

OKLAHOMA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY
DIVISION OF MUSIC

COMPOSITION STUDIES GUIDE
FOR MAJORS IN MUSIC WITH COMPOSITION EMPHASIS

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook is designed for students majoring or minoring in music composition at Oklahoma Baptist University. It contains information about the degrees, the courses of study, expectations of the student, and other pertinent information. Music composition majors should make themselves conversant with the material found in this handbook.

Many undergraduate schools offer degrees in music composition. OBU has offered them since the 1960's, and can boast many successful composers who still are honing their craft since those days. OBU composition graduates have gone on to successful careers in church music, teaching in undergraduate and graduate education, songwriting, film music, audio and video production, and many other related careers. Many others still compose and arrange music while primarily serving in other careers as diverse as business, education, ministry, arts management, and other fields. It is a degree that seeks to engage the student in *creativity* that can be used for life-long learning and practical use.

Successful students in these degrees have traditionally had:

- Earlier experiences with music composition and/or songwriting
- Basic piano skills
- A good understanding of music theory
- An interest in all the creative arts – visual art, theater, literature, music
- Facility with basic music technology such as music notation software

Some students are successful without some of these traits – it is dependent on the student to succeed and thrive through working hard to bridge the gaps in pre-college training and interests.

The three primary methods of composition study will consist of:

- *Imitation*
- *Assimilation*
- *Innovation*

These methods will be explained more as you study composition, but as an introduction here are some attributes of each:

- *Imitation*
 - You learned to speak by imitating the sounds you heard. Why should composition study be any different?
- *Assimilation*
 - You take all the various items you hear and see (and perhaps smell and touch) and transfer them into your available palette of materials you will use to compose music.
- *Innovation*
 - You then make new music – music no one else could make – by creatively using all the things you have learned through the first two processes.

Good luck!

FACULTY

The area of Music Theory and Composition houses the Composition Program at OBU. Professor James Vernon is the current coordinator of Composition Studies.

James Vernon

- Bachelor of Arts, Old Dominion University
 - Major in Music Composition
 - Minor in Art History
- Master of Music, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
 - Music Composition
 - Thesis: *Te Deum* for Mixed Chorus and Orchestra
- Doctor of Musical Arts, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
 - Music Composition
 - Dissertation: *Organ Concerto*
Of the Dust of the Ground for Mixed Chorus, Narrators, and Orchestra
- Additional Study, University of North Texas
 - Electronic Music, Music Composition

Professor Vernon has been teaching composition at Oklahoma Baptist University since 1990. He has also taught courses in music theory, aural skills, fine arts, conducting, score reading, and choral music. From 1990-1994 he directed the Bison Glee Club. In 2003-2004 he was the interim director of the University Chorale, and since 2009 has been the director of the Bisonette Glee Club. Vernon also served as the chair of the Division of Music from 1999-2009. As a composer he has written music for nearly every genre, including orchestral, choral, and instrumental music, as well as music for live and recorded theater. He is a member of the Society of Composers, the College Music Society, and is a BMI-affiliated composer.

His most recent compositions are:

- *Dover Beach* (2019)
for Wind Ensemble and S.A.T.B. Choir
- *Psalm 57* (2019)
for S.A.T.B. Choir and Piano
- *Ithaka* (2019)
for S.S.A. Women's Chorus, Strings, and Piano
- *In Retrospect* (2018)
for Cello and Piano
- *My Words are Like the Stars* (2018)
For Tenor Voice and Two Percussionists

- *Love Song* (2017)
For S.S.A Women's Chorus and Piano
- *Love Came Down At Christmas* (2017)
For S.S.A. Women's Chorus and Piano
- *A Porcelain Doll* (2016)
A full-length stage opera
- *The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me* (2016)
For S.S.A. Women's Chorus and percussion
- *A Belief in Beauty* (2015)
For unaccompanied S.S.A.A. Women's Chorus
- *Septet for Wind Instruments* (2015)
For Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn, Alto and Tenor Saxophone
- *Elegy for Trains* (2014)
For S.S.A.A. Women's Choir, Brass Ensemble, and Piano
- *Three Sacred Songs* (2013)
For Soprano Voice and Piano
- *A Love Song* (2013)
For unaccompanied T.T.B.B. Men's Voices
- *The Glow From That Fire* (2013)
For Mixed Chorus, Alto Solo, Narrator, and Orchestra
- *Magnificat* (2012)
For S.S.A.A. Women's Voices, Piano, and Percussion
- *A Thousand Tongues of Immortality* (2012)
For Soprano Voice, Cello, and Piano

