

Seminar in Music Theory

Engaged Music Theory

FALL 2025

Last updated: October 29, 2025

Instructor

Chris Segall (he/him), Associate Professor of Music Theory

Email: segallcr@ucmail.uc.edu

Office: Mary Emery Hall, Room 4238

Student hours: Friday, 8:00–10:00 a.m.

Course Description

Scholarly research in music theory increasingly broaches issues of cultural and social politics: gender, race, sexuality, disability, class, globalization, decolonization, and the power structures that shape these concepts. Called “engaged music theory” by a workgroup organized by music theorists Michèle Duguay, Marc Hannaford, and Toru Momii, this interdisciplinary body of scholarship draws on writings that lie outside the traditional field of music theory.

Our goal is to familiarize ourselves with both recent engaged scholarship in music theory and sources outside music that develop frameworks for theorizing cultural and social politics. We will ask why music theorists are drawn to cultural and social politics, how interdisciplinary scholarship can be conducted ethically, and what new methodologies might be relevant for our own work.

The seminar is open to graduate students in all music disciplines. Students will assist in curating weekly reading assignments and will write a final research paper (20–30 pages) on any topic occasioned by the course.

Meetings

Wednesday, 2:30–5:15 p.m., in Mary Emery Hall, Room 4230

Multiple Perspectives

This seminar complies fully with the precepts of Ohio Senate Bill 1 (136th General Assembly), the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act. All perspectives are welcome and may be expressed freely and openly. The professor’s goal is to help students develop their own ideas and projects, not reaffirm the professor’s viewpoints.

Course Work

Readings

Each week, you'll read 3–4 articles or book excerpts, totalling up to 100 pages of scholarship.

Response Essays

Write an informal essay that responds to all the week's readings. There is no set format for the essays, but they should refer to each reading at least once, avoiding direct quotations. Use the essays to reflect on the readings' content and to make connections to other writings and music.

Essays should be double spaced and contain at least two *full* pages of text (i.e., the essay should conclude at the top of page 3). Diagrams and musical examples may be appended as necessary. Submit your essay as a post to that week's discussion board on Canvas, no later than Tuesday at 11:59 p.m., then read your classmates' essays.

Final Paper

Write a scholarly research paper (20–30 pages) on any topic occasioned by the course. The paper may be musicological, theoretical, or analytical, or it may employ other methodologies and orientations. You'll submit a proposal, give a presentation, and write the paper.

Proposal: Submit a one-paragraph abstract with accompanying bibliography that outlines the research idea you'd like to pursue. I encourage you to discuss your idea with me in advance. The proposal is due on Wednesday, November 5. I will respond with written feedback.

Presentation: Present your preliminary findings in a presentation of 15–20 minutes. The presentation may be formal (conference-style) or informal in orientation. Presentations will take place on December 3.

Paper: Submit your completed paper by Wednesday, December 10. I will provide written comments.

Grading

Course grades will be determined by participation (20%), response essays (40%), and final paper (40%).

You will receive an A for work that is submitted on time, adheres to the minimum length requirement, and demonstrates in good faith that you have completed the readings thoroughly. Response essays *will not* be assessed based on how well you understood the readings. Final papers *will* be assessed based on your success at identifying and communicating (in your own words) the primary argument of your chosen selections.

You may not use generative AI to assist with the writing process.

Course Schedule

August 27

No essay due

Advance Ohio Higher Education Act, Sub. S.B. 1, 136th General Assembly (2025) (enacted).

Michael Townsen Hicks, James Humphries, and Joe Slater, "ChatGPT Is Bullshit," *Ethics and Information Technology* 26 (2024).

Daniele Shlomit Sofer, "Playing by the Rules in the House of the Dead," *Engaged Music Theory* (blog), May 17, 2022.

September 3

Essay #1 due

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (50th anniversary ed.), trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (Bloomsbury Academic, [1970] 2018), 71–96.

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Routledge, 1994), 1–22, 177–89.

Chris Stover, *Reimagining Music Theory: Contexts, Communities, Creativities* (Routledge, 2025), 44–66.

September 10 @ 3:00 p.m. (Zoom)

Essay #2 due

Featured Guest: Nadine Hubbs, University of Michigan

Send a copy of your response essay to: nhubbs@umich.edu

Héctor Carrillo and Jorge Fontdevila, "Border Crossings and Shifting Sexualities Among Mexican Gay Immigrant Men: Beyond Monolithic Conceptions," *Sexualities* 17/8 (2014): 919–38.

Nadine Hubbs, "Is Country Music Quintessentially American? Or White?" *Musicology Now* (blog), December 13, 2022.

Nadine Hubbs, "I Am Mexican; How Would I Not Like Country Music?" (manuscript), from *Border Country: The Mexican Influence at the Heart of Country Music* (forthcoming).

September 17

Essay #3 due

Martin Scherzinger, "Negotiating the Music-Theory/African-Music Nexus: A Political Critique of Ethnomusicological Anti-Formalism and a Strategic Analysis of the Harmonic Patterning of the Shona Mbira Song *Nyamaropa*," *Perspectives of New Music* 39/1 (2001): 5–117.

Olúfẹmi Táíwò, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (Indiana University Press, 2010), 49–97.

Kofi Agawu, "Tonality as a Colonizing Force in Africa," in *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique*, ed. Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan (Duke University Press, 2016), 334–55.

