

Determining ‘The Why’ First: Using the Nonprofit Mission, Vision, and Values Statements Model to Reimagine the Undergraduate Music Theory Curriculum

BY PAULA MAUST and VID SMOOKE

The Department of Music Theory at the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University recently joined many other institutions across North America in reimagining our undergraduate curriculum. Following practices more commonly found in the nonprofit sector, we began this undertaking by crafting mission, vision, and values statements. These newly articulated ideals for our department then served as a lodestar, effectively guiding the rest of the curriculum review and revision. The process we effected created an environment that facilitated creative thinking while simultaneously engendering clear consensus among our colleagues.

In this paper, we—as co-chairs of the committee charged with reviewing the undergraduate music theory curriculum—discuss the steps that we followed in this process, as well as the results. We believe that this way of organizing curriculum review provides a useful framework that other schools can mirror when they reassess their curricula. Thinking critically about why we teach specific topics helped us to clarify exactly what should be required in the new curriculum and what could be optional for the students. As a case study, we present our mission, vision, and values statements, as well as the new curriculum that these led us to create. In so doing, we illustrate how adopting this approach from the nonprofit sector and applying it to curriculum reform guided us in unexpected directions that have been broadly supported within the Department and the Conservatory as a whole.



Introduction

As part of the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University’s Breakthrough Plan to turn our school into a leader in twenty-first-century music education, the administration has been emphasizing diversity across the institution. The Culturally Responsive Curriculum Task Force was empaneled by the administration in 2020 and was charged with reimagining a conservatory curriculum that enables students to experience, discuss, and perform music that is broad, diverse, and socially relevant. This group produced a report designed to guide Peabody’s future efforts towards creating a more equitable and welcoming learning environment.¹ One of the recommendations

¹ This task force was composed of approximately 30 faculty and administrators drawn from across the institution. The final committee report is for internal distribution only, but the committee’s work

was that the Department of Music Theory (inclusive of classroom theory, ear training, and keyboard studies) complete a thorough undergraduate curriculum evaluation.

Music theory has historically been a substantial component of the undergraduate curriculum at Peabody, and the faculty in our department were becoming increasingly aware that our curriculum as it stood might no longer be best serving our undergraduates' evolving needs.² Since 2017, the student body at Peabody has grown from 575 to more than 800 students. This tremendous growth can be attributed to: 1) recent program expansions including new majors in music for new media and hip hop along with greater recruitment in computer music, voice and opera, composition, and jazz; and 2) the institution's efforts to recruit students from a wider array of backgrounds. Not only is our student body transforming, but the skills our students need for their careers are changing too. Few of our alumni earn a living solely by performing in an orchestra or as a soloist. Instead, they engage with a variety of musical genres and assume many different roles. They might be called on to perform classical and pops concerts, improvise in various settings, record performances, edit recordings, compose music in a variety of styles, read lead sheets, accompany or form rock bands, conduct ensembles and program concert series, and teach in a variety of contexts.

Indeed, scholars in the field have advocated for revising the undergraduate music theory curriculum since at least 2014.³ Many have made compelling arguments for why we should make our courses more antiracist, inclusive, and geared towards the increasingly diverse professional needs of twenty-first-century musicians.⁴ New

is discussed as part of Peabody's ongoing DEI initiatives. "Diversifying the Conservatory Curriculum," <https://peabody.jhu.edu/explore-peabody/dei/diversifying-the-conservatory-curriculum/>.

2 For an overview of the former curriculum, see Example 1 on Page 14 of this document.

3 The Report of the Task Force on the Undergraduate Music Major released by a taskforce from the College Music Society in 2014 spurred a tremendous amount of curriculum reimagining within the larger field of music studies in higher education. The copyedited version of the report was officially released two years later by Campbell, Myers, and Sarath (2016, 45–85). Some of the more recent scholarship focused specifically on music theory curriculum reform (arranged chronologically) includes: Murphy and McConville (2017, 177–228); Kim (2021, 23–46); Abrahams (2021, 81–108); and Geest, Pierson, Burns, Smucker, Pukinskis, and O'Hara (2021, 3–80).

4 A complete list of this type of work would be massive and extend beyond the scope of this paper. Some select recent examples of this type of work (listed chronologically) include: Cohn (2015, 5–23); Agawu (2016, 334–56); Madrid (2017, 124–29); Palfy and Gilson (2018, 79–110); Attas (2019, 125–39); Ewell (2020); Endicott (2020, 109–46); Molk and Ohnona (2020, <https://newmusicusa.org/nmbx/promoting-equity-developing-an-antiracist-music-theory-classroom/>); Maust (2021, 21–23); Hiasma and Lumsden (2021, v–x); Philpott (2022); London (2022); and Ewell (2023).

textbooks and pedagogical materials that address broader topics and repertoire are becoming readily available,⁵ and those who have undergone curriculum reforms in their own institutions have begun sharing their innovations at conferences and in publications.⁶ This discourse is propelling the discipline forward in meaningful directions that will have a direct and lasting impact on the next generation of music students.

