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Beyond Interdisciplinary: Igniting Transdisciplinary Thinking in Tomorrow's Music Technology Graduates

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of innovative music technology programs in higher education is a promising indicator of continued interest in associated careers. Institutions that offer courses motivating the interdisciplinary aspects of the subject tend to produce students that feel greater assurance about the skills they have gained, but institutions lacking that curricular flexibility must chart a different path to the same goal. Curricular structures are often such that multiple disciplines must be motivated disjointly, prioritizing development of pure disciplinary perspectives over cultivation of interdisciplinary discernment. Yet the distilling of constituent disciplines into individual pillars of study presents significant opportunity, as observed in pioneering a new music technology degree at a private, mid-size university. In an academic landscape where students are made to acquire the fundamental perspectives of constituent disciplines first, music-technology coursework should be positioned so that it overtly capitalizes upon the confluence of individual disciplinary perspectives.

Ultimately, this pursuit underscores a philosophical maxim about multidisciplinary in music technology: the concurrence of disciplines in this domain is not most valuable for its potential to facilitate interdisciplinary integration, but rather for its potential to fuse individual perspectives into a holistic system that itself transcends the boundaries of its components: a transdisciplinary system. Music technology courses need to reach beyond interdisciplinarity and confront pupils with transdisciplinary thinking. In structuring coursework around problems that presume multidisciplinary familiarity and demand comprehensive reasoning across disciplinary

perspectives, we challenge students to engage in the thinking that will transform them into tomorrow's practitioners.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

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Dr. Mark De Zwaan is a pianist and educator with extensive background in technology. An Assistant Professor at Bradley University, De Zwaan is a versatile instructor that has taught courses in applied and group piano, music theory, aural skills, music history, and music technology. He is the founder of Bradley's Digital Music Technology degree, an interdisciplinary program combining courses of the traditional music curriculum with studies in communications, interactive media, and computer science. Passionate about the techniques of electronic-music production, De Zwaan has also forged courses in audio production and computer music and enjoys connecting with digital musicians as an adjudicator for the Illinois Music Educators Association and as Composition Mentor for the Music Production Track at the Illinois Music Educators Conference. His career as a classical pianist is a prominent aspect of his professional activities. De Zwaan has been featured as a soloist and chamber musician on three continents, appearing at venues such as the Steinway Pacific Headquarters in Shanghai, China and at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Washington D.C. He is also a seasoned jazz pianist and frequents venues throughout central Illinois as a soloist and within the rhythm sections of larger groups. De Zwaan educational background includes undergraduate degrees in Piano Performance and Recording Arts from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, where he also earned Master's and Doctoral degrees in Piano Performance and Literature. De Zwaan also holds a Master of Science in Computer Science from the Georgia Institute of Technology.