools of music in academic institutions to include studio recordings as evidence of research and scholarly work in considering faculty productivity. Professional recordings and videos produced by performing faculty are considered analogous to the publication of books or articles by academic faculty.

In light of these trends in the academic and professional performance marketplace, the School of Music has implemented the **DMA Thesis: *Recording Project***.

The completed project will consist of a 50-75-minute master recording and accompanying paper that includes a description and justification of the project, program/liner notes, and the formal and public abstracts required by the Graduate College.

Although repertoire for the DMA Recording Project may be performed on degree recitals, live recordings of recitals may not be used for the project. All tracks must be professionally produced studio recordings that would meet generally accepted technical standards for a commercial release. In choosing music, students and advisors should look beyond frequently performed and recorded standard repertoire and seek out high quality works that are new, commissioned, or lesser known. Students should take this opportunity to explore repertoire and illuminate latent musical, stylistic, or historical relationships among the recorded pieces. Within this guiding philosophy, each performance area may create strategies for repertoire selection.

A proposal for the recording and paper will be written by the candidate in consultation with the faculty advisor and vetted and approved by the candidate's final examination committee. The proposal defense consists of an oral presentation, given by the candidate, describing the original contribution(s) of the project and the artistic significance of the repertoire, the composer(s), and the musical genre(s), to the profession and to the candidate. The candidate will prepare, record, and produce the studio recording, then defend it and its accompanying paper at the final oral examination.

Course Requirements

All D.M.A. students are required to enroll in MUS:7140 Seminar in Music Research, a course devoted to thesis preparation and professional development. The goal of MUS:7140 is to supplement the thesis advisor's work with the student, culminating in a complete draft (introduction, statement of purpose, literature/recording review, methodology, proposed recording schedule, bibliography) of the thesis proposal. Students wishing to complete a **Recording Project** should enroll in MUS:7140, section 0002.

MUS:7140 cannot be taken prior to the 3rd semester of coursework in the DMA and passage of the Qualifying Recital.

Over the course of thesis work, students must successfully complete 2-6 credit hours of MUS:7970 D.M.A. Essay. These hours should be spread out over the anticipated number of semesters it will take to complete the Recording Project and successfully defend it. If the student enrolls in the full 6 hours prior to completing the Recording Project, they must continue to enroll in MUS:7970 or GRAD:6002 Doctoral Continuous Registration until completion. The Graduate College requires registration in every semester after Comprehensive Exams are passed, and GRAD:6002 should be used only if the student will not be engaging with the thesis advisor in a given semester.

Timeline, Deadlines, and Associated Costs

Timeline & Deadlines

- DMA candidates who plan to pursue the **DMA Thesis: Recording Project** option must first consult their major professor to determine the feasibility of the proposed project. Once the student and professor have agreed on a potential topic, the candidate must prepare a detailed and specific proposal of the music to be recorded.
- The thesis committee must receive the complete proposal *no less than two weeks* prior to the scheduled Proposal Defense.
- The Proposal Defense and Final Defense cannot occur in the same semester. If a student wishes to graduate in Semester 2, the Proposal Defense must be successfully passed and Topic Approval form completed *by week 12* of Semester 1.
- Once the Proposal Defense is successfully passed, the student completes the Topic Approval form found on this page: <https://music.uiowa.edu/graduate-student-policies#graduate-thesis-options>. On the form, there is a place to indicate if the Recording Project will involve UI Recording Studios or an outside person(s). *Non-UI Recording Studio staff cannot use Voxman Music Building facilities.*
- Prior to the Proposal Defense, the student may consult with the Recording Studios about potential recording dates in Voxman Music Building. However, recording session dates and times cannot be reserved until the Topic Approval form has collected all committee signatures and is received by the Recording Studios and Scheduling Office.
- The student records the Project repertoire and works with the recording engineer to

create the final, mastered audio recording. *Total recording session time is limited to 24 hours and total post-production time is limited to 24 hours, for a maximum of 48 hours of billable time for the Project, plus any recording studio setup/teardown time.*

