OSCAR
Mentoring Excellence Award
Nominee

Name: Greg Robinson

Department: School of Music

Number of Nominations: 1

1. What characteristics make the nominee an exceptional mentor?
   - Dr. Robinson is an inspirational mentor to our music students and non-majors in the areas of ethnomusicology and world music. He is a fantastic faculty member and excellent researcher who exhibits tremendous commitment to scholarship and research as well as amazing dedication to the undergraduate student learning experience. He initiated student writing seminars and scholarly discourse on world music, and led world music ensembles, which created exceptional opportunities for the undergraduates to know and love "musics of the world."

   ~ Colleague

2. If you personally worked with the nominee, please describe your experience.
   - Dr. Greg Robinson is one of our esteemed and highly regarded faculty members within our School of Music (he was recently promoted to Associate Professor without term). I have been his supervisor for several years and can state without reservation that he is a "star" faculty member in every respect. His teaching and his research are superb. Most importantly for this award, he truly cares about his students and takes the necessary time to make sure they are receiving extraordinary learning experiences.

   ~ Colleague
NARRATIVE STATEMENT FOR OSCAR MENTORING AWARD

All university faculty have core priorities and values that they wish to get across to students, while students, for their part, arrive on campus at very different points in their own individual journeys. To me, productive mentoring is about listening to students—trying to understand where they are in their journeys when we cross their paths, and finding ways to make connections between our core priorities and their most pressing interests and concerns.

My own teaching and mentoring values center on helping undergraduate students understand music’s crucial role in constructing concepts like race, nation, and tradition; getting them to see that these categories of differentiation are reflections of social relationships rather than elements of a “natural” order; and helping them develop an orientation toward research and critical thought that empowers them to move beyond unquestioning acceptance of handed-down assumptions and toward thoughtful living and listening. These priorities are informed by the fact that the ethnomusicology program, in which students study music as culture, is a small and specialized corner of Mason’s music curriculum. In this context, my charge as a mentor extends beyond cultivating specialists in my own discipline, and includes efforts to enrich the musical and intellectual lives of students with widely varying levels of musical engagement. There are several key mentoring practices by which I strive to make my own goals meaningful to students.

1. I strive to create a structure within which students are aware of opportunities for research and creative activity. Students often connect to course material in unexpected places, so I try to offer as many ways of engaging as possible. This could be as simple as playing recordings of South American indigenous hip-hop before class or mentioning that there are internship opportunities at NPR’s *All Songs Considered* after the class views a clip from a Tiny Desk Concert. This also means creating pathways for engagement with new research methods and performance practices, like the ethnomusicology minor and the Celtic Ensemble.

2. I build research and writing assignments that encourage students toward independent thought and critical reflection. This semester, I have created an assignment for a music majors’ class in which students work together to produce a collaborative ethnography on the Green Machine, an ensemble with which most of them have very little experience. The intention is to get them to think about the positions that various styles of music hold within our curriculum, and the ways in which these positions relate to prevailing power structures and assumptions about cultural hierarchy. Writing is at the center of all of my assignments and exams because I believe it is the best way to provide students with the intellectual space to work through their own thoughts and values.

3. I continually draw out the implications of course lessons for students’ own lives, and I encourage reflective discussion of assignments, readings, and listening examples. For example, about one third of the way through the semester, I set aside fifteen minutes for in-class reflection on the course so far. This provides students with an unstructured moment in which to think about broad course goals, grapple with core ideas, and work through lingering questions about specific material we’ve covered. Giving students the opportunity to think reflexively as a group strengthens their focus on and commitment to “what we’re doing here,” and allows them to approach new methods and repertoires with greater confidence and self-awareness.

