

Teaching Philosophy

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Teaching is a calling in which we share values, patterns of thought, and skills we cherish. Thus, good teaching demands traits much beyond demonstrable professional expertise. Effective educators not only believe in the value of the subject they teach and ideally enjoy it themselves; they also inspire students to engage in intellectual pursuits and meaningful extracurricular activities that enrich their communities as well as themselves.

Teachers inspire not only through belief in students' potentials as thinkers or as good people, but ideally by serving as the models for how to be, think, and participate in our professions and communities. In subtle and direct ways in- and outside the classroom, thereby, instructors have especially strong influence over each student's development much beyond the immediate subject matter. The delivery and choice of material subtly helps (or hinders) students solidify many basic beliefs about and approaches to the world. Thus, pedagogy as well as curriculum should be constantly evaluated and intentionally chosen rather than inherited thoughtlessly. We also take the responsibility of imparting the value of critical thinking and considered participation in the workplace, family, communities, and political life; as well as teaching much of our profession's canons.

To these ends, we promote a positive learning atmosphere, free of alienating discourse as much as possible. We are alive as scholars, active in our field, and avoid the outdated: teachers are advanced learners. Demonstrating an examined life and striving for the best, instructors seek evaluation of their courses through numerous informal and formal means. Abstract points must be experienced as practical issues, i.e., related to circumstances beyond the classroom and achieving high marks. Their other classes should inform and be informed by our classes. Mediocrity is easily avoided through expecting students to achieve their potential rather than minimum course requirements, and by explicitly stating high (but achievable) standards. These same instructors develop effective methods of evaluating and promoting student progress according to cultural context and institutional goals: We never stop learning.

As teachers, we can often help students discover and pursue their desires. Sometimes we inspire the unmotivated but often help just as much by assisting them when considering alternate life paths. This requires tactful honesty. Even with limited interaction, teachers increase students' awareness of themselves and the world through class atmosphere and assignments, so that they can move from their current level to a higher one as a professional and a person. Those facts, skills, and concepts aim towards the goal of living rich lives that contribute positively to the world through ethical behavior and professionalism we expect from those holding our degrees. Students are not merely competent when they leave our courses.

As a result, some assignments should develop an ability to express and explain their thoughts and beliefs precisely and articulately, while other necessarily teach specific disciplinary skills and knowledge—there is a delicate balance between rote and creativity. Some assignments develop students' abilities at evaluating themselves, others, and information sources. Some exercises may not only encourage inquisitiveness about the world, but also reduce dependence on their teachers as we prepare students for adulthood full of good judgement, ethical behavior, compassion for others, and responsibility.

In other words, course preparation, design, teaching, and grading takes significant effort, time, forethought, intentionality, and reflection—values we wish to instill in our students. By evaluating the way we achieve our teaching goals, we achieve them. With such concern and dedication, the student-teacher bond can be said to stem from a fundamental platonic love for others. Through this bond, teachers can have a profound impact on those in their classes.

Theory/Composition Pedagogy Papers

My interest in developing new ways of teaching has led to several pedagogy papers and posters. As far back as 1999, I co-authored a paper entitled “‘Blip, Buzz, Blurp’: The Challenge of Teaching New Ways to Listen” for the *International Computer Music Conference (ICMC)* in Beijing, China. In this paper, we encouraged theory instructors to teach aural analysis to sophomore-theory classes. We provided a notational method to “dictate” music that lacks musical scores, and we advocated non-formalistic ways students could remember musical events.

Later in 2003, I summarized the results of our pedagogy in a paper entitled “Introducing Electronic Music in the Undergraduate Classroom: Efficient Teaching and Intriguing Results” at the *College Music Society International Conference* in Muelle, Costa Rica. Based on a pedagogy paper I published in 2000, this presentation displayed several student analyses and categorized students’ diverse perceptions of the form and expression in two electronic-music works. Their analyses were compared to the composers’ expressed intents, when known. The pedagogy encouraged students to not only invent new notations but to think creatively about interpreting the works with narratives as well as the traditional formal observations.

