

# Music in Christian Worship (MUSC 137/RELC 138): Syllabus

Andrew A. Cashner, PhD

## Course Links

- Schedule
- Blackboard
- YouTube playlist
- Contact Prof. Cashner
- Download PDF of this page

## Course Information

MUSC 137, RELC 13  
Music in Christian Worship  
University of Rochester  
Spring 2021  
4.0 credits

## Instructor

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Pronouns: He, him, his

## Weekly Meeting Times

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:40–10:55 a.m.

The class will be taught fully online but on time (remote, synchronous). All class meetings will be online via Zoom, at the link on the class Blackboard site.

## Final Exam Time

Thursday, March 13, 4 p.m.

There will be no final exam in this course, but the time of the final exam will be serve as a final deadline for all work in this course.

# Course Overview and Goals

## Catalog Description

This course explores the changing functions and meanings of music in Christian worship practices, from the first-century house churches to contemporary megachurches. We will see how Christians developed music and ritual to embody their beliefs and structure their communities. We will listen closely to music ranging from Gregorian chant and liturgical music of Palestrina, Bach, and Mozart to Protestant hymns and psalms and contemporary evangelical worship music. The course will equip students to understand how people have used music to create relationships with God and with each other.

Rather than presenting worship as a single, unchanging tradition or elevating one type of liturgy above all others, this course focuses on different Christian communities' creative responses to times of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic. The course will emphasize Christianity's global dimensions, with special emphasis on the problems of intercultural missions and colonization and the contributions of women and people of color.

The instructor is both a musicologist specializing in Christian worship and a practicing worship leader (at New Hope Free Methodist Church in Rochester). No musical training or knowledge is required, nor is religious background or belief. ##  
Learning Goals

1. Demonstrate understanding of the changing role of music in Christian worship across its history, and how Christians have adapted their worship practices in response to crises in the church and society.
2. Demonstrate the ability to explain the differences we see today in the worship practices of various Christian denominations and churches, in historical and theological context.
3. Demonstrate understanding of the ways Christians have used music, according to their belief, to connect with God and each other in community.

## What This Course Is Not

1. The content and assignments in this course are not meant to promote any particular form of religious belief or practice. The course maintains a neutral position on the truth claims of any religious tradition. The goal is to understand other people's beliefs and practices of worship.
2. It also is not meant to promote any particular tradition of Christian worship. It does not trace the "rise and fall" of any ideal liturgy.
3. This course is not a comprehensive survey of "sacred music," nor of Christianity.
4. It is not a technically oriented music course, though students with technical knowledge of music theory or history should apply it.

## Anti-Racist Goals

The teaching of music in this university, like most others, has traditionally emphasized almost exclusively the work of European and white North American men, cultivated by the upper classes of the most powerful societies at the height of colonialism. It has also traditionally ignored or silenced any discussion of that fact. Doing so has resulted in a false, whitewashed history and the promotion of the value system and ideology of white supremacy. Moreover, this institution and others like it have historically discriminated against women and non-white people, and continues to do so in both overt and hidden or even unconscious ways. We have a moral obligation to work against racist structures, policies, and attitudes in our academic disciplines as researchers, in our classrooms as teachers, and in our university as faculty members.

In my research and teaching I am committed to the work of presenting an accurate history of music as a human activity, that gives due respect and attention to the music-making of people across social stations and in everyday life. We cannot understand, for example, the "art music" of the elite without understanding its intimate relationship with more popular and traditional forms of music-making. We must actively work to give more attention to the music of women, ethnic minorities, historically disadvantaged peoples, people of lower economic status, and people outside Europe and North America—including not just as composers but as performers, patrons, and listeners. Educators like me must work harder to make sure that we give the musical creativity of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color the central position in our histories and theories of music that it deserves.

My own training was, unfortunately, narrowly Eurocentric, and I have been working over many years to try to expand my horizons and appreciation of a broader world of music, and to sharpen my critical understanding of the power dynamics that created the white-dominated worldview in which I was raised. But I recognize I have a long way to go, and I ask for your help in identifying ways that I and my colleagues can improve our anti-racist efforts.

## Assessments and Grading

### Overview of Assignments

Assignment	Percentage of Final Grade
Learning journal (due every 2 weeks)	15% (about 2% each)
Comparative ethnography paper	25% (20% reports, 15% final paper)
Midterm exams (2)	40% (20% each)
Group “worship song” project	20%

### Assignments in Detail

#### Weekly Learning Journal

Due every two weeks. Reflect on your learning: what you found interesting, exciting, or upsetting; what was new or challenging to preconceived notions; what challenges or obstacles you are encountering in the learning process.

Briefly summarize the main themes of the readings and class sessions and try to make some connections between them or raise questions about them.

Graded “satisfactory” if the writing demonstrates significant engagement with the course materials and learning goals, “unsatisfactory” if it does not, zero if not turned in.

#### Comparative Ethnography Paper

Visit or observe (in person or online as need be) two different worship events in distinct Christian communities. A “worship event” would be one of the community’s primary gatherings, such as a Sunday liturgy or worship service, though in the age of COVID many things are possible. For each of the two events, describe what you observe in detail, analyze the event in relation to what you are learning about the history of music in Christian worship, and try to situate that event in the context of the tradition that community represents. Compare the two events, looking for both commonalities and differences.

Turn in, first, one ethnographic report for each event. Then after receiving feedback on these, write a coherent essay synthesizing your findings and critical reflections.

#### Exams

There will be two midterm exams in the format of open-notes essays. The exams will assess your knowledge of the core concepts discussed in class and your ability to think critically about how they connect to each other and their relevance to contemporary issues.

#### Group Project: Genealogy of a Worship Song

In a small group, trace the history of a given worship song backwards and forwards in time as far as you can go, including different translations, adaptations, and music based on it. Identify primary sources of the text and tune, and situate the song in the context of one or more traditions of Christian worship.

Share your findings with the class in a presentation including musical examples and a visual element like presentation slides. The presentation should include a bibliography of primary and secondary sources. Every group member must make a documentable contribution.

## Grade Scale

Percent	Letter
93–100	A
90–92	A-
87–89	B+
83–86	B
80–82	B-
77–79	C+
73–76	C
70–72	C-
67–69	D+
63–66	D
60–62	D-
0–59	E

## Policies

### Due Dates and Late Assignments

- The assignments are due at on the day and at the time listed on the schedule, via the relevant assignment portal on Blackboard.
- I am happy to grant assignment extensions or modifications as they are needed, but I must to do them in advance of the due date and in writing.
- You may turn in any assignment up to one week late without an extension, for a deduction of one full letter grade from what you would have otherwise received.
- Without an extension, I will give 50% credit (but no more) for any late assignment that you turn in before the final day of classes, as long as it meets minimum requirements.

### Academic Honesty

- You must adhere to the university's policies for academic honesty. The university requires me to report every case of academic dishonesty to the Academic Honesty Board, and I will report every case.
- Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, which means using other people's ideas and words with giving them appropriate credit, including verbatim copying and missing, false, or misleading citations.

### Disabilities and Hardships

- I am committed to making this course equally accessible for all students. If you need a disability accommodation, please contact the Disability Office and they will let me know how to accommodate you without specifying the nature of your disability.
- If you have some other hardship like illness, including chronic illness, family crisis, or economic insecurity, I will do as much as I can to accommodate you. Please stay closely in touch about your situation (as it pertains to the course) and give me plenty of advance notice when you can.
- I would also ask you to be flexible with me, and be prepared that things may need to change because of COVID-19. Like many of your instructors I will be balancing new challenges in teaching against new and changing situations affecting my family, especially my two children in elementary school.