4. Finally, individual mentoring—ranging from formal independent studies and teaching internships to informal office-hours visits and drop-ins—allow me to engage deeply in the kind of listening that is at the heart of mentoring practice. These one-on-one sessions allow me to come to know students as individuals and to offer both insights and focused questions that can steer them in the direction of deeper understanding of course materials and more rigorous reflection on their own values and ideas.
EVIDENCE OF MENTORING EXPERIENCE

Alumni Accomplishments and Continuing Engagement

Sydney Blefko: Ethnomusicology Minor (scheduled graduation date: Spring 2016)
- Accepted for and completed an internship with the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Summer 2014
- Accepted for admission and teaching/research fellowships at (and currently deciding between) two of the country’s major graduate programs in ethnomusicology

Miranda Carver: World Music Minor (graduated Fall 2014)

Benjamin Jackson: World Music Minor (graduated Spring 2014)
- Currently working toward a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology at the University of Maryland, College Park

Agnes Rhee: B.A. Music (graduated Spring 2013)
- Accepted for and completed an internship with Smithsonian Folkways Recordings (Fall 2013 to Spring 2014)

Bill Rogers: World Music Minor (graduated Fall 2011)
- Currently Promotions and Social Media Director at Bright Box Theater, a music venue in Winchester, VA

Amy Tanna: B.M. Flute Performance (graduated Spring 2011)
- Helped to organize the annual Far North Fiddle Festival, a Celtic music concert fundraiser for the Fairbanks Hospital Foundation, in Fairbanks, Alaska (2013 and 2014)

Explanation of Impact: Amy had her first in-depth exposure to Irish and Scottish traditional music in my world music course for music majors, and through Mason’s Celtic Ensemble (see below). She has continued to cultivate her interest in this music since she graduated.

Analicia Carpio: B.A. Music and Conflict Analysis and Resolution (graduated Spring 2011)
- Won a grant from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office through Mason’s Center for Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, completed ethnomusicological fieldwork in Taipei and Orchid Island
- Won a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant and Cultural Ambassador Fellowship in Kaohsiung, Taiwan (2011-2012)

Explanation of Impact: Analicia enrolled in my world music class for music majors in Spring 2010. For this class, she developed an ethnographic paper on the use of music at a local Taiwanese language school for first-generation Taiwanese children. This experience kindled her interest in Taiwanese culture and opened doors to the opportunities listed above.
Undergraduate Independent Studies


Sydney Blefko. Fall 2015. Independent study and research proposal on Chinese erhu players in Washington D.C.


Bill Rogers. Fall 2011. Independent study and research paper on space, place, and the creation of atmosphere at the Birchmere.

Jesse Trask. Fall 2009. Independent study and research paper on African music and dance within George Mason University’s curriculum.

Student Final Papers for Research-Intensive MUSI 490-001, Taught Fall 2015

Elizabeth Barbagallo. “Progression of Musical Preference and the Green Machine.”

Philip Harris. “The Use of Gospel Music at Grace Covenant Church.”

Estrella Hong. “Scaramuzza’s Piano Technique and the “Profound” Sound.”

Courtney Lawrence. “Evolution of Drum and Bugle Corps.”


Emma Proctor. “Change in Northern Powwow Music.”

Evan Schefstad. “Paul Rolland: Preventing Repetitive Motion Injuries in String Players Through Proper Practice Technique.”

Brianna Williamson. “Calling Out to Idiot America: The Use of Shock Effects and Politics in Green Day’s American Idiot.”
Celtic Ensemble

From 2011 to 2014 I led an extracurricular student ensemble specializing in Irish and Scottish traditional music. This provided an opportunity for students to engage in creative activity, typically culminating in an end-of-semester concert. I include here the names of the students who participated in the ensemble for one semester or more.

