Professional Statement

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Teaching

Creating and disseminating knowledge and art are at the forefront of both the University’s and the School of Music’s missions. For me, this synergy is founded on a strong interdisciplinary perspective. I bring this perspective to my teaching by promoting multiple contexts and motivations for learning information. I support the notion of the T-shaped student whose depth of knowledge in one subject area is complemented by their ability to collaborate and communicate in other areas. My course “Introduction to Music Cognition Research” exemplifies this approach. In this course, music students are paired with psychology students to form interdisciplinary teams that design and implement a music cognition experiment. Music students learn how use their experience and expertise in a domain outside of music and they learn to apply key psychological principles to their thought processes.

I work hard to bring my professional expertise, personal experience, critical perspective, and commitment to music, culture, and critical inquiry to my courses. I instill in students a strong work ethic by showing them that hard work and diligence creates practical and valuable knowledge. I work with students to increase their understanding about special topics with the belief that doing so will make them better able to meet future professional and artistic challenges. My goal is to ensure that my courses are pedagogically sound, professionally relevant, and reflect my own values as well as those of the School, College, and University. For core-curriculum classes, I focus on the training of future music professionals, giving students, at the earliest stages, the strongest music-theoretic foundation possible. In addition, I imbue my classes with strong cultural awareness by explaining that music is a product of the world around us. I have developed elective courses that blend disciplinary approaches and get students to recognize their limits and expand their abilities.

In addition to my in-class responsibilities, I make a concerted effort to help and mentor students outside of class and beyond graduation. I am in contact with numerous alumni and continue to write letters of support and provided mentoring. I have a genuine interest in helping students succeed no matter what their goals and I willingly share my experience, perspective, and advice. The School of Music also asks that my professional and artistic activities serve as an inspiration to their students. I take this charge seriously and students that I have, taught and supervised have, under direct advisement and recommendation, gone on to doctoral programs in music composition, music theory, computer science, social work, cognitive psychology, and medicine as well as research and postdoctoral positions in cognitive psychology and neuroscience. Other students I have closely worked with, opting to enter professional employment, now work for high-profile tech companies, in community music education, and in arts management. As a multidisciplinary scholar and music
conservatory graduate, I feel confident in my ability to nurture our growing body of double major, double degree, and interdisciplinary (BxA) degree students. My Faculty Course Evaluations (FCE) for overall teaching and overall course evaluations have steadily improved over my eight-year career at the School of Music to an all-time high of 4.8 for both categories in 2015 (scale 1-5, where 5=“excellent”). I have received extremely positive written comments for every course and have taken all criticisms seriously, adjusting my teaching style accordingly. I am particularly proud of my 4.9 rating for shows respect for students. My teaching philosophy recognizes that a healthy respect for diversity is integral to the vitality of the learning environment, but so also is a respect for the unity of the class as a group. The value of coming together as a diverse community of learners is that, as a group, we can accomplish things that would be impossible for an individual, alone. Part of my responsibility is to cultivate an environment where an individual’s uniqueness is allowed to flourish and make a positive contribution to the group’s experience. Each student has the right to be treated with respect, and with that right comes the responsibility of learning to be part of a group. This means listening to others, considering their ideas, agreeing to disagree, and letting go of one’s self-interest long enough to understand a different point of view.

Research

My training has been infused with the understanding that we must think beyond a single discipline if we hope to gain and articulate important musical insights. Disciplinarity can become an echo chamber, where experts reinforce each other’s beliefs and where outsiders are alienated. Professionally, I have developed a dynamic program of research organized around three questions: What is music?, Why are we musical?, and How are we musical? To answer these questions, I draw on critical and scientific theories of music, sound and media studies, cultural studies, economics, social psychology, cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and mathematical modeling. The T-shaped student I described above is reflected in me and the work I do. I am an expert in music theory, but I believe music is too important and diverse to be relegated to a single mode of inquiry. Cross-disciplinary collaboration is vital to my approach and I have forged productive partnerships with a number of like-minded researchers.

At CMU, I have spent considerable time and effort learning new investigative techniques and creating interdisciplinary partnerships across campus, working with faculty in psychology, english, computer science, electrical and computer engineering, art, and history (to name a few). I have also taken the time to teach what I know to my colleagues, helping them better understand what music is and how it is practiced. It has been wonderful to see CMU embrace the complexity of music as a worthy subject of study. My dedication to multifaceted music research has led to my founding of the CMU Music Cognition Lab and the Listening Spaces Project, as well as my appointment as faculty to the Center for the Neural Basis for Cognition and as Fellow to the Frank-Ratchye STUDIO for Creative Inquiry. In the past three years, my work has received financial support from BrainHub, Center for the Arts and Society, and Sprout Hive Fund for Connected Learning, which speaks to my ability to intelligibly connect with and garner support from diverse constituents. In 2015, I was awarded the Cooper-Siegel Endowed Professorship in recognition of my embodiment of the interdisciplinary values of the University. While I take some credit for these accomplishments, I also credit CMU for providing a uniquely open and supportive environment that engenders these efforts. My professional involvement is demonstrated by publications (book and articles) and national and international conference participation covering subjects such as music theory, music cognition, auditory neuroscience, and music as a cultural practice. Over my career
at CMU, I have gained a high profile in interdisciplinary music research, which has resulted in invitations to present my work at the CMU Department of Psychology, the University of Pittsburgh Department of Communication Science and Disorders, and the Universidad Nacional de la Plata, Argentina. Professionally, I have presented my work by invitation to the Northeast Music Cognition Group, Magnetoencephalography Special Interest Group, Center for the Neural Basis of Cognition, and American Mathematical Society. Additionally, I have held invited term-faculty appointments at the University of Pittsburgh (in Musicology as adjunct associate professor) and Tufts University (in Music and Psychology, jointly, as visiting scholar). I have also organized symposia, round tables, and workshops in order to facilitate focused high-level scholarly engagement of key music-related topics.

In an ever-increasing effort to apply my research and make a meaningful contribution to the cultural life of the community, I partnered with local musicians and activists in 2014 to create Pit-tonkatonk, a multifaceted project that engenders positive civic actions through socially engaged and sustainable musical events supported by vested community collaborators. The event is serious investigation into alternative, socially responsible, musical-event design and implementation. We focus on inclusiveness, equality, eschew boundaries between musicians and audience, and promote music as social ritual rather than a commodity. In 2015, I expanded Pittonkatonk’s scope by launching the Young Musicians Collaborative, which connects music students from Pittsburgh Millions 6-12 in the Hill District to progressive music practices and community engagement. Participating in the YMC has become a bright spot for the school, who reported it as one of two Special Accomplishments in 2014-15.

Service

Service is the foundation of a healthy institution and I have served on Area-, Division-, School-, College-, and University-level groups and committees. While my activities are listed in detail on my CV, highlights include serving on the Vice President of Research search committee, the Scholarly Communications Advisory Board, the IDEATE Media Design Research Working Group, two faculty search committees in the School of Music, and chairing the Academic Division. Professionally, I have served on the Society for Music Theory’s Committee on Demographics, as a peer-reviewer for *Journal of Music Theory, Music Perception, Journal of Mathematics and Music, Reviews in the Neurosciences*, and on program committees for national and international conferences.