

Proposal: Sabbatical Leave

Name: Michael Müller, Music Professor
Proposal Date: March 3, 2022
Proposed Leave: Fall 2022 Semester (August 2022 to December 2022)
Previous Sabbaticals: 0
Seniority of Service: Nine (9) years at COM-FSM, since September 2013

Introduction

I have to travel to Austria, Europe this summer in order to renew my passport. With no repatriation flights being scheduled for the foreseeable future, it is uncertain whether or not I can return to Pohnpei in time for the Fall 2022 semester. Therefore, it seems to me that this is an appropriate time to ask for a sabbatical leave of about four months time (August-December 2022).

Background

I will be staying with my family in Vienna, a European capital with a long and varied musical, cultural, and political history. This will afford me some opportunities that I do not have on Pohnpei. I therefore want to make sure that I can use my time abroad in a productive way, which will benefit my students, COM-FSM, and myself.

Projects

Since four months time does not allow me to take on too many projects, I want to concentrate on writing a new course textbook and researching electronic dance music.

1.) WRITING A COURSE TEXTBOOK

Background: The current course textbook (Alfred's Piano 101: An Exciting Group Course for Adults Who Want to Play Piano for Fun! By E. L. Lancaster and Kenon D. Renfrow) has not proven effective for my music classes. The students are unfamiliar with most of the musical examples (European folk songs and classical compositions), and there is no emphasis on contemporary popular music. The book only addresses the piano/keyboard, but not the ukulele, guitar, or singing voice.

Goal: I therefore want to write and print my own course textbook, which will address the unique needs and preferences of Micronesian students. I will compile all the materials I have used from various sources in the past and organize them in a way that will fit neatly into a sixteen week college course. The main areas of study will include basic keyboard, ukulele, guitar, percussion, and vocal skills. Further areas of study will cover music theory, history, songwriting, and arranging.

Content: Musical examples will be taken from contemporary styles such as Christian rock, worship, Nashville country & western, teenage pop, bluegrass, and electronic dance music (EDM). Artists will include Allison Krauss, Kenny Rogers, Dolly Parton, Matt Redman, Avicii, Taylor Swift, Ed Sheeran, Bruno Mars, Megan Trainor, John Legend, Ariana Grande, Hillsong, Brian Doerksen, Lauren Daigle, among others that my students are familiar with. Topics will center around melody, chords, accompaniment, singing, popular styles, arrangements, compositions, strumming, finger-picking, harmonization, background vocals, song forms, contemporary musicians and computer generated music.

Purpose: After using this book, students should be able to teach themselves new songs, figure out how to strum them on the ukulele, be able to pick out its melody on the keyboard, and then teach the song to their friends or family. They should also be able to write their own songs, produce them on their laptop, and record their singing. Lastly, they should be able to make a music video, upload it on social media, and generate followers and frequent views.

References: My sources will include all the materials that I have used for my classes so far: books on music theory and history, collections of sheet music, online tutorials, educational videos, and music software. I will have to make sure that I do not violate any of the current copyright laws and that I get permission from the authors whose materials I use beforehand. Here are a few examples of reference books I plan to use:

- The Daily Ukulele: 365 Songs for Better Living
- Rise Up Singing: The Group Singing Songbook
- All About Hand Percussion: Everything You Need to Know to Start Playing Now!
- Guitar Book for Adult Beginners: Teach Yourself How to Play
- Teaching Electronic Music: Cultural, Creative, and Analytical Perspectives

Method: I would like to put all the musical examples on one audio CD that will be attached to the textbook. It will include accompaniment tracks for each exercise, which make practicing them more enjoyable for the students. Strumming the ukulele is more fun with a drum and bass accompaniment, and hearing the melody played by a piano makes it much easier to learn a new song. Music should not just be learned from a book, but the student also needs to hear the examples played with accurate pitch, steady time, and precise rhythms.

Time-frame: After the textbook is completed and proofread, I want to first make it available online for free in December 2022. Other music educators on Pacific islands might take notice and start using it for their classes as well. I also want to get about fifty copies printed, so that I can give each student a copy during class time. The textbook

will then have to be reviewed and approved by the curriculum committee at COM-FSM before it can officially replace the old coursebook. This process will take some time, but I think that the result will be worth the time, effort, and work.

ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC (EDM)

Background: Most of today's popular music is produced on computers and recorded with state of the art technology. My students should be able to write music on a computer and record their songs on a laptop. They need to know what software to use, where to place the microphone, how to film a solid music video, and how to market themselves and their music on social media platforms.

Goal: I therefore want to do some research in Vienna on contemporary music production and marketing. Ask for informal interviews with successful music producers of electronic dance music (EDM) and ask them how they first acquired their skills. In order to get started, one does not need much more than a powerful laptop, the right music software, a high-quality microphone, and a USB-capable keyboard in order to produce a decent song. All this equipment can be made available to our students at COM-FSM.

Content: In terms of music hardware, I plan to research wireless microphones, auto-tune racks, mixing boards, active speakers, digital recorders, MIDI keyboard controllers, Bluetooth headphones, and video cameras.