When we received our charge from the Peabody administration to evaluate and potentially revise our undergraduate music theory curriculum in Fall 2021, we recognized that the process would be time-consuming and perhaps even controversial. As co-chairs of the committee formed to undertake this task, we (the authors of this paper) endeavored to devise a thorough process that would honor as many of our department’s core values and goals as possible.

This article is primarily about our process, rather than about the product we ultimately devised as our reimaged curriculum. Since we all teach in different types of institutions serving a wide variety of students with diverse educational needs and aspirations, there is not a perfect one-size-fits-all music theory curriculum. Every school engaging in curriculum revision will arrive at different conclusions, and we do not presume that the new curriculum at Peabody is necessarily the best model for any other school. However, the process we engaged in to develop the new curriculum was in many ways unusual for an academic department, and we assert that it could provide a useful methodology for music theory departments in many types of institutions. Most significantly, we looked outside the academy and utilized the nonprofit model of writing mission, vision, and values statements for our department *before* we did any work to reimagine our curriculum. In this article we will share our approach of developing these mission, vision, and values statements and then demonstrate how our new curriculum aligns with those documents. As we will show, our methodology ultimately rendered the decisions we needed to make about the curriculum clear, aligned with our unified guiding principles, and much more straightforward than we initially expected.

5 Some recent examples focused primarily on diversifying the Western classical canon include Maust (2023); Hoag (2022); “Composers of Color Resource Project,” <https://composersofcolor.hcommons.org/>; Murdock and Parsell, <https://www.musicbywomen.org/about-us/>; and “Music Inclusion Hub Curriculum,” <https://www.boulangerinitiative.org/music-inclusion-hub>.

6 Some noteworthy recent examples include: de Clercq (2019); Lavengood (2019); Peebles (2019); and Loudon (2023).

Background

The undergraduate music theory curriculum at Peabody was last reconsidered in the 2011–12 academic year. Most undergraduates in this curriculum were required to take four semesters of ear training and keyboard studies and six semesters of classroom theory.⁷ In the classroom theory portion of this curriculum, we tried to create enough choice to allow students to take ownership of their music theory education. To do so, we compressed what had previously been a prescribed six-semester curriculum into five semesters, covering 1) diatonic harmony and voice leading in the first semester; 2) chromatic harmony and voice leading in the second semester; 3) Baroque counterpoint in the third semester; 4) Classical forms in the fourth semester; and 5) a class that spans late-Romantic through Contemporary techniques in the fifth semester. Students choose among several writing-intensive classes on various topics that are created on an ad hoc basis for the sixth semester.

Although the flaws in this curricular model quickly became apparent, we maintained it without change for twelve years. In particular, the sixth-semester elective never adequately fulfilled its function. Because students needed to take the class at a specific point in their education, they were not able to plan ahead to find topics that genuinely interested them. Instead, they tended to enroll in a course based on their previous experiences with the instructor or how conveniently the class time fit into their schedule. Ultimately, we lost some of the rigor of the former curriculum without creating true freedom of choice. Additionally, the focus of this theory curriculum remained the same as had been the case for generations at Peabody, without any real consideration of music beyond the Western classical canon. Even as specific instructors worked diligently to find repertoire examples from underrepresented composers, the biases of the program were clearly evinced by the fact that we generically called this our “music theory” curriculum even though it was laser-focused on only one specific repertoire.

We wanted a curriculum that fully embodied our departmental values, but since we had not yet articulated those values, we were unsure as to what this would entail.

⁷ Exceptions to this structure include jazz majors, who took one year of each discipline in addition to theory and musicianship classes that are geared specifically towards their discipline. That these additional classes are administered by the Jazz Studies Department rather than the Department of Music Theory was a source of much soul searching during our curriculum review process, because of what this says about the limits of how we have traditionally defined “music theory” at our institution.

Process Part 1: Forming a Committee and Making a Plan

In Fall 2021, an official committee was formed to evaluate and propose revisions to Peabody’s undergraduate music theory curriculum. The authors of this paper co-chaired this committee, which included six other full-time faculty members drawn from each of the three areas of the Department (classroom theory, ear training, and keyboard studies). Our charge was to critically answer the following questions:

1. What does our current music theory curriculum (inclusive of classroom theory, ear training, and keyboard studies) value as essential skills for our undergraduate population?
2. How does our undergraduate music theory curriculum compare with the curricula at our peer institutions?
3. What should our undergraduate music theory curriculum look like moving forward in order to best serve our students?