September 24 @ 3:00 p.m. (Zoom)

Essay #4 due

Featured Guest: Marc Hannaford, University of Michigan

Send a copy of your response essay to: marchann@umich.edu

Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (University of California Press, 2002), 240–86.

Jarvis R. Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching* (Harvard University Press, 2021), 93–125.

Marc E. Hannaford, "Fugitive Music Theory and George Russell's Theory of Tonal Gravity," *Theory and Practice* 46 (2021): 47–81.

Marc E. Hannaford, "Eric Dolphy's and Yusef Lateef's Synthetic Formations," *Music Theory Online* 31/2 (2025).

October 1

Essay #5 due

David Lewin, "Music Theory, Phenomenology, and Modes of Perception," *Music Perception* 3/4 (1986): 327–92.

Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), 65–107.

Gavin Lee, "Queer Music Theory," *Music Theory Spectrum* 42/1 (2020): 143–53.

October 8**Essay #6 due**

Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (Verso, 1995), 23–49.

Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (20th anniversary ed.) (Columbia University Press, [1997] 2017), 19–51.

Bruce Quaglia, "Musical Prothesis: Form, Expression, and Narrative Structure in Beethoven's Sonata Movements," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, ed. Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil Lerner, and Joseph Straus (Oxford University Press, 2016), 618–39.

Blake Howe, "Music and the Agents of Obsession," *Music Theory Spectrum* 38/2 (2017): 218–40.

October 15 @ 3:00 p.m. (Zoom)**Essay #7 due**

Featured Guest: Vivian Luong, University of Oklahoma

Send a copy of your response essay to: vivian.luong@ou.edu

Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury" (1984), reprinted in *Teaching Black: The Craft of Teaching on Black Life and Literature*, ed. Ana-Maurine Lara and drea brown (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021), 125–27.

Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Duke University Press, 2007), 1–7, 40–45.

Franny Choi, "Imitation Games," *Gulf Coast* 34/1 (2022): 226–38.

Vivian Luong, "Feeling Like a Theorist," *Engaged Music Theory* (blog), June 13, 2022.

Vivian Luong, "Redrawing Analytical Lines," *Music Theory Online* 31/1 (2025).

October 22 @ 5:00 p.m. (Zoom)**Essay #8 due**

Featured Guest: Andrew Chung, University of North Texas

Send a copy of your response essay to: Andrew.Chung@unt.edu

Peter Harrison, "Subduing the Earth: Genesis 1, Early Modern Science, and the Exploitation of Nature," *Journal of Religion* 79/1 (1999): 86–109.

Françoise Vergès, "Racial Capitalocene," in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (Verso, 2017), 72–82.

Andrew J. Chung, "Songs of the New World and the Breath of the Planet at the Orbis Spike, 1610: Toward a Decolonial Musicology of the Anthropocene," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 76/1 (2023): 57–112.

Andrew J. Chung, "Early Modern Tuning, Temperament, and the Natural Philosophy of Empire," *Journal of Music Theory* 68/2 (2024): 315–56.

October 29

Essay #9 due

Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 25–49.

Jessica Bissett Perea, *Sound Relations: Native Ways of Doing Music History in Alaska* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 85–143.

Chelsea Burns, "'Musique cannibale': The Evolving Sound of Indigeneity in Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Tres poemas indígenas*," *Music Theory Spectrum* 43/1 (2021): 91–113.

November 5

No class meeting (AMS/SMT Conference)

Final Paper Proposal due

November 12

Essay #10 due

Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (Fordham University Press, 2017), 1–31.

Jim Sykes, "The Secularism of Music Studies," *Yale Journal of Music and Religion* 6/2 (2020): 119–43.

Horace Clarence Boyer, "A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Contemporary Gospel Music," in *More than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians*, ed. Irene V. Jackson (Greenwood Press, 1985), 127–46.

Braxton D. Shelley, *An Eternal Pitch: Bishop G. E. Patterson, Broadcast Religion, and the Afterlives of Ecstasy* (University of California Press, 2023), 120–46.

November 19**Essay #11 due**

Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (Columbia University Press, 2015), 83–142.

Yayoi Uno Everett, "Intercultural Synthesis in Postwar Western Art Music: Historical Contexts, Perspectives, and Taxonomy," in *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music*, ed. Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau (Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 1–21.

Shyhji Pan-Chew, "Symmetry as a Cultural Determinant in the Music of Chou Wen-Chung," in *Polycultural Synthesis in the Music of Chou Wen-Chung*, ed. Mary I. Arlin and Mark A. Radice (Routledge, 2018), 217–54.

November 26 @ 3:00 p.m. (Zoom)**Essay #12 due**

Phil Ford, "Style as Analysis," in *The Routledge Companion to Popular Music Analysis: Expanding Approaches*, ed. Ciro Scotto, Kenneth Smith, and John Brackett (Routledge, 2019), 15–28.

Rosa Abrahams, "Mimicry as Movement Analysis," *Analytical Approaches to World Musics* 7/2 (2019): 41–68.

Floris Schuiling, "Talking Scores and the Dismediation of Music Notation," *Music Theory Online* 29/1 (2023).

Lara Pearson and T. K. V. Ramanujacharyulu, "Handwritten Notation in Karnatak Music: Memory and the Mediation of Social Relations," in *Musikalische Schreibszenen/Scenes of Musical Writing*, ed. Federico Celestini and Sarah Lutz (Brill Fink, 2023), 285–303.

December 3**Final Paper Presentations****December 10 (no class)****Final Paper due**