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## **Teaching Philosophy**

University learning is undergoing a crisis of conscience. Escalating tuition and fees make students and parents increasingly anxious for a direct, causal relationship between a degree, and a viable career trajectory upon graduation. This anxiety places the enterprise of university learning under scrutiny, and especially calls into question the merits of a university education in the arts. While this disquiet is not new, it is brought into stark relief in the digital age, where ubiquitous access to information online imperils the discipline, patience, and fortitude necessary to accrue wisdom.

Any responsible approach to teaching in this environment should be mindful, therefore, of the abstract, network-driven nature of thriving in the digital age, and temper its breadth with the tactile, slow, and sensory depth cultivated best by time-honored, best practices in pedagogy. Breadth and depth are both vital.

My teaching philosophy is continental in theory. In practice, it celebrates students' drive to live meaningful lives as a principal agent of, and empowering virtue in, their search for meaningful, musical citizenship. The three tenets below—Counterpoint, Community, and Transparency—support it.

**Counterpoint:** Continental thinking in teaching cultivates wisdom by creating symbiosis between academic rigor and playful inventiveness. Learning tools, when used contrapuntally, create a harmony of elements greater than the sum of their parts. In teaching tonal music theory & practice, for example, this means that textbook study, in-class group work, integrated repertoire study, Bach chorale arrangement study, workbook assignments, and class projects all work together in concert to place different learning modalities in dialogue with one other. In teaching electronic music, (where, due to the breakneck speed of innovation in musical technology, proficiency with some software/hardware does not guarantee mastery of the art) contrapuntal thinking considers aesthetics, cognitive sciences, and film editing practices as gateways to abiding musical insights. Contrapuntal teaching is heterophonic; its beauty is constantly on the move.

**Community:** Continental thinking in teaching furthers depth and breadth of student learning by cultivating musical communities. Musical communities encourage classroom environments where students feel accountable not just to their instructor, but to each other. It means that each member of a class is interested and invested in the success of their peers. For my senior seminar on 20<sup>th</sup> century string quartets, for example, each student prepared a fifteen-minute presentation on a quartet or musical artist for a group of sixth-graders at a local arts charter school. Students helped each other with audio/visual assistance, and drew common themes between their presentations. For composers, I have organized new music festivals featuring works by student composers, and, in concert with the chamber music and student orchestra programs, had students perform and conduct new work. Student musicians and composers bonded with each other, and each participant became a better musical citizen by virtue of their working together.

**Transparency:** Effective communities seek out the best from each member of their group. For this reason, continental practice in teaching is transparent in its grading criteria, assignment prompts, pedagogical method, and instruction. It engenders trust and respect from my students, and encourages their best work through the provision of clear guidelines and manageable feedback. My grading rubrics are clearly outlined on my syllabi, and discussed at the beginning of each term. Throughout the course, feedback is anchored within the rubrics, and informs the corrections and suggestions I make to their work. Transparent assignment parameters allow for students to better invest in their own learning. And keeping my grading books online allow my students to track their progress.

**Conclusion:** Good teaching requires virtues of discipline, foresight, and robust moral imagination; the above three tenets in my teaching practice—counterpoint, community, and transparency—aspire to make these virtues real. University learning affords students the opportunity to dig deep into their motivations and hopes for the future, and, as instructors, we must model that search for the right questions with humility, grace, and goodwill.

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