THE DEGREE PROGRAM

OBU offers one undergraduate degrees in music composition:

- **The Bachelor of Music in Composition**

This degree is, like all Bachelor of Music degrees, designed to prepare students for professional work in their field of study, as well as be a preparation for graduate study in music composition, music theory, or related fields. Emphasis in this degree is placed on preparing the student for a variety of style considerations, genres, and eventualities. This degree also is primarily for those studying more 'classical' composition, as the four years of study lead students to a senior recital that would be acceptable as an entrance recital for graduate study in composition.

REQUIREMENTS

- **Entrance into Programs**

All students wishing to be majors in music composition must audition for the composition faculty prior to entrance. An audition consists of at least two representative, original, and written compositions. Audio recordings of these compositions are not required, but certainly are suggested. In addition, student's ACT/SAT scores, piano skills, and prior music theory and performance experiences are considered.

- **Sophomore Barrier**

Students desiring to complete the BM Composition degree are expected to pass a Sophomore Barrier, which will occur at the end of the fourth (4th) semester of music study. The Composition Jury for that semester will serve as the Sophomore Barrier. Students who do not pass the Barrier due to lack of compositional output, deficient quality of compositions, or inadequate submission of required compositions will have one additional semester to pass the Barrier. If the Barrier not successfully completed by the end of the Junior-Fall semester, the student will be advised to complete work on a different degree.

- **Composition Seminar**

Students must enroll in and attend Composition Seminar each semester they are a composition major.

- **Composition Juries**

Students are required to submit completed compositions to the Theory and Composition faculty, along with any recordings, as part of a semester-ending jury. Students are required to take juries each of the semesters they are enrolled in Private Composition, with the exception of the semester in which they have their Senior Recital.

- **Senior Recital**

The culmination of the program is the senior recital. Students in the program are expected to compose music, secure performers, create program notes, and otherwise manage the senior recital logistics. Students in the BM Composition degree are expected to present at least 30 minutes of music on the recital – apart from any other time (performers moving on and off, applause, stage movements, etc.). The student will work with the major professor to develop a varied program of representative works to present. The recital takes place in the 8th semester of study – students should enroll in MUTC 4981 for the semester of their Senior Recital.

- **Recital Hearing**

Students in the BM Composition program will have a deadline of one month before their scheduled Senior Recital to submit names of performers, program information, and program notes to the Composition Studies coordinator. This submission will serve as a recital hearing for Composition. Any submission after 30 days prior to the Senior Recital will result in a delay of the Senior Recital.

BM IN COMPOSITION**Freshman: Fall Semester**

| | | | |
|-------|-------|---------------------------|---|
| FREN | 1313 | French I or | 3 |
| GRMN | 1353 | German I | |
| ENGL | 1153 | English Composition | 3 |
| MUTC | _____ | Intro to Music Technology | 1 |
| MUTC | 1202 | Aural Skills I * | 2 |
| MUTC | 1212 | Theory I * | 2 |
| MUTCL | 1212 | Theory I Lab | 0 |
| APMU | _____ | Piano | 1 |
| MUOR | _____ | Ensemble | 1 |
| MUSC | 1000 | Recital Attendance | 0 |
| PHED | 1001 | PE Wellness | 1 |
| CMAR | 1092 | Intro to Speech | 2 |
| MUTC | 1501 | Composition Seminar | 0 |

16**Freshman: J-term**

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| First Year Experience Course | 0 |
|------------------------------|---|