Music software keeps changing and evolving all the time. It also needs to be easy to use and affordable to our students. I plan to do research in the following fields:

- Choir and learn-to-sing software: (Cantor, Singing Coach)
- Digital audio workstation (DAW) software: (Audacity, Pro Tools, GarageBand)
- Music composing software: (FL Studio, Magix Music Maker, JFugue)
- Music education software: (Soundtrap, EarMaster, Rocksmith)
- Music notation software: (Sibelius, Finale, Frescobaldi)
- Internet, RSS, broadcast music software: (Airtime, Campcaster)

Purpose: If we want our students to be successful in today's music world, which is a global multi-million dollar business, they need to develop their musical talent, acquire discipline and perseverance, know their own culture and musical heritage, stay up to date with current music trends, and know how to record and produce their own music on just a laptop. As a teacher, I believe that a greater emphasis on electronic dance music (EDM) will give my students a better chance to succeed in today's music world. I think that my desire to stay up to date as a teacher is also supported by our mission statement: "COM-FSM is a learner-centered institution of higher education that is committed to the success of the FSM by providing academic and career & technical educational programs characterized by continuous improvement and best practices."

References: Here are some books I plan to read during my sabbatical:

Making Music: 74 Creative Strategies for Electronic Music Producers by DeSantis

The Creative Habit by Twyla Tharp

The Mixing Engineer's Handbook by Bobby Owsinski

Music Theory, Harmony & Composition for Computer Musicians by M. Hewitt

Electronic Dance Music Grooves: House, Techno, Hip-Hop, Dubstep, and More!

But more importantly, I hope to interview some Viennese music producers and ask them about the beginning of their careers and what advice they can give my students.

Method: Since most of our students have their own laptops by now, they just need to install the right music software. They then need to learn how to use it in order to write, compose, record, produce, and market their own songs. This will take up a good chunk of their future class time, but it will also teach them the necessary survival skills for today's music business world. Just as in any other field, musicians constantly need to practice, network, learn new things, be open-minded, and become better at what they do. This is true for my students as well as myself. Being a musician does not just mean singing and strumming a ukulele. My students can become performers, composers of film scores, software engineers, stage designers, accompanists, teachers, songwriters, Broadway dancers, or record producers. But they need to understand first that they have to become lifelong learners first and that these careers require years of hard work.

Timeframe: I want to use my sabbatical to learn all the basics of electronic dance music (EDM) production. Then set priorities according to what I can teach most easily and cost-effective to my students. As I have mentioned before, a lot can be accomplished with just a laptop, an electronic keyboard (with a USB port), and a high-quality microphone. I want to start teaching my students about electronic dance music (EDM) during the Spring 2023 semester.

ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL PROJECTS:

Choir Conducting: *My background in music is predominantly in jazz piano, for which I have had very little use in Micronesia thus far. Instead, I need to be able to teach basic keyboard, ukulele, guitar, and singing skills to my students, as well as some music theory, history, and pedagogy. In the future, I would like to practice more choir music with them, especially songs that have separate soprano, alto, tenor, and bass (vocal) parts. I hope to get basic training as a choir director during my sabbatical, specifically on choir conducting, repertoire selection (songs that are neither too hard nor easy), rehearsal techniques, and classroom pedagogy.*

Online Collaborations: *During this pandemic, many music teachers have taken their classes*

online. I plan to network with other music teachers in Vienna, in order to establish and organize international future online collaborations. This could involve having my students teach Micronesian songs to a student choir in Vienna via Skype/Zoom, and vice versa. Or to have my students give online presentations on Micronesian culture, singing, and ukulele playing.

Fundraising: When I started teaching at COM-FSM in 2013, there was no guitar, only one ukulele, too few functioning keyboards, and no microphones. We have acquired all of these things by now, but much of the college's music equipment has become old, damaged, or worn-out from frequent use. I hope to find sponsors in Vienna who can help me purchase new instruments, music software, and sound systems/hardware for my course (MU101: Introduction to Music). Austria is one of the richest countries in Europe, and also the birthplace of composers such as Wolfgang A. Mozart, Richard Strauss, and Arnold Schönberg. Most likely, there is at least one Austrian foundation or cooperation who is willing to donate something useful to a music program in a developing nation (as part of their public relation efforts). However, this will involve some research and grant writing on my part. Writing grant proposals is not something that I have a lot of experience with, but it is a necessary skill, which can serve me well in the future. This sabbatical can make me a better grant proposal writer.

Networking: I have seen the outstanding work that other Micronesian music teachers are doing with their primary and high-school students. However, I don't get much of a chance to talk to them or find out about their needs, experiences, and future plans. I therefore hope to start an online platform for ALL Micronesian teachers involved in music education, in order to enable and further the exchange of ideas in regards to music pedagogy in the classroom. I keep running into the same problems with my music students year after year (such as tardiness, lack of active participation, shyness), so I would like to know how other Micronesian teachers address these issues successfully. And maybe I can help them with some of their problems in return.

Fresh Perspectives: Lastly, I have gotten stuck in my ways as a music teacher over the course of the last nine years. How I teach my class seems to work well, but that does not mean that there is no longer any room for improvement. Traveling to Europe might give me new and unexpected ideas on how to best teach my class at COM-FSM. I want other people to look at videos of my student concerts and tell me what they see and hear with their fresh pairs of eyes and ears. I get too little feedback from professional musicians and fellow music educators here on Pohnpei, so a sabbatical in Europe will enable me to (in)formally meet with them in person and to have candid discussions.

Benefit:

I hope I have been able to successfully outline in what ways my sabbatical can benefit my students, the college, and myself. I am also open to any additional suggestions and would appreciate and strongly consider them. If I had a choice, I would just stay on Pohnpei and not take this trip at all. But since I have to renew my passport and do not know when the repatriation flights will resume, I want to make sure that I can use my time off-island in the most productive and beneficial way. I therefore want to thank you in advance for considering my proposal and informing me of your decision. Should it be a negative one, I will do my best to work with my supervisors to explore other alternatives in the best interest of my students and the college.