APPLIED COMPOSITION SYLLABUS

COURSE:

All Sections of Applied Composition - MTC 107, MTC 117, MTC 327, and MTC 527
1-3 semester hours
Music Building, Room 252
Scheduled weekly meeting and weekly studio class (Wednesdays at 3:00 in 153)

INSTRUCTOR:

Dr. Stephen Lias  
Music Building, Office 252  
(936) 468-4056  
slias@sfasu.edu

Office Hours: TBA or by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Each semester of composition will take the student on a progressive exploration of the materials, skills, styles, techniques, and aesthetics involved in composing original music. When appropriate, specific content may be included to assist individuals in achieving their creative and/or professional goals, or to rectify a deficiency in their technique.

PREREQUISITE:

None for MTC 107, 117, 527.
For MTC 327, four semesters of MTC 117.

TEXTBOOK/MATERIALS:

(tentative – may differ from one instructor to another)

Essential Dictionary of Orchestration (Alfred)
Essential Dictionary of Music Notation (Alfred)
Handy Manual Fingering Charts by Clarence Hendrickson

All other materials will be provided by the instructor, placed online for download, or placed on reserve in the library or in the composition room.

GRADING:

Below is a chart that shows the percentage of each activity as it is counted for MTC 107, 117, and 327.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>MTC 107</th>
<th>MTC 117, 327 &amp; 527</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Average</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio Class (optional)</td>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolio/Jury</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Website (not required)</td>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading or Performance</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity Submission (optional)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Membership</td>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Detailed Descriptions:**

**Lesson Average – Grading Rubric for Composition Lessons**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Level 5</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantity</strong></td>
<td>25 points Exceeds expectations.</td>
<td>20 points Meets expectations.</td>
<td>15 points Acceptable, but a little less than expected.</td>
<td>10 points Considerably less than expected.</td>
<td>5 points Minimal or none. Falls far below expectations.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Quality</strong></td>
<td>25 points Excellent for a student at this level.</td>
<td>20 points Admirable for a student at this level.</td>
<td>15 points Average for a student at this level.</td>
<td>10 points Weak for a student at this level.</td>
<td>5 points Unacceptable for a student at this level.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Exploratory or Directed Learning</strong></td>
<td>20 points Profound discoveries made during multifaceted self-directed learning. Paradigm shifts in thinking.</td>
<td>18 points Reading and research on multiple planes that led to meaningful discovery.</td>
<td>16 points Acceptable amount of reading and/or listening that represents multiple levels.</td>
<td>13 points cursory or minimal information gleaned. Tendency to gravitate to what you already know.</td>
<td>10 points Nothing to report.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude and Teachability</strong></td>
<td>20 points Student was receptive and eager to learn. The lesson was very productive.</td>
<td>17 points Lesson was productive and the student was interested.</td>
<td>14 points Lesson was generally positive, but student could have been more engaged.</td>
<td>10 points Student was apathetic or distracted and did not benefit a great deal from lesson.</td>
<td>5 points Student seemed uninterested in learning. Lesson was unproductive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Punctuality</strong></td>
<td>10 points Student was on time.</td>
<td>5 points Student was up to 5 minutes late.</td>
<td>2 points Student was between 5 and 10 minutes late.</td>
<td>1 point Student was between 10 and 20 minutes late.</td>
<td>0 points No show (zero for lesson).</td>
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*Assessment of quality includes the following: creativity, artistic merit, idiomatic use of instruments, correct notation, inclusion of expression and articulation, and how well it fulfills the goals of the assignment.*

**Exploratory or Directed Learning:** Many weeks, you will receive a specific assignment – a score, composer, or article to absorb. In these cases, please come to the next lesson prepared to lead a brief discussion about this content. What interested you? What confused you? What questions, comments or objections do you have in response to it? If no other assignment was given, in preparation for their lessons, students should engage in exploratory learning in the following way:
• Start somewhere – it can be a website, a book, a recording, a score, etc. If in doubt, www.newmusicbox.org is ALWAYS a great place to start.

• During your reading, you’ll encounter words, names, ideas, techniques, places, etc. that you are unfamiliar with. When you encounter them, go look them up. If it is a piece of music, go listen to it (preferably with a score).

• As you look things up, this will also lead to other places. Continue to follow the threads and build a web of interrelated knowledge as the materials leads you.

• In doing this, you are likely to learn about more than just music. As you work your way through this, keep some sort of record or diagram that shows the general shape of what you learned, and be prepared to describe all this to your professor at your lesson.

