

**University of Texas El Paso**  
**Department of Music**  
**MUSA 3391 Individual Instruction - Voice**

**Mr. Brian Downen**  
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**Office Hours: by appointment**

**Prerequisite**

Successful audition for the voice faculty

**Course Description**

The study of fundamental vocal production concepts and application of those concepts in specific vocal repertoire. Additional study in historical and genre-specific performance practice and self- and peer-assessment.

**Course Content**

Student shall:

- Independently practice assigned vocal exercises/vocalizes specifically designed to promote vocal growth and a better understanding of the fundamental concepts of vocal technique.
- Independently prepare and memorize assigned vocal repertoire following the guidelines outlined in the UTEP Vocal Division Handbook for each major and level of study.
  - For all repertoire:
    - Learn and memorize assigned repertoire with accuracy of pitch, rhythm, diction, appropriate vocal style and musical expression.
    - Research the composer, poet or lyricist, historical period and context of the piece as it was originally performed.
    - Listen to several recordings performed by recognized professionals in the genre of each piece using sources such as YouTube, Spotify, Rhapsody, etc.
  - For repertoire in a language other than those spoken fluently by the student, the student will also:
    - Obtain and type (using Microsoft Word or similar) a literal (non poetic) line-by line English translation in a side by side format with the original text for use in study, presentation in studio class and for use in recital and concert programs.
    - Write the literal (not poetic) line-by-line translation and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols for the text into student's copy of the music. Provide a three-hole punched

back-to-back copy of this work for placement in Mr. Downen's office binder.

- For repertoire from a musical or an opera the student will also:
  - Obtain and study a synopsis of the complete work.
  - Research the character and understand who he/she is in the context of the work.
  - Research the scene to which the piece belongs.
- For pop, jazz or rock repertoire:
  - Study several recordings, arrangements and remakes of the song, using sources such as YouTube, Spotify, Rhapsody, etc.
- Perform the assigned repertoire to a level acceptable for professional presentation with accuracy of pitch, rhythm, text, diction and with appropriate vocal style and dramatic expression appropriate for the piece.
- Evaluate self- and peer-performances with appropriate terminology and constructive commentary, in person and in writing.

### **Course Objectives:**

The objectives of this course are to increase the student's ability to:

- Identify, discuss and demonstrate consistent practice of the primary vocal concepts of posture, respiration, phonation, resonance and articulation.
- Develop and utilize research skills in order to adequately prepare a piece of music for study and performance.
- Develop and utilize efficient practice skills.
- Develop the skills necessary to combine technical and expressive qualities of singing to create an artistically fulfilling performance.
- Objectively assess their own performances and those of their peers through in-person discussion and written essay.

### **Course Outcomes**

At the completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Effectively vocalize to balance the voice and body in preparation for practice or performance.
- Identify and utilize specific vocal exercises in order to promote vocal growth.
- Perform 5-7 songs from memory with accuracy of pitch, rhythm, diction, appropriate tone quality and musical expression.
- Use objective criticism to evaluate personal performances and performances of peers in order to inform their own artistic progress.

### **Course Requirements**

- Attend all scheduled lessons.
- Audio or video record all voice lessons and review at least once before the next lesson.
- Practice 1-2 hours daily outside of the weekly lesson, working on vocalization exercises assigned in lessons and studying and learning assigned repertoire. Total practice per week: 7-9 hours.

- Prepare and memorize 5-7 songs for performance on area/departmental recital, studio class and juries.
- Maintain a regular practice journal containing dates and content of practice sessions.
- Maintain a research journal for each assigned piece that includes text translations into English, synopsis, character analysis, acting notes and student's own thoughts about the text, music, arrangements, ideas for performance, and the emotional or theatrical landscape of the piece.
- Perform at least once on Voice Area Recital and twice in studio class.
- Attend all scheduled studio classes and perform as assigned.
- Provide at least 5 written critiques of live performances of vocal peers from area recital, departmental recital or studio class.
- Read assigned materials.
- Perform a final jury for the voice faculty. This is the final exam for the course and will be graded based on preparation, memorization, musical and textual accuracy, artistic presentation and incorporation of fundamental concepts of vocal technique (see Objectives, first bullet point).