Additionally, we were asked to draft a recommendation about the curriculum and bring it to the full Department for discussion, revision, and eventual approval by the Department and Conservatory administration. At Peabody, this entire process took three years, and we are implementing our new curriculum with the incoming cohort of first-year students in Fall 2024.

Revising a music theory curriculum is a daunting prospect. After all, there are a wide variety of opinions in any department about what concepts are most important and a limited number of semesters in which to fit an ever-growing set of relevant musical skills. Students also arrive at music school with different levels of preparation and training in a diverse array of styles, and they have an increasingly broad spectrum of professional goals. Paula Maust (as co-chair of the committee) suggested that we look outside the academy to the nonprofit sector for models to guide our process. Maust had recently worked with a consultant to develop mission, vision, and values statements for a nonprofit organization Maust co-directed. This experience had transformed that organization’s strategic planning, and Maust surmised that it would also be beneficial to our curriculum revision process at Peabody. At her suggestion, the committee carefully crafted and revised these documents *before* making any decisions about the curriculum. Once the documents were finalized, they became crucial to our curriculum revision process.

Process Part 2: Writing Mission, Vision, and Values Statements

Mission, vision, and values statements codify “a shared understanding of why an organization exists and its aspirations for the future,” and developing these statements is a crucial fundamental task for most nonprofit organizations.⁸ This strategy, however, is rarely applied in academic departments, although some critical literature on music pedagogy does recommend that we first codify our rationale for revising the curriculum before doing so. For example, the College Music Society’s much-discussed “A Manifesto for Progressive Change in the Undergraduate Preparation of Music Majors” begins by explicitly outlining why such a document was needed before offering recommendations for structural change.⁹ More recently, Jennifer Snodgrass has similarly asserted that it is imperative for theory pedagogues to first define *why* we want to change our music theory curriculum before engaging in the process of figuring out the specific details of what a new curriculum will include.¹⁰ Beginning by discerning the “why” for curriculum revision aligns closely with the nonprofit model of devising mission, vision, and values statements.

During the year we worked to craft these documents at Peabody, we aimed to write statements that convey our department’s core goals and demonstrate how we envision our role within the institution. Of critical importance was ensuring that our mission, vision, and values statements actively honored the conservatory tradition while also looking towards an innovative and broadened future. Collaboratively creating these documents was not only instrumental in our curriculum revision process, but it also brought into clear focus the myriad ways that a Department composed of individuals with many differing viewpoints and perspectives could unite over a shared goal of improving the student experience.

Mission

Literature on creating a mission statement suggests that it should be as concise and focused as possible.¹¹ Michael Allison and Jude Kaye advise mission statement writers to find a way to incorporate both the organization’s purpose (ends) and program

8 Allison and Kaye (2015, 77).

9 Campbell, Myers, Sarath (2016, 57–62).

10 Snodgrass (2020, 1–14).

11 Allison and Kaye (2015, 78–9). Others who have written on this include Sheehan, Jr. (2010, 51) and Brinckerhoff (2009, 39–40).

(means) of how that purpose is accomplished.¹² This clarifies to both internal and external stakeholders what the organization does and why it matters. We frequently came back to three core questions while writing our mission statement: 1) Why does the Department of Music Theory exist?; 2) What is the Department’s function within the broader Peabody undergraduate curriculum?; and 3) What are the Department’s broad overarching goals? In answering these questions, we were able to articulate our purpose, which then naturally led us to clarify the precise ways to accomplish that purpose. Following Allison and Kaye’s model of purpose and means, we wrote an initial sentence focused on an active infinitive verb (in our case “to develop”) to clearly state *what* we aim to do. The second and third sentences of our mission statement provide a more thorough description of *how* we intend to accomplish our purpose.

Our work resulted in the following mission statement:

The Peabody Department of Music Theory, Ear Training, and Keyboard Studies strives to develop well-rounded musicians who are able to advocate for their artistry within the Western canon and beyond. We cultivate an atmosphere of curiosity and inquisitiveness in order to inspire our students to become life-long learners, active voices towards equity within the arts, and leaders within the musical community. Through our classes, students acquire a robust set of tools towards the comprehension, creation, and performance of music, and learn to express their insights verbally, through writing, and through their individual musical practice.

Vision

Vision statements are intended to show what success will look like when an organization’s mission is successfully enacted. Allison and Kaye suggest that a vision statement should “challenge and inspire the group to stretch its capabilities and achieve its purpose.”¹³ Although intended to spark inspiration and motivate hard work, it is also important for the vision statement to be grounded in reality. As we worked to craft our vision statement, we focused on what we envisioned as the most ideal outcomes for the wide array of undergraduate students our department serves. The questions we focused on as a committee while writing our vision included: 1) Why does what we do in the classroom matter?; 2) Where do we want to be as a Department in five years?; and 3) How do we balance the longstanding Conservatory educational model with an ever-changing music industry? As in the mission statement, we were intent on finding active verbs that most clearly defined our desired outcomes (in our case “building,” “broadening,” and “empowering”).

