

**Oklahoma Baptist University
Division of Music**

Composition Studies Guide

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Introduction

This handbook is designed for students majoring in music composition at Oklahoma Baptist University. It contains information about the degree, expectations for the student, and a grading rubric.

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 related careers. Others still compose and arrange music while primarily serving in careers as diverse as business, education, ministry, or arts management. 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, and 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.

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

Faculty

Cameron Duncan is our current adjunct composition professor. Mr. Duncan is a composer and percussionist from Piedmont, Oklahoma. He has earned four degrees from Oklahoma City University, double majoring in composition and percussion for both his bachelor's and master's degrees. Cameron aspires to continue teaching at the collegiate level, earning his doctorate in the near future in order to better serve his students. His teaching philosophy revolves around glorifying Christ in all that he does and encouraging his students to do the same.

The Degree Program

The Bachelor of Music in Composition is designed to prepare students for professional work in their field of study, as well as to prepare for graduate study in music composition, music theory, or related fields. These four years of study lead students to a senior recital that would be acceptable as an entrance recital for graduate study in composition.

This degree is designed to be both a professional music degree and a deep dive into the creativity and flexibility of the liberal arts, a key component of education. As part of this, students complete a rigorous study of musicianship, music composition, and music performance, as well as a nine-hour cognate area outside of music.

Requirements

- Entrance into the program

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, the 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 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 is 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 eighth semester of study. Students must enroll in both Senior Composition Recital and applied lessons in the eighth semester.

- Recital Hearing

Students 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 thirty days prior to the senior recital will result in a delay of the senior recital.

Private Instructors

Every music student at OBU needs to know it is the collective and considered position of the entire music faculty that all enrolled students will make progress with any of the music instructors. In the rare instance when a continuing student's director/conductor/secondary instructor is not completely satisfied with the instruction being received, the following guidelines must be strictly observed as they protect both the student and the teacher from disrupted work:

- Pray first and foremost.
- Refrain from assigning other instructors to the student before addressing all concerned parties. Such an undertaking puts a student in an awkward position as it jeopardizes the relationship developed and established with their primary instructor.
 - Discuss your recommended path forward for the student with the Division of Music chair.
 - Once a suitable path has been reached/agreed upon, the Division of Music Chair will instruct the student to the new path for their private lessons.

Grading

Private study with an instructor in any field is an intense endeavor. Private music composition study is a somewhat nebulous form of learning, since 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 not just expected to write music. Study will also include elements of listening to other music, reading about music, music history, composers, 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 grade for private composition will be determined by the student's work in this manner:

- The quality of musical compositions submitted (quality of 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 quality of week-to-week progress on compositions

See below for the composition grading rubric.

Outcomes

Ratings

Student creates
Aesthetic Appeal

1

Does not present an effective general impression. Musical ideas do not hold the listener's interest.

2

Includes at least one interesting musical idea. Yet the overall impression is not effective.

3

Includes some interesting musical ideas. The general impression is pleasant and moderately effective.

4

Strong aesthetic appeal and general impression. Would be enjoyed by many listeners. Keeps the listener interested.

Student work is
Creative

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
Craftsmanship.

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.

Performances

The optimum way students hear, understand, and learn 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 enrolled in applied composition lessons is expected to place at least one 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 placement on a program.

Musical Styles

BM Composition students 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. BM Composition majors are 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. Because of this, composition majors will be asked to write music in many different styles. This is not done as an arbitrary endeavor, nor is it done to show favor to one style of composition over another.

Tips for the Student

Composition students 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 more than a student who habitually has nothing prepared for a class.
- 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, or 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. If a student enrolls in applied lessons for two hours of university credit, it is expected that the student will compose for at least two hours each week outside of the lessons.
- 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 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.
- 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.

- 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 performers do 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.

Semester Study Plan

Semester 1 Composition Seminar only

Semester 2 Composition and Instrumentation Class // Seminar

- Develop logging and graphic sketching facility
- Composition of 3 works
- Collect musical ideas

Semester 3 Private Composition // Seminar // Jury

- Continue to work on logging and graphic sketching facility
- Imitate older styles
- Investigate use of chromaticism
- Investigate use of triadic expansion
- Explore areas such as planning, bi/poly-tonality
- Collect musical ideas

Semester 4 Private Composition // Seminar // Jury

- Explore new scale ideas
- Develop motives and motivic development
- Collect musical ideas

Semester 5 Private Composition // Seminar // Jury

- Investigate intervallic exploration
- Serialism

Semester 6 Private Composition // Seminar // Jury

- Indeterminacy
- Minimalism

Semester 7 Private Composition // Seminar // Jury

- Recital preparation
- Consolidation

Semester 8 Private Composition // Seminar // Senior Recital

- Recital preparation
- Exploration of new resources