



MUJS 2370 – JAZZ IMPROVISATION II

MU263 | MW 9 - 9:50 am

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Adjunct Instructor of Jazz Piano | MU123

Office Hours: 10:00 - 11:50 am on Mondays & 2:00 - 3:50 pm on Tuesdays

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Due to the instructor's travel schedule, there will be no in-person class meeting on the first day of class (Monday, January 12). Instead, students are required to complete a short **Syllabus and Course Orientation Quiz** on Canvas by **11:59 pm** on that date, after carefully reading the syllabus. Completion of this quiz will count as attendance for the first class meeting. Students who score 80% or higher will receive 2.5% extra credit on the first assignment (Language Journal 1). The quiz is designed to ensure that students understand the structure, expectations, and learning goals of the course.

COURSE PHILOSOPHY AND OBJECTIVES

Jazz improvisation functions as a language, and bebop serves as one of its most widely shared and enduring foundations. While correct chord tones or memorized patterns alone can produce functional results, idiomatic bebop improvisation depends on a deeper understanding of how melodic ideas are constructed, connected, and shaped in real time. This course focuses on the foundational “grammar” of bebop improvisation: the core melodic devices that give the language clarity, fluency, and stylistic accuracy.

Rather than approaching improvisation as a sequence of individual notes or isolated licks, this course emphasizes larger melodic structures. These structures are built from essential bebop devices such as **enclosures, arpeggiations, scale fragments, controlled chromaticism, and commonly shared bebop phrases** from the tradition. These devices function like words in a spoken language, organizing notes into recognizable units. Students are expected to think and hear in these units while improvising, consistently working in larger structures rather than individual pitches.

A central objective of the course is vocabulary development paired with increased fluency. As students internalize these structures, they gain more options and greater clarity of melodic direction in their lines at any moment in the improvisation, supporting more intentional musical decisions. Evaluation emphasizes the accurate, fluent, and consistent use of these idiomatic devices, with clear criteria rather than subjective measures of creativity.

Because learning a musical language is a long-term process, this course does not attempt to be exhaustive. Instead, it establishes a strong conceptual and technical foundation and provides clear practice strategies that students can continue to apply beyond the semester. Mastery of these devices also supports more individualized applications later through choices of harmony, rhythm, phrasing, and form. The course prepares students for Advanced Jazz Improvisation (Improv III).

COURSE CONTENT AND MATERIALS

There is no textbook required for this course, but students should be able to seek out recordings. You should create a playlist of the following recordings and begin *actively listening* to them NOW:

- Charlie Parker on *Yarbird Suite* (from Charlie Parker, *The Complete Savoy Recordings*)
- Wynton Marsalis on *Donna Lee* (from Wynton Marsalis, *Live at the House of Tribes*)
- Mulgrew Miller on *If I Should Lose You* (from Mulgrew Miller, *Live at the Kennedy Center, Vol. 1*)
- Freddie Hubbard on *You're My Everything* (from Freddie Hubbard, *Hub-Tones*)

COURSE POLICIES AND INFORMATION

GRADING: Your grade is determined by the following criteria.

40%: Assignments (Language Journals and Solo Singing Exercises, lowest grade dropped)
20% 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*.

LANGUAGE JOURNALS:

Each student is expected to keep a "language journal". This should be kept as one file in a notation program. It should be continuous throughout the whole semester: you should not re-order anything. The goal is to track and remember all of your favorite "bits of language" from various solos we study in class, and to witness your own growth in real time.

There are **two units** in this class. The first unit establishes a strong foundation in bebop grammar, concentrating on idiomatic enclosures, arpeggiations, and bebop scale fragments. The second unit then expands this vocabulary using chromatic devices, diminished language, and more advanced harmonic application via upper structures.

Within each unit, there are **three journal assignments**:

- In the first assignment, you will simply transcribe excerpts from two different solos.
- In the second, you will break down the solos into "words" (enclosures, arpeggiations, and scale fragments), analyze them, and internalize them in twelve keys, absorbing their melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic components.

- In the third, you will synthesize a new solo into a new context, using the language you have previously internalized and incorporating a variety of rhythmic and phrasing ideas.

The same pattern continues in the second unit, making for a total of **six language journal entries**.