The following is the Department’s vision statement:

¹² Allison and Kaye, (2015, 78).

¹³ Allison and Kaye, (2015, 85).

BUILDING upon our foundation of teaching the materials of Western Classical music within their cultural practice and context.

BROADENING our course offerings to reflect the interconnectedness and wide range of contemporary musical practices.

EMPOWERING students with more agency towards pursuing their own interests while maintaining a solid core curriculum designed to provide foundational knowledge.

Values

An organization's fundamental values are meant to align passion and intellect. Allison and Kaye propose that values "focus on service, quality, people, and work norms,"¹⁴ and they also readily acknowledge that homing in on these values is a process likely to spark spirited debates.¹⁵ While writing our values statement, we asked the following questions: 1) What broad skills do we want our students to get from the music theory curriculum?; 2) What kind of classroom experience do we want our students to have?; and 3) How does what we do fit into the Conservatory's mission and the larger field of music? We wanted to create a values statement that demonstrates our department's greatest strengths and priorities and also allows room for future growth and development. In particular, we sought to incorporate feedback that we had received from applied faculty across the Conservatory in a series of informal conversations about what they hoped the theory curriculum could provide for their students. Additionally, we wanted to emphasize Peabody's continued commitment to having full-time faculty teaching the majority of undergraduate courses and to situate ourselves as a Department at the nexus of tradition and innovation. We again chose active verbs that came up repeatedly in our meeting discussions, including *provide*, *amplify*, *help*, and *foster*. However, rather than emphasizing these verbs for the values statement, we chose to instead highlight the most impactful nouns to give weight to each of our core values. To that end, we settled on foundation, curiosity, connections, respect, full-time faculty, and innovation and tradition.

The following is the Department's values statement:

- Provide a strong academic **FOUNDATION** for students that allows for the development of practical musical skills applicable in a variety of contexts.
- Amplify students' intellectual **CURIOSITY**, dedication to their craft, joy in learning, and persistence towards achieving their goals.

¹⁴ Allison and Kaye (2015, 87).

¹⁵ Allison and Kaye (2015, 90).

- Help students make **CONNECTIONS** between music theory and practice to create more sophisticated musicians who possess a broad understanding of music and are fluent in a variety of theoretical techniques.
- Foster a classroom environment grounded in mutual **RESPECT** that supports a variety of analytic and personal perspectives.
- Dedication to effective teaching focused on individual student success, led by **FULL-TIME FACULTY** who are invested in undergraduate teaching and to continued development of impactful pedagogical techniques.
- Continued assessment of our curriculum in order to ensure that it is tailored to the changing needs of our student body, and balances **INNOVATION AND TRADITION**.

Once our mission, vision, and values documents were in place, they served as a lodestar throughout the curriculum review. By the end of the first year of our process, we had worked out nearly all the details of a revised curriculum that the majority of people in the Department were excited about presenting to the school’s administration. That is not to say that we did not have numerous spirited discussions about what precisely would go into each new syllabus or the ideal number of topics classes, for example. Yet every time we found ourselves at an impasse, we returned to our mission, vision, and values statements to help us make a decision and move forward in a way that felt focused and genuine.

Process Part 3: Collecting Data

As we began drafting the mission, vision, and values statements, we simultaneously charged members with collecting data along two streams: 1) what the undergraduate theory curriculum looks like at peer institutions; and 2) how the Peabody curriculum has been experienced by students.

We sought data about the undergraduate theory curriculum from the following schools (listed alphabetically): Cleveland Institute of Music, Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester, The Hartt School of the University of Hartford, Jacobs School of Music of Indiana University, School of Music of James Madison University, Schulich School of Music of McGill University, School of Music, Theatre and Dance at the University of Michigan, and Oberlin College-Conservatory of Music. We found that several of these schools had recently reconsidered their music theory curriculum, although most still focused their undergraduate music theory classes almost exclusively

in the Western Classical canon. Both Oberlin Conservatory and James Madison University stand out as exceptions, with curricula that focus on electives where the students decide for themselves what music theory topics they should engage with beyond a short, shared core. Several of these schools have incorporated some elective choices into their curriculum, including Eastman, Indiana, and Michigan.¹⁶

