

Course Syllabus

Creative Practice and Dialogue (ICIT Practical Seminar)

MUS 237, code 04768

Fall 2024, UC Irvine

Instructor: Michael Dessen

Weekly class meeting: Mondays 12pm-2:50pm (with a few exceptions), AITR 190

Office hour: By appointment (email me your available times)

Course summary

This is a practice-based, graduate music seminar focused on the integration of composition, improvisation and technology. Students will develop an individual or small group creative project, engage with an outside guest mentor relevant to that work, and provide in-depth feedback on their peers' work.

Guest mentors

With support from a CTSA Research and Innovation grant, this seminar incorporates several outside guest mentors. During spring 2024, students interested in the course were asked to invest the equivalent of one week of coursework (hours borrowed from week 1 in fall quarter) to design their initial project proposals and propose a guest artist mentor with deep expertise in that area. Arrangements with those guest mentor artists were finalized over the summer. Each mentor will provide several individual lessons with the paired student, and will also visit one of our class meetings to discuss their recent work with the group.

Centering dialogue and critique

While a core function of this seminar is to allow space for students to develop creative projects, we will also focus significant attention throughout on discussing the nature and practice of artistic critique, dialogue and mentorship.

In higher education arts training, especially in graduate programs, we often hear teachers emphasize the importance of frank critiques and "telling it like it is," and students are likewise told they must learn to take criticism with "a thick skin." Honesty and resilience are of course crucial for our work as artists, but so are care and empathy, and integrating these dimensions in our professional relationships can be as challenging as in other areas of our lives. Any serious engagement with

teaching/mentorship/colleagueship - let alone with the nature of aesthetic value and human subjectivity - will reveal a complex picture that eludes simplistic aphorisms and binaries. Many questions arise, including:

- What can effective, meaningful critique look like in a program like ICIT, where we come from highly varied training backgrounds, fields and worldviews, and where graduate students are often at a highly formative moment of artistic evolution and integrating new areas of inquiry?
- How can we build stronger creative communities by understanding artistic feedback, critique, dialogue and mentee/mentorship not as merely secondary, unconscious byproducts of our work, but as skills that we intentionally practice?
- How can we learn to modulate those skills across divergent institutional spaces, power relationships, and individual dispositions? How does the role and nature of critique shift across our different professional fields and subcultures?
- What understandings of critique and artistic dialogue must be mastered to access privileged academic and/or high art subcultures specifically? How have those understandings and gatekeeping mechanisms been challenged by artists/scholars in music, or in adjacent fields?
- To what extent are relational skills even distinct from our artistic practice itself?

This seminar is focused primarily on practical projects rather than theoretical inquiry/research, but these topics will be an important undercurrent throughout. Early in the quarter, we will discuss these and related questions to help establish a foundation for our group conversations during the quarter. Rather than prescribe any simple formula or set of instructions, the goal is to support each of us in developing our own approach to engaging with peers' work through dialogue and critique, which can be a lifelong practice as much as finding one's own artistic voice.

Coursework

The coursework for this seminar is as follows:

Individual or collaborative project: The core of this course is your own creative project, already planned in Spring 2024. (Four students are doing solo projects, and two are collaborating on a duo project.) You'll each share work in progress on the due dates noted on the Schedule, and as part of the project, you're also responsible for engaging with your guest mentor and thoughtfully considering their input as well as input from our group. For work in progress presentations/discussions, please plan to use 40 minutes for the solo projects, and an hour for the duo project. For the final project presentations in weeks 9 and 10, we'll have (total time including discussion) roughly 40 minutes each for solo projects and an hour for the duo project. The format/approach of the presentation is entirely up to you and depends on the nature of your work, but please prepare so that you can share your work as clearly as possible within that time limit.

Attendance/participation: Attending our weekly sessions, participating in our discussions, and providing feedback on work presented by other students is a critical part of this seminar.

Study assignments for guest mentor visits: Four of the guest mentors will be visiting our class (via zoom). In each case, I'll set up an assignment including some recent work they provided and ask you to review that work and come prepared with at least one question you'd like to ask them. Instead of them giving presentations, we'll use their visit for a conversation about their assigned works we studied in advance.

