

FAQs for Ethnomusicology Graduate Programs at UBC

How big is Ethnomusicology at UBC and who are the students and faculty?

We are a small but scrappy ethnomusicology program located within the UBC School of Music, which is the major such school in Western Canada. The School as a whole prides itself on its excellent faculty and harmonious, supportive working environment. Out of 25 full-time faculty spread across eight divisions (Theory, Historical Musicology, Ethnomusicology, Composition, Voice/Opera, Strings, (other) Orchestral Instruments, and Keyboards) there are three tenured ethnomusicologists, Profs. Nathan Hesselink, Michael Tenzer, and Gage Averill. Prof. Hesselink's previous specialty was the music of South Korea, particularly the folk drumming; currently he is interested in entrainment, rhythmic analysis, and British rock music. Prof. Tenzer specializes in Balinese gamelan, but is also a composer, and teaches on African and South Indian music as well as seminars on cross-cultural music theory. Both teach theory, history, and methodology of ethnomusicology from numerous perspectives. Since 2010 the Dean of UBC's Faculty of Arts has been Dr. Gage Averill, an ethnomusicologist who specializes in Haitian and American vernacular traditions. Though not currently active teaching in the School of Music, we are well-supported with Dean Averill's presence.

Part-time and occasional professors include Emeritus Professor Alan Thrasher, who remains active and generous with his expertise on the music of China, and PhD graduate Gloria Wong, who leads UBC's Chinese Ensemble. Professor Kofi Gbolonyo, a master musician from Ghana who joined us in 2009 on a term appointment, leads UBC's African Music and Dance Ensemble and teaches occasional seminars on West Africa. We also currently have the visiting artist Putu Gedé Sukaryana (Balot) from Indonesia, composer and leader of UBC's Balinese gamelan and the community gamelan Gita Asmara, and an MA student in the ethnomusicology program.

As of this writing (2019) we have 10 full-time graduate students—4 at the MA level and 6 at the PhD. We expect this number to remain relatively stable, which means admitting at most 2 students per year. Our current students are a diverse group working on topics as different as the Balinese gamelan gambang (Jonathan Adams), Okinawan music and identity (Kirk King), Sri Lankan ritual drumming and social change (Eshantha Peiris), and modal theory in Persian classical music (Taees Gherati). Some recent PhDs were awarded to Curtis Andrews for a study of the music of the Dagbamete shrine in southern Ghana, Juan Diego Diaz Meneses for the Africanization of Brazilian traditional musics and Leslie Tilley for an in-depth structural analysis of Balinese improvisational drumming. The last MA thesis completed was Deavyn West's analysis of Canadian First Nations music and the electric powwow.

11 students have completed the PhD in the program since it began in 2002, and since 2005 16 students have completed the MA. Not all of our graduates opt to continue in academia, with a number of our students going on to work in high-profile arts management jobs, the video game industry, as lawyers, and as singer-songwriters. Those who have pursued academia include appointments at Kenyon College (Ohio), the University of Waterloo (Ontario), Vancouver Community College (British Columbia), MIT (Massachusetts), The Institute of Indonesian Arts (Bali), Middle Tennessee State University, and the University of California-Davis. Students within our undergraduate courses and MA program have been accepted to doctoral programs at the University of

Toronto, the University of Alberta, Memorial University, Wesleyan University, the University of Chicago, The University of California-Los Angeles, the University of California-Berkeley, University College London, and the University of London-SOAS.

We often invite prominent ethnomusicologists as guests for lectures and interaction. Past visitors include Bruno Nettl, Ellen Koskoff, Mark Slobin, Keith Howard, Bell Yung, Joshua Pilzer, Simha Arom, Kofi Agawu, Dana Rappoport, and Marc Perlman.

Lastly, we are situated in Vancouver, a beautiful, sparkling city that is a gold mine of world traditions. Once here, few wish to leave.

Do we have an ideology or perspective that shapes an education here?

In his research, Prof. Tenzer has gravitated over the past several years to music theory and comparative musical analysis, while Prof. Hesselink concentrates more on rhythmic analysis and collaborative aesthetics. Nevertheless, the division strives for balance among diverse aspects of ethnomusicology by stressing performance, music transcription, theory and analysis, and social and intellectual history equally. We collaborate regularly with music theory, historical musicology, and composition divisions in the School of Music, and are linked to Area Studies and other departments across the university. Our goal for every student is to communicate our dedication to and love for the musics of the world, and to encourage original, critical, and constructive writing on music that will enable graduates to contribute actively to scholarship, education, and the cultures of world musics around us. The ethnomusicology students and faculty comprise a small community, but our time together is intense and vibrant, and excellent work is being done.

What is required of applicants and what kinds of applications are likely to be accepted?

Admission is competitive and has been getting more so every year since we introduced our PhD track (for both the MA and PhD programs). In 2017 we were able to accept 2 out of 19 applications. In addition to the usual forms and transcripts, all applicants must submit a maximum of two papers dealing with a topic in music that is representative of work to date. Applicants are also required to complete a brief transcription exercise; please contact Professor Nathan Hesselink (n.hesselink@ubc.ca) upon submission of your application for further instructions. Currently this exercise is emailed to applicants on a Friday in January; applicants have the weekend to complete and submit the transcription.

