

Teaching Reflection

Fall 2016

MUCB 201: Music History I, Early Practice

In my first iteration of Music History I at Crane I thought many things went extremely well, while I'll continue to tweak certain assignments and pedagogical strategies for next fall. The grading scheme of this course was based on unannounced in-class quizzes, attendance and participation, four exams, and a three-part final project. The unannounced quizzes are useful pedagogically; they generally concern material we've covered that day in class, so it both rewards students for paying attention but also cements pertinent concepts from that day's material.

In terms of class participation and attendance, I devoted considerable energy to finding enjoyable ways of involving the entire class while helping them assimilate course content. As the students learned about the Divine Office, for example, I devised a "Crane Convent." Each student was assigned the persona of a medieval nun—I gleaned the names from a medieval manuscript—and given a specific task to do around the convent. This helped emphasize the homosocial but intensely hierarchical structure of convents and underscore the self-sufficient nature of these medieval communities. At the same time, other students were assigned the task of "bell-ringer" and "time-keeper," announcing to all of us "nuns" the various hours of the Office. I thought this activity did a good job of helping the students understand in a personal way the cyclical nature of religious devotion in a medieval convent. It also necessitated the involvement of the entire class—no one was a bystander. For the *formes fixes*, I had students use magnets to move the various constituent pieces of the form around on the whiteboard, helping them conceptualize these forms in a more physical way than just marking letters in their anthologies. I will continue to develop such activities for still more lectures throughout the semester. I also gave the students extra resources to help foster interest, such as DJ mixes incorporating medieval music samples¹ or links to the intersection of popular culture & early music.²

In general, having used Moodle before at another institution, I thought the use of technology in this class went well. I used Moodle for delivering daily course assignments and posting slides, but also included additional tools such as a FAQ for Medieval questions. I also had students post answers to a online forum during two class periods where we didn't meet in person. There are still additional functionalities within Moodle that I haven't explored with

¹ Panda Bear (Noah Benjamin Lennox)'s "I'm Not" (2007) is a fun example, sampling Gothic Voice's recording of Machaut's "Rose, liz, printemps, verdure."

² "What Sounds Medieval?: <https://soundstudiesblog.com/tag/elizabeth-randell-upton/>

Music History I—perhaps having student collaboratively create course glossaries, post their own podcasts to the wiki, etc—so that’s one aspect I’d like to continue developing.

For the three-part final project, requiring the students to put together a themed concert program of early music worked well. Students reported enjoying the project in their end-of-semester evaluations. I also enjoyed teaching students how to access NAXOS/other online streaming services of the university. The second part of the final project asked students to create a blog post for a non-specialist reader, incorporating text, images, and audio. I really liked the concept of this approach, but I’d like to think a bit more about how to incorporate work such as blog post creation in my future classes.

At several points in the semester I paused to emphasize the biases, exclusions, and Eurocentrism which underscore music history narratives. We began the semester by reading and discussing a blog post entitled “If History is Written by the Victors,”³ and I assigned them lengthier readings on Hildegard and nuns in early 1600s rather than the short sections in the textbooks. I’d like to continue to expand these initiatives gradually in subsequent semesters. When I teach Music History I again in the future, I’ll continue to expand the curriculum by including more women, people of color, and non-European musicians and styles. These issues are at the forefront of the questions musicology is asking itself as a discipline at the moment—how to teach courses such as the typical music history core and acknowledge the exclusionary principles at the heart of such practices. I’ve tried several of the approaches mentioned in this excellent blog post by some fellow musicologists, while I hope to continue to try additional approaches in future semesters.⁴

I spent a great deal of time with students this semester—I met with each student one-on-one to discuss their program notes project. I also offered two optional afternoon review sessions for each exam; students greatly appreciated this, and occasionally even students from the other Music History I sections attended the reviews as well. As with all of my courses, I included an additional feedback sheet at evaluation time—many students self-reported wanting to stay on-top of their own work better and that they needed to spend more out-of-class time keeping up with the listening in particular. I’m not sure how to redesign curriculum in order to require this, but the self-reporting is helpful.

In terms of logistical and conceptual changes I’d like to make in the next iteration of this course, I will continue to tweak the ways I schedule exams throughout the semester in terms of having adequately spaced exams (not placing the last semester exam too close to finals week). In this semester, I didn’t do the best job of spacing out writing assignments. In an attempt to give students more time to complete their work/the stages of the concert project, I extended several deadlines. In retrospect, however, I don’t think this was the best approach, as it did

³ Sara Haefeli, “If History is Written by the Victors,” <http://www.theavidlistener.com/2015/01/if-history-is-written-by-the-victors.html>

⁴ Kira Thurman and Kristen Turner, “Six Easy Ways to Immediately Address Racial and Gender Diversity in the Music History Classroom.” <http://musicologynow.ams-net.org/2017/07/six-easy-ways-to-immediately-address.html>

result in several assignments which could technically all be turned in right at the end of the semester. While I think students appreciated the flexibility and the intentions were good for students who regulate their time well, in the future it's better to start projects even earlier in the semester, and if possible, really try to make more things due about 2/3 of the way through the semester. I'd also like to experiment more with different project types.

MUCH 624: Music of the Nineteenth Century

Rather than teach this grad course as a general survey of 19th-century repertoires, I organized this course to have a specific focus, namely the question of performance in the nineteenth century. I thought this approach worked very well, since it gave us the chance to read and discuss foundational texts (Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* or Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*) throughout the semester. It also allowed us to unpack many of the biases of the canon—the focus on composers rather than performers, on the work rather than the realization in performance, etc. In terms of course content, I was particularly happy that we focused on quite a few “marginalized” repertoires within 19th-century music, including music for popular dance, non-Western European repertoires, African-American musicians, and gender & sexuality.⁵ I felt the final week on analysis of early sound recordings went particularly well, as many students found this especially useful to discussing changes in performance styles in their own musical arenas.

The grading scale for this course included serving as a discussion leader twice, a midterm essay, a response essay based on attendance at *Tristan und Isolde* (Met Opera Live in HD), and a scaffolded final project. For the final project, I had students do peer editing of each other's rough drafts, which actually worked quite well and is a useful pedagogical tool for them to hone as future teachers. During the various stages of the scaffolded project, I met with each student several times to discuss their final project topics and assist with their arguments.

This class was challenging to teach for several reasons. Several students had quite limited English skills, which posed problems for readings and class conversation. One thing that was helpful is that at times I had students post questions on a Moodle forum before coming to class. This helped me ensure everyone participated and allowed ESL students more time to formulate their answers. While the additional feedback on course evaluations was not particularly illuminating, I did find students enjoyed the content and found class articles and discussion challenging but interesting. Several reported that they found the particular focus of this class pertinent to their own careers as performers. Overall, I think the content and approach of the class is well-designed; the grading scheme and approach in terms of papers and class participation, however, will need to be carefully crafted for each particular section's strengths and weaknesses.

⁵ To give a few examples: popular dance: quadrille and can-can
non-Western repertoires: dance in the French Caribbean
African-American musicians and performers: Gottschalk and Fisk Jubilee Singers
gender & sexuality: female pianists in Paris in the 1830s, opera singers as composers, Chopin, etc