

# Composing a Community

Honors 2850-001/002/003 - Fall 2021: Mon/Weds

Meets in MHC 1205 (the "Big Ideas Room")

Section 001: 11:50am-1:10pm > Your TA: Ella Baker [u1218712@utah.edu](mailto:u1218712@utah.edu)

Section 002: 1:25pm-2:45pm > Your TA: Rebecca Kenney [rebecca.kenney@utah.edu](mailto:rebecca.kenney@utah.edu)

Section 003: 3:00pm-4:20pm > Your TA: Leila Tatarevic [u1117733@utah.edu](mailto:u1117733@utah.edu)

Phillip Bimstein: Office hours (in MHC 1001) by appointment

email [phillip.bimstein@utah.edu](mailto:phillip.bimstein@utah.edu)

## Course Description

***Composing a Community*** is a unique student-centered, community-cultivating course, where you will engage and critically assess music as a socially-reflective art. Music is our vehicle for a journey into multiple dimensions of human behavior, with side-trips through rhetoric, political theory, sociology, narrative, improvisation, ideology and identity.

Flowing from a wide variety of cultural texts and a pan-historic genre-busting playlist, you will correlate musical forms, processes and expressions with the societies from which they spring—including your own. Cross-cutting themes include: music as dialogue; music as thought; music as identity; music as ideology; music as a mirror of government; music and social movements; and music's evolutionary role in human development.

You are expected to have intellectually rigorous and personally meaningful discussions about music, dialogue and community. The goals are for you to:

- (1) achieve a more articulated experience of music through the filters of other disciplines
- (2) to gain an enriched understanding of community through musical manifestations of participatory democracy.

In addition, you will develop community-building skills in two ways:

- (1) drawing upon examples from musical improvisation, you will study and rehearse *listening*, *understanding*, and creatively *responding* as both musical and dialogical skills.
- (2) you will develop your potential to heal the body politic and transform your communities through the formal practices of mindfulness and loving-kindness.

A touchstone for our course is the Navajo *songdog* myth (about a coyote who "sings" the world into existence) coupled with Benjamin Barber's conception of citizens as "makers" who "create a common future." At the end of the course, you will be able to develop, combine and apply your musical and political potential to metaphorically "sing" your world into existence.

The first phase of ***Composing a Community*** is devoted to musical *Voices* and rhetorical forms, as we explore both *The Dialogue of Music* and *The Music of Dialogue*.

The middle phase of the course examines *Our Musical Selves*, both by “listening” to ourselves (through the music of many cultures and genres) and by “articulating” ourselves (by applying musical processes and analyses to our own lives and identities).

In the third and culminating phase of the course we will explore the ways students can “act in concert” to improvise and orchestrate our *Voices* and *Selves* together, as we collaboratively—and mindfully—*Compose our Community*.

## Course Assignment Schedule

**Composing a Community** includes lectures, performances, demonstrations, discussions, and assignments: *Readings* (pdfs on e-reserve), *Listenings* (sound files online) and *Viewings* (videos and films online). Most will be assigned; others may be proposed or selected by the student with my approval. The content and materials may be modified to match the flow of the class and to respond to the needs/interests of individual students.

The best, easiest and most up-to-date way to see, navigate and fulfill your assignments is via the [Module link](#) on our course Canvas page.

In addition to your brief responses to your weekly class assignments, you will write two short papers (Think Pieces) and one Final Paper. These are detailed in the Modules mentioned above, but to help you plan ahead (and to be sure to submit them on time!) their due dates are:

Think Piece 1    Due Sept 27

Think Piece 2    Due Nov 3

Final Paper      Due Dec 8

## Goals and Objectives

You are expected to have intellectually rigorous and personally meaningful discussions about music, dialogue and community.

The goals are for you:

- (1) to achieve a more articulated experience of music through the filters of other disciplines
- (2) to gain an enriched understanding of community through musical manifestations of participatory democracy.

In addition, you will develop community-building skills in two ways:

- (3) drawing upon examples from musical improvisation, you will study and rehearse *listening*, *understanding*, and creatively *responding* as both musical and dialogical skills
- (4) you will develop your potential to heal the body politic and transform your communities through the formal practices of mindfulness and loving-kindness.