On **exams**, you are expected to use the words/phrases from these language journal assignments in your solos, in new and creative ways. The goal is not to force you into playing a certain way, but rather to ensure that you know how to internalize language from one solo and reuse it in a novel way in a different context. Ultimately, the language journals are about teaching you a **skill** that you can use for the rest of your performing career, not necessarily about making you learn a specific set of tunes, patterns, etc.

All submissions must be **computer notated** and in **concert key (treble clef)**. Neatness and presentation are a part of your grade.

All journal assignments are submitted through **Canvas by 9 am** on the due date. This is a **firm deadline: no late work is accepted for any reason** except an excused absence. If you email the instructor to ask about submitting a late assignment, you will simply be referred to the policy here in the syllabus. Allow yourself enough upload time to account for “Murphy’s Law” (anything that can go wrong *will* go wrong). Illegibility, unclear images or recordings will not be graded. Do not email assignments to the instructor, only use the Canvas platform.

The instructor will provide individual feedback through the Canvas platform and advise if extra work is needed in office hours. Please be sure to check Canvas for comments and feedback on your submissions.

SOLO SINGING EXERCISES:

In the language journal assignments, we spend a long period of time on a small amount of material (just two solo excerpts in each unit). We go into tremendous depth, breaking down concepts, devices, and vocabulary. It is akin to learning a second language: breaking down the grammar and learning to piece words together in a very focused way according to a set of rules. While this is a valuable method of learning improvisation, it can be equally valuable to just learn a high volume of material with much less depth - this is what some would call “learning by osmosis.”

For this reason, you are also expected to submit examples of yourself singing along to great solos. You should **NOT** transcribe these solos, and your singing does not have to be pitch-perfect. But it must be clear that you know the solo inside-and-out, that you are aware of the phrasing, articulations, and other unique elements of each solo. This exercise is designed to help you (or force you, if need be) to keep listening to the great recordings of this music, and to absorb the general “sound” of the jazz language. It is similar to how you learned your first language: you probably did not study grammar, but rather you just picked up general phonetics, rhythmic flow, idiomatic expressions, etc.

EXAMS:

The three exams will be highly specific musical tasks related to the concepts and language discussed in each unit. It is important to note that the exams measure your internalization of the concepts discussed **in**

this course, not your overall improvisational skill or “vibe,” nor your improvisational vocabulary acquired prior to this course. This course is meant to be objective, not subjective.

To clarify, **being a great player is not enough to pass an exam**. You must demonstrate a clear internalization of the language and ideas learned **in each unit**. **Regular practice is essential for success on these exams; you should not procrastinate or “cram”**. The instructor recommends at least twenty to thirty minutes of **daily** practice specifically for this course.

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. If you do not pass an exam, it is recommended that you begin attending office hours regularly for short lessons with the instructor or the teaching fellow for this class.

ATTENDANCE:

Please note: Attendance is not directly factored into any of these grading criteria, but each unexcused absence **after the FOURTH** will lower your **final grade** by 5%, regardless of performance in any of the above criteria. After your fourth absence, the policy is strictly enforced.

The instructor takes attendance promptly at 9:00 am and then once more around 9:15 am. You can receive a “tardy” if you attend late but before 9:15 am. Two tardy marks will equal one absence. Attending after 9:15 am 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 four 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. All class handouts are uploaded online on Canvas. 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.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Unit 1: The Grammar of Bebop: Enclosures, Arpeggiations, and Bebop Scales

Week 1:

Mon Jan 12 - (Online) Syllabus/Foundational Concepts: Improv as Language, Learning Methods

Wed Jan 14 - Exam overview, Transcription Tools, Idea of Language Journal, Bebop Thought Process

Week 2: Journal 1 Due on Wednesday

Mon Jan 19 - No Class (MLK Day)

Wed Jan 21 - Analysis of Transcribed Solos, Isolate Words/Phrases/Devices, Practice Methods

Week 3:

Mon Jan 26 - Class Cancelled (Snow Day)

Wed Jan 28 - Class Cancelled (Snow Day)

Week 4:

Mon Feb 2 - Enclosure and Arpeggiation Drills in 12 Keys

Wed Feb 4 - Bebop Scale and Deflection Drills in 12 Keys

Week 5: Journal 2 Due on Monday

Mon Feb 9 - Drills for Connecting Bebop Gestures, Mock Exam 1

Wed Feb 11 - Rhythmic Variation, Solo Singing, Time Feel and Phrasing Considerations

