



University of Texas at El Paso

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Statement of Philosophy on Teaching, Research, and Service

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Dominic Dousa

STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY ON TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE

Teaching, research, and service are the three prototypical activities of a university faculty member. My work as an educator and professional musician in a music department within a College of Liberal Arts, such as UTEP's, gives me the opportunity to contribute to each of these three aspects of academic life. I have a genuine love for teaching my field of specialization to aspiring professional musicians while still maintaining the wider perspective of a liberal arts education. My creative endeavors as a composer and pianist touch professional musical circles, as well as broader arts communities in society. My service to university and community exemplify the spirit of leadership and teamwork. Through all of these activities, I strive to be a productive member of the UTEP community, to do my part in helping to accomplish the mission of the UTEP and the Department of Music in serving students and the community at large, and to positively affect both the academic world and general public.

Teaching a subject in which many incoming students have a limited background presents unique challenges and opportunities. Ensuring that students meet collegiate national standards for mastery of music theory and aural skills demands a disciplined, rigorous approach to teaching fundamental material. For this reason, I place emphasis on frequent quizzes and exams to solidify students' understanding of this fundamental material. At the same time, it is necessary to provide examples of how theory is applied to the music that students will encounter in the real world as performers and educators. To this end, I use assignments featuring guided analysis of longer musical excerpts that focus attention on important analytic concepts. Such tasks take the student beyond rote exercises, provide a perspective on how analytic tools aid a practicing musician, and offer ideas about how to think critically and independently when encountering music that may have features that go "outside the box" of textbook examples. My goal for students who complete my classes is that they not only have a thorough understanding of the basics of the subject, but also the insight to apply their knowledge intelligently when studying the music that they will present in their future musical activities as professional performers and teachers. While some of our students will pursue opportunities elsewhere in the country, many students who earn music degrees from UTEP will become educators in the El Paso public school system. Helping all students to develop strong general musicianship skills is indispensable in providing them the opportunity to succeed wherever they choose to go and in enriching our own musical community.

As the sole instructor of composition since the fall semester of 2005, I have implemented a challenging curriculum in private composition studies to prepare theory and composition majors for opportunities beyond the undergraduate degree and to give interested non-majors experience with the rigors of the craft of musical composition. In my upper-level and graduate theory courses, students gain a more vivid and deeper understanding of specialized musical topics. Students who successfully complete my courses — whether they are the sophomore-level, upper-level, or graduate music theory

classes, or any level of composition — will have the background in these areas to succeed in the various careers of today’s professional musical world.

An indispensable part of my teaching style that helps me to achieve my goals is my enthusiasm and sheer delight in presenting and sharing this subject matter and relating it to my own experiences as a composer and performing musician. I maintain due authority in the classroom, but am personable and approachable to students. Usually by the second week of each semester, I know all students’ names and, throughout the semester I maintain an “open door” office policy, encouraging students to stop by for questions even outside of regularly-scheduled office hours. Such an approach keeps students engaged, stimulates interest in a subject that often is considered difficult and abstruse, and helps build the confidence necessary in succeeding in these demanding courses.

A continual striving for excellence in teaching requires a self-critical evaluation of the processes one employs. Every year that I have taught the standard curriculum in sophomore-level music theory and aural skills, I have modified the course syllabus and course material on the basis of my previous experience in those classes. Comments and suggestions from colleagues, as well as students, have helped me to refine my courses from year to year and so make them more effective. This willingness to learn and to adapt serves as a model for students and helps me to keep perspective on what students are going through in their course of study.

My professional creative activities as a composer and performer complement well my activities as a teacher. As a member of a university music department that emphasizes training music educators, I focus my work in original composition on music that can have a broad impact across different communities. My compositional output includes works intended for professional performers, such as my colleagues at UTEP and musicians throughout the country, as well as pieces for college and high school student groups, such as ensembles in which UTEP students perform and ones that they will conduct in their own professional careers. These compositions have received successful presentations at conferences, universities, and other professional settings throughout the U.S. and abroad, as well as at school and community events, both here in El Paso and elsewhere.

Notable commissions for new works include those written for internationally known performers such as the Biava String Quartet and choral conductor Weston Noble. My compositions have also received national and international exposure at many professional venues, such as College Music Society national and regional conferences, conferences featuring music for specific instruments (2007 International Trombone Festival, Viva La Flauta!), the American Ambassador’s Residence in Paris, and concert halls in China, France, Mexico, Peru, Finland, and throughout the U.S. In addition to developing a national and international reputation, I have written many works for performance by UTEP student ensembles, as well as public school ensembles in the El Paso community such as at Parkland High School and Nolan Richardson Middle School.

Along with numerous performances of original compositions, I seek to increase my visibility as a composer and that of UTEP’s musical reputation through publication. As

with my performed works, my published compositions are geared toward a wide audience of musicians. Some works, such as those published by TRN Music Publisher, are directed towards ensembles typically found in educational settings. My publication for concert band, “Soaring”, was recently included on a North Carolina Bandmaster’s Association Eastern Division contest list, and my work for string orchestra, “New Day Dawning”, was reviewed in *The Instrumentalist*. Other works, such as those published by Dorn, Pebble Hill Music, and Classical Vocal Reprints, are intended for professional and aspiring professional musicians.

My activities as an accompanist exemplify the spirit of professional collaboration and demonstrate the flexibility and versatility that is so important for succeeding in music today. I believe it is vital for students to observe a teacher of musicianship skills and academic music courses apply his or her knowledge to both composition and performance. Being active as a performer reinforces the practical importance of learning musicianship skills, gives students a perspective on how academic work fits into their overall course of music study, and provides an example of what it means to be a complete musician.

Given the many and sometimes complex needs of a department and university, it is essential for all members to lend their time and expertise and to work effectively with others in solving problems. To this end, I have served as a member of the UTEP Faculty Senate and have been an active member of several committees within our department, playing an important role in revising our department placement exams and reshaping our music theory curriculum to meet the imperatives of state and national agencies such as SACS, NASM, and the broader University of Texas system. Most recently, in a collaborative effort that will have a far-reaching impact on the future of UTEP, I have worked on composing music to accompany the presentations for UTEP’s Centennial Campaign. In addition to fulfilling service roles within the university, I strive to be a worthy representative of UTEP in the various community, social, and professional activities in which I take part, both in the El Paso area and beyond. In this way, I bring positive attention to UTEP, strengthen relationships between the university and the public, and so help position UTEP as a leader in the community.

I believe that, at its best, a university should represent the highest ideals of striving for excellence and progress and of maintaining the tradition that celebrates humanity’s great achievements. With my broad academic and artistic background, I endeavor to live up to these ideals through my teaching, creative endeavors, and service at UTEP.