Peer review assignment: After the final presentations in week 10, you'll be assigned to one peer and asked to prepare a response to their work, to share in our final meeting in exam week. We will discuss the format and details of this review then.

Final brief reflective statement and self-eval (200-500 words): By the end of exam week, you must submit this assessment of your project, including how it was impacted by input from the guest artist as well as from the class. It should also include a *brief* self-evaluation noted below under Grading.

Schedule

The key dates are listed below, and additional details will be updated as we go.

Sept. 30 (Week 1): 2pm-3:3pm

- Brief project introductions
- Course overview/expectations
- Schedule day/time for finals week meeting
- Begin discussing core questions about critique and dialogue
- We'll end an hour early this day to give you back the time spent in our spring quarter planning meeting

Oct. 7 (Week 2): 12pm-2:50pm

- TIME CHANGE: Class will start at 12pm this day (ending at 2:50pm)
- Class visit (zoom) by guest mentor **Atau Tanaka** (due: [Tanaka prep assignment \(https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/66140/assignments/1471810\)](https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/66140/assignments/1471810).)
- Discuss core questions about critique and dialogue

Oct. 14 (Week 3): 11am-1:50pm

- TIME CHANGE: Class will start at 11am this day (ending at 1:50pm)
- Class visit (zoom) by guest mentor **Marko Ciciliani** (due: [Ciciliani prep assignment \(https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/66140/assignments/1471822\)](https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/66140/assignments/1471822).)

- Presentation by Arts Librarian Scott Stone this day (1:15pm)
- Scheduling decisions:
 - Possible idea to cancel Oct. 21 and instead meet on a different day in week 7 (Monday 11/14 is a holiday)
 - Decide who is presenting work in progress on Oct. 28 and who on Nov. 4

Oct. 21 (Week 4): No class (rescheduled)

- Note: Class will not meet this week, rescheduled for week 7 instead

Oct. 28 (Week 5): 12pm-2:50pm

- Class visit (zoom) by guest mentor **Steve Lehman** (due: [Lehman prep assignment \(https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/66140/assignments/1471809\)](https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/66140/assignments/1471809).)
- Mid-quarter work in progress presentation (AW/OB duo)

Nov. 4 (Week 6): 12pm-2:50pm

- (Time/date tentative:) Class visit (zoom) by guest mentor **Chico MacMurtrie** (due: [MacMurtrie prep assignment \(https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/66140/assignments/1475258\)](https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/66140/assignments/1475258) which includes visiting the current Beall exhibit, open hours Tues-Sat 12pm-6pm)
- Mid-quarter work in progress presentations: Start the four solo projects

Nov. 11 (Week 7): Note rescheduled time this week

- This Monday (11/11) is a UCI holiday, but we agreed to reschedule our week 4 meeting for this week
- We will meet Tuesday, Nov. 12 from 3:00pm-5:50pm
- Mid-quarter work in progress presentations: Finish the four solo projects
- Dessen work discussion ([Dessen Nov. 12 prep \(https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/66140/assignments/1484533\)](https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/66140/assignments/1484533).)

Nov. 18 (Week 8): 12pm-2:50pm

- Discussion of work by guest mentor **Annea Lockwood** (due: [Lockwood prep assignment \(https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/66140/assignments/1485463\)](https://canvas.eee.uci.edu/courses/66140/assignments/1485463).)
- Other topic/activity or Dessen presentation, to be determined in the prior week's class

Nov. 25 (Week 9): 12pm-2:50pm

- Final project presentations due (in class, students TBD)

Dec. 2 (Week 10): 12pm-2:50pm

- Final project presentations due (in class, students TBD)

Dec. 9 (Exam week): 12:30pm-2:20pm

- We will hold a final 2-hour meeting during exam week (Monday, Dec. 9 from 12pm-1:50pm),
- We'll use the time to share the assigned final peer feedback, and have a closing discussion to wrap up the course.

