

MUCH 395: Music, Sound & the Environment

Fall 2025

Class Times and Location:

Meetings in Bishop Hall, C303
T/Th, 10:00am-11:15am



Instructor

Dr. Erin Brooks

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Office: Schuette Hall A102

Office hours:

Office hours can be in person or via online meeting or by phone—any office hour is scheduled by appointment in order to maximize the overlap between your schedule and mine! Please email or message me to set up these office hour meetings; I'm very happy to discuss course material or just offer a supportive ear for anything you'd like to share in a safe space.

Course Description and Objectives:

"MUCH 395: Music, Sound, and the Environment" is a course for those who wish to explore interfaces between music, sound, and the environment. Engagement with and representation of the sounds of the world around us is a continuous experience across time and place, though the understandings, use, and mechanism of those engagements differ. Throughout the semester we will read and discuss foundational texts exploring relationships between music, sound, and the environment, engage in close listening and score analysis of selected musical works, listen carefully to the world around us, contemplate methods of engagement with the environment of other times and places, and debate how contemporary music, music-making, and music "consumption" should engage with climate change.

During the semester you will develop an individual research project. Research, methods, and analysis will be shared with classmates at various stages; at the end of the semester, you will present your work and engage in peer commenting on each other's projects.

Topics covered in this class include (but are not limited to):

- assessing musical works depicting the natural world and changing modes of engagement with the environment—selected case studies encompass a variety of musical styles, places, and time periods
- Indigenous ways of hearing, listening, and engaging with the environment, as well as the settler colonial "hungry listening" and the "imperial ear" as described by scholars such as Dylan Robinson and Mary Talusan
- Engage in creative listening work to the world surrounding us, following musicians such as Pauline Oliveros—this will take us outside of the classroom space and will be reflected in our midterm creative project
- Surveying the development and methods of disciplines such as ecomusicology and eco-acoustics
- "Music and the Anthropocene"—how the concept of the Anthropocene might connect to music, sound, and musicians
- musical responses to environmental care and environmental catastrophe (surveying musical literature and responses from environmentalist movements to hurricanes and earthquakes)
- (Data) sonification projects
- discussion and analysis of the weaponizing of sound in various spaces and the differential impacts of sound and noise on communities
- considering the flow of labor, capital, and material in the contemporary music industry—how do recordings, audio technology, and other musical materials participate in conversations about resources and scarcity?
- perspectives of contemporary performers, musicians and institutions on the subject of the environment—particular via the lens of climate change. Likely topics will focus on changing approaches to instrument manufacture, music festivals and musician travel, sponsorships and protest, fundraising and/or charity concerts, and activist groups such as Music Declares Emergency

Upon successfully completing MUCH 395, you should be able to:

- Articulate foundational theories about the environment from a variety of positionalities, and discuss how those relate to/impact music studies
- Recognize concepts, vocabulary, styles, genres, forms, and individual works from our class units on various aspects of music, sound, and the environment
- Think creatively about how music, sound, and the environment influences your identities as a musician
- demonstrate facility with resources for music history research
- frame a research question related to the course topic & identify appropriate sources for exploring the question
- analyze primary sources & critically read the secondary literature related to your research topic in order to construct an argument
- communicate your ideas to classmates at various points in the research and writing process
- produce a final project and consider how your work might be developed for an research journal/presentation, used as a writing sample for job applications, or presented in some sort of other public format

Course Requirements (Prerequisites)

You should have successfully completed MUCH 201 and 202 (Music History I and II) or be admitted on a case-by-case basis—the course is intended for folks near or at the end of undergraduate studies, not for freshmen or sophomore music majors. Environmental Studies majors who do not have the prerequisite may be added by the instructor on a case-by-case basis.

Course Materials: Brightspace

There is no required text for this course. All readings and recordings for this course will be available to you through Brightspace. Visit <https://brightspace.potsdam.edu> for your course resources; we'll do this together starting Week 1.

You are responsible for regularly checking Brightspace for assignments, discussion questions, and any possible updates/changes. Please let me know as soon as possible if you are having any problems accessing any course materials. If you're having issues, the number to the Computing & Technology Services (CTS) helpdesk is 315-267-4444 or helpdesk@potsdam.edu.

How to prepare for class/homework/some general guidelines:

What kind of stuff might be assigned as homework?

- Throughout the course of the semester, you'll usually have to some work to do *before* coming to class—maybe some pages to read, music to listen to, a video to watch.

