

Vidita's letter exemplifies the traditional structure of an academic cover letter: Introduction, current research, future research, teaching, conclusion. Following the formulaic structure allows the reader to focus on Vidita's engaging writing and key points without having to hunt for each critical component.

Remember that each document in your package should stand alone, telling the same story in a different way. For example, the CV lists all of your academic accomplishments, while the cover letter will emphasize the most important and relevant parts of your background. The letter should not read as a CV in prose, and should summarize and encapsulate the points you expand upon in your research statement and teaching statement. Allow your professional voice to shine through in your writing to express your sincere enthusiasm for your work and the confidence that you are the best candidate for the particular position, department, or institution.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY • DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

MUSIC BUILDING

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138, USA

617-495-2791

January 14, 2025

Professor Rosalie Cork
Search Committee Chair - 51674
University of Washington, School of Music
Seattle, WA 98195

Dear Professor Cork and Members of the Search Committee:

I write to apply for the position of Assistant Professor of Musicology in the University of Washington School of Music. Under the direction of Dieter Fischer, I am completing my Ph.D. in historical musicology at Harvard University with an expected degree date of May 2025.

My interdisciplinary research unites two strands of recent, significant musicological inquiry: the development of American musical modernism as a transatlantic phenomenon, and the transmission, reception, and circulation of music in interpersonal networks. In my dissertation, "The American Mahler: Musical Modernism and Transatlantic Networks, 1920–1960," I argue that the growth of Mahler's reputation shaped musical modernism in the United States. I draw from historical musicology, oral history, sociology, American studies, and Jewish studies to examine the relationship between Mahler's music and an intimate network of four influential figures in American modernism: Nadia Boulanger, Aaron Copland, Serge Koussevitzky, and Leonard Bernstein. Boulanger's score collection shows that she encountered Mahler's music in Amsterdam in 1920 and taught his music to her American students, including Copland. On his return to the United States, Copland drew on his engagement with Mahler's music to construct his own identity as an American modernist. Copland also encouraged Koussevitzky and Bernstein to promote Mahler; Koussevitzky enlisted Mahler's music to reinforce his own advocacy of modernism in the concert hall, while Bernstein did so to bolster the stature of modern tonal composition. The discovery of these figures' shared relationships with Mahler's music reveals that their articulations of Mahler's significance were deeply bound to their priorities as members of a transatlantic modernist community.

My next major research project will make use of the University of Washington's archival holdings to interrogate long-held assumptions about art music as a written tradition by examining a practice that most onlookers today reject as sacrilegious but that was once quite common: the abridgment of orchestral works

in performance, by conductors, in the United States in the first half of the 20th century. In the course of my dissertation research, I discovered performing scores, as well as marked orchestral part books and concert reviews, that document this practice. A comparison of these sources illuminates a written record of the transmission of such changes among performers and across generations. Scholars usually approach symphonic works as permanently fixed entities, but my own published research on Chant transmission has prompted me to treat abridgment as evidence that performers and audiences have negotiated symphonic music through complex patterns and channels of oral and aural transmission. I look forward to enriching my perspective on American musical culture during this period by exploring the papers of Helen Hopekirk and of the Club Filarmónico Tucsonense.

My teaching, like my research, reflects a passionate interest in the specific circumstances in which musicians and audiences interact with music. My primary goal as a music educator—fueled by several years of experience teaching at the secondary level and in higher education—is to harness the powerful relationships that students already have with music in general, bridging the gap between those relationships and the music they encounter in academic settings. In exploring the melodic aesthetics of mass songs in the 20th century for a course on American musical theatre, I had students compare the experience of attempting to sing Marc Blitzstein’s song “The Cradle Will Rock” with “7 1/2 Cents” from the Richard Adler and Jerry Ross musical *The Pajama Game*. To approach a rhythmically complex passage from the scherzo of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony in a general education course on music appreciation, I led the class in conducting it from a recording; I also had students collaborate to create play-by-play podcasts of portions of the work in the style of sports commentary. Through such activities, I transform music history from an abstract phenomenon into a tangible part of students’ lives, generating entry points for discussions of how musicians and audiences in the past grappled with music.

