

SENIOR PROJECT IN MUSIC HISTORY

Overview

The senior project in music history is a “capstone” independent study in which the student engages in historical research in a topic of his or her choosing. It is an opportunity for students to draw on the musical experience and knowledge they have previously acquired and to direct it toward a topic of special interest to them. The project involves reading and research of primary and secondary sources, culminating in a substantial final paper and formal presentation.

The project need not be limited to Western art music. Students may propose any musical topic pertaining to history and culture and which involves substantial research of primary and secondary sources as well as musical analysis. Typically, senior projects focus on a select body of works, a specific historical or cultural issue, or some combination of the two. Examples of past senior projects include: Soviet ideology and political dissidence in the music of Dmitri Shostakovich; avant-garde jazz as an expression of African-American identity; and the relationship between music and mathematics.

Eligibility

Students *must* propose potential topics and discuss them with the project adviser **in the semester before the project is undertaken**. This will insure in the final semester that the project will adhere to the calendar as outlined below.

Before approving a Senior Project, the Committee (see below) may also require students to submit a previously written paper as an example of the student’s research and writing abilities. If these abilities are not deemed sufficient, the student’s request to pursue the Senior Project may be denied.

Choosing a Topic

Most successful senior projects focus on a restricted body of music: a single composer, a specific genre, a time period or historical moment, the music of a specific place, etc. Within this body, students will be expected to analyze specific pieces as part of their research.

At the beginning of the semester, after consultation with the project adviser, the student will write an abstract and provide a preliminary bibliography of his or her proposed topic. These will then be reviewed by the department faculty. The faculty may recommend or require modifications to the topic, which the student will be required to address. The student will then submit a revised abstract and bibliography. The project adviser, in consultation with the committee (see Committee and Grading below), has the final say in approving a topic. The project topic must ultimately be approved by the faculty before the student may proceed with the semester work.

Research

The senior project requires students to use advanced research techniques. Students will be required to make use of peer-reviewed journals and scholarly monographs for their secondary sources, as well as consult primary sources where appropriate. Anonymous internet sources and CD liner notes will not suffice. (A good rule of thumb for the senior project is this: if the issue you’re writing about can be answered or explained by quickly consulting Wikipedia, then it’s not an appropriate topic for a senior project.)

Paper

The final paper should be a substantive report combining historical research, analysis, personal insight, etc. Typically, the final paper includes the following components: a historical overview of the issue, including a summary of what has already been written about it by other scholars; a clear thesis statement explaining how and what the paper contributes to the issue; and detailed analyses and/or argumentation in support of the thesis.

The paper should be at least 25 pages of text (typed and double-spaced). In addition to this, the student should also include properly formatted citations and a bibliography as well as musical examples where appropriate. (These are *not* counted toward the 25-page total.) Citations should be in either MLA or Chicago format, whichever the project adviser deems more appropriate. A high standard of grammar, writing style, and argumentation is expected.

Copies of the final paper should be submitted to ALL members of the committee (see below). The student should ask each individual committee member whether hard copies or electronic copies are preferred.

Presentation

At the end of the semester (usually during finals week), students will give a 20-25 minute presentation summarizing their project. A complete overview is not necessary; rather, the student should summarize the main issue and offer a few examples of his or her findings and what implications they have for the broader topic at hand. The student may include handouts, audio examples, etc. The student should expect that a brief question-and-answer period will follow the 20-25 minute presentation.

The presentation will be combined with those by other music majors who have worked on senior projects that semester. Though the presentation is usually open to the campus and community, the student should present his or her material in such a way that it is understandable to other music majors (i.e. competency in basic musical vocabulary can be assumed among the audience but the student should be careful about using specialized terms and concepts that are specific to the topic of the project and with which typical music majors may not be familiar).

Committee

The committee, which is responsible for the final grade of the project (see below), consists of the primary adviser, who is determined by the department, and second readers taken from other AC faculty members as deemed appropriate.

The primary adviser is responsible for approving the topic at the beginning of the semester (after consultation with the committee members) and for overseeing the project throughout the term. Over the course of the semester the student will consult mostly with the primary adviser but is encouraged to meet with and get feedback from the other committee members where appropriate.

When the final paper is submitted, it is read by ALL members of the committee and graded according to the rubric outlined below.

Semester Calendar and Deadlines

The senior project should adhere to the following semester schedule:

WEEK 1	Proposal of topic and preliminary bibliography
WEEK 2	Submission of abstract and bibliography to faculty
WEEK 3	Official departmental approval of project
WEEK 7	Mid-term summary of research
WEEK 12	First draft of final paper
WEEK 15	Final paper due
EXAM WEEK	Presentation

Grading

The final grade for the senior project is determined jointly by the adviser and second readers (committee). 50% of the grade is assigned by the adviser, the remaining 50% by the second readers.

For both the advisers and the second readers, the presentation is worth 25% of their respective 50% portions (i.e. 12.5% of the overall grade). Additionally, 12.5% of the primary adviser's grade will be based on the student's research work over the course of the semester. Finally, all three committee members will submit grades for the final paper, and these will be tabulated together to calculate the final grade.

Thus, the complete 100% is calculated according to the following rubric:

	ADVISER		SECOND READERS
	12.5% Presentation		12.5% Presentation
	12.5% Semester Work		37.5% Final Paper
	25% Final Paper		
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Total =	50%	+	50%