How much?

- I've tried to be as humane as possible: while this is a reading-intensive course (upper division music history seminar!), I have often tried to only assign one longer article per week. Occasionally this will mean that I'll split the class up into two groups (a Tuesday group and a Thursday group), and you'll only do the reading one day a week.

How to get to it?

- Course content and activities are structured using a weekly format on Brightspace
- You'll see a module for a week [Week 1, for example], then individual modules for each day [Tuesday/Thursday].
- All of the specific reading / listening / viewing instructions will always be provided on each day's module: exact assignment of required page numbers, PDFs and/or listening links.

When can I access the homework?

- I generally will have the work for the following week posted by the end of business on Friday, so you can do it as it fits into your schedule (over the weekend, or day by day).
- You should have a look at Brightspace every day for listening/reading assignments, discussion questions, quizzes, and any possible updates/changes.
- Anything that's listed for a day, please do it **BEFORE** I see you in class that day.
- Once modules are opened, they will remain visible for the rest of the semester.

Gentle reminder:

- SUNY guidelines assume **at least** 2 hours of study time per hour of class time or credit. For this 3-credit class, which meets 3 hours/week, they therefore assume you would potentially spend 6 additional hours a week outside of class (studying, listening, reading).
- Now: I don't think you always need to hit that number of hours outside class—some of that depends on YOU and obviously the number of hours you spend reading or listening will vary over the course of the week or the semester.....**but if you are obviously not doing work outside class, you will likely not be successful in this course.**
- Please feel free to come meet with me for guidance on how to organize your studying and reading time most effectively.

Course Evaluation

Assessment will be based on five overall categories: weekly short assignments, in-class work (attendance, participation in in-class activities, discussion, in-class writing, etc), a creative soundscape project, and a research project (which has a number of internal steps). For more details on specific categories, see below:

Evaluation in this course also attempts to minimize stress and anxiety: **no exams and there is *some* flexibility for deadlines (more on this below).**

Details:

1. Weekly Assignments/ Forum posts on Brightspace – 25%

- a. You'll be asked to either complete an assignment or a discussion forum post on Brightspace at least once each week of the class. Start early, stay on top of it, and it should help us start our discussions from a more complex and interesting place!
- b. However many forum posts/homework assignments I give you—there will be between 15 and 25 of them this semester—you can miss up to **four** of them with no penalty.
- c. If you miss additional assignments beyond the four freebies, you will lose 10% from your weekly assignment grade for each additional missing assignment/post.
- d. I will often give you some specific guidelines or things to think about to help you focus your thoughts a little. Starting in week 2, I'll give you a rubric to explain what counts as a "good/thorough" response to a reading (this is the basis for my grading of this).
- e. Your post or assignment must be completed the evening before our class, 11:59pm (so that I and others can read them before class that morning)

2. Attendance/Participation – 20%

This class will only be successful if it becomes an engaged, active learning community, especially because it's a seminar-style course. Simply put, you can't successfully engage with this course if you're routinely not here. Due to these factors, attendance and participation is **essential** and is encouraged through multiple means of evaluation.

I've tried to build in **flexibility** into this class—**EVERYONE NEEDS IT!**—while also acknowledging the **reality** that you cannot be successful in this class without being present.

- a. I will track attendance and participation. Many days you'll have a discussion post to do before class, and during participatory discussions, you are expected to contribute (simply being present is not enough).
- b. There are a couple of days built into this semester when we won't meet in person, ranging from fall break and November recess....and who knows what else will come up in addition (snow days??). Overall, we're likely to have around 30 class meetings.
- c. This fall, you can miss **FOUR** classes for whatever reason with no penalty. **Use these as you see fit—you can use them for illness, mental health days, prep for some giant deadline or recital, whatever works. I strongly suggest you reserve some of your absences for sickness, since we all get sick. Four days=two entire weeks of class, if you're counting.**
- d. If you miss more than **FOUR** classes, I have concerns about the extent to you are participating in our communal work and discussions. I **reserve the right to subtract 10% from your participation grade for each additional absence after the four "use-as-you-see fit" absences.**
- e. If you have more extended issues this fall—major illness, family crises, or anything else that significantly impacts your ability to attend the class sessions—please schedule a time to talk to me *as soon as possible.* I want to help anyone in need find

workarounds, but I can't help if I don't know the situation. It is to your advantage in these kinds of extraordinary situations to make sure to communicate with me and/or Dean Heuser so that we can help you find the right solution for your situation.