- Once the mastered recording and accompanying paper are finished, they are submitted to the thesis committee in advance of the final defense. The complete, mastered recording and accompanying paper must be made available to the thesis committee *no less than two weeks* before the Final Defense Date. The candidate will upload CD-quality .wav audio files (16bit at 44.1kHz) to their Office 365 Onedrive and share the folder with committee members.
- Following the successful Final Defense of the project, and *no less than one week before* the Graduate College's Thesis Deposit deadline (see Graduate College website for exact date), the candidate will submit final edited, mixed, and mastered CD-quality .wav audiofiles (16bit at 44.1kHz) to the University of Iowa Libraries for archiving and uploading to the streaming server. The Libraries will email the student all streaming audio permalinks for inclusion in the accompanying paper no later than three days prior to Graduate College's Thesis Deposit deadline. Consult with the music librarian for more information on this process.
- Once the permalinks are added to the post-defense revisions of the accompanying paper, the project may be submitted to the Graduate College by its Thesis Deposit deadline.

Associated Costs

- The student will pay the standard hourly rate for recording services as established annually for the School of Music's Recording Studios and published on the website <https://callboard.performingarts.uiowa.edu/music-callboard/recording-studio> The applicable rate as of April 2024 is \$35 per hour.
- The final total amount will be charged to the student's U-Bill. The student is responsible for this expense, which includes recording, editing/mastering, and setup/teardown for recording sessions.
- UI offers a number of funding opportunities for graduate students looking for financial assistance to work on theses, projects, and other activities. Many of these can be found at the following webpages:
<https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/funding/fellowships>
<https://clas.uiowa.edu/graduate-students>
<https://gss.grad.uiowa.edu/funding>

Various awards are available to specific degrees so be sure to read the fine print. Students interested in funding should research the options and consult with their advisor to confirm which ones are appropriate to the activity.

The Proposal and Proposal Defense

A successful Recording Project proposal provides important information to the committee that convinces its members of the project's appropriate scope and worthiness of research/recording. There is no required page length for the proposal. Just as the body of music is large and richly varied, proposals will, likewise, vary somewhat in length and content.

Proposal Components and Expectations:

- I. *The working title of the project*
- II. *Introduction*
 - a. The clear statement of purpose and brief description of the project, and its value to the field. Why will the project be significant to others inside and/or outside the research area?
 - b. Why was this project chosen? Provide a cursory overview of the music and/or composers featured in the project.
- III. *Literature Review*: This section can take many forms and vary in length, dependent on the nature of the Project. What recordings of this material or related material already exist and what is their relationship to the proposed Project? How do they influence your project? What scholarly sources informed the nature and/or scope of the proposed Project? Composers and musicians, even contemporary ones, seldom work in isolation, removed from cultural, historical, or interpersonal influences.
- IV. *Methodology & Limitations*: Explain the criteria employed to arrive at the Project's proposed repertoire. Explain how the recording, as a program, provides new artistic, stylistic, technical, or other perspectives on relationships among the chosen works.
- V. *Repertoire*
 - a. Describe each of the works to be recorded and how it fits into the context of your recording. Some introductory analysis of key works may be appropriate here, if that analysis strengthens the Project's significance.
 - b. Provide information on the availability of scores, editions, and any other performance-related sources.
- VI. *Technical Information and Timeline*
 - a. Provide a detailed timeline for completion of the project that includes estimates of the time needed to acquire, learn, and rehearse music, complete recording sessions, edit recordings, and prepare the final accompanying paper.
 - b. Technical information about the recording, including names of any potential collaborators, proposed location of recording studio(s), and names of individuals providing technical services (recording engineers, piano technicians, session producers).
- VII. *Bibliography*: Provide a detailed bibliography of consulted sources including existing recordings of proposed works, written resources, and other sources that inform your project.

