Course Overview
Over the last 20 years the psychological study of music has matured from a sporadic enterprise into a continuous and connected discipline. Despite the rapid growth of interest in music psychology, few psychology departments offer a course that integrates the field. This course will do just this. In the first part of the course, we will explore how psychologists have attempted to understand the basic elements of music. We will discuss the psychological organization of pitch and rhythm, in isolation, and then in combination. We will also examine how musical knowledge is acquired through development.

Thus, the early part of the course we will attempt to understand musical behavior by breaking it down into its constituent components. One drawback to this approach is that music loses much of its richness when analyzed piecemeal. Therefore, the remainder of the course will attempt to analyze behavior surrounding intact musical pieces. We will begin by examining one of the most powerful effects of music: its ability to move us emotionally. This discussion will be followed by an attempt to isolate the factors that lead people to prefer one piece or genre of music to another.

In the last part of the course, we will explore music cognition outside of the laboratory. We will look at how other media (television, movies, and commercials) employ music. We will also look at music as a mnemonic device including how it contributes to our memory for song lyrics. We will discuss how music therapists use music in the treatment of a variety of mental and physical disorders and will end the semester by looking at music from a cross-cultural perspective. Every known human culture engages in some kind of music-making activity. We will try to examine which aspects of musical behavior are universal, and how Eastern and Western musical systems differ.

Readings
You will be responsible for a handful of reading assignments each week. In addition to reading every assigned reading every week, each student periodically will be responsible for presenting one article to the class. Presenting an article will involve not only summarizing the key questions, hypotheses, methodology, results, and interpretation. You will also be expected to foster discussion amongst your peers. Everyone, whether presenting or not, should read the articles critically. By this, I mean you should not necessarily accept the authors' claims at face value. Are their hypotheses warranted? Do they do a good job of setting up an experiment to test their hypotheses? Are their interpretations of the data justified? Can some other theory also explain the results? How might you improve the experiment? What is the next experiment that should be done to further test the theory in question? All weekly readings are available electronically via the CMS web page (click on the Assignments button).
Thought Papers

In addition to the weekly readings, you will also be responsible for turning in a written response to the week's readings. You should use this paper as an opportunity to demonstrate your critical reading of the assignments (see above). **Do not summarize the papers!** Tell me what you think! What were the strong and weak points of the paper? What aspects of the argument/design need clarification? How might you counter the arguments/conclusions made by the author(s)? Do the data support the claims made by the researchers? Why or why not? What might you have done differently? What would be the next important question/experiment to pursue? **Thought papers should vary between a paragraph and a page in length: NO MORE!** If you have more to say, you can hold it for class, just give us the flavor of your thoughts.

Notice that I used the word 'us' in the last paragraph. Everybody in the class will be responsible for reading all of the thought papers for the week. How will you get access to everyone's thought papers? Via the CMS website. I will set up a forum each week in the Discussion Board section of the website (the Discussion Board is located under the Communications button). Your thought papers will be due by **9:00 PM on Wednesdays.** Late papers will receive a grade of 5 out of 10; failure to turn in an assignment will result in a 0.

Class Participation

A seminar is only as good as its participants and the contributions made by those participants. At the end of the semester, your peers and I will grade the quality of your contributions to class. Your peers will use whatever criteria they deem meaningful. I will grade your performance based on the frequency, creativity, and scientific relevance of your input.

Short (4-5 page) paper

I would like you to choose a song that you LOVE and analyze why you like it. Ideally, you will draw on some of the work we will discuss in class, but I would also like you to consult other sources, as well as propose your own hypotheses. **The first draft of this assignment is due Monday, March 1st. The second and final draft of this assignment is due on Friday March 30th.**

Final Project

For your final project, I would like you to research a topic related to music and psychology. You will need to prepare a 15-page paper and a 20-minute presentation on your topic. If you decide to write/speak about one of the areas we discussed in class, be sure you discuss ideas, information and/or sources in addition to the one's covered in class. You can and probably should mention things we discussed in class, but do bring in other sources, too. Your final project is due on **Friday, May 14th.**

Course Grade

Your course grade will be determined, as follows:

- Thought Papers 30%
- Class Participation 30%
- Short Paper 20%
- Final Project 20%
Course Schedule

January 28th
Welcome

February 4th
Pitch

February 11th
Rhythm

February 18th
Melody
**February 25th**

**Development**


**March 4th**

**Emotion**


**March 11th**

**Cross-Cultural Studies of Music**


March 25th  Preference

April 1st  Music as a Mnemonic Device

April 8th  Neuroscience / The Brain

April 15th  Therapy


April 22nd

Music and Society


April 29th

Evolution


May 6th

Presentations
Short Written Assignment

As with every assignment this semester, my goal is to press you to think critically. On the surface, the topic for the short written assignment seems simple enough: Write about a song that you love and explain why you love it. However, experience tells me that your attitude will change when you actually sit down to write the paper. In past semesters, students have 'freaked out' when it came time to write, largely because the assignment provides little or no structure.

The reason to give you so much freedom is to give you experience floundering around in search of an interesting argument. Many times, you know what the professor wants to hear and you tailor your discussion to suit his/her agenda. I guarantee you that I have no agenda for this paper. I have no pre-conceived notions about what a good paper 'should' say. I want you to think long and hard about why you love your song so much. Is it the music, itself? Does the music remind you of a particular event or period of your life? Does the music reflect something important about you or your journey of self-actualization? You are free to cite relevant literature, but are not required to do so. Start thinking about what you song you will choose now; use spare moments to try to reconstruct what makes your song so likeable.

In addition to obliging you to think critically, I want to provide a respite to those of you who balk at the cognitive approach to studying music, that is breaking music down into its constituent components. This is your opportunity to redress this failing, to deal with music at whatever level you choose. Just be sure that your paper reflects a careful, reasoned, and insightful attempt to understand the factors related to musical preference.

Final Presentation Suggestions

The question of what would constitute a reasonable topic is always a tricky one for me. Students often complain if they aren't given a very specific question. However, when I give a very narrow topic to write about, students complain that it wasn't very interesting and they could have done a much better job if they could have written about something else. So, what to say about topics? I decided to provide a couple of suggested topics below to give you a sense of what a reasonable topic would sound like. In general, your paper can take any of three forms:

• A literature review in which you compare/contrast two different areas.
• A research proposal in which you describe an experiment that could be used to answer a burning question in the area of music psychology. Ideally, you would not only propose the experiment, but implement it and collect and report data, as well.
• You may - after consulting with me - take a different approach, but an acceptable topic must use the papers we discussed in class to address some other problem in the world.

Of these three possibilities, the second (research proposal/data collection) is strongly encouraged.

Advertising

How do marketers use music to sell products (Don't make this up, read some papers from the marketing literature)? What do these strategies fail to take into account about how people learn/remember music? What would be a good strategy if you wanted people to do the following: a) buy
your product, b) remember your brand name, c) forget your competitor's brand name, or d) discuss your product with friends? Obviously, you would not need to cover all of these questions.

Development

How is the development of musical ability analogous (or not) to the development of other physical or linguistic skills in infants? One way to proceed on this topic would be to read an introductory text on language to see what the different steps are in language acquisition and see if they map easily on to musical development?

Emotion/Preference

This area might be quite amenable to a research proposal. The papers we read in this area were not controlled as well as one might like. How might you do a better job of measuring what factors lead a person to like jazz over classical music? Or, what types of music instill different emotions? Don't be afraid to throw out a heretofore untested hypothesis like, perhaps, people who had very strict parents like more "rebellious" types of music. Just be sure that you can back up your hypothesis, preferably with published work.