



MUJS 1131 / 1132 – JAZZ PIANO FUNDAMENTALS

MU221 | WF 10 – 10:50 am

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Office Hours: BY APPT - See Schedule on MU123

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COURSE PHILOSOPHY AND OBJECTIVES

This syllabus covers both **MUJS 1131** (offered in fall only) and **MUJS 1132** (offered in spring only). These two courses, while distinct for purposes of registration and grading, were created as one unified curriculum occurring over the entire academic year.

Applied lessons (also known as one-to-one or “private” lessons) are an important part of any jazz studies curriculum. However, this kind of instruction is ideally meant to be artistic, subjective, fluid, and high-level. In other words, applied lessons assume that the student **already** has the strongest possible command of the most essential jazz piano fundamentals, so that the student and teacher can work together on a higher artistic plane.

But it’s true (in any program) that 1st year students arrive with some level of gaps and deficiencies in jazz piano fundamentals. Even the most advanced pianist has plenty of room to improve in their command of the “basics.” So, rather than address the same fundamental concepts repeatedly in applied lessons for every single 1st year student, we have found it better for students and instructors to fill in these knowledge gaps **as a group**.

The group format also helps build camaraderie, mutual respect, and healthy competition among pianists. This music, and our culture within it, is sometimes driven by ego, posturing, and other toxic social dynamics. The group format helps us learn to recognize other students’ strengths in a way that inspires us to rise to their level. It also helps us to see the hidden weaknesses in what we have long perceived to be our strengths. So, through this group course, students will emerge stronger than if they would have had “private” lessons.

For now, we are trying to develop the **functional** skills required of a modern jazz pianist...in other words, the skills that help you **get work** and **get paid**, including but not limited to:

- improving sight reading: both scored notation and lead sheet notation
- quickly understanding harmonic structure of a tune and being able to transpose it
- creating introductions, endings, interludes, and other arrangement devices
- understanding voice leading, internalizing **all** common voicing structures in **all** keys
- developing rhythmic coordination and basic pianistic integration between the hands
- using functional basslines and other basic solo piano techniques
- understanding basic stylistic accompaniments: bossa, swing, groove, samba, etc.
- developing a basic appreciation and understanding of the jazz piano continuum

It is important to understand that this course sequence is meant to bring each pianist up to a

similar standard, **regardless of current skill level**. Exam grading is **not** on a sliding scale, and it does not make special allowance for how much progress a student has made from where they started (even if that progress is substantial). This is the reality of our field: either you “make the cut” or you don’t! So, it is possible that some students will need to work harder (or even much harder) than others to reach the standards we set for this course. However, unlike in the professional world, you have a fantastic support structure to help you. Please know that the instructor, the teaching fellow for this course, and your peers are here for you. We would love the opportunity to work with you outside of class if needed.

COURSE CONTENT AND MATERIALS

There is no textbook required for this course, but students should be able to seek out recordings when necessary. The instructor will provide course materials as needed.

COURSE POLICIES AND INFORMATION

GRADING: Your grade is determined by the following criteria.

25%: Assignments (Sight-Reading, Transposition/Repertoire, Historical Excerpts)
25% each: Exam 1, Exam 2, Exam 3 (**retakes allowed, see below**)

The final grade is determined by the following scale:

A = 90-100%, B = 80-89%, C = 70-79%, D = 60-69%, F = below 60%.

Grades that are one point or less below a cutoff can be rounded up at the sole discretion of the instructor based on a student’s overall effort, disposition, and attendance both in class and in office hours. For example, 89.1 and 89.0 *can* be rounded at the instructor’s discretion, 88.9 *cannot*.

SIGHT READING JOURNALS:

Each student is expected to keep a “sight reading journal”. One of the most critical skills for all jazz musicians is the ability to sightread. Jazz pianists especially need to be able to read **scored notation** in grand staff, **lead sheet notation** in a single staff, and, to some extent, **open score** excerpts (e.g. vocal jazz or choral works).

For this course, you are expected to sightread something **at least six days a week**. Keep a journal of what you read, at what tempo, and what you found easy or challenging about the excerpt. This task should take around 10 minutes of each day. You will submit your journal entries each Friday via Canvas before the start of class. The journal can be formatted in any way you want: a Word document, or a screenshot of the relevant journal entries for that week, or a phone picture of your handwritten journal. The format is not important, and the journals are only graded for completion. The point is that you need to sightread **regularly** to improve.

TRANSPPOSITION / REPERTOIRE EXERCISES:

Repertoire is the “barrier for entry” for a jazz pianist. It does not matter how many voicing constructions, patterns, or complex technical maneuvers you can execute, if you do not know any tunes in which to use these skills. In this course, we will place a heavy emphasis on **deeply**

memorizing standard repertoire through a variety of keys and styles. The goal is that you will remember these tunes for decades to come, without the help of lead sheets or apps. Each week (after we complete the first unit of the course), you will be responsible for learning a new tune from the standard jazz repertoire. You will need to demonstrate that you can break down the tune into its most basic harmonic components, as we will discuss in class. Then you will need to transpose these harmonic components into a variety of new keys. These assignments will be submitted as videos via Canvas (before each Friday class meeting). These can be simple videos from your phone. You will learn and submit transposition/analysis videos for **five tunes** in the fall semester, and **ten** in the spring semester. By the end of the year, you should have **fifteen tunes** thoroughly learned and memorized in several keys.

