

CONTEMPORARY MATERIALS & TECHNIQUES I (MUCP 1180)

SYLLABUS — Fall 2026

class meetings: M 11:15 am – 12:05 pm (MUSIC NOW) — Merrill Ellis Intermedia Theater/MEIT (MU 1001)
 W 11:15 am – 12:05 pm (lecture) — MEIT (Klein)
 F 11:15 am – 12:05 pm (labs) — MEIT (Mei), MU 321 (Kaplan)
 F 12:20-1:10 pm (lab) — MEIT (Chen)

course instructor: Dr. Joseph Klein
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teaching assistant: Mr. Daniel Mei
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office: MU 2001 / Bain 218

NOTE: Office hours will be posted on the respective instructors' office doors and posted on Canvas by the second week of classes.

REQUIRED TEXT:

Gould, Elaine. *Behind Bars: The Definitive Guide to Music Notation*. London: Faber Music, 2011.

COURSE PRE-REQUISITES:

All students enrolled in MUCP 1180 *must fulfill the following pre-requisite requirements:*

- Admission to the College of Music;
- Enrollment in or completion of Theory I (MUTH 1400) and Aural Skills I (MUTH 1410).

Students who do not meet the above requirements must make an appointment with the course instructor immediately or risk being *dropped from the course*.

Students enrolled in MUCP 1180 who have passed Theory I-IV and Aural Skills I-IV and are not planning to be composition majors may wish to enroll in MUCP 3090 in the spring semester instead of 1180 in the fall. Please contact course instructor for more information.

COURSE STRUCTURE:**General:**

The purpose of this course is to explore a variety of compositional techniques and materials from the concert music repertoire of the recent past, contextualizing them within a larger aesthetic, historical, and cultural framework and applying them within guided technical projects, thus providing students interested in composition with the basic tools needed to compose effectively in contemporary concert music idioms. Because music history and theory curricula focus primarily on music from the “common practice” era in Western Art Music (c.1600-1900), this course supplements that material by focusing on concert music composed since 1900. Thus, it serves as an important foundation for the study of contemporary composition at the undergraduate level. While the focus is on notated music within the concert repertoire, the techniques covered may be applied to other genres as well, such as music for media and various popular music idioms.

MUCP 1180 is required for all prospective undergraduate composition majors and is also offered as an elective course for qualified non-composition majors (including BA students). Given the variety of students enrolled, the course attempts to achieve the following goals:

- To provide a broad foundation for future composition majors, providing practical skills and enabling them to effectively practice their craft in a variety of contexts.

- To provide theory and jazz arranging majors with compositional experiences outside of those they are more familiar with in their respective degree programs.
- To provide non-composition majors with the tools necessary to understand and appreciate a wide variety of contemporary musical idioms and aesthetic perspectives within the concert music tradition.
- To determine the most appropriate academic track for students in the program: e.g., BM Composition, BM Jazz Studies, BA Music, BA Commercial Music, BA Critical Studies in Music & Society, etc.

The material covered in this course is critical to the understanding of current compositional trends; as a result, the amount of work required may be considered quite significant by many students.

Prospective composition majors who do not feel up to this challenge should seriously consider pursuing another major. Although MUCP 1180 may be taken concurrently with Theory I and Aural Skills I (MUTH 1400/1410), students who have little or no previous experience in music theory and/or composition may find the material beyond their grasp at present. In those cases, it is recommended that students either consider another major or defer enrollment in this course until completing additional semesters of Theory and Aural Skills.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students should attain the following skills:

- Recognizing and applying a variety of technical and contemporary stylistic approaches through listening, score study, and guided projects.
- Developing strategies for listening to unfamiliar music, with an understanding of the appropriate cultural, historical, theoretical, and aesthetic contexts.
- Developing critical thinking skills and the ability to assess “quality” in a variety of musics.
- Synthesizing and applying the material covered in the course to create a short, cohesive, and effective musical composition.