Sophomore: Fall Semester

| | | | |
|-------|-------|--------------------------|---|
| ENGL | 2013 | European Civ: Literature | 3 |
| HIST | 2033 | European Civ: History | 3 |
| MUTC | 2212 | Theory III * | 2 |
| MUTCL | 2212L | Theory III Lab * | 0 |
| MUTC | 2232 | Aural Skills III * | 2 |
| MUTC | 2262 | Private Composition I | 3 |
| APMU | _____ | Piano | 1 |
| MUOR | _____ | Ensemble | 1 |
| MUSC | 1000 | Recital Attendance | 0 |
| _____ | _____ | Music Elective | 1 |
| MUTC | 1501 | Composition Seminar | 0 |

16**Junior: Fall Semester**

| | | | |
|-------|-------|-------------------------------------|---|
| MUTC | 3263 | Private Composition III | 3 |
| MUTC | 3013 | Advanced Synthesis Techniques OR | |
| MUTC | _____ | Internship in Music Composition | 3 |
| MUSC | 3202 | History of Music and Art I | 2 |
| MUSC | 3412 | Conducting I | 2 |
| MUOR | _____ | Ensemble | 1 |
| MUSC | 1000 | Recital Attendance | 0 |
| APMU | _____ | Piano | 2 |
| _____ | _____ | Pedagogy (applied area) | 3 |
| MUTC | 1501 | Composition Seminar | 0 |

16**Freshman: Spring Semester**

| | | | |
|-------|-------|---------------------------|---|
| FREN | 1323 | French II or | 3 |
| GRMN | 1363 | German II | |
| ENGL | 1163 | English Literature | 3 |
| MUTC | 1222 | Theory II * | 2 |
| MUTCL | 1222L | Theory II Lab * | 0 |
| MUTC | 1242 | Aural Skills II * | 2 |
| MUTC | _____ | Music Comp and Instrument | 2 |
| APMU | _____ | Piano | 1 |
| MUOR | _____ | Ensemble | 1 |
| MUSC | 1000 | Recital Attendance | 0 |
| MUTC | 1501 | Composition Seminar | 0 |
| MUSC | _____ | Intro to Music History | 1 |
| PHED | _____ | PE Activity Course | 1 |

16**Sophomore: Spring Semester**

| | | | |
|-------|-------|------------------------------|---|
| ENGL | 2023 | Modern Civ Literature | 3 |
| HIST | 2043 | Modern Civ History | 3 |
| MUTC | 2222 | Theory IV * | 2 |
| MUTCL | 2222L | Theory IV Lab * | 0 |
| MUTC | 2242 | Aural Skills IV * | 2 |
| MUTC | 2272 | Private Composition II | 2 |
| APMU | _____ | Piano | 1 |
| MUOR | _____ | Ensemble | 1 |
| MUSC | 1000 | Recital Attendance | 0 |
| MUTC | 2012 | Intro to Music Synthesis | 2 |
| MUTCL | 2012 | Intro to Music Synthesis Lab | 0 |
| MUTC | 1501 | Composition Seminar | 0 |

16**Junior: Spring Semester**

| | | | |
|-------|-------|-------------------------------|---|
| MUSC | 3422 | Conducting II | 2 |
| MUTC | 3273 | Private Composition IV | 3 |
| APMU | _____ | Piano | 2 |
| MUOR | _____ | Ensemble | 1 |
| MUSC | 3213 | History of Music and Art II | 2 |
| MUSC | 1000 | Recital Attendance | 0 |
| INMU | _____ | Instrumental Methods Elective | 1 |
| DMAR | 1203 | Audio Production | 3 |
| _____ | _____ | Music Elective | 2 |
| MUTC | 1501 | Composition Seminar | 0 |

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| Senior: | Fall Semester | | |
|---------|---------------|-------------------------------|----|
| REL | ___ | OT, NT, or Bib Ethics | 3 |
| MUTC | ___ | Theory Seminar | 2 |
| MUTC | 4263 | Private Composition V | 3 |
| MUOR | ___ | Small Ensemble | 1 |
| APMU | ___ | Piano | 1 |
| INMU | ___ | Instrumental Methods Elective | 1 |
| ___ | ___ | General Education Elective | 3 |
| MUSC | ___ | Music History III | 2 |
| | | | 16 |

| Senior: | Spring Semester | | |
|---------|-----------------|-------------------------------|----|
| REL | ___ | OT, NT, or Bib Ethics | 3 |
| MUTC | 4233 | Music History Elective | 2 |
| MUTC | 4272 | Private Composition VI | 3 |
| MUOR | ___ | Small Ensemble | 1 |
| MUTC | 4981 | Senior Recital | 0 |
| APMU | ___ | Piano | 1 |
| MUTC | ___ | Theory Seminar | 2 |
| INMU | ___ | Instrumental Methods Elective | 1 |
| ___ | ___ | General Education Elective | 3 |
| | | | 16 |

