

**Building Musical Intuitions:
Teaching Music Theory at a Liberal Arts College**

PROSPECTUS

This workshop will bring together eleven music theorists from seven different institutions in the Mellon 23 Cluster to discuss the particular challenges and issues of teaching music theory at liberal arts colleges. The participants will range from prominent scholars who have had extensive experience teaching at liberal arts colleges to those who have finished their graduate work in the past few years and have only recently encountered these unique challenges.

Teaching Music Theory at Liberal Arts Colleges

The goal of an undergraduate music theory curriculum is to give students a conceptual means of understanding and creating music. Teaching this subject at a liberal arts college is a very different proposition than teaching it at a conservatory (or even at a large liberal arts university) for two main reasons:

First, liberal arts college students, though intelligent and academically gifted, often enter college without the depth of musical experience that their peers at conservatories possess. Hence, they lack the musical intuitions that are assumed by most textbooks and established theory curricula, which are aimed at conservatories and larger universities with greater numbers of music students. Moreover, while the conservatory teacher is able to assume students' past and future involvement in Western classical music, the liberal-arts theory teacher faces students with a diverse range of musical backgrounds and interests. As a result, the liberal arts theory teacher, a "minority" within the discipline, usually has to figure out unique strategies "on site" in order to develop the musical intuitions of his or her students and address their particular needs. Although one might suppose that this may also be the case at larger liberal arts universities, the situation at these larger institutions is not the same, because there is always a critical mass of musically talented and experienced students.

Second, the role of music theory in the music curriculum must be addressed by theorists, particularly at smaller liberal arts institutions. Music theory has served as the foundation for traditional undergraduate music curricula in the US for the past half century, and a series of music theory courses forms the core of most music majors. Conservatories still offer the traditional music curriculum requiring six to eight semesters of music theory. By contrast, music curricula have become more diversified at liberal arts colleges in the past twenty years, resulting in the elimination of upper-level courses and/or the condensing of the theory curriculum into two to four semesters. This not only poses a pedagogical challenge, but a philosophical one as well. Since it is not possible to offer the comprehensive theory curriculum, one needs to find strategies to prepare students who wish to pursue graduate studies in music. In addition, the role of music theory in this new context needs to be clarified.

Workshop Format

We are planning a two-day collaborative workshop to take place at both Pomona College and Scripps College. The organizers will do the logistical preparatory work, but all participants will take an active leadership role in the workshop discussions. In preparation, the participants will send copies of their music theory syllabi and descriptions of their departments' music curricula, which will be distributed to all participants. Participants will then review these materials, as well as selected textbooks, before the workshop.

The first day will be devoted to discussion of music theory pedagogy at a liberal arts college. During the morning, the participants will discuss some recent theory and ear training texts and evaluate their efficacy specifically for liberal arts students. In the afternoon, the participants will compare syllabi, discuss our courses, and share "best practices."

The second day will start with a comparison of the music curricula at our institutions and proceed toward a discussion of the following questions: What are we trying to accomplish with music theory courses at our schools? What alternative approaches to music pedagogy can accomplish some of the goals that we'd like to achieve? How do we prepare our students for graduate school in music? What are some of the logistical and political challenges of teaching music theory at our schools?

Goals

This workshop aims to accomplish six goals:

1. Allow participants to gain some new ideas for teaching music theory by reviewing texts and sharing ideas with each other.
2. Find answers to the question: How do we build on the wide variety and levels of musical intuitions that our students bring to college?
3. Allow participants to gain new insights on the role of music theory in the music curriculum, and the role of the music curriculum at a liberal arts college through dialogue with pedagogues facing similar challenges and situations.
4. Result in pedagogical innovation at levels ranging from lesson design to course design to curricular design.
5. Foster on-going dialogue between the participants about theory pedagogy and the evolving music curricula at the various liberal arts colleges.
6. Foster closer cooperation between the music theory programs of the two hosting institutions, Pomona College and Scripps College.

Follow-up

During the year following the workshop, the organizers will facilitate email discussion in which participants discuss outcomes of the workshop, such as results of new lesson designs or plans for curricular innovation.

Workshop Organizers and Participants

Alfred Cramer, Associate Professor, Pomona College (organizer)
YouYoung Kang, Associate Professor, Scripps College (organizer)
Joti Rockwell, Assistant Professor, Pomona College (organizer)

Raphael Atlas, Associate Professor, Smith College
Thomas Flaherty, Professor, Pomona College
Edward Gollin, Assistant Professor, Williams College
Jennifer Goltz, Assistant Professor, Scripps College
Courtenay Harter, Assistant Professor, Rhodes College
Justin London, Professor, Carleton College
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