Readings in Music Theory
FALL 2020

Instructor
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Virtual office hours: Thursday, 4:45–5:45 p.m.; Friday, 10:00–11:00 a.m. (Eastern Time)

Course Description
You and I are going to dive into current research trends in music theory. We’ll read recent scholarship in a wide range of subfields, focusing on a few big questions. What are the goals of music theory, and how and why have they changed? How does music theory mediate among the creative process, the musical text, and the listening experience? Whom is music theory for, and whom has it excluded? On a practical level, we’ll explore how to read scholarship and situate it in the context of larger debates. Sometimes we’ll be joined by invited guests. Overall, this course will prepare you to enter the field of music theory, whether as interested observer or active participant.

Who Should Take This Course?
You! True, this course is required for music theory majors, but it benefits from the widest possible range of student backgrounds and perspectives. Each of you will bring something different to the course, and I want your voice to be heard. Whether you have read every issue of Music Theory Spectrum or have never heard of Music Theory Spectrum, I encourage you not only to participate but also to take ownership of your role in this class. You belong here.

Weekly Meeting
This is a synchronous online course. We’ll meet for a live video conference of 60–75 minutes on Wednesday afternoons, usually at 2:30–3:45 p.m. (Eastern Time).

Course Work
Readings
Each week, you’ll read 100–200 pages of scholarship in a single area. You’ll take notes on each reading. Send me your notes by email (first few weeks only), no later than Monday, two days before our class meeting. Response essays have the same deadline.
Response Essays
You'll write a single 2-page essay that responds to all the week's readings. Submit your essay as a post to that week's discussion board on Canvas, no later than Monday, two days before our class meeting. Whenever we'll feature a guest speaker, email them your essay, too.

We'll start the class discussion on Tuesday in the online forum. You'll read your classmates' essays and post friendly, supportive replies. I trust you to keep your comments collegial and to engage with the content of the essays. (Please don't evaluate your classmates' work.) You can participate as much as you like, but I'll ask that each of you respond to at least two essays.

Book Review
You'll write a book review, 8–10 pages long, on any academic book in the field of music theory. It can be a monograph (the whole book is written by the same author(s)) or an edited collection (each chapter is written by a different author). It can be a book that we'll read an excerpt from, another book in the course bibliography, or a book from outside the course bibliography. Make sure you tell me your selection in advance, so I can say whether it's okay. Submit your book review by November 11.

Interview
You're going to interview a music theorist and write a short paper, 6–8 pages long, that's a summary and critical reflection of the interview. This is a great way to meet someone new and develop your networking skills! You can choose any established scholar in the field, with the exception of (1) faculty members at CCM or your previous universities and (2) our featured guest speakers. Browse the course bibliography and recent music theory journals and conference programs for ideas. Tell me whom you're thinking of, and I'll say whether it's okay. The busiest times of the semester are (1) the first two weeks of November, when the AMS/SMT national conference takes place, and (2) the end of the semester, from Thanksgiving on. Plan to conduct your interview in October or mid-November, and be sure to read some of your chosen scholar's work before you interview them. Submit your paper by December 9.

Reading Scholarship
Each work of scholarship makes an original contribution to the field of music theory, in the form of a new idea or argument. It doesn’t just apply an existing idea to a new work. Part of reading scholarship involves identifying what's new, even if you're not already familiar with the work that preceded it.

Scholarly writing often follows certain conventions that can help you figure out what's new. Typically, authors state their main argument up front. They situate the argument with respect to the existing literature, explaining how their idea is different. They present a new methodology: that is, a theory and a method of applying it. Then they test the methodology through a case study, which in music theory is usually an analysis of excerpts from one or more works.
Here’s our motto: “The topic of the paper is not the topic of the paper.” The methodology is the main contribution, not the case study. I encourage you to describe the methodology without referring to the case study.