In order to assess the efficacy of the Peabody curriculum, we sought data on the success rate of students in our music theory classes. Under this curriculum, incoming students took a placement examination and were then tracked in one of three ways: 1) an accelerated class that covers the first four semesters of our curriculum in two semesters; 2) the standard curriculum; or 3) an intensive class where students spend more time working on fundamentals for their first year, and then rejoin the regular classes in their second year. We were particularly interested in how many students failed at the end of each semester of our six-course curriculum. As one might expect, students who arrived with less training in notated music theory and were placed into the intensive track were more likely to fail a theory class than those who passed the initial placement examination.¹⁷

In perusing Peabody's enrollment data, our most surprising realization was regarding the placement levels of incoming students over the previous four years. In most years, approximately 60% of the incoming students placed into the intensive track.¹⁸ We realized that we can no longer assume a shared background in notated Western Classical music theory among our undergraduate students. For this reason, we determined that the design of a new curriculum should either 1) allow the bulk of our students to enroll in what we consider the standard music theory curriculum from the start of their time at Peabody; or 2) change the names of the classes so that the one

¹⁶ We are grateful to the various faculty at these schools who took the time to discuss their curricula and philosophy with us. In addition, we would like to note that this data was gathered in Fall 2021, and these schools may have revised their offerings in the interim period.

¹⁷ Over the four years for which data was collected, 93% of students passed Theory 1 Intensive, while 98% passed Theory 1. Similarly, 83% passed Theory 2 Intensive, compared with 90% passing Theory 2. Ear Training had similar issues, with 89% passing Ear Training 1 Intensive compared with 95% passing Ear Training 1, and 88% passing Ear Training 2 Intensive versus 93% passing Ear Training 2. No data had been collected on the comparative success rates of students from the various first-year classes as they continued into their second and third years of study.

¹⁸ Academic year 2017-18: 30 students began in Theory 1, and 44 in Theory 1 Intensive; 2018-19: 32 students began in Theory 1, and 53 in Theory 1 Intensive; 2019-20: 49 students began in Theory 1, and 64 began in Theory 1 Intensive; 2020-21 was the outlier with 65 beginning in Theory 1, and 38 beginning in Theory 1 Intensive. 2020-21 was also the year when all classes were remote due to the Covid pandemic and was therefore an outlier in many other ways as well.

serving the majority of students would be considered regular music theory.

At this time, we also informally surveyed members of Peabody’s applied faculty to determine how well they believed the music theory curriculum served their students. Most expressed broad support for the music theory curriculum in general. Despite this, many faculty found that their students often did not make the leap from learning theoretical topics in the classroom to applying these tools to their own repertoire. These faculty encouraged us to find ways in the curriculum to help students more effectively forge the connection between theory and practice.

Process Part 4: Crafting a Revised Curriculum

The data we collected and our department’s consideration of the new mission, vision, and values statements created broad agreement that our classroom theory curriculum needed to be revised. We began by asking ourselves the following questions:

1. What topics in our current curriculum are necessary for every student to know?
2. What topics are not in our current curriculum that are necessary for every student to know?
3. What topics in our current curriculum should students have access to but not necessarily be required to know?
4. What topics are not in our current curriculum that students should have access to but not necessarily be required to know?

We then divided into two subcommittees that worked independently to draft a variety of proposals for what a new curriculum might look like. Both working groups created models based on a shared three-semester core followed by topics classes that allowed student choice. That there was clear agreement as to the general direction of our proposed curriculum change was a surprise to all involved, because previous reconsiderations of our curriculum had never begun with such a distinct consensus. We attribute this to the fact that both groups were guided by our mission, vision, and values statements, which helped significantly to clarify both our purpose and means. Once we had articulated our ideals, it became apparent that doing so had created clarity as to what we sought to become as a Department and how this might translate practically into a new curriculum.

The next step was then to propose exactly what should be required in that common initial core and how to empower students with more agency to pursue their own interests while maintaining some semblance of a shared curriculum. We had four

goals in mind while creating the new undergraduate music theory curriculum: 1) to adhere to our mission, vision, and values statements; 2) to create a curriculum that would allow students the tools to consider theories of music more broadly, while also providing a solid foundation in analysis of the Western Classical canon that many of our students still consider their professional home; 3) to create required classes that would be useful for all of our students, providing the grounding in fundamentals necessary for those without strong backgrounds in notated Western Classical music theory without boring those who already felt confident in applying those tools; and 4) to consider this revision as part of an ongoing process in which we will regularly reevaluate the efficacy of our curriculum.