Total Hours: 128

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

* Students who wish to be admitted to the Junior level of composition study must maintain a B average in these courses

Piano Proficiency

English Proficiency Examination

A grade of C or better in all area of concentration and supportive courses

Six (6) semesters of Recital Attendance

Enrolled in Composition Seminar each semester enrolled as a composition major

The University Catalog is the official document for degree plans; this degree plan sheet is not the official degree plan for this degree and is only intended to give the student a semester-by-semester plan to achieve the degree in eight (8) semesters.

Revised: 7/17

SYLLABUS

Private Composition

James Vernon, Instructor
Office: Raley Chapel 205E
Phone: extension 2317
Email: james.vernon@okbu.edu
Office Hours: posted

Purpose of Course

Private music composition for composition majors and elective composition students; course will cover small composition genres and focus on developing an awareness of compositional devices, trends, and materials

Goals

The goals of undergraduate music composition study are:

- to know and understand musical notation
- to be conversant with and be able to use musical instruments, voices, and sounds in an effective manner
- to have an expanded knowledge of musical literature
- to develop a systematic approach to composition that meets the individual needs, talents, and traits of the student
- to be able to compose music in a variety of styles
- to have completed compositions performed
- to interact with the musical triangle of composer, performer, and audience

Specific goals for you this semester will be determined by the instructor and the student together in private composition lessons.

Statement on Disabilities

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting accommodations, please contact Christina Perry in Student Services located in GC 101 as early as possible in the semester. You must have documentation from the Student Services before accommodations can be granted.

Requirements

Private study (one-on-one) study with any instructor in any field is an intense endeavor. Private music composition study is a somewhat nebulous form of learning, for much of the direction of the study is left to the student and the general nature of grading musical compositions makes overall assessment vague and seemingly arbitrary.

For Private Composition the student is expected to write music, certainly. However, the study will also include elements of listening to other music, reading about music, music history, composers, and the composition process, and analysis of other compositions. These assignments will not be fixed on a schedule, for each student is different in background, motivation, and need; the instructor will attempt to tailor-make assignments to the student.

Because of the lack of a schedule and stated, firm assignments, the grade for Private Composition will be determined by the student's work in this manner:

The quality of musical compositions submitted (this includes the quality of their appearance, adherence to accepted notational tenets, correct compositional techniques, and idiomatic writing for the instrument(s) involved)

The timely completion of assignments (including compositions, reading assignments, listening assignments, and any other assignments. The instructor will give the student a due date for each assignment at the time of the assignment)

The quality of week-to-week progress on compositions (although this can be four measures of music, significant progress must be achieved over a span of time in order to gauge student achievement; this is also an individually-based assessment)

Each lesson will be graded using the Grading Rubric found at the end of this syllabus.

To sum up this section on requirements of the student, significant weekly progress in writing music and keeping up with assignments is crucial to the learning process, and crucial to the grade assessment made by the instructor.

The students' semester grade will be determined by the following:

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Composite scores of individual lesson grades (see <u>Rubric</u>) | 40% of total |
| Appropriate weekly progress on compositional projects | 20% of total |
| Attendance and participation in masterclasses and events | 10% of total |
| Performance of compositions | 10% of total |
| Composition Jury | 20% of total |

The standard 10-point grading scale will be used

Meetings

The instructor will meet with the student twice a week each week of the semester for 25 minutes each meeting, or for one session each week for 50 minutes each meeting. The exact time will be determined by mutual agreement between the student and the instructor. Sessions may be made up if the instructor is told in advance of the need for an absence. Sessions missed by the student without prior arrangement will not be made up. Sessions missed by the instructor will be made up. Sessions for which the student is more than ten (10) minutes late will be considered cancelled.

