

DEREK KELLER
CONTRIBUTIONS TO DIVERSITY THROUGH TEACHING

As a first-generation college graduate, my commitment to fostering an inclusive academic environment is rooted in the lived experience of navigating higher education as an outsider. I view diversity not as a standalone initiative, but as a primary catalyst for the inclusive excellence and scholarly innovation that define a premier research institution. My approach integrates culturally responsive pedagogy with interdisciplinary creative research to serve a diverse student body and fulfill the university's mission of global educational leadership.

The foundation of my teaching philosophy is the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which ensures that the "hidden curriculum" of music theory and composition is accessible to all students regardless of their prior access to elite training. Having taught in settings ranging from community colleges to research universities, I recognize that composers enter the studio with widely varied technological and stylistic backgrounds. I lead with a scaffolded, project-oriented approach that empowers students—from those in commercial music and production to those focused on contemporary concert music—to develop their unique voices. My goal is to foster self-resourceful and self-aware artists who are equipped to thrive in a rapidly changing, multi-genre professional landscape.

My creative research into the hybridity between contemporary concert music, jazz, and rock naturally aligns with the value for diverse musical practices and complementary perspectives. For example, my multi-media work, the California Tableaux Project, serves as a model for how composition can interrogate historical narratives, celebrate cultural crossings, and address issues of appropriation and indigenous heritage. By bringing these critical inquiries into the classroom, I encourage students to de-center traditional canons and explore how their own artistic output can function as a tool for social transformation and community engagement.

I extend this commitment to social transformation through direct community advocacy and service, bridging the gap between high-level research institutions and underserved populations. My work has included facilitating concerts for elementary school children in downtown Cleveland and exposing rural communities to experimental music through the Native Scholars Program at the La Jolla Reservation. Additionally, I have served as a clinician for local high schools in the Rogue Valley, specifically working with students at Ashland High School to develop their songwriting projects. By mentoring these young creators, I help demystify the compositional process for the next generation, providing them with the technical vocabulary and artistic confidence necessary to pursue higher education.

Beyond the composition studio, I serve as a persistent advocate for student retention and financial literacy to ensure that the path to a degree remains sustainable for students from all socio-economic backgrounds. I have a proven track record of mentoring students to avoid predatory for-profit institutions, instead channeling them toward reputable, accredited programs. This advocacy is crucial for maintaining a diverse pipeline of innovative leaders in the arts. I am eager to contribute to a collaborative faculty culture by mentoring students across all demographics, ensuring they have the support systems necessary to bridge the gap between the concert stage and the community at large.