

Theory Seminar II
Analyzing Popular Music
MUST 3896
Spring 2018

COURSE INFORMATION:

11:00 MWF
Presser 128
Dr. Jarek Paul Ervin
tua43104@temple.edu
Office Hours: By Appointment (Presser 308)

COURSE OVERVIEW:

Theory Seminar II is a writing-intensive course devoted to a sub-topic within the field of music theory. The course begins with a brief survey of music theory as a scholarly field before focusing on an intensive study of one topic within that discipline. Class sessions are devoted to critical thinking/discussion about scholarly articles, advanced musical-analytical techniques, research techniques, and writing skills.

The topic of this seminar will be **Analyzing Popular Music**. The study of popular music presents special challenges from the standpoint of music theory. Systematic music analysis emerged in tandem with modern European art music, yielding elaborate frameworks designed to make sense of large-scale works driven by formal development. Popular music often eschews complex pitch organization, instead foregrounding text, timbre, rhythm, and genre—exactly the analytic categories most neglected by music theory. This has been an opportunity and a challenge, requiring special attentiveness to underdeveloped areas of theory while offering new avenues for thinking about and understanding what music is.

Key questions for this course include:

- What is popular music? How does popular music “work”?
- Is popular music a coherent analytic category? Is it similar to or distinct from other stylistic categories (e.g. romanticism, minimalism, classical music)?
- How can music theory contribute to popular music studies? Are the two fields incompatible?
- What are major developments, texts, and approaches in popular music studies?
- What are techniques for analyzing pitch, harmony, melody, rhythm, timbre, form, genre, and other musical elements of popular music?

Prerequisite: passing grade in Written Theory I-IV (or equivalent)

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To learn how to write the various texts necessary for graduate school: an article summary, a personal statement, an annotated bibliography, an abstract, an outline for a research project, and a research paper.
2. To hone critical thinking in response to scholarly writing in music studies.
3. To develop research skills (e.g. generate a bibliography, learn about and assess sources).
4. To develop advanced analytical techniques, particularly focusing on the analysis of popular music repertoires.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Attendance	20%
Weekly Reading Responses	20%
Writing Projects	40%
Final Paper	20%

Attendance:

Students are required to attend all course meetings. Everyone is allowed **3** unexcused absences. Any student missing additional classes or arriving late will receive a 1% deduction (of the overall course total).

Weekly Reading Responses:

Each week, we will read and discuss an article related to one of the major course topics (see course schedule; all readings available online). By midnight on the night before class, students must submit a 1 page summary of the major arguments presented in the reading. Any response that is not submitted or is submitted after midnight without prior approval will receive a **0**.

Writing Assignments

Each week, students will submit or revise a writing assignment (see course schedule) and will complete and submit an in-class peer review. Handouts for each assignment will be available.

Term Paper:

An original research paper related to popular music and analysis (broadly construed). This project is designed to produce a writing sample of sufficient scope and quality to demonstrate capacity for graduate-level research (e.g. to function as a writing sample for a MA/PhD portfolio). Papers must be **15** double-spaced pages in length and driven by an argument or analytic question. Topic must be approved in advance by instructor. Students are strongly encouraged to consult regularly about aspects of the project. Weekly writing assignments will also directly address components of the project.

GRADING SCALE:

A	>94%
A-	90%-93%
B+	87%-89%
B	83%-86%
B-	80%-82%
C+	77%-79%
C	73%-76%
C-	70%-72%
D+	67%-69%
D	63%-66%
D-	60%-62%
F	<59%

ACADEMIC HONESTY STATEMENT:

All students must abide by standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism of any kind, whether in-class or for a project, is prohibited. Examples of infractions include:

- Using notes during a closed-note test
- Failing to acknowledge assistance on an assignment
- Turning in an assignment made for another class

The prohibition against plagiarism is intended to foster independence, respect, and academic freedom. Any student believed to be in violation of the Student Code of Conduct will receive an automatic 0 for the assignment, and may be subject to additional University Sanctions. For more information see Temple's official statement of [Student Responsibilities](#).

ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT:

My class is designed to be accessible and inclusive for all students. Hate speech of any kind is prohibited. Please be sensitive to the fact that other students in the class may approach the course from a range of perspectives, and work to contribute to a positive, inclusive classroom environment.

My class is also designed to be accessible to all students. Any student who has concerns about access based on a disability or other circumstance is encouraged to speak to me as soon as possible if they would like accommodations. I am happy to facilitate any such concerns within the confines of university policy. Questions may also be directed to Disability Resources and Services at 215-204-1280 at 100 Ritter Annex. See also Temple's official [Accessibility Statement](#).