SEMESTER	2012 CURRICULUM	2024 CURRICULUM
1	Diatonic Voice Leading: Harmonize Diatonic Melody; Diatonic Figured Bass; Analysis	Fundamentals: Sound; Hearing Structure; Notation; Scales (all); Sonorities (all); Counterpoint
2	Diatonic and Chromatic Voice Leading; Introduction to Form: Harmonize Chromatic Melodies; Chromatic and Sequential Figured Bass; Analysis	Tonal Harmony 1: Diatonic Harmony; Melody Harmonization; Figured Bass Realization; Score Analysis; Composition
3	Baroque Counterpoint: Analysis of Baroque music with special attention to the contrapuntal works of J.S. Bach; Model Compositions	Tonal Harmony 2: Chromatic Harmony; Basic Form through Sonata Form; Post-Tonal Analysis
4	Classic and Romantic Styles: Classical-Era Structure with special consideration of sonata form; Analysis; Romantic-Era Expansions	Topics Course 1: See below for list of topics
5	Late Romantic through Contemporary Musical Practices: Extended Modulatory Techniques; New Tonalities; Pitch-Set and Serial Theory; 20 th - Century Styles	Topics Course 2: See below for list of topics
6	Special Topics in Music Theory: Focus on analytic writing	Capstone Practicum Seminar

Topics Include:

Baroque Styles
Classical Styles
20th-Century Styles
Jazz Harmony
Music of the World

Renaissance Counterpoint
Romantic Styles
21st-Century Styles
Popular Music
Tonal Improvisation

Example 1.
Comparing Curricula.

A case study in three parts follows that illustrates the defining aspects of our new classroom theory curriculum and also demonstrates the ways the curriculum was directly derived from our mission, vision, and values statements.

Case Study Part 1: Theory 1–3 Shared Core

With the aforementioned goals in mind, we proposed a new shared three-semester core. Most incoming undergraduates will take a new Fundamentals class in their first semester. Recognizing that our mission statement calls for students to work within the Western canon and beyond, we decided to begin this course with the analysis of sound, providing tools that may be applied toward the analysis of any music. The first unit will be focused on topics including: the harmonic series and tuning, timbre, sound envelopes, filtering, dynamics, and texture, while also covering notation and hearing structural elements in music. The second unit of the first semester will encompass scales and sonorities, including those normally reserved for contemporary music classes (modes, symmetrical scales, extended tertian chords, and sonorities based on intervals other than thirds). In this unit, we will explicitly teach jazz and lead-sheet notation alongside the five-line staff. Finally, the third unit of the first semester will engage with topics specific to tonal Western Classical music, including species counterpoint, part writing, harmonization, and figured bass realization.

In this way, students will immediately be exposed to theories that are applicable to all musics. They ideally will gain a strong academic foundation of practical musical skills applicable in a variety of contexts, learning about the basic elements of sound in a way that will allow them to consider their own sound production as a part of music theory and to understand the tools in a typical digital audio workstation. Their knowledge will immediately be grounded in both listening and notation.

In recognizing that most of our students intend to perform or compose on or alongside orchestral instruments, the next two semesters of the shared core will focus on elements of tonal Western Classical theory. The second semester will cover diatonic harmony utilizing melody harmonization, figured bass realization, composition, and score analysis. The third semester will move into chromatic harmony alongside formal structures of tonal Western Classical music, and will include further exploration of topics in post-tonal analysis. These courses align with our mission of helping students advocate for their artistry within the Western canon, while providing them with a robust set of tools towards the comprehension, creation, and performance of that music.

We believe that this three-semester common core will build upon our foundation of teaching the materials of Western Classical music, while broadening the focus of study to develop tools applicable to a wide variety of musical styles.

Case Study Part 2: Topics Courses

In line with our vision statement, which asks us to broaden our course offerings and empower students with more agency towards pursuing their own interests, each student will follow the three-semester shared core by choosing any two topics courses, as the fourth and fifth semesters of the six-semester undergraduate music theory curriculum.

We wanted the topics courses to reflect the variety of backgrounds and diversity of professional goals across our student body. We also wanted to ensure that students will choose topics courses based on their interests rather than scheduling convenience. Therefore, we will have a set list of classes offered as a rotating, consistent, and predictable cycle, so that each of the following topics will be available at least once every two years. These main topics include several of the classes that were formerly the basis for required classes within our curriculum, including: Baroque Styles, Classical Styles, Romantic Styles, and Twentieth-Century Styles. Additionally, we intend to offer new classes that formerly were not available to our undergraduates, including Renaissance Counterpoint, Twenty-First-Century Styles, Jazz Harmony, Popular Music, Music of the World, and Tonal Improvisation. Over time, additional courses may be developed and added to these initial options. Although our hope is that students will choose their own path through these topics classes, we are aware that individual departments may require their students to take specific courses.