Let’s say we read a book on metrical dissonance in the music of Robert Schumann. (There is such a book, and it’s great: *Fantasy Pieces*, by Harald Krebs.) The methodology is a system for identifying metrical dissonance, or conflicting layers of regularly occurring pulses. The case study is the music of Robert Schumann. Of course, we’ll learn something about Schumann’s music from reading this book. After all, there’s a reason that Schumann was chosen for the case study. But the methodology of metrical dissonance can be applied to any music, not just Schumann’s. The book makes a broad contribution to the field of music theory, beyond refining our understanding of one composer’s works.

**Taking Notes**

Each piece of scholarly writing advances a primary argument. Each subsection makes a mini-argument that supports the primary argument. You’ll use the following template to classify the large-scale and small-scale arguments in each reading. I recommend that you pause after each subsection, summarize its mini-argument in a single sentence (in your own words), and assign it to the appropriate category below.

**Argument:** What is the author’s primary argument? The reading’s introduction usually presents and contextualizes the primary argument. The remainder of the reading develops the argument in detail.

**Background:** Some subsections review existing ideas or existing literature, in order to identify problems that the author’s approach will attempt to solve. How will the present reading build on what’s already known?

**Methodology:** A theoretical idea and method for applying it, this is the crux of the author’s contribution. How will the author apply and test the primary argument? The author might demonstrate the methodology with short analytical examples, but try to summarize it without referring to particular works or composers.

**Case study:** The reading explores implications of the methodology through extended analytical application. The case study may focus on a single work or composer, or it may deal with several works or composers. What argument is made through each case study? You may not be familiar with the repertoire. Listen to the music, study the score and musical examples, and read through the analysis in detail.

**Conclusion:** Readings usually end by restating the primary argument and findings. What further implications does the author suggest for their work?
**Commentary:** As you work through the reading, write down any other ideas or questions that you have. What do you find particularly interesting or convincing or problematic? How does this reading relate to other scholarship you’ve read? How else could the methodology be applied?

You’ll complete this six-category note-taking template for each reading this semester. I’ll ask you to email me your notes for the first few weeks. These notes will help you refer back to each reading without having to re-read it. Compiling them will help train you to read scholarship effectively and place it in a broader scholarly context. They’ll help you develop a skill that I hope will be useful in your further academic work.
Course Schedule

August 26
The Discipline of Music Theory
No essay due


September 2
Schema Theory
Essay #1 due


September 9
Neo-Riemannian Theory
Essay #2 due


September 16
Embodied Cognition
Essay #3 due


September 23
Topic Theory
Essay #4 due


September 30
Early Music
Essay #5 due

Featured Guest: Megan Kaes Long, Oberlin College
Send a copy of your response essay to: megan.long@oberlin.edu


October 7
Russian Music Theory
Essay #6 due


October 14
Video Game Music
Essay #7 due

Featured Guest: Elizabeth Medina-Gray, Ithaca College
Send a copy of your response essay to: emedinagray@ithaca.edu


**October 21**

**Rap**

**Essay #8 due**

Featured Guest: Mitchell Ohriner, University of Denver

Send a copy of your response essay to: mohriner@gmail.com


**October 28**

**Pop/Rock Music**

**Essay #9 due**


**November 4**

No class

Let’s take the week off for Election Day (November 3) and the first weekend of the AMS/SMT annual conference (November 7–8).

**November 11**

No class

Book review due

We’ll take today off for Veterans Day and the second weekend of the AMS/SMT annual conference (November 14–15). Remember to send me your book review.

**November 18**

**Feminist Music Theory**

**Essay #10 due**

Featured Guest: Rachel Lumsden, Florida State University

Send a copy of your response essay to: rllumsden@fsu.edu


**November 25**

**Antiracist Music Theory**

**Essay #11 due**


**December 2**
**Post-1945 Music**
**Essay #12 due**


**December 9**
**No class**
**Interview report due**
Course Bibliography

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**Russian Music Theory**


### Classical Form


### Harmonic Theory


**Rhythm and Meter**


**Schema Theory**


**Performance and Analysis**


**Pedagogy**