## Required Materials

Materials required for this course are:

- *The Art of Is: Improvisation as a Way of Life*, by Stephen Nachmanovitch  
(It's best to buy the physical book, but you can also read it electronically [HERE](#))
- Various readings (pdfs), videos, audio, links, films—each provided in daily class assignments
- Your open heart and mind, your inherent creativity, natural curiosity and active imagination

## Policies and Statements

### Teaching Methods and Goals

In a Navajo legend a coyote, or “songdog,” emerged from a hole in the ground and sang the world into existence. The songdog story, and the feeling of possibility it engenders, has inspired all my work as composer, mayor and citizen. My goal as teacher is to spark that feeling and develop that capability in my students, helping them to become conscious and intentional co-creators—songdogs—singing ourselves and our communities into existence.

My experiences as a musician and a mayor dispose me to think of learning taking place within collaborative frameworks, where ideas are proposed, elaborated, tested, counterpointed and reprised like themes in a classical sonata or issues at a town meeting. It is key that each participant interacts with the subject from his own experience, and speaks with her own voice.

I teach like I lead a band or conduct a meeting: Create the welcoming space, put a “song” on the table, propose an agenda, and have at it together. I present when useful and I listen always, my ears tuned to response, whether silent or spoken. The subject is then articulated in collaboration with one another. My students and I create a community of learning, and we learn in concert with each other.

My goals for my students and myself are to achieve critical understanding in three areas – music, community, and participatory democracy:

(1) I want us to become curious about, and familiar with, varying musical styles, genres and practices from different cultures and historical periods, and to enter into the forms and processes of the music in ways that make sense within our own experience.

(2) I want us to ferret out and understand relationships between musical texts and the communities that produce and express them, and therefore be able to interpret and understand different communities.

(3) I want us to develop dialogue skills in tandem with music listening/participating skills—to develop citizenship skills through musical analogy. I want us to become more conscious of, and better at performing, our roles in our communities as “composer/citizens”—songdogs singing the world.

# Grading

Students are graded on class preparation/participation, two Think Pieces, and one paper:

Attendance, engagement, discussion and/or written response to assignments	33%
Two Think Pieces	33%
Final paper (on collaborative community)	33%

Students will be graded on standards rather than a curve. Specific criteria will be given for the final paper. Each student will have the opportunity to successfully meet the criteria in their own way. Pre-discussion of formats and topics is welcome.

While I and your Teaching Assistants will take careful notes on your participation (including your verbal and/or written comments on daily assignments), grading on your daily preparation and engagement in each class session is not by a point system, and is therefore not recorded in a cumulative fashion on Canvas. However, your TA will let you know mid-semester if you need to improve your engagement. If you don't receive a note from them, you can presume you are doing well, but you can always check with them if you are uncertain.

The Think Pieces and final paper will be graded in the traditional way: I will give comments and a letter grade to each one, and post them to you individually on Canvas. Please note that late paper submissions may have their grade reduced as much as one letter grade per day.

Although specific criteria will be given for the final paper, the following is the general grading rubric that applies to all assignments, class work and participation in this course:

## **A**

Outstanding achievement. Student performance demonstrates full command of the course materials—including thorough reflection, thoughtful critique, insightful interpretation, and meaningful application of the substantive knowledge gained in the course to a variety of topics, disciplines or situations. Student superbly communicates her or his ideas and interpretations in multiple class sessions and online discussions, and comments on, counterpoints or develops the thoughts of other students. Student also evinces a high level of imagination, originality and/or creativity that far surpasses course expectations.

## **A-**

Excellent achievement. Student performance demonstrates thorough knowledge of the course materials and exceeds course expectations by completing all requirements in a superior manner. Student effectively communicates his or her ideas and interpretations in multiple class sessions and online discussions, and comments on, counterpoints or develops the thoughts of other students.

## **B+**

Very good work. Student performance demonstrates above-average comprehension of the course materials and exceeds course expectations in all areas as described in the course syllabus. Student clearly communicates his or her ideas and interpretations in multiple class sessions and online discussions.

**B**

Good work. Student performance meets designated course expectations and demonstrates understanding of the course materials at an acceptable level. Student participates adequately in class sessions and online discussions.

**B-**

Marginal work. Student performance demonstrates incomplete understanding of course materials. Student participation in class and online discussions is minimal, unengaged and unenlightening.

**C**

Unsatisfactory work. Student performance demonstrates incomplete and inadequate understanding of course materials. Student participation in class and online discussions is weak.

**D**

Unacceptable work.

All of the evaluations above are also affected by the student's demonstrated effort and investment, and by what the student both puts into and takes out of the course—as evidenced by papers, Think Pieces and class participation. All higher grade levels also require that work be submitted on time.

## Key Evaluative Criteria

Your papers, discussion and online comments will be evaluated using the following criteria:

1. To what extent do you demonstrate a thorough and deep understanding (and/or critique of) our Readings and discussions?
2. To what extent do you fully engage concepts from our Readings and discussions and articulate them with your own?
3. To what extent do you meaningfully express your interpretation and application of the concepts we have studied to the topic you have chosen?