- f. Except under specific circumstances, if you miss more than **EIGHT** classes during the term (that's one month of classes or more than 25% of our class meetings), I reserve the right to consider that you haven't been able to do enough of the work to successfully complete the course (meaning you can't "pass" the course). This isn't automatic, but is a possibility.
- g. For any class you've missed, I strongly suggest you contact me to discuss missed content, as you'll still need to know it for projects.
- h. If you have a religious observance during the semester, any missed coursework during that particular class will not count against you. However, you should inform me before the absence and you'll still want to stay on top of the relevant coursework for that class date.

3.Creative Sound Project – 25%

- a. Given in Week 4, due in Week 8.

4. Final Project – 25%

- a. started by Week 8 and continuing throughout the rest of the semester.
- b. Will likely include 5 parts: research consultation, initial topic, research question & initial bibliography, brief presentation, final submitted version

5. Reflection Questions – 5%

- a. A series of prompts to help you to reflect on our work together, and how to help you move forward with thinking about music/sound/environment beyond this class. We will spend some class time on these during Week 15 (they will only be assigned at the end of the semester).

Single-Seat Honors

For an embedded single-seat honors course, you will be expected to follow the regular procedures of the class outlined in this syllabus.

In addition, the honors student will:

- Have two 30-minute one-on-one meetings with me during the semester. During these meetings, you will discuss an assigned reading (s) and engage in a dialogue with me regarding the concepts and ideas in the reading and their relation to course material.
- The honors student will serve as co-discussion leader (with me) one time throughout the semester. You will come up with a series of discussion questions and activities for a specific course date & reading. This will be done in consultation with me—we'll find a topic of interest, assign the readings several weeks ahead of time, and then you will meet with me to discuss how you'd like to organize your questions & activity.
- For the final project, you will meet with me an additional time to workshop the content and design of the final project; you have the potential to work with me to exhibit your work through the course website, university study day, Learning & Research fair, or other appropriate public platform (depending on timing and topic).

Course Policies

Grading

All grades are determined on the following scale (this scale is consistent throughout undergrad music history courses at Crane).

4.0:	95-100
3.7:	92-94
3.3:	88-91
3.0:	85-87
2.7:	82-84
2.3:	78-81
2.0:	75-77
1.7:	72-74
1.3:	68-71
1.0:	65-67
0.0:	0-64

Please note the passing grade for this course is 2.0 (75% or above).

Grade Appeals

I want you to think hard, learn, do your work, AND not be stressed about grades in here—generally speaking all of those things can happen :)

But if you do have questions about a grade, please speak with me (in person) first. The Undergraduate Catalog has specific criteria upon which you are allowed to appeal a grade. If we cannot come to an informal resolution, you would complete a formal Grade Appeal Form and consider if additional resolution is necessary. Details about specific steps/timelines for this process are located in the Undergraduate Catalog: <https://catalog.potsdam.edu/content.php?catoid=4&navoid=191>

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- **Email:** I check email several times a day; if you don't hear back from me within 24 hours, feel free to try again. Please make sure to check your campus email regularly—I frequently send essential updates via email.

- **Office Hours:** Office hours can be in person or via online meeting—**any office hour is scheduled by appointment** in order to maximize the overlap between your schedule and mine! Please email or message me to set up office hour meetings; I'm very happy to discuss course material or just offer a supportive ear for anything you'd like to share in a safe space.

- **Pandemic Protocols?:** At the moment there aren't a lot of specific protocols on campus, but if circumstances change during the semester, I will follow official campus guidelines....which may mean that our classroom policies could change over the course of the semester. I'll keep you posted should there be any changes in policy as we go. Please let me know if you have concerns.

- **Trauma-Sensitive Teaching:** In my entry ticket for the course, I asked each of you to feel free to come to me with any personal issues and/or other things that might impact your semester; please always feel free to keep me updated should your circumstances change during the semester.

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>

- **Accessibility:** I'd like to borrow a few words from the wonderful scholar Mimi Khúc (scholar/artist/activist in Residence in Disability Studies at Georgetown University):

"**Everyone's** access needs matter, and we will try collectively to meet them as they arise.