More recently, I developed CAI (Computer Aided Instruction) for the teaching of species counterpoint using WebCT, and I presented my findings in a poster “Efficient Teaching: Species Counterpoint and Developing CAI Applications” at *College Music Society 2007 International Conference* in Ayuthaya, Thailand, and at the *Association for Technology in Music Instruction* in Salt Lake City in 2007. Rather than relying solely on time-consuming traditional methods for teaching species composition, I was interested in speeding up the learning of my freshmen through CAI. Carefully crafted error-detection exercises and automated feedback helped students learn the sixteenth-century vocal style and to memorize the rules as a basis for the study of tonal harmony. Some exemplary student species compositions, from cantus firmi to 2v imitative counterpoint, were displayed to show the effectiveness of the pedagogy.

In my presentation “Teaching Chromatic-Chord Identification and Part-writing Efficiently and Effectively” at the *College Music Society 2009 National Conference* in Portland, Oregon, I shared a new method for students to identify tonal chords quickly. Current textbooks don’t provide a step-by-step methodology to distinguish many categories of chromatic chords. So, I invented a flowchart that isn’t fancy but works well—and students love it. The method relies upon the leading characteristics of raised and lowered scale degrees. The remainder of the presentation improved the way diatonic and chromatic common-chord modulation is taught.

In sum, I want my students to build a solid technique that allows them to use their theory skills creatively in their own music making. I am interested in doing this in the most efficient manner possible with concise handouts, clear presentations, and regular homework. I often help students see the “forest through the trees” and, as a performer and composer, I’m able to excite students about the pragmatic uses of theory. I’m also interested in opening their ears to many styles by providing them with grounded approaches to appreciate different musics. As a result,

my goals require a good balance between necessary drill and open-ended assignments that accommodate multiple points of view. These assignments develop students' musical intuitions in addition to establishing technical prowess and knowledge of theoretical concepts.

Details about Teaching

I believe that my colleagues would say that I think creatively about my teaching. Below, I've listed a few approaches in addition to those detailed in my pedagogy papers.

In many of my classes I have a homework redo policy that encourages students to incorporate feedback on graded assignments. I average the grades of their first and their last submissions. After a few weeks, students want to do their best on their first submissions, because they didn't want to have to redo assignments. As a result, the grading load is not much heavier. The quality of work is generally higher, and the depth of learning is greater.

Most of my theory courses incorporate guided composition, whenever practical. In the first-semester theory projects, students produce a 4v setting of a rhymed text of their choice. In the second semester, students not only learn more 2v counterpoint, they learn embellishment and reduction through eighteenth-century chorale-variation technique. These skills are used to compose an artsong that incorporates compound melody and a piano accompaniment based on their own chorales. My third-semester course ends with group projects and presentations, where students discover twentieth-century techniques through analysis and produce a significant composition with those techniques. All composition projects are performed in class.

I've also used third- and fourth-semester courses to teach effective communication skills. The third-semester course (Chromatic harmony) often involves extensive writing about musical analysis. (In fact, my course at Texas A&M University was designated as a writing-intensive course for the major.) In the fourth semester (Form & Analysis), students work on their verbal skills through a series of group projects that each end with oral presentations. I select pieces that are apt for multiple interpretations, and, because groups come up with different solutions, the presenters learn how to manage discussions with contradictory points of view.

In musicianship classes, I have found that physical movement (Dalcroze) helps students learn material very well. In particular, it improves rhythm and helps students control their pacing. My teaching of harmonic dictation distantly derives from the old French *Règle d'octave* approach but addresses chromatic pitches as well. In addition to supplementing their studies with MacGamut, I also use figured bass to teach the ear-training of harmony: Students touch, see, and hear the harmonies they produce, while reinforcing their theory knowledge. I've also developed a series of worksheets (the so-called "evil exercises") that develop basic ear-training skills that undergird most sight-singing and ear-training.

I've also been keen to teach interdisciplinary courses. In 2004 and 2009, I co-taught a hymnody course with an English professor. In both years, we paired non-musicians (English majors) with music majors, and each group composed their own hymn texts, tunes, and accompaniments for a formal public concert. This required students to not only to negotiate their style preferences; they imagined the conception of the whole artwork and had to work out their differences of faith. These projects sparked lively and important class discussions about the expansive nature and intersections between the arts, society, religion, and so forth. Having never created such interdisciplinary art before, students found the evening empowering, and the packed audiences left inspired. Many students and listeners said their experiences changed their lives.