This component of the curriculum will give students the freedom to decide for themselves what aspects of music they would like to explore, and students will be able to engage more deeply with the subject matter in each course. For example, more traditionally-minded students might find themselves replicating the first four semesters of our former curriculum by taking the Baroque Styles and Classical Styles topics courses. A Baroque Styles class filled with these sorts of students should be able to delve more deeply into music of that era than a Baroque Counterpoint class that is required of all students. Similarly, a Classical Styles class taught as an elective will be able to consider elements of performance and creation that were previously neglected in the class that was required of every student regardless of their background or interest level. In a required class, teachers must navigate between the Scylla and

Charybdis of creating a syllabus designed to inspire those students who enter the class with a deep well of knowledge about the topic while simultaneously allowing those who have no interest in the subject matter to succeed. Additionally, students with less background in the material will be more likely to excel in a class they have chosen to take that focuses on a topic in which they are deeply invested.

Another advantage of the topics classes is that they will allow us to think of music theory more broadly in the undergraduate curriculum. Students will have the opportunity to engage with many different types of music, including several styles and genres that were absent from or barely discussed in our former curriculum.¹⁹

Case Study Part 3: Theory 6 Capstone Seminar

Our informal conversations with studio faculty members at Peabody about their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the former undergraduate music theory curriculum revealed a consistent and common theme: nearly every faculty member we spoke with was hopeful that we might find a way to create a curriculum that would help students more firmly grasp the critical connection between theory and practice. These conversations not only significantly influenced the scope of our mission, vision, and values statements, but they also assisted us with crafting the sixth and final semester of the undergraduate music theory sequence. During this capstone seminar, each student will directly apply the skills they have developed throughout the rest of the curriculum to complete a detailed analysis of a piece they are performing or a piece that has inspired their own compositions and creative output. Students will work to develop basic research skills, and each student will present their work to their classmates in various stages across the semester. The capstone culminates with each student writing an analytical paper and delivering a twenty-minute presentation of their analysis.

In addition to being reflective of our commitment to facilitating students’ grasp of the connection between theory and practice, this capstone seminar also demonstrates our vision of empowering students with the agency to pursue their own interests

¹⁹ We anticipate several challenges with the implementation of the topics classes (and surely unexpected issues will arise as well!). At least two of the proposed topics are in genres that none of our faculty—as of this writing—feel qualified to teach. Student enrollment is also a concern, especially since even full-time contracts at Peabody are largely sustained by having nearly all of our classes within three students more or less of the maximum enrollment (which is capped at fifteen students). This means that if any single topic is exceedingly popular or less desired, it will create repercussions felt throughout the Department until we are better able to predict student interest and plan accordingly.

and our value of amplifying intellectual curiosity. Furthermore, it is our hope that students in the class will be able to learn from each other by sharing their work with their classmates. It is our intent that students will choose topics courses in their fourth and fifth semesters that align with their interests and the repertoire that they are studying in the studio, thereby preparing them for this course. With an enrollment of approximately fifteen students in each section, there is the potential for students to engage with an array of repertoire from multiple time periods, locations, and styles. Perhaps in a single section a baroque flutist will analyze a sonata by Anna Bon, a composer might study George Lewis' *Mnemosis*, a cellist could evaluate a movement of Antonín Dvořák's Cello Concerto, a soprano might examine *Songs of the Seasons* by Margaret Bonds, a computer music major might focus on recent albums by Beyoncé, and a music for new media major could discuss Koji Kondo's music for *The Legend of Zelda*. The repertoire possibilities for this course are as endless as the imaginations of our student body. By providing students with the opportunity to deeply examine a work that they care about and are engaged with in the studio, we are endeavoring to mentor the next generation of professional musicians to be critical, thoughtful, and as musically and intellectually sophisticated as possible.

Conclusion

We are excited to begin implementing this curriculum in Fall 2024, as it will create an entirely new experience for both our undergraduate students and our faculty. The process we engaged in engendered a working environment that was collaborative and constructive and resulted in a structure that we could not have predicted beforehand. By framing our discussions through newly crafted mission, vision, and values statements, we were able to approach our work in a more creative fashion, tethered to ideals of what our department and curriculum could be, rather than anchored to the traditions of prior generations.

While we understand that our reimagined curriculum, as with any curriculum, is not perfect and will not be ideal for every student, we are hopeful that it will be an improvement on the prior course of study. Most importantly, we are dedicated to evaluating and reconsidering our work on a regular basis, and we have departmental mission, vision, and values statements that will help us navigate the changing world of music education in the twenty-first century.

