1. **Current Learning Goals.** To pass Part A of the examination students should demonstrate facility in writing a coherent essay, and competence in basic knowledge of foundational concepts and terminology. We want to ensure that new students in each of our areas are operating at the level expected of entering doctoral students. To pass the two-week paper (part B) students should demonstrate the ability to undertake sophisticated research in an unfamiliar area, formulate a research agenda, and present findings in literate prose and in a well-argued exposition.

2. **Description and preparation.** Part A is a written examination taken by students in Music Theory, Composition, Musicology and Ethnomusicology who do not have a master’s degree in music (or in Ethnomusicology for students in that area). Part B (The two-week paper) is taken by all students in all of those areas except Music Theory and the DMA in Composition. Students in the Performance DMA, who all enter with a master’s degree, take neither Part A nor Part B. Part A is a three-part exam consisting of term identifications, score or notation identifications and an essay on a broad topic. The two-week paper is a take-home exam on a topic chosen from two possible topics. Preparation for these exams is mainly in the 70000-level introductory proseminars in musicology, analysis and research methods.

3. **Grading and Evaluation.** Each examination or paper is initially read by one reader. The decision Pass/Fail is determined, to the extent possible, through a set of standards unofficially distilled from the aggregate of past exams. If the examiner judges an exam to be failing, it is read by a second examiner who does not know the first examiner failed it. Students who do not pass the First Exam, Part A, in its entirety are asked to consult with one or more of the examiners to map out a strategy for retaking the exam. Students who pass but whose papers show weaknesses meet with one or more of the examiners to discuss those weaknesses and how to remedy them. The reader of Part B makes one of three recommendations: Pass, with no or merely cosmetic revisions; Pass, contingent upon substantive revisions; Fail. In all three instances, the student receives comments on the paper. If revisions are required, the revised paper must be re-submitted within one month of receipt from the reader. Further revisions may be required until the paper is deemed acceptable. If the paper fails, the student must do another one on a different topic. If the student fails the First Exam (either part) twice, the student must submit a petition for permission to take the exam a third time. If the petition is granted and the student fails a third time, the student will be advised to withdraw from the program.

4. **Review.** This initial review of the First Examination was conducted a committee of the area advisers in all of the programs disciplines. Any changes in the exams will require approval by the Curriculum and Exams Committee and the Executive Committee and will entail greater participation by faculty and students. For its review the committee relied on the following: the stated goals for the examination, a sample of examinations and exams and papers written by students, a summary of the results over the previous three years and a survey of students who took the exam over past three years. The key questions on the survey had to do with the adequacy of preparation and guidance for the exam, the adequacy of feedback, and whether students felt the exam was a fair indicator
of their progress in the program. Students were also asked for suggestions for the exam. With all this in hand, the committee addressed the following questions:

1. Do the goals for the exam reflect what we and students need to know about their initial progress in the program?

2. Do the exams and the results reflect those goals and tell us what we need to know?

3. Should we be more specific about the timing of the exam? Should we require it in all areas?

4. Should we approach grading and feedback to students differently? Should there be a more systematic way to give students feedback on their strengths in different areas?

5. Do we need more and better data about exam results?

Conclusions:

1. The learning goals need to be more specific and need to address more directly what students are expected to be able to do after their first year to year and a half in the program. The goals and assessment may also have to be more area-specific since in some areas (like Music Theory) students tend to have been music majors and in Ethnomusicology (for example) students often do not have strong background in music.

2. The exams as currently framed do not focus on what would probably more specific learning goals for an initial assessment. Also, in so far as we can determine (more about this later), the pass rate is virtually 100%, suggesting that the exam is not an effective measure of student progress.

3. Although we do not have adequate data, we know students take the exam at all different numbers of credits before 45. This seems to undermine the function of the exam as an means of assessment and guidance at a relatively early stage of study. There should be more specific guidelines about when the exam is taken, although that may vary from area to area. Since the exam should be a means to assess and guide students in the early stages of their studies, there is no reason not to require it in all areas.

4. Grading and feedback need to be more closely tied to goals for the exam. In the survey of students, the main complaint was that there was little feedback. Five of eleven students responding raised that as a concern. Most students (seven out of eleven) said they had received adequate guidance for the exam and six out of eleven felt it was a fair indicator of their progress. The committee thought it would be much more useful if students were given feedback on each of the key goals for the exam and if a record of how well they did on each of goals was reported to the program. This would allow a record to be kept in general of how well students were faring in the key areas in which we would like to see progress. In addition, there need to be more examiners (two or three) reviewing each exam.
5. We have no data to speak of. For this study we were only able to determine that since 2008 50 students were recorded as having passed the first exam and three were recorded as failing Part A of the exam last August. We have no data on how many students were asked to retake all or part of the exam or at how many credits they took one or both parts of it. Based on anecdotal evidence, we believe no students have left the program in the last three years as the result of failing the exam. One of our key recommendations is that the EO and APO develop a plan for collecting and reporting First (and Second) Exam data that will track the progress of each student and give the program cumulative data on when students are attempting, re-attempting and passing the exam, how well they are doing and their relative strengths and weaknesses in different areas defined as benchmarks of progress in early stages of their studies.

As a result of this review, each of the area advisers was asked to come up with a plan for his or her area that will define learning goals and an assessment plan (including timing, feedback and reporting) that will satisfy a need for students to get timely feedback and guidance early in their doctoral studies and give the program as a whole a picture of how well students are doing. These plans are due by the end of January.