***Be sure to note the underlined words above:***

*The purpose of the underlining is to emphasize that papers and comments which truly demonstrate a considered understanding and interpretation of course topics (as developed in lectures, sources, class discussion and your own thought) will tend to earn the better grades. On the other hand, papers and commentary that skim the surface (for example, simply reciting the basic analogies we've discussed but not developing, exploring or analyzing them), demonstrating only a superficial, narrow or limited understanding and interpretation of course topics, will tend to earn lower grades.*

***The most important thing for you to know and keep in mind:***

Make sure that your writing and discussion are well-grounded in the topics we explore.

## Attendance and Participation

In this collaborative, seminar-style class Attendance and class participation are highly important—and required. Some material is presented only in class, and student participation is key to achieving the course goals.

Therefore, each student is expected to attend and participate in ALL\* classes (including the guest presentations). In rare cases where class participation is not possible due to an unavoidable absence, an explanation is expected (when possible, in advance). I will excuse such absences only with a doctor's note or other form of official documentation.

In any case, makeup work will be required (and it is the student's responsibility to contact their TA to find out what must be done, and to complete the work in a timely fashion).

Lack of student participation will affect the final grade.

Students are expected to arrive before class begins and remain until class ends. Coming to class significantly late or leaving significantly early may be factored into attendance.

Keep in mind that more than two unexcused absences will begin to affect your final grade.

\*Note: if on a particular day, because of an unavoidable appointment or emergency, you are unable to attend your section but could instead come to another time slot, it would be far better to do so than to miss the entire day (and it will be easier for you to do that than to do the makeup work). In that case, contact your TA and me ahead of time, if possible, or come on the fly if it is not.

However, this is only a rare stopgap solution, and not meant to be a regular occurrence, as it is better for you to continue to develop your relationships and build the community in your own section. But again, in rare cases where you need to attend another section, you are welcome and encouraged to do so (just be sure to email me and your TA to let us know—whether before, during or after class—so that you are appropriately credited for your attendance).

## Personal Engagement

Because deep engagement is such a vital part of this course, and key to your own learning, here are a few thoughts to help you participate and strengthen your contributions:

You are expected to engage deeply, thoughtfully and thoroughly with every assignment—whether it is a book, a shorter reading, a work of art or music, a film, video, audio talk, or an activity. I trust you will bring your own perspectives, insights and interpretations to each one—and share them with your classmates and me.

Light or superficial engagement will be noted; active and deep engagement will be rewarded.

To play to your strengths and invite your preferred method of participation, there are three ways to engage in this class: (1) real-time in class (vocally); (2) uploaded commentary on particular assignments; and (3) online posts to the Canvas course Discussion.

(1) A valuable and productive way to manifest and express your engagement—and to share your insights with your classmates—is within our live spoken class discussions.

(2) However, if you prefer collecting your thoughts on paper rather than expressing them in class, you may offer your summary, commentary, or other response in a few written sentences and submit your response directly to the assignment on Canvas. I still ask that you contribute to our in-class discussions when you can, but your submitted commentary may help supplement or bolster your in-class participation.

(3) A third way to productively and creatively engage with course assignments and themes is by sharing your comments, perspectives, and insights in posts to the online written discussion for this course on Canvas.

I offer these three ways of engaging and participating in order to build on the strengths of each student. Some of us prefer to speak, while others prefer to write. Some of us prefer the spontaneity of the moment, while others prefer to process and collect their thoughts. Some of us love to jump in and raise our hands, while others prefer to wait and let others have the floor. And we may have different preferences at different times. I want you to be assured that in whatever way you choose to engage, your contributions will be valued and appreciated.

And you don't need to engage in all three ways in each class session. Just one good comment per class—if insightful and very relevant to the reading or discussion—will be fine. And you can opt for a different way in different classes and for different assignments.

(Note: while the Canvas assignments will ask you to “Mark when done,” please know that this is only a minimal indication, as much for yourself as for me, that you have finished that particular assignment. It does not take the place of the engagement described above. You still need to respond to the assignments in order to earn full credit for engagement.)

Tips for interactive discussions:

For in-class discussions, depth, relevance and quality (of comment) is more important than quantity, length and frequency.

In other words, it is better to make one good, relevant point—that clearly builds upon or reflects on the assigned text—than to speak multiple times but without strong grounding in the text's ideas.

