COURSE:

MTC 117
2 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:

One hour of private instruction in composition plus one hour of studio class each week. 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. Students are expected to devote approximately 10 hours per week working on their compositions (over a 15-week semester). Prerequisite: none.

TEXTBOOK/MATERIALS:

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:

40% - Lesson Average
15% - Finished Works (2 or more)
10% - Listening Quizzes
10% - Studio Class Attendance
10% - Readings/Performances (at least two readings or performances)
10% - Opportunity Submission (at least one)
5% - Professional Membership (at least one)
**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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantity</strong></td>
<td>25 points</td>
<td>20 points</td>
<td>15 points</td>
<td>10 points</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations.</td>
<td>Meets expectations.</td>
<td>Acceptable, but a little less than expected.</td>
<td>Considerably less than expected.</td>
<td>Minimal or none. Falls far below expectations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality</strong></td>
<td>25 points</td>
<td>20 points</td>
<td>15 points</td>
<td>10 points</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent for a student at this level.</td>
<td>Admirable for a student at this level.</td>
<td>Average for a student at this level.</td>
<td>Weak for a student at this level.</td>
<td>Unacceptable for a student at this level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exploratory or Directed Learning</strong></td>
<td>20 points</td>
<td>18 points</td>
<td>16 points</td>
<td>13 points</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profound discoveries made during multifaceted self-directed learning. Paradigm shifts in thinking.</td>
<td>Reading and research on multiple planes that led to meaningful discovery.</td>
<td>Acceptable amount of reading and/or listening that represents multiple levels.</td>
<td>Cursory or minimal information gleaned. Tendency to gravitate to what you already know.</td>
<td>Nothing to report.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude and Teachability</strong></td>
<td>20 points</td>
<td>17 points</td>
<td>14 points</td>
<td>10 points</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student was receptive and eager to learn. The lesson was very productive.</td>
<td>Lesson was productive and the student was interested.</td>
<td>Lesson was generally positive, but student could have been more engaged.</td>
<td>Student was apathetic or distracted and did not benefit a great deal from lesson.</td>
<td>Student seemed uninterested in learning. Lesson was unproductive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Punctuality</strong></td>
<td>10 points</td>
<td>5 points</td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>1 point</td>
<td>0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student was on time.</td>
<td>Student was up to 5 minutes late.</td>
<td>Student was between 5 and 10 minutes late.</td>
<td>Student was between 10 and 20 minutes late.</td>
<td>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](http://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 from 3:00-3:50 on Wednesdays. 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 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. Listening quizzes also happen in studio class from time to time.

**Completed Works** – This requirement is designed to emulate the expectations that a publisher or competition would have in terms of the quality and content of a finished work. All students will be provided with an in-house style guide which clearly establishes expectations regarding layout, notation, and all editorial matters. This will include:

• Single PDF file of score including:
  o Professional-looking cover page
  o Program notes & any necessary explanatory notes to the performers
  o Complete transposed score which conforms to our area style guide
• Single PDF file containing all necessary parts for the work. These will also be carefully edited to conform to the area style guide.
• MP3 file with recording/mockup of composition. This must be better than merely an audio export from Finale/Sibelius/Dorico. It can be a recording with live players, done in a concert hall or studio, a mixture of live performers and samples (done in a DAW), or entirely done with samples in a DAW. In all cases, though, great care should be given to make the recording be the best possible representation of the piece.

**Reading or Performance** – All MTC 117 students are required to have at least TWO readings and/or performances 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 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 or summer program
• 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRST PRIORITY (Composition and Related Courses)</th>
<th>Composition Lessons Recital Attendance Music Theory Aural Skills Scoring and Arranging Counterpoint Composition Software Film Music Collaboration Projects</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<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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<tr>
<th>SECOND PRIORITY (Music Core)</th>
<th>Intro to Music Literature Music History Required Ensembles Applied Instruction Conducting Functional Piano</th>
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<tbody>
<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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<table>
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<tr>
<th>THIRD PRIORITY (General Education Courses)</th>
<th>English Communications Mathematics Natural Sciences Visual &amp; Performing Arts Humanities US History Political Science</th>
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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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<tr>
<th>LOW PRIORITY</th>
<th>Electives Non-Degree Courses</th>
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<tr>
<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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<tr>
<th>LAST PRIORITY</th>
<th>Social Activities Jobs Sports/Recreation Gigs</th>
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</thead>
<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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</tbody>
</table>
**How to screw up:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things that will result in a composition major being placed on <strong>probation</strong></th>
<th>Semester GPA of lower than 2.6 in music classes</th>
<th>C in Applied Composition, Music Theory, or Aural Skills</th>
<th>Consistent failure to fulfill assignments or show initiative</th>
<th>Failing to show sufficient compositional skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Things that will result in expulsion from the composition major</strong></td>
<td>2nd semester GPA of lower than 2.6 in music classes</td>
<td>2nd semester with a C in Composition, Theory, or Aural Skills</td>
<td>D or F in Applied Composition, Music Theory, or Aural Skills</td>
<td>Being placed on University academic probation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.