Composition Studio Class meets for an hour each week. The time and location of studio class changes from time to time and is determined by the availability of the students enrolled. For the last few semesters, it has been at 3:00 on Wednesdays and it is likely to remain at that time unless some conflict arises. This is a time of interaction during which we cover a variety of topics. Weekly subjects might include listening to each other’s works, guest lectures, field trips, studies of great works, lessons on compositional technique, and group discussion. All on-campus students enrolled in MTC 117, 327, or 527 are required to attend all studio classes during a semester. If you have a legitimate reason to be absent, it must be arranged in advance. Unscheduled absences result in a zero. Although studio class does not generally include homework, there are occasionally required readings.

Website: One of the most important elements of a career as a composer is managing your online presence. This can be done in a variety of ways, but to get the process started, all composition majors are required to have a website that provides the public with a coherent and professional presentation of their work. There are a variety of methods of doing this. You may ask your professor for advice, or consult with other composition students to find out how they have handled it, but learning how to do this yourself is part of the assignment.

Requirements:

• It must be as close to yourname.com as possible. If you have a compelling reason why this should not be the case, talk to your professor.

• You may build your own site, use a template/content management system, or create something on a collective composition site. In any case, the domain name (yourname.com) should forward the end user to the correct location.

• Your webpage must include the following minimum requirements. You are welcome to add additional material that you think will help you professionally.

  o Picture of you – something classy or artistic (take your choice).

  o Bio – Create a current bio of yourself in the third person. This should take the form of the type of bio that might be included in a concert program and should summarize your education, activities, accomplishments, stylistic sensibilities and aspirations as a composer.

  o List of Works – Provide a cumulative list of all the compositions that are “concert-ready” (you are proud of them, and they are ready for performance). Include information about their approximate length, instrumentation, and date composed. A brief description of each work can be included if desired. Remember that in addition to fulfilling a requirement, this will be seen by the public, so it should be
clear and accurate. If your site belongs to a larger composer collective, this may be created automatically as you enter works into the catalogue.

**Portfolio/Jury** – At the end of the semester, you will be given instructions on how to submit your portfolio. This might be electronic or physical. It will include:

- All compositional work undertaken during the semester.
  - Complete pieces should include score, any parts needed, and program notes.
  - Audio mockups or recordings of readings or performances of all works.
  - Incomplete works can be included as score only.
- Documentation of any additional accomplishments during the semester.
- Any other documents that you feel help highlight your activities.

**Reading or Performance** – All applied composition students are required to have a reading and/or performance of a piece of theirs during each semester. You will receive the credit for this based on proof that it happened. In cases where the professor is present, that will constitute proof. In cases where he is not present, please arrange to make a video or audio for later review.

**Opportunity Submission** – All applied composition students enrolled in MTC 117 or 327 are required to apply at least once per semester to one of the following:

- A competition
- A publisher
- A call for scores
- An ensemble or performer seeking new works
- A residency
- Other opportunities as approved by Dr. Lias

You must provide EVIDENCE that this has occurred in the form of copies of the forms you submitted, or email confirmation of your submission. Once you have shown this evidence to Dr. Lias, your grade will be entered immediately. It is always wise to keep a copy of your submission materials for your own records.

**Professional Membership** – Likewise, all composition majors are required to maintain a membership in some professional organization for composers. Options include SCI, NACUSA, ACF, ASCAP, BMI, etc. Once you provide proof of membership to your professor, the grade will be entered immediately.

**ATTENDANCE:**

Students are expected to attend all lessons and studio classes. If it is necessary to be absent, you must notify the instructor in advance. When notification occurs the day before the lesson, every effort will be made to reschedule the lesson for an alternate time. When notification happens the same day as the lesson, the lesson may still be rescheduled, but 20 points will be deducted from the grade. Unexcused absences will be counted as a zero and cannot be made up. Students must attend at least 12 lessons and each semester.

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:**

Please familiarize yourself with the Academic Dishonesty policy as listed in the University Policies and Procedures Manual. As with any course, it is imperative that you do all your own work and not
participate in cheating or any type. Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.

Definition of Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit.

Please read the complete policy at http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp

WITHHELD GRADES

Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

OTHER IMPORTANT POLICY MATTERS:

Adding/Dropping: Students can add up until the 4th class day. Movement into and out of classes after the 4th class day requires approval of the Department Chair. Students can drop until mid-semester with a W. Drops after mid-semester require the approval of the Dean and will be assigned a WP or a WF. You are responsible for your own enrollment status with the college.

Student Services: To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/.