Therefore I ask that you pick your moments well, and, once you have spoken, consider giving space for others to share their insights. Of course, when a dialogue develops between you and another student, or in a continuing thread that relates to your original point, you are certainly welcome to continue to speak within that dialogue or thread.

To provide space for students who have not yet spoken, or are taking advantage of time to collect their thoughts, we will at times notice that a pause or moment of quiet enters our discussion. This is perfectly natural and productive, as it gives us time to reflect on what has already been said, and also offers an opportunity for a new voice to enter the dialogue. We can observe and welcome such a moment as a gift.

## Other Classroom Policies

This course is designed to cultivate a community of learning that is productive, hospitable and fair to all. To support our community of learning, all students are expected to abide by the following policies:

- The use of cell phones or other communication devices, whether for calling, checking news or messages, texting, social networking or any other purpose, is prohibited during class, except for a medical emergency. Students are expected to turn off such devices during class. Students using such devices will be required to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period.
- Students are permitted to use computers or tablets during class for note taking, discussing assigned pdfs and other class-related work ONLY. Students using computers for any purpose not related to our class will be required to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period.
- The wearing of earbuds, AirPods or any other kind of headphone is prohibited during class.
- Late submissions of Think Pieces and the final paper can cost one letter grade per day.

## COVID-19 Campus Guidelines

You can remain current with the University's policies on COVID-19 here: <https://coronavirus.utah.edu/>. As of August 1, there are no requirements for proof of COVID-19 vaccination for students and faculty, and no requirements for masks and face coverings on UU campus. However, the Honors College and I would like us each to consider how we can best protect ourselves, our colleagues, and our broader community from COVID-19.

**Vaccinations:** The Honors College strongly recommends (and I strongly encourage) that every student get vaccinated if they have not done so already. This is the single most powerful way that you can protect yourself, your friends/families and to keep the virus from mutating. [Free vaccinations](#) are available on campus.

**Masking:** CDC guidelines (as of July 27) recommend masking in indoor public spaces (regardless of vaccination status) because breakthrough infections are possible and do occur. **Given this guidance, the Honors College requests that all faculty and students wear masks while indoor in classrooms until further change in COVID infection rates.** In setting our own community standards, the Honors College will continue to monitor epidemiological data on [COVID cases from the Utah Department of Health](#) and [CDC's evidence-based guidance for COVID-19](#).



## Faculty and Student Responsibilities

All students are expected to maintain professional behavior in the classroom setting, according to the Student Code, spelled out in the Student Handbook. Students have specific rights in the classroom as detailed in Article III of the Code. The Code also specifies proscribed conduct (Article XI) that involves cheating on tests, plagiarism, and/or collusion, as well as fraud, theft, etc. Students should read the Code carefully and know they are responsible for the content. According to Faculty Rules and Regulations, it is the faculty responsibility to enforce responsible classroom behaviors, beginning with verbal warnings and progressing to dismissal from class and a failing grade. Students have the right to appeal such action to the Student Behavior Committee.

## Student Names & Personal Pronouns

Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name as well as "Preferred first name" (if previously entered by you in the Student Profile section of your CIS account, which managed can be managed at any time). While CIS refers to this as merely a preference, I will honor you by referring to you with the name and pronoun that feels best for you in class or on assignments. Please advise me of any name or pronoun changes so I can help create a learning environment in which you, your name, and your pronoun are respected.

## LGBT Resource Center

If you are a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I want you to know that my classroom is a safe zone. Additionally, please know that the University of Utah has an LGBT Resource Center on campus. They are located in Room 409 in the Olpin Union Building. Hours: M-F 8-5pm. You can visit their website to find more information about the support they can offer, a list of events through the center and links to additional resources: <http://lgbt.utah.edu/>. Please also let me know if there is any additional support you need in this class.

## Diversity / Inclusivity Statement

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. Please see more info below.

## Modifications to the Syllabus

The standards and requirements set forth in this syllabus may be modified at any time by the course instructor. Notice of such changes will be by email, announced in class or in a Canvas notifications (be sure to set your Canvas notifications so that you receive such announcements!).

## Coda (final notes)

I really look forward to our explorations and discussions of music, dialogue and community. As a musician and former mayor I am attuned to the flow of a meeting. I encourage us all to listen and respond to each other. We will mindfully compose our community of learning together. Content may be shaped or altered to fit students' needs and interests. It is my hope that we will all leave this course having a richer understanding of music and knowing more about ourselves, our communities and our world.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

For University Policies and Resources, please click [the Resources link](#) on our course Home Page, or go to:

<https://utah.instructure.com/courses/735242/pages/university-policies-and-resources-2>