HISTORICAL EXCERPTS:

The art of jazz piano has a rich history. You will study many contributors in-depth in your future applied lessons, improvisation classes, history classes, and more. In this first year, we only want to get an overview of the notable pianists in the history of this great music. You will be asked to periodically submit brief transcriptions (via Canvas) of the pianists that we discuss and listen to in class, as well as some who you discover on your own. The transcription should be a notable texture, an iconic phrase, or a “trick” that a particular pianist uses frequently.

EXAMS:

The three exams (per semester) will be highly specific musical tasks related to the concepts discussed in each unit. Below is a tentative layout (subject to change) of exams for the fall and spring semesters:

Fall

Exam 1: Voicing Constructions in 2/3/4 Voices

Exam 2: Basic Rhythmic Coordination (LH + RH)

Exam 3: Basic Arranging and Solo Piano Textures (Intros, Endings, Basslines, etc.)

Spring

Exam 1: Voicing Constructions in 5/6 Voices, Advanced Voice-Leading under Melodies

Exam 2: Advanced Rhythmic Coordination (LH + RH)

Exam 3: Artistic/Stylistic Accompaniments and Arranging Devices

You are permitted to retake each exam **one (1) time** within a semester for a higher score. I count the higher of both scores. There will be designated “retake days” in finals week.

ATTENDANCE:

Please note: attendance is not directly factored into any of these grading criteria, but each unexcused absence **after the THIRD** will lower your **final grade** by 5%, regardless of performance in any of the above criteria. This is a generous attendance policy that allows you to miss approximately 10% of class meetings with no questions asked. So, after your third absence, the policy is strictly enforced. The instructor takes attendance promptly at the start of class. You can receive a “tardy” if you attend late but before 10 minutes into the class. Two tardy marks will equal one absence. Attending after ten minutes into class results in an absence, but it would still be beneficial for you to attend given the relatively quick pace and

cumulative nature of the course.

Excused absences are, of course, always permitted with reasonable cause and ample notice (when possible). **These absences do not count towards the three unexcused absences.** Please email the instructor to clear these in advance, or as soon as possible after-the-fact in case of emergency. Please provide documentation/verification.

For any missed classes, **you** are responsible for covering missed material and obtaining handouts. If you feel overwhelmed in any way, or if you are dealing with something that is causing you to miss a significant amount of class, the best thing to do is speak with the instructor as soon as possible, not at the end of the semester.

OTHER COURSE INFORMATION

EMAIL AND CANVAS USE:

The instructor uses Canvas notifications to communicate with the class. Please ensure that these are enabled and are forwarded to your email client if necessary. It is expected that you use your **UNT** email address for all correspondence related to your degree. Any university-related questions emailed to Prof. Meder from your personal email address, through Facebook or any other social media platform, or through SMS (text messaging) will not receive a response. Furthermore, you must check your **UNT** email **DAILY**. All inquiries from Prof. Meder (or any other professor or administrator) **should be responded to within 24 hours**.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND INFORMATION

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment or exam [or specify alternative sanction, such as course failure]. Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students, who may impose further penalty. According to the UNT catalog, the term "cheating" includes, but is not limited to: a. use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; b. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; c. the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university; d. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or e. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage. The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to: a. the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and b. the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

LINK: <http://vpaa.unt.edu/dcgcover/resources/integrity>

STUDENT BEHAVIOR:

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other

students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

LINK: Student Code of Conduct - <https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>

ACCESS TO INFORMATION – EAGLE CONNECT:

Your access point for business and academic services at UNT occurs at my.unt.edu. All official communication from the university will be delivered to your Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect.

LINK: eagleconnect.unt.edu/

ODA STATEMENT:

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation.

LINK: disability.unt.edu. (Phone: (940) 565-4323)

FINANCIAL AID AND SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS:

Undergraduates

A student must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to continue to receive financial aid. Students must maintain a minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA in addition to successfully completing a required number of credit hours based on total registered hours per term. Students cannot exceed attempted credit hours above 150% of their required degree plan. If a student does not maintain the required standards, the student may lose their financial aid eligibility.

Students holding music scholarships must maintain a minimum 2.5 overall cumulative GPA and 3.0 cumulative GPA in music courses.

If at any point you consider dropping this or any other course, please be advised that the decision to do so may have the potential to affect your current and future financial aid eligibility. It is recommended that you to schedule a meeting with an academic advisor in your college or visit the Student Financial Aid and Scholarships office to discuss dropping a course being doing so.

LINK: <http://financialaid.unt.edu/sap>

Graduates

A student must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to continue to receive financial aid. Students must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA in addition to successfully completing a required number of credit hours based on total registered hours per term. Music scholarships require a 3.5 cumulative GPA. Students cannot exceed maximum timeframes established based on the published length of the graduate program. If a student does not maintain the required standards, the student may lose their financial aid eligibility.

If at any point you consider dropping this or any other course, please be advised that the decision to do so may have the potential to affect your current and future financial aid eligibility. It is recommended you schedule a meeting with an academic advisor in your college, an advisor in UNT-International or visit the Student Financial Aid and Scholarships office to discuss dropping a course.

LINK: <http://financialaid.unt.edu/sap>

RETENTION OF STUDENT RECORDS:

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Blackboard/Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. You have a right to view your individual record; however, information about your records will not be divulged to other individuals without the proper written consent. You are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the university's policy in accordance with those mandates.

COUNSELING AND TESTING:

UNT's Center for Counseling and Testing has an available counselor whose position includes 16 hours per week of dedicated service to students in the College of Music and the College of Visual Arts and Design. Please visit the Center's website for further information: <http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services>.

For more information on mental health issues, please visit: <https://speakout.unt.edu>.

The counselor for music students is:

Myriam Reynolds

Chestnut Hall, Suite 311

(940) 565-2741 | Myriam.Reynolds@unt.edu