

MUS 150, Undergraduate Composition, Spring 2009
Michael Dessen, University of California, Irvine
Syllabus

Course meets: Mondays, 3-5:50pm, MM 316

Course webpage: <http://music.arts.uci.edu/mdessen>

My office: 105 Music and Media

Phone: (949) 824-0386

Office hours: Thursdays, 10:30-12:30, and by **appointment**

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Course description

This course will survey a range of concepts and methods in music composition. Assignments will include short composition exercises, reading and listening, and two small projects.

My hope is that this course will expose you to new ways of listening to and thinking about music, and help you cultivate your own voice as a composer and/or performer. Because of this focus, as well as the time constraints of a 10-week course with nearly twenty students, the course will not attempt a comprehensive introduction to any singular tradition of compositional practice, nor will you have time to create a magnum opus. Instead, each of the one-week assignments will immerse you in a particular compositional concern, using specific constraints and drawing on examples from diverse historical and cultural moments to spark your imagination. The midterm and final projects will give you practice extending one or more of those ideas into a slightly larger format, with more artistic freedom.

Please note that all students must be willing to perform in class on their primary instrument when asked, in order to facilitate weekly readings of composition exercises.

This is an upper division course for music majors, and you should expect to work roughly six hours per week outside of class on assignments. The prerequisite is MUS 16C.

Schedule

March 30: Introduction

April 6: Assignment #1 due - Melodic line and musique concrete

April 13: Assignment #2 due - Harmonic counterpoint and resonance

April 20: Assignment #3 due - Rhythmic counterpoint and cycles

April 27: Light reading/listening due (work on midterm project)

May 4: Midterm project due

May 11: Assignment #4 due - Timbre, texture and stasis

May 18: Assignment #5 due - Improvisational forms

May 25: UCI holiday, no class.

June 1: Light reading/listening due (work on final project)

June 8 (exam week): Final project due, attendance required, 4-6 pm.

Assignment topics are subject to change.

Class time

In most weeks, the first half of class will be used to hear each student's assignment and offer brief critique. After a short break, the final hour will be used for lecture/discussion and to contextualize and explain the assignment due in the following week.

Required materials

For written scores, it is not important to me whether you notate by hand or software, but in either case you should present clear, proofread work with attention to detail.

A few assignments will involve recorded or electronic sounds, and similarly, in those cases it is not important to me what software or hardware you use, only that you follow the guidelines for the assignment. For those students with no previous experience with recorded or electronic

sounds, I will specify tools and methods appropriate for first-time users.

Grading

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Weekly composition assignments: $5 \times 8\% = 40\%$

Attendance and informed participation in class discussion (includes reading/listening assignments): 15%

Midterm project: 20%

Final project: 25%

Late policies

Late assignments and projects will not be accepted. In order to receive a passing grade for an assignment or project, you must turn it in on time, at the beginning of the class when it is due. If you have a severe (documented) illness or genuine emergency that prevents you from completing an assignment or attending a class on time, you must contact me on the due date.

Class discussion and critique is also an important part of this course, and failing to attend class or arriving late will lower your attendance and participation grade.

Special needs

If you have a disability that affects your performance in this course, you must document it through the [Disabilities Services Office](#) and have them contact me at the beginning of the quarter to establish the necessary arrangements.

Office hours and getting help

If you have any trouble with the course, it is important to seek help as early as possible. If you want to meet for help but cannot make my office hours, please [email me](#) some times you are free.