At the MA level we are open to considering applications from many quarters. If you apply, do not feel as though you need to present a focused research plan: your openness to new knowledge and perspectives counts a great deal. Students with strong training in Western music tools—repertoire, scholarship, notation, theory—will find much of that to be of continuing use as an ethnomusicology student. But people who lack such skills or need further training should not necessarily be discouraged. This could mean social science students with burgeoning interests in the world of music, or specialists in non-Western traditions with significant scholarly promise. The two bottom line considerations *in such cases* will be ability to write well in English, and the ability to

hear and represent music in some kind of notation (not necessarily Western standard notation).

Students applying for admission at the PhD level, on the other hand, should demonstrate significant experience with the literature and practice of the field, and have a well-developed interest in a particular topic. Those with MA degrees in related fields (such as music education, composition, or theory) should consult with us before applying.

What scholarships and financial aid are available?

Graduate funding at UBC comes in several forms, and new initiatives are introduced by the University and government on a regular basis. Among the current (and, in recent years, consistent) possibilities are:

- *Graduate Entrance Scholarships* (typically between \$2,000 to \$10,000 per year)
- *4-year Fellowships* for entering PhD students (\$18,000 per year plus tuition)
- *Social Science and Humanities Research Council/SSHRC Fellowships* (government awards available only to Canadians or Canadian Permanent Residents (up to \$35,000 per year for 3 years))
- Killam, Vanier, and Affiliated Fellowships (doctoral study awards—see the link below for more information)
- *Research Assistantships* (some professors hold government grants that pay students for research assistance)
- *Teaching Assistantships* (depending on qualifications but typically for Music 128 or one of the history, popular music, or musicianship courses)
- *International Tuition Award* (automatic reduction of \$3,200 per year for foreign students)

More information is found at

<https://music.ubc.ca/scholarships-awards-graduate>

What is the usual path to the degree?

At the MA level, in addition to completing the required 32 course credits and language proficiency requirement (one language in addition to English), there are three pathways to advancement or completion, decided on case-by-case with the student:

- An M.A. thesis typically 60-100 pages in length. This can be based on local or international fieldwork, but may also focus on theoretical work or library research.
- An additional 2 seminars (6 credits total) in place of the written thesis.
- *Acceleration*, after the first year of MA coursework and only upon approval of the faculty, directly into the PhD program (for exceptionally strong students with clearly defined research goals).

PhD students take 21 credits over their first 1.5 to 2 years. Then follows the comprehensive examinations, development of a dissertation prospectus, selection of an advisor and committee, and advancement to candidacy, typically occurring at the end of the third year. A period of fieldwork and the writing of the dissertation take two or more years beyond that. When the dissertation is complete the student presents and defends it at a final oral examination. At some point before the degree can be conferred, demonstration of one more language proficiency is required.

For the PhD comprehensive exams the student and the advisor jointly select five broad topics, which the student then investigates independently for 6 months. Closer to the exam date these topics are narrowed down to specific questions. At the exam itself, which takes place over two days, students typically are given two hours to address two of the questions in essay format. A third topic is given as a lecture to an undergraduate class, and the fourth is presented in the form of a professional conference paper. The last topic is written up in advance in the form of a fieldwork report, a comparative book review, or as a major grant proposal. All that said, the form of the comprehensive exams is often revised, and the faculty is open to negotiating with the student on what sorts of exam formats are most suitable in each case. At the discretion of the faculty, there may be a follow-up oral examination. (For more information consult Prof. Tenzer or Prof. Hesselink.)

What courses are typically offered?

Profs. Tenzer and Hesselink each teach 5 courses per year: 3 academic courses and 2 performance/ensemble courses. The courses offered (virtually) every year without fail are:

- Music 165/565: *Korean, West African, or Balinese music performance* (must be taken for both terms)
- Music 128: *Musical Rhythm and Human Experience* (each September; an undergraduate intro)
- Music 529: *Introduction to Ethnomusicology* (each September; the foundational course for new graduate students)

Among those offered in rotation are:

- Music 428: *Area Studies in Music* has been (or will be) offered as *Indonesian Music, Korean Music, African Music, North Indian Music* and others
- Music 328: *World Music Cultures* (an upper level undergraduate survey)
- Music 403/530. *Oral Composition*
- Graduate courses (open to upper-level undergraduates at the instructor's discretion) have recently included:
 - Human Musicality*
 - Ethnography and Representation*
 - Categories and Concepts in Musical Thought*
 - Popular Music Analysis and Collaborative Aesthetics*
 - Periodicity in Music*
 - Transcription and Analysis*
 - Music Origins and Universals*
 - World Systems of Melody and Mode*
 - West African Musical Thought and Aesthetics*
- Courses on Jazz and Popular Music are frequently offered from a variety of perspectives by Prof. David Metzger (historical musicology) and Prof. Hesselink
- Musicianship courses on *Korean* or *South Indian Rhythm*
- Graduate students may also propose Music 512: *Directed/Individual Study* at any time

This list grows and changes as the years pass; we are constantly developing new course syllabi and ideas, and are open to suggestions.

What else?

If your questions have not been answered, please write us! If you can visit our campus, you are welcome to sit in on classes or ensembles and discuss the program in further detail. If you wish to contact one of our students to get their impressions, we will be happy to arrange it.

Sincerely,



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