Access needs are needs that when met enable participation in the course to the fullest--therefore they are wide-ranging and can be met in wide-ranging, creative ways. I

am committed to making participation as accessible as possible. Please let me know if anything comes up that makes participation feel hard....**We are taught not to have**

needs, that needs mean we are "weak"; resist this impulse. Access is relational. This

means that creating access and accessibility is something we do together, in relationship and community. It requires a shared commitment

to each other's wellbeing and participation in the community space, and requires

communication and negotiation and

flexibility.... **Everyone has access needs, and**

these needs change over time. I will try to anticipate as much as possible but I cannot

know everyone's needs at all times. When

you become aware of your access needs,

please communicate them to me."

There are no quizzes or exams for this course, so that should help. If you have any concerns about our *in-class work*, please let me know and I will work with you to find acceptable accommodations. Some of you may have a registration on file with Accommodative Services (<http://potsdam.edu/support/oas>)—you're very welcome to share these with me. I look forward to talking to all of you about your access needs as we work together this semester.

One important access need relates to both attendance and late work—I have tried to hit the sweet spot with both by offering flexibility but also some structure. Please come to me if you have questions or concerns.

- **Classroom conduct:** In this class, it is inevitable & important that we will disagree with points in the readings, critical approaches, and with each other. Critical engagement—which should include reasoned debate, critique, and questions—is essential to the central questions of this class, and is often the way we all learn the most. It is essential, however, that we be considerate in the ways we conduct these discussions: have an open mind, don't make assumptions about your classmates, have respect for different viewpoints, and hone your ability to listen thoughtfully and compassionately to each other. Please let me know if you have any concerns about discussions during the semester.

- **Note taking:** A few friendly note-taking suggestions:
 - It is very important for you to follow along with listening examples and to take detailed notes about what is happening in the musical examples as you listen. If you don't write it down, you often don't remember.
 - **If I use slides at any point in class, I will post the slides on Brightspace,** no need to copy down all the info directly from the slides as you go. It will help you to focus on jotting down important verbal content from classroom discussions (i.e. material beyond just copying down any information directly from a slide). While everyone assimilates information differently—I do still strongly suggest that you take notes during class, otherwise it'll be murky down the road!

- **Technology:** we're likely to be using technology regularly in this class! Please feel free to come to me with personal issues and/or technology limitations that might impact your ability to participate in the semester. You'll likely find it helpful to bring laptops, tablets, or phones to class—I'll let you know in advance if there's a particular class where it is especially useful to have such devices.

Regardless of what we're doing during our in-class meetings (unless we're specifically using the internet to look things up) please try to help yourself focus on your classmates by refraining from multitasking (texting, being on social media, etc).

- **Late work:** See above, but as a general policy, all quizzes and projects have an automatic two week "grace period" (no need to ask for extensions, you can submit it up to two weeks after the deadline with no problems at all). I am unlikely to grant any extensions beyond this window, since it causes problems for you and me! Please contact me with questions.

- **Academic Integrity:** This class will strictly follow SUNY Potsdam's policies on academic integrity. Please consult the Academic Honor Code website (<http://www.potsdam.edu/studentlife/studentconduct/honorcode>) for more information regarding your responsibilities.

- In general, academic misconduct includes acts in which you seek to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation. Examples include (but are not limited to):

1. Cutting and pasting text from the web without quotation marks or proper citation.
2. Paraphrasing from the web or written texts without crediting the source.
3. Using notes in an exam when such use is not allowed.
4. Using another person's ideas, words, or research and presenting it as one's own.

***Please note that this also includes working together on any assignments that are not explicitly framed as collaborative projects.**

I encourage you to discuss class content with each other inside and outside of class. For assignments, however, no collaboration with other students is permitted. Disguising words or work by others as your own undermines the academic community here at SUNY Potsdam. If you have any questions about this, don't hesitate to ask me. For specific questions on intellectual property and proper citation techniques, advice is available both at SCCS and the Writing Center.

AI/Chat GPT, etc:

Here's a specific guide on ChatGPT. https://library.potsdam.edu/citing_ai

While I don't have issues with you using AI as a research tool, I'll just say BE CAREFUL (it's got issues and makes a lot of weird mistakes....it may actually be getting less accurate with time, not more so!) and do not present such text as "your own" (it's not).

Cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, falsification and other academic honor code violations are taken very seriously. Any suspicious situations will be dealt with through proper judicial channels and may result in serious consequences. For more information about academic misconduct procedures, see the processes and procedures at the Academic Honor Code website.