The Proposal Defense:

The proposal defense consists of an oral presentation, given by the candidate, describing the original contribution(s) of the project and the artistic significance of the repertoire, the composer(s), and the musical genre(s), to the profession and to the candidate.

The committee will suggest modifications regarding repertoire or the production process, and make observations and recommendations on the viability and significance of the project as well as the practicability of the process and timeline.

Scheduling Recording Sessions

The Recording Studios are available for DMA Recording Project recording sessions during the following times of the year:

- Finals Week of the Fall semester, Thanksgiving Break, during Winter Break, and the first three weeks of the Spring semester.
- Finals Week of the Spring semester, Spring Break, during Summer Break, and the first three weeks of the Fall semester.

NOTE: If a Project uses non-UI recording personnel for recording sessions, but uses the UI Recording Studio for post-production, sound files ready for post-production must be submitted to the UI Recording Studio by the end of the third week of the semester. Total post-production time is limited to 24 billed hours. Non-UI recording engineers should communicate with the Recording Studio concerning requirements.

Please allow for a minimum of two weeks to schedule and process reservations for major recording project sessions. The maximum allowable Recording Session time available per project is 24 hours plus any additional setup and strike time. Sessions will be scheduled in blocks of 3 or 4 hours depending on performers' preferences and hall availability. In order to coordinate with staff schedules, please email <shu-min-chang@uiowa.edu> and <james-edel@uiowa.edu> before submitting your reservation request. If you are performing solo piano repertoire, then please include <jeremy-herrera@uiowa.edu> in that correspondence.

The DMA Recording Project Scheduling Form is located in the scheduling section of the School of Music website (<https://callboard.performingarts.uiowa.edu/music-callboard/scheduling-policies#dma-thesis-recording-project-scheduling>).

DMA Recording Project Recording Sessions typically take place in the School of Music Recital Hall. The Concert Hall may also be used, subject to approval from the Recording Studio and Scheduling Office.

Cancellation Policy

If you need to cancel your recording session, please notify the following staff by email as soon as possible:

music-scheduler@uiowa.edu

james-edel@uiowa.edu

shu-min-chang@uiowa.edu

jeremy-herrera@uiowa.edu

Session cancellations made within less than 48 hours of the reserved setup time in the hall will be subject to the full recording fees for the scheduled session billed at \$35/hour, as well as forfeiture of scheduled time in the hall. Exceptions will be considered in cases of illness, emergency, inclement weather, or other safety concerns.

The Recording Session & Post-Production: Definitions and Best Practices

James Edel and Shu-Min Alice Chang, Recording Engineers

Pre-Production Preparation - Before your first recording session, the following suggestions can help you spend your recording time efficiently.

- Marked up scores with measure numbers, at least at the beginning of each system
- Decide in rehearsal the tempos for each section and mark those in the score. Using a metronome during the sessions can help to ensure that multiple takes match.
- Identify potential cut points for future editing and mark those sections in the score. That can help you organize the sections you will record as separate takes, rather than decide that in the midst of your session. To achieve a natural-sounding product, understanding how editing works is essential. The figure below is an example of good planning.

The image shows a musical score for Violin Sonata No. 1, Op. 78, I. Vivace ma non troppo by Johannes Brahms. It features two overlapping takes: Take 7 (orange box) and Take 10 (green box). A red vertical box highlights a 'Cut point' at the beginning of measure 21. Dynamics markings include 'f dim.' and 'p'. The score is for violin and piano, with measure 19 indicated at the start.

Violin Sonata No.1, Op.78, I. *Vivace ma non troppo* by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

If the desired cut point is the downbeat of m.21, Take 10 should overlap with Take 7 for 1 measure or more to ensure there is reverb of the previous notes at the cut point. Otherwise, there will be a "hole" in the sound at the edit. It is recommended that both takes are as identical as possible - matching tempo, musical timings, and dynamics.

