

Mark Applebaum: *Teaching Statement*

I remain fully invested as a teacher and mentor at Stanford. My abiding concern is to increase my students' creative capacity and artistic agency. I haven't succeeded with every student, but, for the vast majority, I think I've been a positive and useful influence. I'm especially grateful to have been recognized as the *Hazy Family University Fellow*—one of the *Bass Fellowships in Undergraduate Education*.

My teaching evaluations have been strong. Through 42 courses my average rating is 4.59 out of 5. I work hard at my teaching and hold my students to a high standard (which is appreciated by many, but not all students). I routinely attend *Center for Teaching and Learning* roundtable discussions and talks by award winning teachers (and have given one). I invited *CTL* staff to my music appreciation class to film a lecture and provide feedback on my teaching, a helpful process that prompted subsequent tweaks in my approach. (The filming revealed flaws in my teaching for sure; but the *CTL* also asked permission to show the film to new professors as a model of excellent lecturing.) Similarly I have attended lectures by colleagues in order to get ideas, and to have them attend my courses to offer critical feedback (most recently, for example, in an exchange with Rob Reich, Political Science).

Since tenure I've designed many new curricula at Stanford. New freshman seminars include *The Work of Art as Noun & Verb*; *The Beatles*; *Humor in Music*; and a laboratory course on the design and construction of *Experimental Instruments*. New composition courses for both undergraduate and graduate students include *Composition for Electronic Musicians*, which addressed a particular interest in the CCRMA community; and a *Songwriter's Workshop* that, for the first time at Stanford, responds to the needs of creative students working in vernacular idioms (e.g., rock bands, singer-songwriters, spoken word hip hop poets, laptop DJs, EDM beat-makers, turntablists, Broadway musical writers).

I've also developed *The Trans-Idiomatic Arts Practicum* for the Bing Overseas Study Program—an exciting abroad course that invites students to observe and make artwork in a variety of media in different foreign countries. This curriculum has been retooled for students in several contexts: in Stanford's quarter-long Paris and Oxford programs, and for intensive three-week summer seminars I developed in Amsterdam (and in Copenhagen and Stockholm, upcoming this summer, 2015). Rather than impose a rigid itinerary, the courses challenge and allow students to discover a local culture that is particular to them, and to pursue an art-making agenda of personal relevance. For example, there are no requirements to attend specific arts events; but once a student chooses to write an evaluative critique on, say ballet, the subsequent ones must address a medium other than dance (e.g., visual art, music, film, theater, architecture—or even a review of a street performance, culinary experience, and beyond). Similarly, creative work must be undertaken in a variety of media, albeit chosen by each student: a photography project, for example, must be followed by non-photography, such as poetry, performance art, song, graffiti art, and so forth. (The only requirement is that certain projects must be collaborative, and others must be site-specific.) As such, everyone functions as an experienced artist at some points, but as a novice at others. These courses have been very successful and popular educational opportunities, ones that stretch the abilities and affinities of undergraduates dedicated to the arts but whose majors are chiefly in other disciplines. And, from a personal growth perspective, they have extended my own abilities to mentor students in a wide variety of art forms, to understand the expressive intersections among media, and to develop a taxonomy of cross-idiomatic parameters and intermedial vocabulary.

My graduate and undergraduate composition seminars have explored a variety of topics that I've cultivated at Stanford, always project-oriented. Some highlights include the *Theme in Search of*

Variations project (in which students compose autonomous pieces in response to a shared source—a piece of my creation—after which the entire collection of works is performed in concert by a visiting ensemble); *Collaborative Composition* (a response to the fact that composers often collaborate with choreographers, dramaturges, filmmakers, and the like but, except in popular idioms, they rarely work with one another); *Responses to a Compositional Control* (in which students take turns working with a shared musical fragment in the presence of the full class, thereby revealing at the very moment of invention—albeit in an artificial context—the personal train of thought leading to specific creative decisions); and *Partnerships in Film Music* (in which graduate composers are paired with students in Stanford’s documentary film program to make short works based on a common duration, and then re-paired randomly in a public screening session in the classic Cage-Cunningham manner of media cohabitation rather than coordination).

Almost all of the courses I teach at Stanford are of my own creation. I have had the pleasure to teach some on multiple occasions, thereby affording continual revision. [sic]—the *Stanford Improvisation Collective* that I started more than a decade ago—is constantly updated with each new iteration. While pieces like John Zorn’s *Cobra* remain a mainstay of the curriculum, other strategies are employed to accommodate the unpredictable and often idiosyncratic collection of enrollees who vary widely in instrumentation, musical orientation, and experience. Since my sabbatical in 2013-2014 I’ve ceded the course to my capable colleague Erik Ulman. My break from [sic] has been welcome, but now I’m very excited to return as director this coming year with renewed energy.

Outside the Music Department, the course for which I am most widely known on campus is *Rock, Sex, and Rebellion*, a curriculum I developed more than a decade ago in response to the absence of popular music offerings at Stanford (a circumstance that has since changed with the addition of new faculty colleagues). The course attracts upward of 200 students, most of whom are shocked (and eventually delighted) by the detailed listening and analytical acumen that I demand. The curriculum embodies three overlapping courses: a broad critical listening skills course (whose takeaway must be adaptable to non-popular traditions as well as idioms not yet invented); a survey of particular genres and artists (ones that, together, tell a story about cultural change and human invention); and an examination of how popular music confers expressive agency on minority groups and diasporic cultures (with particular focus on African-American contributions to rock’s legacy, starting in West Africa—where I have travelled—and continuing through gospel, blues, and jazz antecedents). The course is cross-listed in American Studies. Many of my students claim that, as a history course discussing civil rights and other storied parts of American history, it has been their most valuable course at Stanford. Throughout the term I model how a newfound understanding of musical genre through serious inquiry and the acquisition of what George Steiner calls *contingent knowledge*—especially those genres most foreign to us—can lead to appreciation, and potentially admiration. Each student gives a presentation on the top song of all time, an assignment whose purpose is not to make an insipid VH-1 type of list; instead it is to concurrently collect the set of values from which one might choose a top song. Although not fashionable, my not-so-secret motive is to provide a framework for a generation of students to encounter people and ideas that are different from their own. This is not a music curriculum goal; it is human one.