Class meetings:

The class meets three days each week and consists of three interrelated components:

- Departmental (MUSIC NOW): These weekly meetings are scheduled on Mondays at 11:00-11:50 am, and are attended by all of the composition students active in the program (from entering freshmen to doctoral candidates, including non-composition majors). Because of the diversity of experience represented by the students in attendance, MUSIC NOW presentations may range from introductory-level to very advanced topics, and subjects run the gamut from commercial to avant-garde experimental music. These presentations are intended to expose students to current musical practices and issues, thus supplementing the more historical material covered in the lecture portion of this course. MUSIC NOW presentations include lectures, demonstrations, panel discussions, video presentations, and performances featuring guest artists, faculty, students, and alumni.
- Lecture (Wednesdays): Taught by the primary course instructor, these comprise intensive explorations of repertoire, techniques, concepts, and aesthetics presented in the listening, score study, and reading assignments. These topics set the context for the guided composition exercises assigned throughout the semester.
- Laboratory (Fridays): Taught by the teaching assistants, these focus primarily on the technical aspects of the assigned projects and general compositional issues. Technical projects are workshopped and discussed during the lab sessions, and topics from the listening, score study, and reading assignments may be further explored through small group discussions.

CANVAS:

The course **syllabus** will be posted on Canvas by the first day of class, and guidelines for each of the four guided **technical projects** will be posted as they are assigned. These and other materials are available on the course **Canvas site** and may be downloaded throughout the semester. Make sure you have explored the Canvas site by the end of the first week of class, and that you are familiar with all of the resources that are available there—including listening and reading assignments, weekly logs, lecture slides, quizzes, terminology, and other information.

Additionally, all students enrolled in the course will be expected to complete the online **Preliminary Survey** (on Canvas) *by the end of the day Thursday during the first week of class*. This survey will not only provide important advisory information for the course instructors, but will include information regarding available performing forces for the lab workshop sessions throughout the semester. Students will be able to access names, instruments, and contact information for all of the students enrolled in class, which may be used as a resource for workshops, as well as the final composition presentations. (Note: because students will be collaborating with one another regularly in this class, it will be necessary to provide contact information of some kind on the survey).

ASSIGNMENTS:

Regular assignments include the following:

- Guided technical **Projects** based upon the techniques and materials covered in class and studied in the assigned repertoire.
- Weekly **Listening/score study**, primarily from the 20th- and 21st-century concert music repertoire.
- Weekly **Readings** (articles, book chapters) pertaining to contemporary music.
- **Discussion boards**, allowing students to discuss the previously assigned works and readings. These are assigned during the weeks between technical project due dates.

Guidelines for each of these assignments are included on the course Canvas website. *You are responsible for following these guidelines*, so please make sure you have read this information carefully. *It is important that these assignments are done in a timely manner*, as this material will be discussed during class meetings. Listening and score study materials are available online (YouTube, Soundcloud, etc.), which are linked from Canvas. Reading assignments—as well as lecture materials and other course information—may be obtained from the course Canvas website. *Please carefully read the grading rubric for each assignment prior to submission.*

Final Composition:

The culminating project for this course is a 3- to 5-minute **composition** for up to five performers, which must *effectively and organically* incorporate *at least two of the contemporary techniques covered in class*. All students who are planning to major in composition are expected to present their work during the final examination time; options for other students will be included in the final composition guidelines, which will be posted later in the semester.

*NOTE: Students will not be eligible to have their final composition read if they are (a) missing **any** of the technical project assignments, (b) missing two or more log posts, and/or (c) have not had their previous projects workshopped in class.*

Examinations:

There *is no final examination* for this course. However, there will be three online **quizzes** on covering repertoire and terminology discussed during the course of the semester; these are short, multiple-choice exams that will be available on Canvas at the end of the fifth, tenth, and fifteenth week of classes. These quizzes are optional and will not be graded; however, they are required for students planning to major in composition since they serve as preparation for the **Freshman Barrier Examination** (FBE). Students planning to continue in the composition

program *will be tested comprehensively on the content of MUCP 1180-1190* during the FBE prior to enrollment in MUCP 2180. Please note that students *must complete all six quizzes* (three in MUCP 1180 and three in MUCP 1190) to be eligible to take the FBE. Additionally, students planning to major in composition *must earn a grade of **at least a B** in all MUCP and MUTH courses*, which is a requirement of the BM Composition degree. The FBE will not be administered to students who do not meet these requirements. Students who plan to remain in the BA Music degree do not need to meet these requirements, yet may continue to take composition courses as part of their BA degree electives. Refer to the online Composition Student Handbook (<https://myunt.sharepoint.com/sites/unt-composition/SitePages/Handbook.aspx#freshman-barrier-examination>) for further details.