Grading criteria

I will let you know if your work at any time during the quarter falls below "B" quality. As part of the final self-reflective statement, you should include a *brief* self-evaluation (a few sentences is plenty) explaining the grade you think you earned and why, based on these criteria:

- 50%: Punctual attendance and active participation in all classes, and completing all assigned work thoroughly and on time, including the prepared questions for guest artists, the peer review, and the end of quarter reflective statement.
- 50%: Meeting all project submission deadlines, and investing time to advance your project consistently throughout the quarter. The expectation for a 4-unit seminar is an average of 6-8 hours per week outside of class meetings

I will assign your course grade taking into account my own evaluation along with your own.

If you cannot attend any class meeting due to emergency or illness, please inform me as soon as possible. Given the nature of this class and the fact that we only meet once per week, attendance is crucial, so missing more than 2 meetings for any reason may result in a failing grade.

Help and accommodations

If you need help with any aspect of the coursework, please email me your available times and I will find a time when we can meet as soon as possible. If you have a disability that requires accommodations, you must ensure that I receive a contract from the [Disabilities Services Center](https://dsc.uci.edu/) (<https://dsc.uci.edu/>) at the beginning of the quarter, then contact me to discuss any necessary arrangements.

Academic integrity and inclusivity

Many activities in this course are collaborative, but as a core guiding principle, you must be always careful to *avoid representing another person's work as your own*. This includes AI-based tools, which if used in any way, should be clearly cited and explained in detail. Any attempt to represent the work of other people as your own (including other people's work digested and reconfigured through AI software) will be considered an academic integrity violation, and will be reported.

My intention is always to facilitate welcoming environments for collective learning, in the spirit of the

UC's system-wide policies on diversity. (<https://diversity.universityofcalifornia.edu/policies-guidelines/>)

Those policies define diversity as "the variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from differences of culture and circumstance" and "include race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, abilities/disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and geographic region, and more." I expect all of us to help create a supportive environment, to communicate with one another in respectful, constructive ways, and to understand the presence of different life experiences in our classroom as a learning opportunity for us all. By remaining in the course after reading this syllabus, you are affirming that you share these intentions.

Campus support resources

As a UCI student, you have access to a wide range of resources on campus to help you with not only your academic work, but also many other kinds of challenges, including food and housing insecurity, mental health and much more. I am always happy to talk if you are not sure where to start, and I also recommend consulting with CTSA Student Affairs staff, who are experts on these campus resources and very experienced at helping students with all kinds of challenges. Here is a list of campus resources I encourage you to be aware of:

- **CTSA (School of the Arts) Student Affairs** (<https://www.arts.uci.edu/student-affairs-office/>): A great starting point if you're not sure where to go, or if you prefer to talk to a staff advisor there rather than a professor.
- **UCI Basic Needs Hub** (<https://basicneeds.uci.edu/>): Help for UCI students struggling to meet basic food or housing needs.
- **UCI Counseling Center** (<http://www.counseling.uci.edu/>): Counseling for UCI students, and an excellent resource to help you cope with stress.
- **Disability Services Center** (<http://disability.uci.edu/>): Support for UCI students with disabilities, including helping you to establish accommodations in your courses.
- **UCI LGBT Resource Center** (<http://lgbtrc.uci.edu/>): Provides support for LGBT students and "education and advocacy services supporting intersectional identity development."
- **UCI Dream Center** (<http://dreamers.uci.edu/>): Mission is to "stand with and serve those impacted by immigration policy through advancing systemic change, deconstructing oppressive policies, and fostering community."
- **Student Outreach and Retention Center (SOAR)** (<https://soar.uci.edu/>): Support for academic success, wellness and empowerment, especially for underrepresented students
- **UCI CARE (Campus Assault Resources and Education)** (<https://care.uci.edu/>): "Free and confidential support services to members of the UCI community who have been impacted by sexual assault, relationship abuse, family violence and/or stalking."
- **Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity (OEOD)** (<https://www.oeod.uci.edu/>): Promotes "equal

opportunity, affirmative action, and nondiscrimination at UCI," and a place where students can report and get support for any perceived violations of university policy or the law, such as hostile work environments

- **Office of Academic Integrity & Student Conduct (OAISC)** (<https://aisc.uci.edu>): Oversees academic integrity and student conduct, and also a place where students can submit reports or speak with staff about perceived violations of UCI policies and codes of conduct

Thank you for reading the entire syllabus. I look forward to working with you!