

Teaching Reflection

Fall 2022

As a couple of general notes on my approach to teaching and reflection:

- Writ large, I have tried to continually reflect on removing punitive language, policies, and ideas from my syllabi, in hopes of creating courses that are sensitive to student needs and provide the structures and flexibility for all students to succeed.
- In all courses, I start out the semester with a confidential check-in document, where I ask students to fill me in on pronouns, any mental health concerns or issues they may want to alert me about, etc. Then, midway through the semester, I do another confidential mental health check and ask them to let me know how things are going around week 7 or so—I always learn a lot from these check-ins, and it allows my students to keep me in the loop of things that are just helpful to know or sometimes allow an entry point for further conversations or office hours.
- In upper division courses, I utilize online discussion forums in part because it offers a different means of engagement than in-class participation—which may be stressful for certain students due to factors such as language fluency, anxiety, etc. In certain courses, I may have the students do an online assignment that is not a forum post if I have concerns about potentially harmful discourse (as in, only I see the initial posts and then we work from there).
- In all courses, I am extremely attentive to how students participate: I note interruptions, occupation of classroom space, body language, frequency of speech. While I obviously don't get it right all the time, I strongly endeavor to make my classrooms places where anyone—but especially marginalized voices—can speak safely. I include a classroom conduct statement in all of my syllabi: during the first week of class, I discuss this with students, explaining some of the ways we can support each other (and avoid negative interactions) in class.
- I've been thinking a lot about classroom spaces and environment—in the upper division courses, I always try to have us sit in a circle or in spaces where we can look at each other's faces as we discuss.
- Back in 2020, I developed the following language to add to my syllabi, which I continue to use: "I am committed to using trauma-sensitive teaching and learning principles to support your resilience and success in this course. Trauma-sensitive principles help create a safe, transparent, connected, and collaborative classroom environment where you feel empowered and respected. Be sure to do periodic self-checks on how course material—and the ways in which material is delivered and discussed—are affecting you, and please talk with me if you are having difficulties with any aspect of the course. Getting support from friends, colleagues, family, and mental health professionals is also important, especially if you have risk factors or you find yourself becoming distressed. For additional links to campus and community services, see <https://www.potsdam.edu/studentlife/wellness/counseling-center>
- I aim to address diversity and inclusion in my teaching through course content, course policies and pedagogical strategies, service, and scholarship. I bring new content and new approaches to current content to all of my classes, whether it is teaching a course such as "Opera and Race in the

United States" or "Music, Gender, and Sexuality, post-1800" or in the music history core, where I incorporate both new repertoires and new frameworks to teaching well-trodden works. My focus on diversity-rich course content is evident in that two of my syllabi—Music & Disability Studies and Music/Gender/Sexuality—are featured as examples of diversity-rich syllabi for DIAC's Diversity Attribute.

Music History III: Music Since 1900

I have tried to reflect on what I am actually interested in students taking away from a course, and it is certainly not the ability to think under time duress, or to always get it right the first time. With that in mind, I no longer give exams in the music history core, and instead ask them to work on projects.

I have streamlined certain aspects of this course, both to emphasize pedagogical priorities and to avoid overloading the students. I forced myself to only assign 3-5 pieces every week. Within that limitation, I brainstormed overarching organizing themes for each week and strictly abided by the principle that each week's 3-5 pieces should at minimum include one piece by a woman composer and one piece by a BIPOC composer. This specific framework yields a diverse repertoire, avoids tokenism (no weeks on "women"), and helps normalize talking about and being intentional about representation throughout the semester.

I always add a few new units and different things each semester: this semester, for example, I included a new section on EDM.

I believe overall the history course approach worked really well, based on student feedback on teaching evaluations. I'll quote a few snippets from student reviews of the course:

Student #1: "I love that the content is taught thematically instead of chronologically. I feel this way we learn more about music's social/emotional/political purpose.

Student #2: "I really liked that we did projects instead of exams, it helped me learn and retain the information better."

Student #3: "I really liked how we did something new in every class and all of it related to a bigger picture throughout the week. I think that going out of chronological order was super helpful with understanding the music and how it all fits together. Also, I thought that the projects were super fun!"

Student #4: "This course features one of the most adaptive curriculum plans I've ever encountered. The course content is responsive, thought-provoking, and relevant to the world of music today. It highlights points that explain how lots of today's music came to be, and finds a great blend of engaging and cognitively demanding."

Student #5: "Erin Brooks is dedicated to her work, passionate on the course material, and conscious of her students' abilities. She created a curriculum that required students to put real thought into the subject matter, but didn't demand hours upon hours of work that students would likely have gotten burnt out by. I'm trying to think of how to further complement Dr. Brooks's teaching; she is absolutely fantastic."

Opera & Race in the USA

I've taught this course once before online, but I specifically wanted to teach this course again during Fall 2022 to coincide with the Pellicciotti Opera Competition finalist selection. Several of my students were performing in the final scenes, so there was a lot of interest in the competition. I was really excited to not only build on the material from the last time I taught this course, but also include new research and concepts from my own work and attendance at conferences dealing with current conversations about race and opera. While we did deal with some historical context, a great deal of the class was centered on important conversations about race and opera today. I'm really glad we had the space to have these conversations over 15 weeks, and I think the course was really successful. The semester culminated in a researched project (podcast, paper, or presentation); students examined a wide variety of issues in these final projects. I was really happy with how responsive and excited the students were to take this course.

To quote from a few student evaluations:

Student #1: "I really enjoyed this class and I am so grateful I had the opportunity to take it. As a vocal performance student, it was a great opportunity to take a history course that directly relates to my field. I enjoyed the wide variety of topics the course covered. I thought the workload was incredibly reasonable and any work outside of the class was beneficial to the course material. I would gladly recommend this course to any student."

Student #2: "Course content was exceptionally diverse, unfortunately I wish we had more time to unpack more topics, but I wouldn't change a thing. pellichotti was a great inclusion and I feel as though it helped us open up as a discussion based class. My favorite topic was the Native American and indigenous opera because it was something we touched on but was sure to circle back to. I really liked that this was included."

Student #3: "Erin Brooks is one of the best faculty I have ever worked with on campus. She is kind, professional, and very personal during her lectures. She is also very understanding during the semester and is always prepared. I appreciate her unbiased ideas, yet very clear and honest points that are mentioned in the lecture because I think opera is a very problematic art form. I really appreciate her lectures and elaborate content."