Masterclasses and Events

There will be six (6) general Composition Seminar sessions this semester, where all composition students (and others, if the wish) will gather to discuss, listen, and experience each other's compositions and those of other composers. The dates for these masterclasses for the semester are:

TBD

All composition students are expected to attend all seminar sessions.

Sessions

Please bring your **composition in progress** to each session. This can be handwritten, on your laptop, or printed from notation software; however, a hard, visual copy of the student's work must appear at each session. The instructor will not accept "performed" demonstrations of the student's *intent* to compose a particular piece. The act of putting a composition down on paper is an essential skill for the composer and is demanded for successful completion of this course of study.

If you do use notation software, please bring an electronic medium containing the file(s) for the work in progress with you to the session. The instructor is currently using Finale 2014; please make sure your work can be read by this software configuration. The instructor can read files in Sibelius 7.0.

The student is not expected to bring compositions to sessions in printed form from software notation. However, finished copies of works are expected for performance and to be placed in the student's file. In what form (hand manuscript or software notation) this occurs does not matter; only that a copy is submitted to the instructor upon completion. Please do not ask the instructor to print copies of your manuscript - take care of this before you come to the session.

Computer, electrical, software, or any other technological problems associated with music software notation is not an acceptable excuse for a work not to be shown in progress, for instrumental or vocal parts not to be available for performances, or the lack of submission for student's files. If you are going to use electronic means to manuscript your works you must be prepared for a variety of problems to arise; consider these problems before they happen and make backup plans.

For those students writing by hand, it is preferable that the student make a photocopy of the composition before the session unless they do not mind the instructor writing on it. In addition, it is better for composition students not to use bound manuscript notebooks, especially very small ones. Individual pages of 8 and ½" by 11" size manuscript paper with at least 10 staves is the best starting point for the composition student.

Performances

The optimum way a student hears, understands, and learns from the composition process is by having their work performed in a live setting and hopefully gaining an acceptable recording of the performance. Each composition student is expected to place at least one (1) composition each semester on a General Recital or in another manner. It is the student's responsibility to arrange for performers and to complete the necessary arrangements with the Division of Music Office for its placement on a program. General Recital recordings are placed in the Listening Center for a limited amount of time; the student should contact the Listening Center as soon as possible after the recital and arrange for duplication of their work onto a CD format for future study and other uses. Please bring the recording of each work performed to the next available session in order for you and the instructor to listen and evaluate the composition together.

Musical Styles

A student enrolled in the degree Bachelor of Music in Composition will be expected to write music in a variety of styles, but serious, artistic composition is the primary goal. If a student is taking this course as an elective the choice of musical style is the student's. The instructor does not judge one musical style to be more correct or better than another style; however, a BM Composition major is expected to write music that will fulfill the degree requirements and the primary intent of the degree, which is to prepare the composition major for graduate study in composition.

In addition, a student (especially those in the BM Comp degree) will be asked to write music in styles which are not either familiar to the student or in a style which the student "likes." This is not done as an arbitrary endeavor, nor is it done to show favor to one style of composition or another. It is a pedagogical tool the instructor uses to both introduce the student to writing in a variety of different styles and exposing the student to unique musical characteristics of various musical styles. The main goal of composition study at the undergraduate level is to have the student experience as much as possible and begin to develop their own style of composition based on those experiences. The student, at any rate, is not expected to "copy" any one style, composer, genre, or period in their compositions.

Tips, Hints, and Notes

Composition students in this studio should be aware of some things which might help them in becoming the best composer they can be:

Don't come to a session unprepared. Nothing bothers any instructor (and especially this one) more than a student who habitually has nothing prepared for a class. It is preferable that the student call and cancel the session with the instructor than show up with nothing to do. If a composition has not had significant progress, bring a recording you wish to discuss; bring an article or book about composition or composers and ask questions about your reading of it; come with a significant topic of conversation regarding composition you wish to discuss with the instructor. Please don't show up at the door and say "I don't have anything for you today."