Bibliography

- Abrahams, Rosa. 2021. “Rethinking Music Literacy in the Undergraduate Theory Core.” *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 35: 81–108.
- Agawu, Kofi. 2016. “Tonality as a Colonizing Force in Africa.” In *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique*, edited by Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan, 334–56. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Allison, Michael J., and Jude Kaye. 2015. *Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: A Practical Guide for Dynamic Times*. Hoboken: Wiley.
- Attas, Robin. 2019. “Strategies for Settler Decolonization: Decolonial Pedagogies in a Popular Music Analysis Course.” *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 49, no. 1: 125–39.
- Boulanger Initiative. 2024. “Music Inclusion Hub Curriculum.” <https://www.boulangerinitiative.org/music-inclusion-hub>.
- Brinckerhoff, Peter C. 2009. *Mission-Based Management: Leading Your Not-for-Profit in the 21st Century*. Hoboken: Wiley.
- Campbell, Patricia Shehan, David E. Myers, and Edward W. Sarath. 2016. “Transforming Music Study from Its Foundations: A Manifesto for Progressive Change in the Undergraduate Preparation of Music Majors.” In *Redefining Music Studies in an Age of Change: Creativity, Diversity, and Integration*, 45–85. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- de Clercq, Trevor. 2019. “A Music Theory Curriculum for the 99%.” *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy* 7. <https://doi.org/10.18061/es.v7io.7359>.
- Cohn, Richard. 2015. “Why We Don’t Teach Meter, and Why We Should.” *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 29: 5–23.
- Endicott, Neal P. 2020. “Mamlok on Day One: Strategies for Incorporating Recent Music Into the Early Undergraduate Music Theory Curriculum.” *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 34: 109–46.
- Ewell, Philip A. 2020. “Music Theory and the White Racial Frame.” *Music Theory Online* 26, no. 2.
- . 2023. *On Music Theory and Making Music More Welcoming for Everyone*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Geest, William van, Marcelle Pierson, Chelsea Burns, Peter Smucker, Katherine Pukinskis, and William O’Hara. 2021. “Corralling the Chorale.” *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 35: 3–80.
- Hisama, Ellie and Rachel Lumsden. 2021. “Diversifying Music Theory.” *Theory and Practice* 46: v–x.
- Hoag, Melissa, ed. 2022. *Expanding the Canon: Black Composers in the Music Theory Classroom*. Milton: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Humanities Commons. 2024. “Composers of Color Resource Project.” <https://composersofcolor.hcommons.org/>.
- Kim, Catrina. 2021. “Issues in Teaching Music Theory Ethically.” *Theory and Practice* 26: 23–46.
- Lavengood, Megan L. 2019. “Bespoke Music Theory: A Modular Core Curriculum Designed for Audio Engineers, Classical Violinists, and Everyone in Between.” *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy* 7.
- London, Justin. 2022. “A Bevy of Biases: How Music Theory’s Methodological Problems Hinder Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,” *Music Theory Online* 28, no. 1.

- Louden, Sarah. "Reframing the Music Theory Curriculum." Lecture presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Music Theory and the American Musicological Society, Denver, CO, November 10, 2023.
- Madrid, Alejandro. 2017. "Diversity, Tokenism, Non-Canonical Musics, and the Crisis of the Humanities in U.S. Academia." *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 7, no. 2: 124–9.
- Maust, Paula. 2023. *Expanding the Music Theory Canon: Inclusive Examples for Analysis from the Common Practice Period*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2023.
- . 2021. "Racism and Sexism Remain Pervasive in Western Classical Music Instruction." *Journal of the International Alliance for Women in Music* 27, no. 1: 21–23.
- Molk, David and Michelle Ohnona. "Promoting Equity: Developing an Antiracist Music Theory Classroom," *NEWMUSICBOX* (January 29, 2020): <https://newmusicusa.org/nmbx/promoting-equity-developing-an-antiracist-music-theory-classroom/>.
- Murdock, Molly and Ben Parsell. "Music By Women." <https://www.musicbywomen.org/about-us/>.
- Murphy, Barbara and Brendan McConville. 2017. "Music Theory Undergraduate Core Curriculum Survey: A 2017 Update." *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 31: 177–228.
- Palfy, Cora S. and Eric Gilson. 2018. "The Hidden Curriculum in the Music Theory Classroom." *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 32: 79–110.
- Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University. "Highlights of Our Work." <https://peabody.jhu.edu/explore-peabody/adei/work/>.
- Peebles, Crystal. 2019. "Inclusion and Agency in the Undergraduate Theory Core." *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy* 7.
- Philpott, Chris. 2022. "What does it mean to decolonise the school music curriculum?" *London Review of Education* (March).
- Sheehan, Robert M. Jr. 2010. *Mission Impact: Breakthrough Strategies for Nonprofits*. Hoboken: Wiley, 2010.
- Snodgrass, Jennifer. 2020. "The Golden Circle: 'Why,' 'How,' and 'What.'" In *Teaching Music Theory: New Voices and Approaches*, 1–14. Oxford: Oxford University Press.