A few recent developments in *Rock, Sex, & Rebellion* might be noted explicitly. First, I have learned to play the electric guitar. (It turns out that it is pretty important in rock music.) This has allowed me to demonstrate music in class in a new, relevant, and especially compelling way. Second, since our sessions end at noon, I have begun a regular Monday lunch hour in which a small exodus of students join me for a meal at the student union. These have been enormously popular, a chance for students to continue our class conversations in a casual setting. Although optional, a large number of students avail themselves, many regularly, over the course of the term. They tell me

that it is a somewhat rare opportunity to hang out with a professor outside of class. And third, having toured a vast number of popular genres in approximately chronological order, I end the class with a completely new and competing organizational principle: an aesthetic polarity that sorts performances into what I call *Heroes of Universality and Authenticity* and *Heroes of Individuality and Virtuosity*. A full explanation here would be tedious. But the point is that I leave my students with a reminder that teaching is speculative; that courses represent (merely) the gospel according to one professor; and that each of us has license to construct an idea of culture according to our own hierarchical organization of issues and personally considered rubrics.

Special teaching opportunities have included my Sophomore College course called *Musical Collisions and Radical Creativity* (an intensive summer seminar for rising sophomores). Displaced by my commitment to the aforementioned summer overseas seminars, I do hope to return to this course some day because it was very successful. And a new, upcoming team-taught course, one that I developed in Stanford Faculty College with my political scientist colleague Rob Reich, is *The Paradigm Shift*. This course will feature lectures by distinguished colleagues from across the campus disciplinary landscape, each one—through the form of an introductory lecture for an educated lay audience—answering the dual question *What was the most important development in the history of your field? As opposed to mere evolution, what was the singular revolution in your discipline?* This course aspires to give undergraduates—especially first year ones—an introduction to many of Stanford’s luminous professors from across campus, as well as spark their interest in potential majors, modes of inquiry, and ways of thinking. It also invites them to consider how thought changes, and to reflect on the potential significance (or triviality) of events during our time.

As my promotion statement outlines, my focus as an educator has been directed mostly toward my undergraduate and graduate students at Stanford, but it is also represented by a visiting professor residency at the University of Chile and as a guest professor at the University of Oregon; in courses taught at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, the Antwerp Conservatory, and Singapore Republic Polytechnic; and at Hope House (a halfway house in Redwood City for women parolees with chemical dependencies at which I team-taught a course on humor in music—which was eventually retooled for the aforementioned Stanford freshman seminar). I care deeply about the students with whom I work closely, but my interest in education is seen more broadly in my service as a member of the Carleton College Board of Trustees to which I’ve been recently appointed.

Back at Stanford, I conceived and hosted an unprecedented conference on pedagogical praxis in graduate composition for which over one hundred faculty and students participated, including keynotes from distinguished colleagues at eight peer institutions, and a subsequent volume I co-edited and published in *Contemporary Music Review*, including my own paper. Plans are now underway for a follow-up symposium of even greater scope, including undergraduate composition and educational strategies relevant to public institutions, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, and conservatories.

The symposium adjusted my approach as a teacher and led to important structural changes in our own DMA curriculum. Among the changes, I instituted a yearlong *Graduate Composition Forum* (which I’ve now taught for two complete years). The forum serves as a needed locus for conversation among our community and with visiting guests, planning sessions for the performance of new student work, and a setting for the introduction of new graduate students, third year portfolio reviews, special area exam presentations, and dissertation defenses. (For the introduction of new graduate students I’ve taken to having senior graduate composers give presentations on the music of new ones—*without their input*—after which the new composer may respond and present additional thoughts. This has proven an effective way for senior students to learn about and genuinely invest in the work—however different—of newly arriving classmates;

but more important, the “cold response” gives each new student a candid, untarnished, pre-metabolized view of his or her work in a way not possible after his or her ideas become familiar.) Another change that I proposed was to switch our qualifying exam from a historical survey basis to an annually evolving canon of 125 pieces (100 chosen by the faculty, 25 by the students) that comprise essential musical techniques and ideas of importance to composers. The faculty do not tell the students why a piece was selected (and most pieces are significant in myriad ways); instead the students have to wrestle with each work in the context of the entire collection in order to divine its utility and meaning. Although not perfected, the new exam has been compelling, relevant, and persuasive. There is general agreement that it represents a considerable improvement.

As noted elsewhere, I have also exerted significant influence over our DMA admissions and I’m extremely proud of the diverse community of student composers we have assembled—all of them extraordinary and gifted, but ranging widely in their idiom (from visual music to installation art, live animation to new concert ritual, gritty modernism to expressive lyricism). None of them sound like any of us on the faculty, and I love that. Most recently I’ve secured a three-year grant affording our graduate composers an annual budget of \$70,000 for the performance of new works, a resource that has made an enormously favorable impact on the program through substantial collaborations with many top ensembles throughout the world leading to both well-prepared public performances and excellent recordings.