Week 6: Solo Singing 1 Due on Wednesday

Mon Feb 16 - Synthesizing a New Solo from Isolated Words/Phrases/Devices

Wed Feb 18 - Group Solo Construction, Practice Strategy, Exam 1 Final Review

Week 7:

Mon Feb 23 - **Exam #1**

Wed Feb 25 - **Exam #1**

Exam #1 Objective: Students will demonstrate the ability to think and respond quickly within bebop grammar by completing and connecting musical ideas in real time using enclosures, arpeggiations, and scale fragments. Given random chord changes and starting pitches, students will fluently integrate these devices, drawing from Unit 1 materials and their language journals.

Week 8:

Mon Mar 2 - Application of Bebop Devices to a Blues/Rhythm Changes/Standards

Wed Mar 4 - Application of Bebop Devices to a Blues/Rhythm Changes/Standards

Spring Break**Week 9: Journal 3 Due** on Monday

Mon Mar 16 - Exam 2 Preview and Mock Exam

Wed Mar 18 - Analysis/Feedback on Selected Journal 3 Solo Submissions

Week 10:

Mon Mar 23 - **Exam #2**

Wed Mar 25 - **Exam #2**

Exam #2 Objective: Students will demonstrate the ability to apply bebop grammar fluently within the formal contexts of the blues and rhythm changes. Using enclosures, arpeggiations, and scale fragments, students will connect musical ideas with rhythmic clarity and a consistent time feel across these progressions, drawing from Unit 1 materials and their language journals.

Unit 2: Chromaticism, Diminished Patterns, and Upper Structure

Week 11: Journal 4 Due on Monday

Mon Mar 30 - Harmonic Logic Behind Chromaticism, Diminished Patterns, and Upper Structure

Wed Apr 1 - Analysis of Transcribed Solos, Isolate Words/Phrases/Devices

Week 12:

Mon Apr 6 - Learning Isolated Words/Phrases/Devices in 12 keys

Wed Apr 8 - Learning Isolated Words/Phrases/Devices in 12 keys

Week 13: Journal 5 Due on Monday

Mon Apr 13 - Advanced Harmony and Substitution Logic

Wed Apr 15 - Applications of Chromaticism and Diminished Patterns

Week 14: Solo Singing 2 Due on Wednesday

Mon Apr 20 - Upper Structure Logic

Wed Apr 22 - Exam 3 Preview and Mock Exam

Week 15:

Mon Apr 27 - **Exam #3**

Wed Apr 29 - **Exam #3**

Exam #3 Objective: Building on the skills developed in Exams 1 and 2, students will demonstrate the ability to recognize a dominant chord and quickly generate clear melodic structure leading to its resolution. Given randomly displayed dominant chords, students will outline upper-structure triadic arpeggiations and connect these ideas to the resolution using chromatic connectors, diminished patterns, and other previously discussed devices including enclosures, arpeggiations, and scale fragments.

Week 16 (Finals Week): Journal 6 Due on Monday

Mon May 4 - No Class, Exam Retakes (Submit Journal 6 through Canvas)

FINALS WEEK:

Monday May 4 from 9 am to 12 noon - Exam Retakes

IMPORTANT: NO EXAM RETAKES WILL BE OFFERED AFTER THIS DATE/TIME.

OTHER COURSE INFORMATION

EMAIL 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. You must check your UNT email DAILY.

PROFESSIONALISM AND INCLUSIVITY:

All students are expected to contribute to an environment of inclusivity and mutual respect, in this course and in all department courses. Please consider how some words, phrases and actions that you feel are harmless and acceptable may actually be perceived by others as an attack on their very identity. Show proper respect for all of your peers and treat others how *they* would like to be treated.

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: <https://vpaa.unt.edu/ss/integrity/index.html>

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: <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/dean-of-students/conduct/index.html>

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)

Spring 2026 Semester Academic Schedule (with Add/Drop Dates)

<https://registrar.unt.edu/sites/default/files/spring-2026-academic-calendar.pdf>

Final Exam Schedule

<https://registrar.unt.edu/exams/final-exam-schedule/spring.html>

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 schedule a meeting with an academic advisor in your college or visit the Student Financial Aid and Scholarships office to discuss dropping a course or 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.

Link: <http://ferpa.unt.edu/>