

DEREK KELLER
TEACHING STATEMENT:
INTEREST, EXPERIENCE, AND PHILOSOPHY
(WITH RESPECT TO THE POSITION AT SOU)

Over my career, I have taught in a wide range of settings: community colleges, liberal arts universities, research institutions, conservatories, private/applied lessons, and master classes. While teaching in this diverse array of settings, I have not forgotten *whom* I am teaching. I teach *and reach* a wide variety of learners from myriad socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. I am sensitive to *how* my students learn, whether challenged with a learning disability while filling a GE requirement at Cosumnes River College, or a prize-winning conservatory student with every privilege at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. To reach all of them, I accommodate their learning patterns and creative backgrounds; I motivate them to be self -resourceful, -reliant, and -aware; and I contextualize my curricula, both contemporaneously and historically to empower my students with artistic and entrepreneurial purpose.

I approach teaching as a practice through continuing professorial education, participating in regular faculty/student evaluations, conferences on teaching methodologies, training in current and emerging music technologies, and informal open classroom conversations with my students about my teaching. As an educator, I strive to impart to my students ways in which they can use their developing musical skills as tools for social transformation within their communities, in partnership with local businesses, and entering the world stage, whether it be literally on stage or online. My dedication to teaching has been recognized by the University of Georgia through the Outstanding Teacher Assistant Award, my induction to the Phi Beta Kappa Society (beta tau chapter, UGA 1996), and by the University of California San Diego through the Summer Teaching Fellows program. Please allow me to share my experience with, and vision for mentoring students from underrepresented backgrounds at SOU.

One of the most exciting aspects of the position at SOU is the diversity of classes and ensembles that I would potentially teach/lead. This curricular diversity also demands the ability to adapt to many different kinds of learners, and particularly those of underrepresented groups. Not surprisingly, this has been my central demographic while teaching aural skills and audio & music production at Cosumnes River College (CRC), one of the most ethnically and socio-economically diverse community college campuses in California. Much of my career in higher education has focused on teaching across the traditional/non-traditional student divide: turning informally trained musicians into those prepared for four year institutions, being sensitive to those less prepared for academic demands (who often feel actively disenfranchised from higher education), and finding the right starting point in order set them up for success on their pursuit of a college-level music education.

I have encountered innumerable students of the aforementioned types in my years of teaching commercial music courses, namely in audio & music production. In this setting, I observe that these students are situated along a continuum of preparedness. For the beginners, I reinforce that anyone can be creative if given the space, time, concepts, and skills. For intermediates, I create project-oriented activities that engage the instrumental skills they have with the technology. On the occasion that I encounter advanced students, I question their aesthetic stance, help them determine who it is they are trying to reach, and urge them to consider how their music may be socially transformational in their local communities.

To accommodate the students I describe above, I have written curriculum as part of our Commercial Music emphasis in our suite of Entrepreneurial Arts Certificates at CRC. In this curriculum, our department will offer certificates in recording software, such as ProTools, that are immediately applicable to a young musician's resume. If employed at SOU, this curriculum could be further bolstered by developing commercial music performance ensembles, which I would love to direct (in turn, these ensembles can then become the subjects for advanced recording courses). When at Folsom Lake College, I directed an ensemble of this type whereby the students wrote, rehearsed, and produced evening-length concerts of completely original music. Most of the students, again, were informally trained. However, a curious phenomenon occurred every semester: a camaraderie and exchange of musical knowledge that resulted in compelling musical creativity between both formally and informally trained students. I observe the same thing happening regularly in my

audio & music production courses (again, at CRC) – music majors and non-program students end up learning from and creating music with each other. Moreover, the non-program students that take these commercial music courses are incrementally filtering into our class piano courses, and theory & aural skills sequences.

At SOU, I envision a similar scenario: through the creation of a commercial music emphasis or major, the department will most likely capture a demographic of students that would otherwise go unrecruited. This body of students would have a program of study that accommodates their varying levels of college preparedness, puts them in contact with ‘traditional’ students (where the musical-osmosis-thing happens as described above), and opens doors to other higher educational and creative musical paths. Per the latter, if ‘jazz’ is indeed a broad category that describes a music that synthesizes a variety of cultural styles, then I would seek to assemble and coach several small ‘hybrid’ ensembles that fuse different musical aesthetics, i.e. jazz, hip-hop, rock, the plethora of sub-genres of the aforementioned, and even indigenous forms – I experienced this at the Native Scholars Program at the La Jolla Reservation in Southern California as member of a jazz/improvisational group, The Yellow Chair Ensemble when pursuing my Ph.D. at UCSD.

