

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: A Pedagogical Guide for Teaching Diatonic Modality in the College Music Theory Curriculum

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PAGES: 190

Music theory plays a central role in the education of every college music major and minor. The typical undergraduate music theory core curriculum consists of a four- or five-semester sequence of courses. As a result of the emphasis on traditional tonal harmony in Western music education, these core courses concentrate almost exclusively on the major/minor scalar system while marginalizing other types of scales such as diatonic modes. Common undergraduate theory textbooks that include the introduction of modality often only list the basic modal and scalar structures without offering further analysis and application; many other textbooks do not mention the term at all. This project addresses this curricular deficiency via the development of a sequential instructional program on diatonic modality for the undergraduate music theory curriculum. Applying a comprehensive musicianship approach, the project facilitates instruction that makes conceptual connections through listening, analysis, composition, and performance. The final product includes:

- A firm and broad pedagogical foundation for teaching diatonic modality in the undergraduate music theory curriculum—a research- and learning-theory-based foundation that supports the construction of the detailed scope and sequence. Three instructional principles in particular

provide the foundation for the curriculum: sound before symbol, spiral learning, and comprehensive musicianship.

- A detailed curriculum guide for teaching diatonic modality in the undergraduate music theory core curriculum with a specific focus on the first two years of theory study: fundamentals, diatonic harmony, chromatic harmony, and 20th-century music theory. This includes specific pedagogical recommendations, a comprehensive scope and sequence delineated in three curriculum mapping tables, and thorough sequenced instructional guidelines for each step in the teaching-learning process. The 24 written theory and aural skills plans were specifically designed to be integrated throughout the typical four-semester curriculum. All of the plans are strongly activity-based and built around an extensive core of modal repertoire from all style periods including contemporary pop and jazz, emphasizing the authentic connection with music throughout history.

If applied effectively, the innovative curriculum in this guide has the potential to not only significantly improve the teaching and learning of diatonic modality in undergraduate music theory but also to serve as a model that may help transform the overall approach to collegiate music theory instruction.