

**University of Southern California  
Thornton School of Music  
MUSC – 255 Songwriting I  
Mondays, 5:00 – 6:50 pm, Fall 2018**

**Instructor:** Christopher Sampson  
**Phone:** 213/821-1096  
**Office:** LPB 116  
**Office Hours:** By appointment  
**Email:** [sampson@usc.edu](mailto:sampson@usc.edu)

**Final Exam Date:** MONDAY, DECEMBER, 10TH, 2018 – 4:30 PM – 6:30 PM

**I. Course Description**

Organization of musical ideas and words into the writing of popular songs. Analysis of current and historic songwriting trends. Emphasis is on building skills towards efficient use and knowledge of the songwriting craft with the ultimate goal of working towards individual creativity and/or commercial viability. The class will take an “emulate, assimilate and innovate” approach.

**II. Basic Supplies**

1. Ability to make simple audio recordings (Phone quality is fine)
2. Ability to legally download or stream music and create playlists (iTunes, Spotify, etc.)
3. Your instrument

**III. Required Books**

1. *Steal Like an Artist: 10 Things Nobody Told You About Being Creative* by Austin Kleon
2. *Songwriters on Songwriting: Revised and Expanded* by Paul Zollo

**IV. Learning outcomes**

At the conclusion of this class you will be able to demonstrate a proficient level of organizing harmonic, melodic, rhythmic and lyrical elements into a compelling and cohesive structure through the writing of original songs. This class will help establish a “creative habit” that will increase the flow of original ideas and will lead you towards

developing your unique songwriting “voice”. Songwriting I will also provide a historical context to songwriting and trends. Additionally, this class will help you write with intention either for yourself as an artist, other artists, in collaboration and for a wide range markets.

## V. Assignments and grading

**Writing Sessions – 25% of grade.** Over the course of the semester each student will be required to participate in a minimum of 3 writing sessions. These writing sessions will be with one or two of your other Songwriting I classmates (no more than three songwriters on a session.) A writing session is initiated and scheduled by you with your classmates. The goal is for you and your collaborators to complete a song in a single session. To receive credit, you will complete out an online form providing information about the song and writer credits. Songs from writing sessions will be performed regularly in class throughout the semester. To receive full credit in this category, all students will perform a song from a writing session at least once.

**Assignments – 20% of grade:** A variety of assignments will be offered throughout the semester designed to strengthen your skills as a songwriter. These assignments will be in-class and out of class. These can include, but aren’t limited to, writing of full or partial songs, analysis exercises, lyric writing exercises, etc.

**Mid-term song (October 15<sup>th</sup>):** **20%**

**Final Showcase/Exam (December 10<sup>th</sup>):** **25%**

**Participation and Collaboration:** **10%**

### GENERAL NOTES ON ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION

- All songs will be submitted by a simple demo recording and lyrics. Additional materials such as lead sheets or analysis papers might be required depending on the assignment.
- The Final Exam Showcase will be open to the public and you are welcome to invite friends and family.
- All lyrics should be neatly typed, organized in a way that shows the song form, and free of typos.

- Mid-term and Final songs will be written independently (no co-writes). A brief 3-4 page paper will be submitted along with the song and performance detailing your creative process.

## VI. Additional Information

1. **Establish a Work Environment/Schedule** – to the best of your ability, create a consistent work space and schedule that is conducive to your creativity. Have materials prepared and available, it often helps (depending on what/how you're working) if your area is organized and uncluttered. A regular schedule may also help in making you more productive.
2. **Late Assignments** – Late assignments will be marked down accordingly.
3. **Attendance and Participation** – Attendance and participation is expected at all classes. I do not consider excused/unexcused absences. You are permitted one absence. Anything beyond one absence will impact your Participation portion of your grade.

### Songwriting I Code Of Respect

It takes a lot of courage to present an original composition in front of other people. Every student's performance will be heard with respect and all feedback will be constructive. Each student is responsible for fostering a classroom atmosphere in which it is OK to take artistic and creative risks.

### NOT YOUR USUAL CLASS

Creativity and the individual needs of students can be unpredictable and can vary from class to class. It's my job to monitor the interests, strengths, weaknesses and potential of the entire class and orchestrate the content, pace and assignments to maximize the experience. Therefore, it's generally very difficult to provide a week-by-week break down of the activities. I will provide, however, very clear and adequate notice of when assignments, songs and other required course materials are due.

## Important Dates

September 3rd – Labor Day (no class)

September 11th – Last day to add or drop class

October 15<sup>th</sup> – Mid-term song

November 9<sup>th</sup> – Last day to drop class with a grade of “W”

December 10<sup>th</sup> – Final Exam Showcase

## Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

## Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.