My research and my recent teaching experience—which has included designing and executing a yearlong course for other graduate students on teaching methods, conducting video-based consultations on their classrooms, and advising faculty members on their syllabi—have primed me to create and teach inspiring music courses. I was selected to lead an intensive survey of Western music history for graduate students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst this spring. I am also prepared to lead classes on a wide array of subjects in art and vernacular musics, from medieval to 21st-century music, including surveys, for students with varying levels of musical knowledge and experience. I would enjoy planning courses that cover a variety of areas, including transmission and reception, modernism as transnational phenomenon, the intersections between Western art music and vernacular traditions, and the shifting relationships between musical institutions and their cultural contexts.

As a lifelong teacher who is committed to public service and working with members of diverse populations, I would look forward to serving the University of Washington community. Along with a colleague at Harvard, I applied for and received grant funds to establish the Harvard Mobile Music Lab, in which we teach various subjects through music to a diverse classroom of fourth graders in Boston. As a former Teach For America corps member who was recognized for teaching math through music to economically disadvantaged children, I would relish the opportunity to work with colleagues and students to inspire the next generation of musicians and scholars in Seattle and beyond.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Vidita Chatterjee
vchatterjee@xxx.harvard.edu, (617) 000-0123

Department of Modern Languages and Literatures
Reed College, Portland, OR 97202

September 15, 2024

Dear Dr. Rima Sadek and Members of the Search Committee,

I am delighted to be applying for the position of Assistant Professor of Arabic in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Reed College. I am completing my PhD in Comparative Literature at Harvard University for a defense in May 2025. I specialize in modern Arabic literature and bring a demonstrated commitment to innovative and inclusive pedagogy in undergraduate Arabic language teaching. My research focuses on transcultural Arabic literatures in Hispano-, Luso-, and Anglophone contexts. Accordingly, I am well equipped to serve MLL and Reed at large by engaging with students and colleagues working across multiple languages and disciplinary contexts. As a graduate of Reed, I would be honored to return to Portland and contribute to the liberal arts education of future generations of Reed students, building on my teaching experience, ambitious research agenda, and formative experiences as an alumna.

My dissertation, “Consectetur cras tempor mollis phasellus porta nulla,” considers how writers during an initial period of Arab transatlantic migration (1860s-1930s) responded to ongoing forms of racial stratification and histories of conquest and enslavement in the Americas. While recent historical scholarship has revealed how Arab migrants sought access to legal and social privileges by aligning themselves with white or *criollo* elite, literature imagines alternative forms of affiliation that cut across racial, national, and religious boundaries. Thinking beyond common narratives of diaspora that emphasize either assimilation or marginalization, I argue that the texts I study—notably, travelogues by ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Baghdadi and Ameen Rihani, and fiction by Shukri al-Khuri—articulate an ambivalent solidarity with non-Arab communities, including enslaved African Muslims in Brazil and indigenous Maya in Mexico. They draw parallels between histories of colonization and displacement in the Americas and the Mediterranean basin, while simultaneously reiterating colonial logics by placing Arabs in hierarchical relation to other minoritized groups. Through historically grounded literary analysis, the dissertation addresses questions of pluralism and its legally and culturally constructed limits, which are particularly relevant today in the face of rising ethnonationalist discourses and the so-called migration crisis.

My first book project will build on the dissertation by incorporating contemporary literature that thematizes early-20th-century Arab migration to the Americas. Examining 21st-century Arabic, Anglophone, and Lusophone literature, I have begun to explore how the initial period of transatlantic Arab migration is revisited by authors writing from a present marked by increased militarism, displacement, and mobility control. My transcultural approach to literature also encompasses my scholarly work on translation and my publications as an active literary translator: my article in the *Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures* analyzes dream interpretation as a parody of translation in Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq’s *al-Saq ‘ala al-Saq*, arguing that translation functions as a site of cultural friction between the Arabic interpreter and his European patron; and recent published translations include Muhammad Said Hijoui’s novella *Kafka in Tangier* (Agora 2024) and poetry by Rasha Omran in *ArabLit Quarterly*.

My teaching is likewise informed by the productive frictions that arise in cross-cultural encounters. Regardless of my students’ professional aspirations, I believe that studying language and literature provides not only the language skills but the cultural competency to make meaning of, and effect change in, an increasingly interconnected world. While emphasizing the goals of fluent speaking,

vocabulary acquisition, and grammatical accuracy, I engage students in dynamic activities at every language level to extend their pursuit of Arabic in interdisciplinary directions. For example, my advanced-intermediate students used their knowledge of roots and morphology to understand the unfamiliar vocabulary in Mahmoud Darwish's poem "*al-hadir al-gha'ib*" (the present-absentee). From there, we launched into a lively discussion about the power of language to categorize people, and the power of literature to destabilize those categories—all in Arabic. My teaching, which has been recognized with a Certificate of Distinction in Teaching from the Harvard Office of Undergraduate Education based on student evaluations, employs a communicative approach in which students encounter language as a contextualized phenomenon, rather than a static collection of grammatical forms. I push students to challenge themselves daily to communicate about increasingly complex topics so that they see tangible progress and build lifelong learning skills.