SETTING YOUR PRIORITIES
Nothing causes more problems for composition majors than poor decisions and confusion concerning priorities. There are lots of exciting opportunities available to music students at SFA and it is imperative that everyone have some “guiding principles” to help them make wise choices about their time and commitments. The following table should help composition students understand what is expected of them with regards to priorities and academic performance.

| FIRST PRIORITY (Composition and Related Courses) | Composition Lessons  
Recital Attendance  
Music Theory  
Aural Skills  
Scoring and Arranging  
Counterpoint  
Composition Software  
Film Music  
Collaboration Projects |
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<td>These courses focus on skills that are central to the composer’s career. Composition majors are expected not only to consistently earn A’s in these courses, but to regularly go beyond the requirements and pursue the highest level of excellence. If you find that you are unwilling, or unable, to do this, you should seriously consider whether you are in the right major.</td>
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| SECOND PRIORITY (Music Core) | Intro to Music Literature  
Music History  
Required Ensembles  
Applied Instruction  
Conducting  
Functional Piano |
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<tr>
<td>These classes provide much of the foundation and background composers need to succeed in their field. Composition majors are expected to consistently get high grades (A’s and B’s) in these classes.</td>
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| THIRD PRIORITY (General Education Courses) | English  
Communications  
Mathematics  
Natural Sciences  
Visual & Performing Arts  
Humanities  
US History  
Political Science |
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<tr>
<td>Creative works in the fine arts must engage the emotions and intellect, and comment on the human condition. For this reason, students who are well informed and knowledgeable in a variety of academic disciplines are far better equipped to write music of meaning and lasting value. While composition students are expected to do their best in all classes, these Gen. Ed. classes should never take precedence over first or second priority classes. A’s and B’s are desirable with occasional C’s.</td>
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| LOW PRIORITY | Electives  
Non-Degree Courses |
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<td>Composition students should only enroll in electives and non-degree courses when the demands of these courses will not interfere with the students’ performance in first, second, and third priority items. Students who consistently find themselves dedicating time to these courses at the expense of higher priority items will be asked to drop the extra courses, put on probation, or expelled from the composition degree.</td>
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| LAST PRIORITY | Social Activities  
Jobs  
Sports/Recreation  
Gigs |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are many exciting activities available to college. While it is important to gain experience, and develop lasting personal relationships, the university experience must ultimately be focused on completing a degree. Some students are able to meet all their high priority requirements admirably, while still participating in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. Others must guard their time more carefully if they are to fulfill the most important obligations well.</td>
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**How to screw up:**

| Things that will result in a composition major being placed on **probation** | Semester GPA of lower than 2.6 in music classes | C in Applied Composition, Music Theory, or Aural Skills | Consistent failure to fulfill assignments or show initiative. | Failing to show sufficient compositional skills. |
| Things that will result in **expulsion** from the composition major | 2nd semester GPA of lower than 2.6 in music classes | 2nd semester with a C in Composition, Theory, or Aural Skills | D or F in Applied Composition, Music Theory, or Aural Skills | Being placed on University academic probation | Failing to live up to the terms of a probation contract. |

**Probation Contracts**

Students who are placed on composition probation will be asked to sign a contract that details their situation and clearly indicates what is expected of them in order to continue in the program. Students on a contract may be permitted to continue taking applied composition at the discretion of the professor. Failure to meet all the requirements of the contract will result in permanent exclusion from the composition studio. This is a policy that I have to use far more than I would like, and at least five students have been casualties of this process over the last few years.

**PHILOSOPHICAL MATTERS**

**Take Bold Steps** – This is a difficult concept to quantify, but one that I believe in very deeply. When I trace my best successes back to find their starting point, it is inevitably because of some scary, daring, or expensive thing that I chose to do in spite of lots of reasons not to. Traveling to a far-away place alone; spending more than I could afford to get the best performers; bartering with a local recording studio to make a much-needed demo; applying for something that everyone thought was out of my league; these are all “bold steps” in their own way. They are evidence of an inner passion that refuses to live inside safe boundaries – a faith in our works that causes us to aim high and create opportunities where none exist. You will find that you need to remind yourself to think this way frequently as life has a tendency to put out the fires of our passion.

**Building your Network** – Your success will depend largely on the network of colleagues, friends, performers, conductors, teachers, and students you develop over the years. No composer can grow, have works performed, or gain employment without this principle working in their life to some degree. This does NOT mean that you should actively recruit acquaintances and then exploit them in the way that insurance salesmen or Amway distributors do – quite the contrary. What you need is genuine relationships built on trust and mutual admiration. This is only accomplished the hard way: by being a genuinely trustworthy, reliable, and likeable person. If you could look ten years into the future and see who is commissioning you, or hiring you for a job, or inviting you to score a film, or playing your pieces on concerts, you would be shocked to discover how many of those people are sitting next to you in class right now, or living right down the hall, or chatting with you on Facebook. These people are your future. Take relationships seriously and work to be the sort of person that people trust. This would be the right thing to do even if it had no effect on your career.