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Teaching Philosophy

As a teacher of music theory and composition, my primary responsibility is to create a forum in which undergraduate students can actively participate in learning and understanding the material. This forum should stimulate interest and facilitate the lively exchange of ideas about musical concepts and various interpretations. My objective is to produce individuals who are able to think critically about diverse musical issues and approaches, who have the confidence to question what is being taught, and who have the knowledge and skills to present valid arguments and ideas in a professional and thoughtful manner. These skills will prepare students for advanced and graduate studies, where they can take the application of those skills to a higher level. Ultimately, my goal is to provide an individual with a skill set, which they can apply in daily life beyond an academic institution as well as allowing them to function as well-rounded members of musical society.

To accomplish this goal, a student must first be presented with the information that forms the foundation of the course. For music theory and composition, this means providing the students with the fundamental musical concepts, whether theoretical or applied. Music is much more than just rhythm, pitch and harmony; yet from a theoretical perspective, it is necessary for the instructor to provide students with a frame of reference in which they may begin to learn and understand more advanced materials. This is especially important for undergraduate students, who may be approaching the subject matter for the very first time. Secondly, it is the instructor's responsibility to discuss, when relevant, how the approach to musical theory and composition has changed throughout history. A musicological shift in focus that has occurred over the last 2000 years has had a profound effect on how music is composed, interpreted, and taught. It is important that students are aware of these musical hermeneutics, and are encouraged to view concepts from different perspectives.

It is important for the students to train and develop their musical skills through constant and active participation. A successful strategy for encouraging constant participation is through a well-developed relationship between the student and instructor, which reconciles the students' needs with the instructor's expectations. Within an environment of constant participation, the students are better able to focus on developing their skills. This helps to place some of the responsibility for their

education onto the students. Finally, the students should be exposed to a wide variety of interdisciplinary musical concepts. This provides students with the opportunity to apply in the classroom the same types of questions and critical analysis that professional musicians do during their research, performing and creating processes.

My style of lecturing has been formulated directly by what stimulated me during my undergrad and graduate studies. I prefer to engage the students freely with the aid of lecture notes, rather than reading from a rigid script. The students are more likely to be involved and ask questions when the instructor speaks in conversation-style with the class. Passion and excitement for a subject can be infectious when a connection is established with a student through his or her specific style of learning. I am very sensitive to the different needs of various students when I am teaching and am committed to experimenting with various teaching methods to ensure that all students are given the best opportunity to excel. An effective classroom exercise is to have the students apply traditional analytical techniques to current and popular music, or to their preferred musical genre. This exercise keeps theoretical inquiry and compositional practice fresh and relevant for each new generation of musicians.

My evaluation of students strives to be as equitable as possible, given the differing strengths and weaknesses of the students. The largest portion of their grade (usually 40%) stems from regular assignments and quizzes assigned throughout the semester. This allows me to identify each student's area of weakness, provide feedback, and monitor his or her improvement over time. Attendance and participation comprises 20%, which is an easily attainable amount provided the student demonstrates a commitment to the course and puts forth an honest effort regardless of specific shortcomings. The remaining 40% is earned through examination of the course material. I believe my evaluation method reflects the balance of responsibility in the learning process between the student and teacher.

Passion and excitement for a subject can be infectious when a connection is established with a student through his or her specific style of learning. I am very sensitive to the different needs of various students when I am teaching, and am committed to experimenting with various teaching methods to ensure that all students are learning in an equitable manner. Teaching should be rewarding to everyone involved, both student and teacher. I view every class I teach as an opportunity to learn from the students, and to broaden my own perspectives. Some of the most important lessons I've learned have occurred while teaching. I am fully committed to striving for excellence in teaching.