My sensitivity to students’ level of preparedness and experience also manifests in core-program courses: music theory and aural skills. These skills are only relevant to students’ lives when those skills are connected to history and culture, both contemporary and antiquated. To meet the needs of my students’ increasing desire to work in the commercial field, I reference popular music examples while I show, play, and explain how music theory ‘works’ across genres: from Bach to Beyoncé, from Ellington to Queen – I would love to teach an upper division course on Popular Music Theory! Moreover, I might have the students transcribe the hook to the latest hit by Ariana Grande in my aural skills class. My devotion to effective instruction is leading to a forthcoming aural skills handbook for instructors (currently under review for publishing), which will provide 60 weeks of lesson plans with integrated audio playback. This compendium is a result of my extensive teaching in musicianship and ear training. It covers the gamut of necessary skill development for students to acquire skills in hearing and transcription applicable to a wide array musical style, from ‘old’ music to music of our present.

In my composition studio, I strive to instill in my students a sense of self-reliance, versatility, community engagement and entrepreneurialism that goes beyond composing a piece and expecting someone else to play it. No matter their experience with or approach to ‘composing’, I help my students discover ways of conceptualizing and producing their creative work, whether a chamber work for 3 or 4 mixed instruments, or violin and turntable (truth!). Intent on learning *how* my students receive inspiration and process their artistic genesis, I urge them to find their voice through the *practice* of composition, comprehensive score study, and critical listening – and I ensure their creation of a compelling portfolio. If the instrumentation includes their own instrument or voice, I push them conduct and even perform their own work. As a student develops their portfolio, I help them create a timeline of preparedness based on a proposed performance date: when the score and parts need to be delivered, scheduling rehearsals, arranging for audio/visual recording, etc. I encourage my students to build their own website to make their portfolio available. I make it very clear that if a student wants to ‘get the gig’ in this artistic climate, they have to be versatile and develop an entrepreneurial spirit that takes their music into their communities. This entrepreneurial spirit must also have a collaborative component whereby students learn how to work with different kinds of artists, business people, and community members. I strive to impart to them that art that changes lives does not happen without community engagement.

In addition to the aforementioned educational settings, I enjoy teaching social, historical, and cultural aspects of music. I have taught courses in music of the western tradition, world music, 20th-century concert music, and popular forms (jazz, rock, hip-hop, etc.). In these courses, music is the means to examine cultures and musical traditions within their socially, politically, and historically specific contexts. The students not only become familiar with the music through lectures, reading, and listening assignments, they often learn how to identify and articulate politics of race, class, gender, and economics through research and writing. Teaching these kinds of courses affords me the chance to acquire and practice different approaches to delivering course materials and preparing strategies of framing and balancing the historical, theoretical (both in the cultural and musical sense), and aural components of the course.

In my life as a composer-performer, socio-political issues have often entered my creative pursuits. For example, my developing multi-media work/opera, the *California Tableaux Project*, is more timely than ever with regard to the present administration. *CTP* synthesizes music, spoken word, video and dance to celebrate California's cultural crossings *and interrogate the forces that wish to dismantle its diversity*. *CTP* looks back into early California history, as seen through the eyes of the infamous Sir Francis Drake; draws on post-Gold Rush short stories; reframes popular song (such as Led Zeppelin's "Immigrant Song" – in Spanish!); interpolates native and multinational folk songs; sets poetry and prose by California authors and poets; and perverts the cultural function of English "Tableau" games. This project aims to counteract a historical amnesia that forgets California was Native land; was invaded first by the Spanish, then the English; was occupied, farmed, mined; and then worked by Mestizo, Mexican, Chinese, Chilean, Peruvian, French, German, and African-American peoples. Through this project I seek to highlight and question what it means to be "American".

As a professional educator and musician, the work to reach my surrounding community does not stop at the teaching institution, nor at the edge of the concert stage. I often situate myself in the community at large. For example, I have participated in several concert performances for underserved elementary school children, such as those in downtown Cleveland, Ohio. I have taught guitar courses as part after-school arts enrichment programs serving largely immigrant and low-income schoolchildren in Downtown San Diego. Finally, I have been a singer (tenor) at a local church or have sung in community choirs for most of my professional career in my own backyard.

In closing, *Hearing* is not just a physical ability that can be trained to perceive the mechanics of music. Rather, it is also a way of becoming attuned to music's social, cultural and political contexts in order to expose other and, perhaps, more radical meanings. Teaching in these diverse settings has enabled me to emphasize the importance of both practical musical skills as well as the cultural, social and political contexts in which music is imagined, created and produced. Because musical knowledge and ability is intertwined with one's personality and background, I understand that every student I teach in these settings needs a slightly different approach from another, a different kind of attention, and perhaps a different kind of coaching.