

MUSIC THEORY AND COGNITION

music.northwestern.edu/academics/areas-of-study/music-theory-and-cognition

Undergraduates majoring in theory or cognition receive a broad education in music analysis and the cognitive sciences. The emphasis is on cognitive musicology, whereby music is studied using the tools and insights of cognitive science and musicological research.

Programs of Study

- Music Cognition Major (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/music/music-theory-cognition/music-cognition-major/>)
- Music Cognition Minor (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/music/music-theory-cognition/music-cognition-minor/>)
- Music Theory Major (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/music/music-theory-cognition/music-theory-major/>)
- Music Theory Minor (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/music/music-theory-cognition/music-theory-minor/>)

Music Theory Courses

MUS_THRY 251-0 Intro to Music Cognition (1 Unit) An introduction to music cognition for music undergraduates as well as students with limited music backgrounds. Readings primarily from secondary sources, with some primary sources as well.

MUS_THRY 313-0 Analytical Approaches to World Musics (1 Unit) This class explores aspects of musical rhythm, meter, pitch, harmony, and structure through a comparative lens. It is centered around transcription, beginning with theories of the role of transcription for the researcher, and uses active listening as a way of cultivating an awareness of musical behavior of some of the many musics of the world.

MUS_THRY 316-0 16th Century Counterpoint (1 Unit) Contrapuntal textures from two to four voices. Cadence and form, melodic line and motive, rhythm, simple and complex imitation, and treatment of dissonance in the sacred music of Lassus, Josquin, and Palestrina.

MUS_THRY 317-0 Historical Improvisation (1 Unit) The study of harmony at the keyboard as learned by musicians since the early 17th century. Figured bass is an essential subject for performers of early music (including Bach and Mozart) and a key to the analysis of most pre-20th century European music.

MUS_THRY 318-0 18th Century Counterpoint (1 Unit) Baroque dance suite, chorale prelude, invention, fugue, chiefly involving the music of J. S. Bach. Melodic, harmonic, structural characteristics; contrapuntal techniques.

MUS_THRY 321-0 Classical Form (1 Unit) An examination of phrase-construction and punctuation in the musical forms of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The focus will typically be on Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven's skillful use of conventional formal structures to engage creatively with listeners' expectations.

MUS_THRY 322-1 Rhythm and Meter I (1 Unit)

Close reading and discussion of key canonical texts from the last three decades' rich scholarship in rhythm and meter as well as innovative new work. Each student completes a substantial analytical and/or theoretical paper.

MUS_THRY 322-2 Rhythm and Meter II (1 Unit)

Among the most remarkable developments in the music theory of recent decades have been the rapid advances in the study of rhythm and meter. This course combines close readings of canonical texts and innovative work in this field with analysis of rhythm and meter in common-practice repertoire.

MUS_THRY 325-0 Style and Phrase (1 Unit)

An investigation of the musical phrase in the long 18th century (1680–1830) from the perspective of schema theory. A schema is a typically short, memorable pattern defined by a characteristic pairing of scale degree progressions in the melody and bass, and an accompanying harmonic progression. Such schemata are the essential building blocks of composition in the long 18th century.

MUS_THRY 331-0 Analytical Studies (1 Unit)

Extension and refinement of concepts and techniques acquired in first and second year music theory.

MUS_THRY 333-0 Analysis of Popular Music (1 Unit)

Course objectives are (1) developing skill in analyzing popular music and (2) exploring how music scholars have studied traits such as form, harmony, timbre, etc. in a variety of popular repertoires. Students will become familiar with recurring issues in the interpretation of popular music and develop the ability to form their own critical interpretations using music analysis as a tool.

MUS_THRY 335-0 Selected Topics in Music Theory (1 Unit)

Topics vary; announced before registration. May be repeated.

MUS_THRY 336-0 Selected Topics in Music Cognition (1 Unit)

Topics vary; announced before registration. May be repeated.

MUS_THRY 340-0 Analysis of Recorded Performance (1 Unit)

This class provides an overview of the recent literature in music theory and cognition, focusing on articles published in the main journals of these fields. Students will engage with the current themes in the literature, while also situating these readings within a broader historical context in the field.

MUS_THRY 341-0 Sound to Structure (1 Unit)

Music theory privileges the parameters of pitch (as melody, harmony, and counterpoint) and rhythm (as surface rhythm and meter), but music as experienced is much more than the sum of these. This class engages how musical experience arises from and is shaped by other parameters, notably timbre, register, texture, and dynamics, across musical styles and periods.

MUS_THRY 345-0 Experimental and Empirical Methods in Music Theory (1 Unit)

Empirical methods in music research have been used to study aspects of musical style, performance practice, authorship, musical behaviors and auditory perception, among other topics. This course provides a foundation and overview of empirical methods used in musicological and music-theoretic research, and equips students with the tools needed to critically engage with the literature in the field while designing their own empirically-based music research.

MUS_THRY 348-0 Corpus Studies (1 Unit)

Corpus studies, or distant readings of multiple musical works, are often employed as a way of better understanding issues such as the relationships between pieces, authorship, trends over time, or differences and similarities between genres. In this class, we will explore

the techniques, history, and philosophy of such approaches, and will construct and analyze our own corpora. For the most part, this class will deal with notated scores, and students will be encouraged to ask their own research questions of the music that they are most interested in.

MUS_THRY 355-0 Analysis of Post-Tonal Music (1 Unit)

Techniques for analysis of atonal and nonfunctional tonal music, including serial, set-theoretic, and parametric approaches. Emphasis on music of Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Stravinsky, and Debussy. Selected readings in analytic literature.

Prerequisite: MUSIC 211-3 or equivalent.

MUS_THRY 385-0 Senior Project (1 Unit)

MUS_THRY 390-0 Music Theory Colloquium (0 Unit) Special topics presentations for music theory students.

MUS_THRY 399-0 Independent Study (0.5-1 Unit)