Notation:

All composition assignments (including the technical projects and final composition) are to be *copied by hand*, properly formatted, legible, and conforming to proper notational conventions (refer to Gould's *Behind Bars*, which is the course textbook and will be a useful resource for you in your compositional careers long after you leave UNT).

COMPOSITION PORTFOLIO:

Students planning to continue as composition majors in the BM program are expected to maintain a composition portfolio, which includes scores, complete sets of parts, recordings, concert programs, and other related documentation. This composition portfolio will be reviewed at critical points throughout the degree program (e.g., composition jury, final portfolio review hearing). Students are also encouraged to maintain a folder of their various project sketches, which may be useful for future reference or even developed into more substantial compositions. Students in the composition program are expected to compose for a variety of instruments/voices and ensembles, as a diverse portfolio is expected of all composition majors.

GRADING:

Composition Assignments:

Technical projects and the final composition will be graded on the following criteria:

- Submission of **pre-composition work**, to be submitted for review by the TAs prior to each workshop session.
- **Effectiveness** in applying procedures according to the assignment; this includes preparation of composition assignments that are workshopped in class.
- Overall **musicality**, including use of expressive markings, dynamics, phrasing, articulations, and sensitivity to instrumental/vocal ranges and capabilities
- Proper musical **notation**, including rhythms, pitches, and correct transpositions—score and parts.
- **Presentation**: manuscript and score layout, including spacing, margins, correct paper size, and overall neatness (score and parts).
- Insights provided in the accompanying **commentary/analysis**. These should be technically substantive and thorough, and must address any specific questions raised in the assignment guidelines.

A detailed grading rubric will be provided for each composition assignment in Canvas, with specific weightings for each of the above criteria.

Discussion Boards:

There are ten discussion boards assigned throughout the semester, during weeks when a project is not due. Discussion boards will be graded on the following criteria:

- General **engagement with the material**—specifically in relation to the class lecture that week. This means you should focus your discussion primarily on technical issues related to composition rather than expressive or extra-musical references.
- An **ability to write about music** in a cogent way. This includes how you work examples into an argument—most effectively by identifying an example clearly (e.g., with a time stamp or measure number), describing in adequate detail how the given passage is significant, and succinctly explaining why.
- **Writing style**. This includes how you organize your comments and how effectively you are able to communicate your point.
- A clear **understanding of the material**, as demonstrated in the substance of your comments. In your observations, you should always take into consideration the perspective of the composer/author, and attempt to address the work/writing on its own terms, rather than simply providing a subjective response to each.

Each discussion board will include two separate threads: one for the assigned listening and one for the assigned reading (or video commentary). These assignments are listed at the top of each discussion thread, along with the given prompt(s).

Students will submit a primary response to one of the given prompts for each thread and respond to other posts in the discussion. Grading for each discussion board is as follows (100 points each):

- 30 points for the primary listening post: 250-300 words per post;
- 30 points for three responses to other listening posts (10 points each): 75-100 words per response;
- 20 points for the primary reading post: 200-250 words per post;
- 20 points for two responses to other reading posts (10 points each): 75-100 words per response.

Attendance and Participation:

Since there is much material to cover during the course of the semester, punctuality is crucial; to this end, chronic tardiness will be considered in the attendance portion of the grade (for the purpose of grading, 3 late arrivals = 1 absence). *Students with more than **four** unexcused absences (or the equivalent) are subject to be dropped from the course or failed at the instructor's discretion.*

Participation is critical in this class and will be reflected in the final course grade. Students are expected to be adequately prepared to have their projects workshopped in the labs (as assigned) and to regularly perform their classmates' projects. Additionally, students will be expected to participate in class discussions, such as critiquing student projects during the workshops.