### **Materials and Personal Equipment**

- 3 copies of each assigned piece in 3 separate three ring binders (for self, accompanist and instructor). The instructor's binder is to be kept in FFA office 333.
- Practice journal and Research Journal (composition notebook)
- Audio or Video recording device (iPhone or similar okay)
- A copy of the International Phonetic Alphabet pronunciation guide for English, Spanish, Italian, French and German
- Access to the Internet

### **Grading**

Grades are based on the following criteria:

- 50%: Weekly lesson grades
  - Attendance (see attendance policy below)
  - Arrival with voice in teachable condition
  - Active Participation in the lesson
  - Completion of assignments (ie. Text translations and IPA work)
  - Evidence of consistent practice
  - Mastery of assigned exercises and concepts
- 10%: Written Work
  - Written critiques of peer performances
  - Completion and quality of research journal
  - Completion and quality of practice journal
- 10%: Performance on Area Recital.
  - Students sign up for Area Recital date. Grade will be lowered if dates must be reassigned due to lack of preparation.

- Performances will be graded based on preparation, memorization, musical and textual accuracy, artistic presentation and incorporation of fundamental concepts of vocal technique (see Objectives, first bullet point).
- 30%: Jury Grade
  - Average of grades assigned by the Voice Area faculty or Commercial Area faculty if applicable.

NOTE: No automatic withdrawals will be given by the instructor.

### **Attendance Policy**

- Students are required to attend 14 one-hour (50-minute) lessons or 28 half hour (25-minute) lessons each semester. Lessons will be scheduled at the beginning of the semester and constitute a class that meets weekly at the same time. The instructor will determine whether the student takes one 50-minute lesson or two 25-minute lessons per week.

### **Excused Absences**

- Students are permitted one excused absence per semester. More than one absence, no matter the reason, will reflect poorly on the student's grade.
- Only illness or family emergency will be accepted as a reason for an excused absence. All other reasons constitute an unexcused absence.

### **Unexcused Absences**

- The student forfeits the lesson if they arrive more than 10 minutes late for a 25-minute lesson or more than 15 minutes late for a 50-minute lesson.
- The student's absence is unexcused no matter the reason if they fail to show for the lesson without prior notification.
- The student's absence is unexcused if they cancel for any reason other than illness or family emergency.

### **Lesson Cancellation Policy**

- Notify Mr. Downen as soon as possible, but no later than 9:00 a.m. the day of your lesson. Email Mr. Downen with the word CANCELLATION in the subject line and briefly describe your reason. Text messages are also acceptable. Be sure to include your name and make certain you receive a confirmation from Mr. Downen that your message (whether email or text) has been received.

### **Make-up Lesson Policy**

- Lessons missed by Mr. Downen will be made up.
- Lessons missed or cancelled by the student will not be made up except in the case of an emergency.

### **Communication**

- Student will communicate with Mr. Downen by email, or when time is of the essence or in case of emergency, by text message or phone call. In all communications, be sure to include your name and be sure that you receive confirmation from Mr. Downen that your message has been received.
- Mr. Downen will communicate with the student by email. It is the responsibility of the student to check their UTEP email twice daily. If time is of the essence or in case of emergency, communication will be by text message or by phone call.

### **Concert Attendance**

- Students are expected to attend all choral music concerts and one performance of each opera workshop production.
- Students are expected to attend all voice recitals.

### **Extracurricular Performance Policy**

According to the UTEP Vocal Area Handbook, all performance and/or coaching opportunities outside the UTEP Vocal Area should be discussed with Mr. Downen before accepting. This includes: UTEP Dinner Theater, Theatre Department productions, professional choirs, master classes with guest artists or local teachers. AUDITION FOR EVERYTHING, but discuss with Mr. Downen before accepting anything.

### **Useful Resources**

<http://www.ipasource.com>

<http://artsongcentral.com/wp-content/uploads/ipaquickguide.pdf>

<http://www.aria-database.com>

<http://www.schubertline.co.uk/home.htm>

<http://www.musicnotes.com>

<http://www.sheetmusicplus.com/welcome>

<http://www.classicalvocalrep.com>

### **Vocal Health**

Effective practice is very important in order to progress toward your vocal and performance potential. However, excessive practice or singing in excess of two hours per day can be counterproductive and dangerous to your vocal health. Listen to your body. Give yourself appropriate rest periods. Hydrate, do not smoke, avoid overuse of caffeine and alcohol, get adequate sleep, stay healthy and do not abuse

your voice (ie. talking over loud environments, yelling at sporting events or concerts, etc.).

### **Academic Honesty**

<http://sa.utep.edu/osccr/academic-integrity/>

**If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations**, please contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at 747-5148, or by email to [cass@utep.edu](mailto:cass@utep.edu), or visit their office located in UTEP Union East, Room 106. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at [www.sa.utep.edu/cass](http://www.sa.utep.edu/cass). *CASS' Staff are the only individuals who can validate and if need be, authorize accommodations for students with disabilities.*