

**Auditory Theory: Aesthetics and Communication  
MUS 410 01**

3 credits  
Tuesday & Thursday 2:00 – 3:15 PM  
Location: Benildus 246

**Instructor: Steven M. Miller**  
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**Syllabus**

**Overview**

This course is an upper-division seminar on a broad range of topics subsumed under the general rubric 'aesthetics & communication.' Another possible course title might simply be 'music and ideas' – and not just ideas about music. We will encounter a broad range of ideas and their implementations across stylistic, philosophical, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries. We will examine some major trends and lesser-known by-ways of musical thought concerning music in the 20th and 21st Centuries. Along the way we will delve into relationships between and among musicology, philosophy, acoustic ecology, acoustics & psychoacoustics, political economy, anthropology, technology, aesthetics, information theory, sociology, critical theory, cultural studies, etc.

This course, perhaps more than most, will be more about questions than answers. We will encounter contradictory and perhaps even antagonistic viewpoints. The task will be to sift through a welter of information and viewpoints, ideas and opinions, and begin to develop for ourselves a set of questions that will help guide our own encounters and explorations with music. Music is a multifaceted human phenomenon – our explorations this semester will undoubtedly bear this out.

**Expectations Concerning Student Work**

As this is an upper-division seminar, an emphasis will be placed on informed and productive participation in all discussions. It is expected that all readings will be done in advance of the assigned discussion dates, and extensive notes will be brought to class to aid in discussion. These notes will also serve as material for the final paper.

In particular, readings should be assessed not only for content, but also for indications of biases, beliefs, assumptions, pitfalls, strengths, opportunities, and resources that each embodies and presents. Finally, these readings should be fit into a framework of your own thought as it relates to your own aims, goals, and experiences (as well as your biases, beliefs, assumptions, etc.) in music.

Keep in mind that you don't need to agree with everything you understand, but you should, at the least, understand everything with which you agree or disagree.

*Note: This is NOT a lecture course – you are all responsible – collectively and individually – for shaping the quality, content, and flow of the course through active and informed discussion in relation to the readings and assignments.*

### Required Texts

- Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, eds., *Audio Culture; Readings in Modern Music*, Continuum 2004
- Michael Bull and Les Back, eds., *The Auditory Culture Reader*, Berg 2003
- All other readings are on reserve and online. PDFs of all assigned readings not in the course texts are available in my public folder on the CMP server (Users/millersteven/Public). Hard copies of all are in binders on reserve, as are the original texts from which they were drawn, where applicable.

### Assignments & Projects

- In addition to weekly readings and in-class discussion, each student will do weekly reading notes, 2 short (15-20 minutes) in-class presentations, a mid-term paper, and a final paper.
- Reading Notes – Each Tuesday students will turn in notes on the week's readings. The notes will consist of a 1-2 paragraph summary of each article, and 2 discussion questions.
- Presentation 1 – Give an introductory summary on a Tuesday of the readings, ideas, issues, etc. for a specific week's topic. This may not be the same week/topic as your presentation 2. You should read and reference sources beyond the required readings from written and/or online sources. You will provide the class with: a written outline of your presentation with bibliography; 2 discussion questions.
- Presentation 2 – Present and discuss 1 piece (recording and score, if applicable) of music on a Thursday that is presented, mentioned, related to, or somehow exemplifies the readings, ideas, issues, etc. for a specific week's topic. This may not be the same week/topic as your presentation 1. You should read and reference sources beyond the required readings from written and/or online sources. You will provide the class with: a written outline of your presentation with bibliography; 2 discussion questions.
- Midterm Paper – This research paper will be based on one section either of the two course texts not already covered in the assigned readings and discussions. You will clear your selected topic with me no later than week 4 of the semester. In addition to the selected readings from the course text, additional sources will be consulted from print & electronic media. The paper will summarize and discuss the relevant ideas, issues, etc., and also give an in-depth analysis of at least one piece of music (not your own) related to the topics. A recording (and score, if applicable) of the piece of music will accompany the paper. Minimum length: 2000 words plus (i.e. not including) title page, bibliography, music score, etc. Must follow appropriate style guidelines.
  - You may choose from the following book sections (not individual chapters) for the midterm:
    - *Audio Culture*: IV – The Open Work; VII – Minimalisms; IX – Electronic Music and Electronica
    - *The Auditory Culture Reader*: II – Histories of Sound; III – Anthropologies of Sound; IV – Sounds in the City.
- Final Paper – This paper will synthesize the major topics of the course into your own thinking on music. You will be expected to show evidence of encountering, understanding, and applying the ideas, techniques, and concepts from the course into formulating a major statement about your own work as a musician/composer. In addition to the assigned course readings, additional sources will be consulted from print & electronic media. You will also give an in-depth analysis of at least one piece of your own original music related to the topics of your paper. A recording (and score,

if appropriate) of the piece of music will accompany the paper. Minimum length: 3000 words plus (i.e. not including) title page, bibliography, music score, etc. Must follow appropriate style guidelines.

- Note: Both midterm & final papers will be submitted in machine-readable form (acceptable formats include MSWord, RTF, text, AIFF, PDF, etc.) on a CD-R. The accompanying recording and score must also be included on the CD-R. Sound files must be in AIFF or WAV format; scores must be in PDF format.

### **Grading**

All students will be responsible for completing assigned readings and projects and fully participating in all class discussions. While acknowledging and allowing for special circumstances, students are expected to complete assignments in a timely manner. All assignments will be typed/printed. Assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the due date. Late assignments will receive half-credit.

Reading Notes	10%
Presentation 1	10%
Presentation 2	10%
Midterm Paper	30%
Final Paper	40%
Semester Grade	100%

### **Americans With Disabilities Act**

The College of Santa Fe makes every effort to provide appropriate accommodations for students with documented disabilities in compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act. Students may receive the accommodations if they contact their professor and register at the Center for Academic Excellence with the Disabilities Service Coordinator.

### **Note**

All reasonable attempts will be made to adhere to the schedule & information in this syllabus. However, the instructor reserves the right to make accommodations & adaptations based on class progress, special opportunities, as well as occurrences outside the instructor's control.