Katie Anderson (voice, flute)  Yvonne LeFrancois (flute, voice)
Sandra Changanaquí (fiddle)  Larissa Marian (fiddle, voice)
Joshua Cruse (piano)  Lisa Robinson (fiddle)
Andrew Dodds (fiddle)  Thomas Routon (mandolin)
Kevin Elam (guitar, pennywhistle, flute)  Ryan Shumway (bodhrán)
Justin Lago (double bass)  Amy Tanna (flute)
Randy Lattimer (fiddle)

Teaching Interns

The School of Music requires most music majors to complete a one-semester teaching internship, in which the student helps a faculty member administer an academic course. I normally ask interns to run weekly extra-credit small-group review sessions, give two or three ten- to fifteen-minute presentations in front of the entire class, help with some of the minor administrative work for the course (send due date reminders, alphabetize assignments, etc.), and lead the final exam review. This program helps students to hone their research, public speaking, and mentoring skills. I meet with student interns frequently to share advice on teaching techniques and address any challenges they may face. Even though this program does not require that students produce a deliverable research or creative product, such as a paper, recording, or performance, the internship experience and the mentoring that accompanies it often lead students toward lasting engagement with academic materials and to a better understanding of the teaching practices that are central to a career in music. I include here the names of the students I have mentored in this capacity, in reverse-chronological order.

Thomas Routon (Spring 2016)  Allison Holland (Spring 2011)
Ben Jackson (Spring 2014)  Joseph Neale (Spring 2011)
Alex Lytle (Spring 2014)  Isora Heckel (Fall 2010)
Katie Campbell (Spring 2013)  Katie Kane (Fall 2010)
Andrea Murano (Spring 2013)  Jennifer Watson (Fall 2010)
Agnes Rhee (Spring 2013)  David Begin (Fall 2009)
Iliana Fernández (Fall 2012)  Patty Hernández (Fall 2009)
Yvonne LeFrancois (Fall 2012)  Katara Wright (Spring 2009)
Talisha Vernon (Spring 2012)
March 16, 2016

Dear OSCAR Faculty Excellence Award Committee,

I wish to recommend Dr. Gregory Robinson, Associate Professor in Mason’s School of Music, for the Faculty Mentoring Excellence award. Dr. Robinson enriches the undergraduate learning experiences through his excellent mentoring of Mason students pursuing the Minor in Ethnomusicology as well as music majors who are studying World Music. He takes the requisite time to effectively work with students to develop relevant, engaging, and creative research topics relating to non-Western music. Subsequently, he mentors and guides them through the entire research process, including the writing and revision stages. In addition, Dr. Robinson has been an extremely effective mentor for our MUSI 395 undergraduate teaching interns that assist with his World Music classes for non-majors.

Dr. Gregory Robinson influences students’ academic choices and future trajectories through his modeling of academic excellence and his passion for the field of ethnomusicology. Several of our undergraduate music majors decided to pursue a master’s degree in ethnomusicology as a direct result of the positive influence of Dr. Robinson’s stellar teaching of his undergraduate non-western music history courses. Several of these students requested a teaching internship with Dr. Robinson at the undergraduate level (primarily in the MUSI 103 World Music sections) as they knew he would be an effective and caring mentor. Dr. Robinson exudes enthusiasm and passion for the subject matter; his student interns do the same, as they have learned from the best!

Dr. Robinson helps to foster a culture of student scholarship at Mason through his active involvement with the University Writing Across the Curriculum Committee. He has led initiatives within our School of Music for creating an award to recognize outstanding undergraduate student research. He has been active with creating world music events on campus, providing pre-concert scholarly lectures, and engaging students in the entire process. Dr. Robinsons provides a unique and invaluable service in that he is able to combine the “scholarship behind the notes” into the concert experience for the students.

Dr. Robinson has had a very positive impact on both our current and former Mason students and their subsequent success. He teaches our students how to think critically, how to develop a research topic, how to write effectively, and encourages all to have a healthy and open curiosity for learning new things. Because Dr. Robinson’s courses focus on non-Western music, our music majors are initially surprised to discover ethnic/global music where the tuning systems are quite different than our Western music, the notation may be non-existent, and the concept of beauty can be different than what we are accustomed to hearing in our Western music. Thererfore, Dr. Robinson’s “global understanding” courses are pivotal in having our students hear and experience music differently than what they were accustomed to hearing before entering his class.