The Arabic classroom attracts a set of students with diverse backgrounds, abilities, faiths, and complex relationships to the language. I have taught groups comprising Arab heritage learners (who may speak some colloquial Arabic but not write), Muslim students (who might know Arabic in a religious context), and true beginners, all from a range of racial, socioeconomic, and national backgrounds. Because I employ a communicative approach, in which students are constantly talking about themselves and others, identities are in focus from day one. Students share a lot about their experiences, beliefs, and plans. An inclusive and caring community is therefore key. I have helped students contend with Arabic's grammatically gendered nature with sensitivity to nonbinary students, and navigate the emotional dimensions of learning a language, including for heritage learners who may feel they should already be fluent, and individuals raised in places where Arabic was stigmatized. In every classroom, I work to form a community founded in mutual respect, where diversity is valued and pursued.

Having studied at Reed, I take my undergraduate professors as models of the teacher-scholar: innovating in the classroom while developing pathbreaking research, thereby keeping their teaching at the cutting edge. As a member of the Reed faculty, I would be delighted to teach any language level appropriate to the needs of the department, as well as courses such as Introduction to Arabic Literature and "Home without a Map: Travels, Migrations, and Returns in Arabic Literature and Film." I would work to grow the Arabic program through teaching excellence in conjunction with student advising and mentorship, organizing Arabic conversation tables and film screenings to foster engagement beyond the classroom. Having studied and lived in Jordan and Egypt, I am well equipped to advise students on study abroad, from selecting a program to preparing for life in a new country. Building on my experience advising undergraduate research, I look forward to working closely with advisees on their Senior Capstone projects and, utilizing my past training with Harvard's Bok Center for Teaching and mentoring Teaching Assistants on pedagogical strategies. I would be honored to contribute to Reed's vibrant intellectual community through collaborations with colleagues in MLL and programs like Asian and Middle East Studies and International Studies to develop interdisciplinary courses and programming on migration, transregional connections, and translation.

I have included my CV, references, and transcript, and I will be happy to provide other materials, including a writing sample, teaching portfolio, and sample syllabi. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Alina Badawi
abadawi@g.harvard.edu
929-123-4567

Alina's letter follows the typical flow of an academic cover letter and has considerable tailoring that is relevant to her interest in teaching at a liberal arts college and to Reed College in particular. While providing concise descriptions of her current and future research, she dedicates 3 full paragraphs to teaching, including one focused on inclusivity. Note, also, that she proposes a course and includes the course title in quotes, indicating that it is a course of her own design which she would describe in more detail in her teaching statement. It's common to propose two or three courses in the cover letter.



HARVARD
UNIVERSITY

Max Umbutu
Harvard University
17 Oxford Street | Cambridge, MA 02138
mumbutu@fas.harvard.edu | 999-123-4567

November 29, 20XX

Dear Faculty Search Committee:

I am writing to apply for the tenure-track faculty appointment at Princeton University in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering through the Quantum and Semiconductor Materials search. I am completing my Ph.D. in the Department of Physics at Harvard University, where I have been designing and synthesizing new thin film materials with atomic-scale precision using molecular beam epitaxy (MBE).

Atomic-scale construction of a crystalline lattice can be used to design new classes of materials, as well as to control the manifold electronic, magnetic, and functional phases inherent in a family of materials. In my doctoral work, I engineered superconducting compounds by leveraging atomically-precise synthesis to create layered nickelate compounds. My discovery, which unveiled superconductivity through dimensional layering without chemical doping, unlocked the nickelates as a true new family of superconductors. Furthermore, it showcased the role of atomically-precise synthesis as a powerful knob to traverse the phase diagrams of quantum materials and stabilize new materials which cannot be made with bulk synthetic methods. I described this discovery in *Nature Materials*, with six additional related manuscripts.