Keep writing music. All composers (or any creators of any art form) get "writer's block" or have stagnant periods. The best solution for this is to keep writing, even if it is something not pertaining to the current composition in production; even if you feel you are writing nothing of particular worth; even if the instructor says, "yes, that is interesting." Keep writing.

Find a time to write and write on a regular basis. Do not write music 30 minutes before each composition session. Find a regular time in your daily/weekly schedule and write music during that time, just as you would practice an instrument or study another subject. Private Composition I carries two (2) hours of university credit; it is expected that the student will compose for at least 2 hours each week outside of the sessions. Find the best time of day, the best place, the best setup, and the best way for you to write music and do it the same way each time. Do it every day for just a little; do it every other day for more; do it two days a week for a lot. Find the way which best fits your learning and creative style.

Don't be afraid to copy the music of others. Imitation is flattery; it is only plagiarism when you attempt to pass it off as your own creation. You may learn a lot from copying the style or other habits of other composers. Copying others' music gives you a detailed and in-depth look into the composition process of that music, a look which might add to your understanding of your own music.

Don't listen to what others say. This happens to apply, in certain circumstances, to your instructor. Only you are the one you have to please with your composition. The instructor will suggest, offer constructive criticism, show you examples of others' writing which might achieve the goals you are attempting in a better way, or other ways to help you become a better composer. But do not listen to the praise or criticism of others at this point in your compositional career. Take comments (especially from performers of your works) into consideration but do not allow those comments to adjust the direction of your composition. Just because others "like" or "dislike" your work makes it no more or no less valuable as a work of art. You are the final arbiter - you must like or dislike your work to find out the type of composer you are, want to be, and eventually will be.

Work with performers. Make an effort to write music for specific people, and bring those people into the compositional process. Make those performers look at and perform sections as they are composed and listen for feedback, especially feedback concerning how "right" your writing is for their instrument. This is an excellent way of having fresh ears hear your works as they progress without a "like" or "dislike" formulation appearing. You will also find the performers become eager to perform the completed compositions and they perform them better because they have seen them grow as you have seen them grow. Collaborate with others.

Listen. You are what you listen to. If all you listen to (when not required to listen to something else) is vocal jazz, you will have a difficult time writing music that does not sound like vocal jazz. If you want to write a brass quartet, fill your ears with brass quartet music for as long as you are able before you ever write a note. Get that sound in your head.

Perform. The best way to learn how a performer does their work is to do it yourself. Play your applied instrument as much as possible. Learn a new one. Join an ensemble and play (or sing) some part in the music making of that group.

- Recital preparation
- Exploration of new resources

COMPOSITION LESSONS: GRADING RUBRIC

| Outcomes | Ratings | | | |
|---|---|---|--|--|
| Student creates <i>Aesthetic Appeal</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| | Does not present an effective general impression. Musical ideas do not hold the listener's interest. | Includes at least one interesting musical idea. Yet the overall impression is not effective. | Includes some interesting musical ideas. The general impression is pleasant and moderately effective. | Strong aesthetic appeal and general impression. Would be enjoyed by many listeners. Keeps the listener interested. |
| Student Work is <i>Creative</i> | Musical idea is familiar or cliché. No Variety or exploration of musical elements (range, timbre, dynamics, etc.) | Musical idea is neither familiar nor cliché. However, there is no development, variety, or exploration of musical elements. | Involves some original aspect(s) of manipulation(s) of musical idea(s). Explores and varies at least once musical element. | Includes very original, unusual or imaginative musical ideas. Explores and varies at least two musical elements. |
| Student demonstrates excellent <i>craftsmanship</i> . | Gives no sense of a completed musical idea. Exhibits no clear beginning, middle, or end section. Form appears to be random rather than organized. Musical elements do not connect well or are not used to organize musical ideas or the form. | Presents one complete musical idea. However, composition lacks overall completeness. Fails to use musical elements to organize musical ideas or form. | Ending feels final. Uses at least one musical element to organize the musical ideas and overall form. | Presents at least one complete musical idea. Has a coherent and organized form with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Uses musical elements to organize musical ideas or the form. |