Dr. Robinson’s support and engagement of undergraduate scholarship at Mason is exemplary. He fosters a creative and scholarly culture through his compelling teaching.
and mastery of the subject matter, his total engagement with the undergraduate student researcher, his effective mentorship of the student doing the research (from conception of idea to completion of project), and his passion and energy for the field of Ethnomusicology. Some of our students decide to pursue ethnomusicology studies at the graduate level due to the incredible influence and mentorship that they experienced at Mason through Dr. Robinson.

I give my highest recommendation for Dr. Gregory Robinson to receive the Mentoring Excellence Award.

Sincerely,

Dr. Linda A. Monson
Managing Director
School of Music
703-993-3580
lmonson@gmu.edu
To The Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research,

In my time at George Mason University Dr. Gregory Robinson made a tremendous impact on me, and altered the course of my future career. Dr. Robinson’s ethnomusicology courses are among the most memorable of my entire undergraduate degree. College is a place where your ways of thinking should be challenged and expanded, and Dr. Robinson lives that credo. I took his World Music course my sophomore year and the culminating project was to write an ethnography of a local music scene. Given my degree’s concentration in jazz performance, I chose jazz venues in Northern Virginia.

Dr. Robinson’s assignment pushed me out of my comfort zone. It made me attend shows, conduct interviews, and establish meaningful connections with members of a community I previously had no connection with. Being a shy undergrad, I would have been happy to never learn how to introduce myself to strangers and hold a conversation. If the only thing I took away from that class was greater confidence in myself and my newfound ability to connect with people I did not previously know, it would have been worth my tuition in full. Throughout, I was able to meet and discuss with Dr. Robinson who helped guide me in how to engage with others, ask meaningful questions, and encouraged me create an original contribution to scholarship. I came to George Mason to study trombone performance, but nothing had stuck with me as much as Dr. Robinson’s lectures. He was able to take a class that could have easily been a survey of diverse musical cultures and forced us to think critically about music in society. My worldview changed as Dr. Robinson led discussions about music and the systemic injustices that define life for so many. I saw in Dr. Robinson’s teaching the opportunity to use a love for music to affect tangible change on others, hopefully to the end of fostering a more just world. I decided that I wanted to have an impact like his, and applied to graduate school to pursue a career in ethnomusicology. Dr. Robinson was thrilled when I told him, and he encouraged me to attend the upcoming national meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology. Throughout the conference, Dr. Robinson was a constant companion. At a conference where I didn’t know a soul, and he could have left me to figure it out alone, he was accompanying me to panels and introducing me and my research to eminent scholars in the field. Throughout, I was made to feel like a fellow researcher, and my ideas were given time and value by Dr. Robinson and others.

The next semester, I took an independent study of ethnomusicological theory with Dr. Robinson and I conducted more fieldwork developing my original ethnography project. After myriad drafts back and forth, it became my writing sample. I ended up accepting a full-tuition teaching assistantship at the University of Maryland’s ethnomusicology program, where I am currently finishing my Master’s degree, and beginning my doctoral studies in the fall. The research project from his course fueled my interests, helped me overcome my fears, and fostered the connections that made my current thesis on jazz scenes in Washington, D.C. possible. Dr. Robinson’s ability as a mentor has affected many others. Even now, I have been charged with recruiting one of Dr. Robinson’s graduating mentees to Maryland’s ethnomusicology graduate program. I can confidently say that, were it not for Dr. Robinson’s exuberance, dedication, and passion as an educator, I would not be entering into the field of ethnomusicology. Dr. Robinson continues to be someone I can bounce ideas off of, or even send a draft to for feedback, years after I have left George Mason. From my initial exposure to the field, to my eventual decision to make ethnomusicology my career-path, Dr. Robinson has been a true mentor and friend.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Jackson