Student Research

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I have supervised numerous student research projects since 2000, including independent research, collaborative scholarship, and creative works. I enjoy training students in scholarship and creative work, from writing the initial abstract to doing the actual work to perfecting the final paper or composition.

Students find it particularly challenging to reduce the scope of research projects to a manageable size and to get beyond the preliminary research stages of literature review and budget proposals. To move through this potentially interminable stage, I have students write thesis statements and abstracts that require them to think of methodology and focus more quickly on their research. During the research-proposal stage, I particularly enjoy teaching students how to find funding opportunities and to win research grants. Once the real work begins (researching), the best motivation comes from small research groups, where I ask students to meet weekly or biweekly and present their current findings, thoughts, and challenges. These informal reports keeps students on task, when coursework and life issues encroach on research time. The feedback from peers in these groups is invaluable, especially when it comes to presenting ideas in writing or orally—they learn a lot from each other and often can be more frank than professor are. In groups, we all work hard on scholarly prose sometimes for months, as good, lucid writing takes much revision and thought. The practice at oral presentations in the groups is also important to their success at conferences.

Over the years, I've learned that the most important factor of a successful student research project is picking the right students to invest one's time and ideas. Apt students are not necessarily the most accomplished or brightest students in my music-theory classes. Instead, I look for inquisitiveness, the spark I see when they encounter new material. Of course, successful students need to demonstrate self-motivation and the ability to go beyond mere course requirements. There are many other personality traits that help or hinder students in such independent work, but I believe many more students could benefit from a true research experience than currently do.

I have learned a lot over the past ten years about picking, coaching, and motivating young researchers. Not every project results in a publishable paper, but the experiencing are nevertheless valuable for me and the students. Ever year, I become a better teacher of independent and collaborative research.

Independent Research (Scholarship)

Most recently, I advised Ashley Higgins at Converse College on a SCICU Student/Faculty Research Grant (\$2099), 2008–2009. After watching her do group presentations in my theory class, I was certain she would be good. I asked her to do a research project and listed my areas of interest. She did the preliminary research with the 13 or so topics I suggested; and, she got excited by the musical-rhetorical analysis I do. She suggested comparing Buxtehude's and Peri's music, and I coached her through the abstract writing. I mentioned fascinating *prosopopoeia* figures in funeral works, and she ran with the idea. Her preliminary research took about a semester, and the actual research and paper writing took about a year of hard work. Ashley Higgins presented her research on *Parallels of Musical Prosopopoeia in*

Buxtehude's Fried und Freudenreiche Hinfahrt (1674) and Jacopo Peri's L'Euridice (1600) at the USC Upstate Research Symposium on March 27, 2009, and won the best presentation award. She also presented her research to the Pacific Chapter of the College Music Society in Northridge, California, on April 4, 2009. Probably as a result of her work, Ashley was accepted in many regarded music-theory master's programs and accepted a full-tuition stipend to the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. You can survey her research materials here: http://profcoach.us/Courses/Spring2009/Spring2009_UndergradResearch.html .

In the research group I ran at Texas A&M for four years, students won several grants to do independent research through the *Glasscock Undergraduate Student Research Awards* (\$2000). In weekly research-group and private meetings, I directed students on topics within my areas of research interest. Matt Bridges (\$500) studied musical rhetoric in a seventeenth-century north German vocal cantata. He ultimately was unable to focus the project into a manageable scope, because of his exhaustive literature review. Luis Garcia (\$500) studied electronic works by Schaeffer's female students with Schaefferian theory. With specific examples, Luis showed how female students not only used Schaeffer's theories but also patterned after the processes of his music. Jason Patterson (\$500) studied duration in works by the band Metallica. His observations were new, but his consistent challenge was prose and staying on topic. Meg Fries (\$500) studied the extra-musical relationships between Berio's *Sinfonia* and other works. These were presented to students and faculty on campus. For more detail, see http://ProfCouch.us/Courses/Fall2003/Fall2003_MUSC485.html.