Cumulative:

Final grades will be based upon the *final composition, technical projects, weekly log posts, attendance* (which includes attendance at five Composition Division events), and *class participation*, and are distributed as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| • Final Composition: | 25% |
| • Technical Projects (4 @ 6.25% ea): | 25% |
| • Log Posts (10 @ 2.5% ea): | 25% |
| • Attendance: | 15% |
| • Participation: | 10% |

Students may keep track of their progress by viewing their grades on Canvas. Please inform the course instructor or teaching assistant immediately if you notice any discrepancies or missing grades, or if grades are not posted within 10 days of submission.

INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMPOSITION PROGRAM:

Composition HUB:

All students enrolled in composition courses must create a profile on the **Composition HUB**, a Microsoft-based platform that hosts the *Composition Handbook*, the events calendar, communications, and other information within the division. Instructions for creating a profile on the Composition HUB may be found at <https://myunt.sharepoint.com/sites/unt-composition/SitePages/HUB-Guide.aspx#%f0%9f%93%9a-table-of-contents>; please create your profile by the end of the first week of classes.

Event attendance:

In addition to attending class meetings (including Music Now), students are required to attend **at least five** events sponsored by the Division of Composition Studies (*the four Spectrum events are required* among these five; in the case of an excused conflict, other Composition Division events may be substituted for a Spectrum program).

Events are listed on the Composition HUB (<https://myunt.sharepoint.com/sites/unt-composition/SitePages/CompositionDivisionEvents.aspx?csf=1&web=1&e=0qiifY&CID=5de404fd-fad2-4332-b945-4fb7d24e1f77>); *make a note of these events at the beginning of the semester and plan your schedule accordingly*. To receive event attendance credit, you will scan a QR code on your phone for each event. If for any reason the QR code is not available for a given event, you may take a selfie at the event and upload it to a form on the Composition HUB in order to get attendance credit. See the course instructor for details.

Composers Forum:

Composers Forum is the student organization that represents all students actively involved in the program (whether majors or non-majors). This organization sponsors events (including the Spectrum concerts), coordinates collaborative opportunities, hosts guest artists, and contributes to the Composition Division in other substantive ways. Involvement in Composers Forum is an excellent way to participate in the community of composers and to take advantage of various creative, educational, and professional development opportunities in the larger artistic community.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

In addition to the above information pertaining specifically to this course, the following links provide important information regarding general University policies. Students should familiarize themselves with these policies:

Defibrillators in the Music Building: These may be found in the following locations:

- Music Building: Across from the west side of the Music Commons, directly across from the elevator
- Music Building: Third floor hallway, across from the staircase that comes up from the Copy Room. Next to Room 322
- Music Building: Across from the Copy Room next to Room 293
- Music Building: Voertman Lobby by the big double set of doors that lead out to the courtyard
- Music Building: Main Office (247) under the student worker's desk
- Music Annex: Next to room MA117, near the triple set of doors on the east side of the building
- Music Practice Building North: First floor on the Avenue C side
- Music Practice Building South: First floor on the Avenue C side
- Bain Hall: First floor by the restrooms
- Murchison Performing Arts Center: Located off the main lobby, beyond the grand staircase, across from the single occupancy restroom (next to the public water fountains)

Academic Integrity Policy: <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>

Student Behavior Policy: <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. For more information, please visit eagleconnect.unt.edu/

ODA Information: disability.unt.edu; phone: (940) 565-4323.

Semester Academic Schedule (with Add/Drop Dates):

<https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-academic-calendar.html>

Health and Safety Information: <https://music.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness>

Registration Information for Students: <https://registrar.unt.edu/students>

Academic Calendar at a Glance (including final exam schedule):

<https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-registration-guide>

Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress: <http://financialaid.unt.edu/sap>

Retention of Student Records: <http://ferpa.unt.edu/>

Counseling and Testing: <http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services>; for more information on mental health issues, please visit: <https://disparities.unt.edu/mental-health-resources>.

The counselor for music students is:

Myriam Reynolds
Chestnut Hall, Suite 311
(940) 565-2741
Myriam.reynolds@unt.edu

Add/Drop Policy: <https://vpaa.unt.edu/advising/dropping/deadlines>

Student Resources: <https://success.unt.edu/aa-sa-resources>

Care Team: <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care-team>