My research program at Princeton will harness atomically-precise materials design and synthesis to explore and exploit the myriad phenomena that arise when electrons collectively engage. Aside from superconductivity, these phenomena include topological orders, magnetic orders and frustration, ferroelectricity, and excitonic pairing. Such behaviors evolve in lower dimensions and can even emerge at atomic interfaces, stressing the need for lattice control at the atomic-scale. Meanwhile, anion content and bonding is another critical determinant of materials properties. To this end, my program will unite atomic construction of the cation scaffolding with chemical tuning of the anion matrix, leading to exquisite tunability of correlated phases and unprecedented access to new classes of quantum materials beyond the canonical transition metal oxides. Finally, I will integrate synergistic characterization techniques that give us deep insight into how electronic behaviors correlate with atomic structure, closing the “materials-by-design” loop and accelerating the discovery of new materials.

My approach is transferrable beyond my immediate research efforts in quantum materials, such that I am uniquely poised to leverage the versatility of combinatorial materials synthesis to thematically expand. For example, a focus on functional materials could involve perfecting traditional materials for novel quantum circuitries, developing dielectrics for electro-optic devices, or anion-tuning toward stable photovoltaics. My research program, interdisciplinary by design, aligns well with the priorities of Princeton’s Engineering Strategic Plan. The world-class user facilities will provide a strong technical and communal environment to support my scientific vision, and I look forward to finding collaborative avenues in the Princeton community.

In addition to my intellectual interests, outreach, teaching, and mentoring have been central to my practice of science. Having consistently worked within my institutions to develop educational and support resources for underserved populations, I am drawn to Princeton’s commitment to strengthening representation *and* conditions for underrepresented groups to thrive. As my Ph.D. group’s first student, I took on leadership roles in establishing and managing the group, mentoring new graduate students, designing undergraduate projects, and establishing collaborative networks. I look forward to leading a diverse research group, to effectively mentoring students with a variety of goals and backgrounds, and to creating vibrant, inclusive learning environments at Princeton.

Please do not hesitate to reach out for any additional information – I hope to hear from you in due course.

Sincerely,

Max Umbutu (they/them)

Identifying information has been changed.

As a physical scientist, Max kept their cover letter to one page. Often, in quantitative and computational sciences, the letter can be even shorter... just a few short paragraphs. Note that Max uses a lot of field-specific jargon, knowing that their audience of physicists at Princeton would be very familiar with this level of jargon. While Max did not address courses they could teach, they did emphasize their commitment to fostering inclusivity in their teaching and mentoring.

(via email)

Dear Dr. Keshilian -

My Ph.D. advisor, Martin Rothberg of Harvard Medical School, suggested I write to you to inquire about the possibility of a postdoctoral position in your laboratory. I am currently completing my Ph.D. in Immunology at Harvard, and expect to defend by May, 2025.

I am interested in immune responses to viral infection, and my research with Dr. Rothberg has concentrated upon defining the role of IL-21 in the development of CD8+ T cell responses to viral antigens. Using an *in vitro* system, we have demonstrated that IL-21 can induce Bcl-2-mediated apoptosis of memory CD8+ T cells specific for an SIV antigen. We have also demonstrated that IL-21 plays a crucial role in the development of primary and secondary responses to virally encoded antigens in IL-21Ra-deficient mice. This study has indicated that IL-21 directly stimulates CD8+ T cell proliferation and survival. Our *in vitro* work has been published in *The Journal of Immunology* and we anticipate submitting a manuscript describing our *in vivo* results soon. This work is described in more detail in my accompanying CV.

I hope to complement my understanding of the CD8+ T cell response to viral infection and CD8+ T cell apoptosis with postdoctoral training that furthers my understanding of innate immune responses to viral infections. I have followed your lab's work in this area and am particularly interested in your work on autophagy, RLRs, and NLRs in viral infection. I would be very interested in working with you for my postdoctoral training to further my understanding of innate immune responses to viruses.

If you anticipate a position becoming available, I would greatly appreciate an opportunity to further discuss my research interests with you. I will be attending the upcoming Gordon Conference on Immunochemistry & Immunobiology in La Jolla, and I would be available to meet with you there or at UCSD that week.

Sincerely,

Melanie Porter
mporter@xxx.harvard.edu
She/Her/Hers

This is a concise email inquiry about a potential postdoctoral position in the laboratory of Dr. Keshilian at University of California at San Diego.

As the email is going to an expert in her field (rather than to a disciplinarily-diverse committee), Melanie's use of jargon is appropriate in this case.

Note that Melanie leaves open the possibility of meeting with Dr. Keshilian at an upcoming conference, but she could also have dropped the last sentence if she wasn't already planning to be in the area.