The purpose of the Introduction to Music Literature (MUS 010) course offered as part of the general education program at Kutztown University is to expand on students’ familiarity with music of the Western Classical Tradition. One key component of this course is the development of listening skills, with the goal of developing better listeners overall, as well as listening for the musical aspects of music. Listening critically, both for music and non-music, is essential to developing sensitivity to our aural world and reinforces the importance of preserving our students’ hearing health.

An online measure to assess critical listening skill (using Instant Survey) was designed by members of the music department and implemented in two phases: first, in Fall 2008, the measure was used as an online post-test, and second, in Spring 2009, an online pre- and post-test design was used for one class of students. The implementation phase sought to determine if the online format could be used and in both phases, the implementation was successful. Interestingly, the pre- and post-test design revealed that students began the Intro to Music Lit courses already knowing a great deal about music, although significant gains were found for identifying meter and differentiating between two stylistic periods of music history.

During the summer of 2009, these findings were used to develop a more rigorous measure. The revised measure was created using the Survey option in Blackboard, which allowed for the inclusion of musical listening samples, and implemented in Fall 2009. The listening samples were:

- Classical Gas (Mason Williams)
- Symphony #6, Mvt 1 (Ralph Vaughan Williams)
- Symphony for Brass, Mvt 3 (Eric Ewazen)
- mio babbino caro, from Gianni Schicchi (Giacomo Puccini)
- Il et bel e bon (Passereau)
- Danzon #2 for Orchestra (Arturo Marquez)
- Ritornello/opening, from L’Orfeo (Claudio Monteverdi)
- 3rd Movement from Concerto for Violin (Eric Korngold)
- ³Angelkonzert² from Mathis der Mahler (Paul Hindemith)
- Entrance of King Heinrich from Lohengrin (Richard Wagner)
- Dance for Lute by Bernardo Gianoncelli (Original version from the Renaissance period) compared and contrasted with the same piece re-done in the Ancient Airs and Dances Suite #2 by Ottorino Respighi (20th century)
This testing of the new format for conducting the Introduction to Music Literature core assessment revealed statistically significant findings using a pre and post-test format. The pretest, given during the first week of class, showed that the average score of 29 points out of 50 (range: 11 – 50), and at post-test, the average score was 34 (range: 19 – 50); analyses revealed that the pre-post differences were statistically significant. Additional analyses indicated that the strongest gains were related to the ability to identify meter, texture and style within multiple-faceted questions.

A third study of the assessment procedure for the Intro to Music Lit core assignment is currently being conducted and analyses and further revisions are planned for the summer and fall of 2010.

A full report of this project is available from the Principal Investigators.