Luis Garcia's fascinating project was based on preliminary work done under a *Faculty/Student Collaborative Research Grant* (\$3000) at Luther College in Summer 2001: "Gender Differences in the Compositional Procedures, Musical Style, and Musical Expression in Selected Works of American Electronic Music Composers" by my student Tyné Steele. See http://ProfCouch.us/Courses/Summer2001/Summer2001_SummerResearchGrant.html.

Another preliminary project was funded by the *J. McElroy Trust Student/Faculty Research Fund* (\$2000) through the Iowa College Foundation in 2000–01: "Investigations in Performance Technique through Contemporary and Historical Theories." Three advanced undergraduates, Sara Renaud, Erik Sherburne, and Scott Pauli, studied recordings of their favorite pieces and related their analysis of the works to the recordings. For more detail, see http://ProfCouch.us/Courses/Fall2000/Fall2000_AnalysisGroup.html. I learned a lot about organizing, teaching, and directing student research through these sets of projects, but the research was not publishable.

Collaborative Research (Scholarship)

I've also asked students help out directly with my research. As far back as in 1999, I had a student researcher spent 10 hrs/week analyzing musical figures in chorale preludes of Buxtehude under a *AAA Grant* (approximately \$800) at Luther College. Since this was my first experience at directing research, the selected student needed a lot of guidance and was only able to complete specific small tasks. I underestimated how much background the project required to rise to yield professionally-interesting discoveries. Now, I know better what is a reasonable scope and topic for students. Often, I now ask students to do related work springing from my primary research, where they feel a greater sense of ownership and pride. That is very motivational, while still keeping the energy of collaborative work.

Creative Projects (Composition)

I've also had some less traditional grants involving student creative projects. I composed music for collaborative projects, where students designed public multimedia shows. These projects lasted approximately a year long each and involved teams of students working on different aspects of an hour-long multimedia performance. The students produced a theme, video, and sound effects, while I was primarily involved as a composer for the first set. This collaborative art was good enough that student animators who worked on these projects often were hired by Pixar and other major companies. I taught collaboratively with the architecture professor who headed up the projects as part of her teaching load. We also used choreography of a dance professor and a student dance troupe. These annual projects at Texas A&M were funded by \$5000 grants in 2005–2006, 2004–2005, and 2003–2004.

In the music discipline, composition is considered the equivalent of research for music scholars. I've written grants that supported my coaching of student compositions and public performances. I used *Humanities Council of South Carolina* grant, *National Endowment for the Humanities* grant, and several small intramural grants totaling \$10,000 for hymn festival/conference. Here, a colleague and I introduced students to musical composition and coached them through their first projects to a public performance. One of the programs can be found here: <http://teaching.profcouch.us/Winter2009/HymnodyProgram012909.pdf>.

I did a similar project at Texas A&M under an *Instructional Enhancement Grant* (\$5000) at Texas A&M University in 2004 entitled "A Hymn Festival Concert: Words and Music by Students Artists." It was also supported by *Arts Council of Brazos Valley Grant* (\$500) and Department of Performance Studies (\$2000). Students enrolled in MUSC489/ENGL489 created new hymns for performance by a professional ensemble from Houston, the Houston Bach Society choir & orchestra, and the audience. Hymn texts were written by students in a cross-listed course and musical settings of the hymns were created by students. I supervised student composition over two-month period and conducted this excellent ensemble in concert. The program can be seen here: <http://ProfCouch.us/Courses/Spring2004/HoustonBachSociety050804.pdf>. Several of the hymns are publishable and have been used in worship settings.

Non-traditional Research

Another less traditional type of scholarship is the creation of pedagogy materials I did with two students under the *Montague Center for Teaching Excellence Grant* (\$5000) in 2005–2006. With the grant, I hired a talented undergraduate, Daniel Griffing, and a doctoral student, Nancy Wood. I oversaw and participated in the development of CAI materials for the teaching of species counterpoint in undergraduate music-theory curricula, including error-detection exercises, grading rubrics, evaluation procedures, and so forth for 2v species as well as basic imitative counterpoint, using WebCT. More information can be found here: http://scholarship.profcouch.us/CAI_SEDE_Poster.pdf and the resulting pedagogy paper can be found here: http://scholarship.profcouch.us/CAI_SEDE_Article.pdf.