

## Peer Review of Jennifer Muniz Gretchen Anderson

Peer Reviewer Name: Gretchen Anderson

Peer Reviewer Title: Professor of Biochemistry

Peer Reviewer email: [ganderso@iusb.edu](mailto:ganderso@iusb.edu)

I have not been co-instructor, graduate school peer/classmate of dean/chair of candidate

I observed her Music Theory III class 09/14/2017, and her group Piano Class on 09/21/2017.

**Teaching Philosophy:** Based on your observations, comment on the candidate's philosophy of teaching and how this philosophy relates to their identified teaching goals and student learning.

In her teaching philosophy, Jennifer Muniz talks about learning Music Theory as one would learn to ride a bike; with enough experimentation, mistakes, and change of perspective students not only master the material, but enjoy the process and keep the mastery for life. Sure. It all sounds good, but can it actually be done in an upper level music theory course; a course universally dreaded by even the most ardent of music majors?

From experience and notoriety, I know that the subjects of Neopolitan Sixths and Augmented Sixths are pedantry at its most lethal. Therefore, when I walked into Dr. Muniz's classroom, I was expecting to see students readying their devices for rapid access to various social media apps. I was quite surprised to see students positively *eager* to engage in the subject matter. They sat in the front of the class and talked animatedly of the work they had done to prepare for this class. From my lonely perspective in the back of the room, I could see that every single laptop was opened exclusively to the workbook and text pages at hand.

It was clear from the outset that the students were very comfortable with the Dr. Muniz's teaching style. Experimentation and mistakes were assumed to be a part of the learning process. For example, students were not afraid to go to the blackboard and write what they had determined for appropriate modulating chord progressions. For one student, it was only when he heard Muniz play his progression on the piano that he realized it just didn't sound right. Muniz went through the progression step by step until the student could find which portion was incorrect and how to address it. Meanwhile, the rest of the students were engaged by rooting and encouraging the student.

Muniz puts into practice her philosophy of "learning by doing" in unique ways. One of the many ways Muniz used to cement the concept of Neopolitan 6ths was for all the students gather around the piano. One student would pick a key signature, and another student would work out a chord progression in that key on the piano. Some students were clearly novices at the piano, but they all successfully worked their way through figuring out the progressions.

The crowning achievement, in my opinion, of getting the students engaged in the potentially dry subject of Neopolitan chords, was the way Dr. Muniz animatedly drew students through the recall of a Schubert song, Erlkönig (the Elf King). Students vaguely remembered being exposed to this piece in a previous semester. Since I knew this piece well, I could see the way that Muniz built tension into teasing out the story line from the students in the same way the story line and the accompanying music itself built tension, culminating in the Neopolitan Sixth chord.

Muniz: "So they're riding in a forest. In a car? In a carriage? On horseback!"

(Muniz demonstrates the hoofbeats of the horse by playing the insistent background chords in the music.)

"The kid is sick. How sick? Will he live? Who's talking to him? Is it a good thing he hears the Elf King whispering to him?"

"Listen to these sinister chords of the Elf King – so slippery, so seductive!"

"Listen to the voice of the kid's father, imploring him to hang on while they gallop through the forest for help."

As the students became more involved in remembering the key parts of the story line, Muniz became increasingly animated until the absolute climax:

"The Elf King claims the kid! At that exact moment, with the frantic father still galloping for help, the kid surrenders to the triumphant Elf King; this is when Schubert uses the Neopolitan 6<sup>th</sup> chord!"

Wow! What could be more exciting than that?! Who would ever guess that Neopolitan 6<sup>th</sup> and Augmented 6ths, the driest of the dry Music Theory topics, could keep a room full of students on the edge of their seats?

In one single classroom experience, Muniz used all seven of the commonly accepted learning styles:

- Visual learning: textbook examples of written chord progressions and written musical examples
- Aural learning: playing the music, both as students had written them, and as used by classical composers
- Verbal learning: using words to outline the procedure for building the chords, weaving an exhilarating story to illustrate the effectiveness of the chords
- Physical learning: students each playing a chord progression on the piano
- Logical learning: students figuring out logical progressions based on the set of rules
- Social learning: students working in groups, and actively supporting one another
- Solitary learning: as homework, students worked out chord progressions from workbook problems

After this class, I, for one, immediately went home and practiced Neopolitan chords. I find them everywhere, now that I know what to look for and what to listen for. I'm quite sure it is the same with Dr. Muniz's music students. It's like riding a bike.

**Evidence from LEARN: Document your observations of the candidate's classes and comment on their teaching materials. How would you summarize their**

strengths, especially in promoting student learning?

Dr. Muniz makes excellent use of various teaching materials with an imaginative blend of physical and online resources. In her Music Theory III class, I was particularly impressed with the way she used Canvas to have students post questions on the readings before class. During the class session, she answered every student's question without identifying the source. This was an excellent way for introvert students to ask for help without drawing attention. It was also affirming to have the instructor paying personal attention to each student. This is a powerful approach that I plan to use in my own classes.

Dr. Muniz's Piano Class III is a group piano lesson which offers particular challenges to teach. Dr. Muniz handles these hurdles adroitly with the use of various types of technology. When I observed the class, there were 8 students in the room, each seated at an electric piano equipped with a music keyboard, a computer keyboard, a large computer screen, music stand, and headphone set. Students put the printed music for the day on their music stands, donned their headphones and practiced a series of chord progressions (using Augmented 6ths!) which only they could hear through their headsets. In the silent room, Dr. Muniz observed the hand placement and finger movement of each student, and she could imagine the sounds the students were producing. The proficiency of the students ranged dramatically. Dr. Muniz nevertheless found something for every student to work on; for novices, she gave tips on how to place the fingers, and for advanced students, she suggested modulating to different key areas. In this way every student was learning something new, according to their current knowledge base.

One of the purposes of the group piano class is to teach students to compose simple accompaniments for other performers and, when required by the performer, play in keys different than the music is written. To acquire this skill, students were asked on homework assignments to post a video of themselves playing the allotted passages in different keys. Of course, students would submit their video only when they themselves could see they had it right. Students could therefore make their mistakes, learning as they went, before submitting their work for a grade. In this way, it is the student who decides when mastery has been achieved.

Teaching Summary: How do you assess the candidate's past efforts to help others in teaching? Describe your observations of the candidate's effort to continue to grow in teaching through peer mentoring, teaching scholarship (SOTL), participation in professional development activities related to teaching, or demonstrated leadership in teaching.

Seeing Dr. Muniz in the classroom, it is clear she loves her work and thoroughly enjoys working with people. She is cheerful, supportive, and completely dedicated to teaching and learning at various levels. She is a campus leader in the design of online courses, and has given several presentations to help other faculty experiment with new teaching strategies. She has mentored individual undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty in diverse disciplines (*e.g.* nursing).

## Jennifer Muniz, Assistant Professor of Music, IUSB

Dr. Muniz continues to develop her own teaching. She regularly attends UCET workshops and national and regional meetings of music teachers, and gives presentations on various aspects of incorporation of online elements into myriad courses. She has been recognized for her leadership and accomplishments through various teaching awards and grants to support her teaching with technology. Her leadership and expertise in teaching is further exemplified by her two articles in peer reviewed publications.