Good places to cut:

- Long rests/silence
- All the notes line up vertically on the score AND in the take
- Pedal changes
- Cutting while 1 person is playing is easier than 2 or more people playing together

Recording Sessions/Tracking - Here are some helpful suggestions and reminders about recording sessions:

- There is a lot of equipment setup, testing, and piano tuning that must take place before you begin sound-checking or recording. That time in the hall is not available for warmup or rehearsal, so please plan to arrive at the time agreed on with the recording engineer, not before.
- If all your pieces and sessions have the same instrumentation, we will only need to

soundcheck once. This requires about 30mins before you begin recording takes. If there is different instrumentation, we will need to soundcheck for each change in ensemble.

- Please provide a score with measure numbers to your recording engineer so that they can follow along during your sessions and mark your takes precisely (Ex. 105 BRAHMS, Violin Sonata No. 1 mvmt I, mm.1-32). This may be helpful later when you select your favorite takes for editing.
- It is good to have at least 3 takes of each section to choose from.
- Check the metronome frequently to ensure your takes match in tempo or listen back to previous takes for reference.
- If you are happy with a take you just finished, you may ask for the take number and write it down. It could speed up the process of choosing takes when it comes time for editing.
- Wait for 2 seconds of silence/room sound before and after each take, except when you reach the very end of a piece. For the end, wait for 5 seconds after the last note has decayed before talking or playing any more.

Post-Production: Editing - After all the recording sessions are done, the musician(s) pick their best takes and the studio stitches those takes together with crossfades. The studio cannot alter the pitch, the tempo, or the musical timing without making an artificial sounding product. Changing vibrato, separating instruments from one another, changing the left vs right hand of piano, etc. are also not possible. Depending on the complexity of the cuts, each cut takes an average of 5 minutes to execute. This means about 192 edits can be made in 16 hours of post-production editing. In addition to the suggestions related to edits and cut points in the "Pre-Production Preparation" section, please note that balance, timbre, and Noise-Reduction adjustments will occur during mixing and mastering. Editing sessions are typically completed by studio engineers and not attended by musicians or clients. However, there will be multiple opportunities to review and revise edited compilations before mixing and mastering.

Post-Production: Mixing and Mastering - After all the edited compilations are complete and approved, the studio can mix and master your recordings. These final adjustments can improve the timbre of individual instruments and the overall ensemble, the balance between instruments, reverb/hall sound, noise-reduction, and overall loudness to give your project a polished and professional final sound. All editing and crossfade adjustments between takes must be finalized before mixing or mastering begins. Adjusting edits after mastering will add considerable post-production time. Mixing and Mastering typically takes 6-8 hours and sessions are not attended by musicians or clients. However, there will be ample opportunity to review the Mastered Project files before delivery to the committee and library. Although not all DMA Thesis Recording Projects are released commercially, our professional production standards are applied equally for all our clients.

The Accompanying Paper

The Recording Project is an artistic endeavor supported by a level of academic research. The Accompanying Paper, in the suggested range of 35-60 pages, should include these basic components:

- I. Introduction: This can draw upon the initial proposal. Expansion and further discussion of statement of purpose and literature review.
- II. A chapter that provides discussion of research that informs and contextualizes the project. It includes presentation and analysis of supporting evidence (musical, historical, cultural, aesthetic, etc.) pertinent to statement of purpose. It should conclude with a reflection on outcomes and future opportunities.
- III. Liner Notes (4-8 pages): Effective liner/program notes should distill the essence of the accompanying paper in a prose style aimed at an educated or concert-going audience. It should also provide technical information about the recording itself such as recording dates, engineers, producers, collaborators, and other common technical information.
- IV. Bibliography

The Final Defense

The final defense features an oral presentation, given by the candidate, of project outcomes and a discussion/evaluation of the completed, mastered recording and accompanying paper by the candidate's committee. The thesis committee may recommend revisions of the paper and only minor adjustments in the recording (track sequencing, for example).