

Teaching Reflection

Spring 2024

A few reminder notes about teaching (general concepts that I tend to utilize in all recent semesters):

- 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 in a course such as “Music, Gender, and Sexuality” or in the music history core, where I incorporate both new repertoires and new frameworks to teaching well-trodden works.
- In terms of classroom climate and mental health, I start out the semester in all courses 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 writing prompt, asking 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 terms of accessibility, I aim to find a good balance between the need to be in-class to participate and form part of the classroom learning community and the obvious need for flexibility. Each semester I experiment with different policies aimed at providing this supportive and open atmosphere around flexibility, both in terms of attendance and assignments. I always provide flexibility for students when possible, and I also have expansive discussions about access needs (going beyond just accommodation paperwork) and trauma-informed pedagogy). Please see my syllabi for more detailed statements on accommodation, accessibility, and policies in each course.
- For each of my courses, in addition to the online teaching evaluation forms used through Brightspace, I also ask the students to complete reflection questions at the end of the semester, which helps them synthesize their learning throughout the semester. I began doing this in Spring 2023, and continue the practice—these are usually very thoughtful ways to synthesize our work together at the end of the semester. It helps increase a sense of student growth and understanding of how their perspectives have shifted over the course of 15 weeks. I ask them to consider how our class materials and takeaways may impact their musicking in other areas of their work (education, performance, business, etc), encouraging them to forge connections between these areas of inquiry. I also draw on their suggestions for additional material in these reflection questions, so that I can incorporate new topics in subsequent semesters.

Music History III:

This was my twelfth semester of teaching “Music History III: Music Since 1900,” and I’ve continued to include recurrent threads of earlier semesters: critiquing the canon, a focus on identities and inclusions/exclusions, and an intentionality about *which* examples I choose in terms of regularly highlighting works and concepts by women, composers of color, and other underrepresented groups. I tried to include various repetitive threads throughout the semester, to allow students to have something to hold on to as overarching ideas throughout the 120-year span of the class. One of these was “Music and Politics,” and really digging into this topic also allowed us to have some information with which to push back against the ubiquitous “music transcends politics” discourse. I always try to

incorporate some element of student choice in the semester; some of this occurs through the daily “Guest DJ” options where a student shares a listening of their choice at the beginning of each class. But each of the four projects throughout the semester also have choice built in—while they have instructions and a broad theme (music and politics, for example), the example the student chooses to explore is up to them.

Probably the biggest difference with this spring’s class was that due to some irregularities in class and section planning, I only had one small section of History III, comprising 8 students. Because of this, I was able to really get to know each of the students and craft things responsively to their interests. For instance, I devised an “add an example” assignment at the end of the semester, where each student presented a mini Music History lecture to the class on something they thought should be added to the curriculum. These were overall really successful and enthusiastic. The one downside to this smaller class was that a missing student or two *really* impacted class flow and discussion, and I still had a student or two who missed a ton of class due to mental health struggles—so the individualized attention certainly doesn’t fix all ills.

To quote from a few student evaluations from the spring section:

Student #1: Course content is rich, diverse, relevant, and practical to my musical world. The content is a basis for all modern music and is crucial to know, no matter what your music major may be.

Student #2: Dr. Brooks is a fantastic educator, many of the topics in class were both interesting to learn about as well as relevant to dialogs available outside of class.

Student #3: Dr. Brooks is a terrific professor who strives on teaching students in a modern format, giving them insight, while talking to us like adults. I appreciated her teaching style and would take other classes if she was teaching them 4.9/5 on ratemyteacher.

Music, Sound, and Video Games:

In spring 2024, my course on “Music, Sound, and Video Games” received a permanent course number. I used much of the same material as last time I taught this course (spring 2022), but was excited to incorporate a few more applied learning and guest lecture opportunities. I had a few students in my course who were active in the SUNY Potsdam Esports Club, so as a class we journeyed over to the Esports headquarters in Dunn and had the chance to play some of the vintage equipment there and chat with Tony Betrus (what an amazing source of video game knowledge and institutional memory about arcades at SUNY Potsdam!) It was a really fun opportunity. In April, I invited Dean Gibbons to talk about video game canons via his new work entitled “Rewritable Memory: Concerts, Canons, and Game Music History.” This was a great discussion and really enjoyable to bring Will’s expertise into our classroom. Also in April I brought in Dr. Chris Hernacki to present on arranging video game music: he gave a truly stunning lecture on the ways he arranges and multitracks video game music for brass ensemble.

I continue to assign “Play Days” as part of the coursework, where we play games in structured assignments and then discuss our experience and reactions in class. These tend to go really well, and continued to be a good approach to work in the class. The biggest change this year was that in addition to our other work, we organized a “Video Game Music Event” in Crane on April 23, 2024. This event was (to my knowledge) the first stand-alone concert devoted to video game music in Crane’s history; I used money from the two single-seat honors students to provide food at intermission. We had a terrific crowd, and the student feedback was excellent (many of them enjoyed not only the repertoire but also the opportunity to take part in an informal music making experience).

I've attached a file for the concert flyer and program in my dossier. I can't wait to do this again! I'd also like to increase the applied activities in this course, while making sure to still ground the class in understanding the breadth of ludomusicological scholarship that exists. I'm hoping that in the future I can partner with others doing work on video games in Crane to make more lasting institutional presence for work on video games.

To quote from a few student evaluations:

Student #1: Class consisted of studying music in video games. It's still a fairly new field of study so it was fun to pioneer some things.

Student #2: Video game music is super important to include in Crane's curriculum!!! Keep this class!!!

Student #3: I would definitely take another course from Dr. Brooks! Her teaching is very effective—I can genuinely say I've learned more in her classes than I have in many other classes at crane. She is one of the most approachable and caring professors and she structures her courses in a very accessible way.

WAYS 103: Gender, Sexuality, and Music

I taught two sections of WAYS 103 for the first time in Spring 2024; the course topic focused on "Gender, Sexuality, and Music." I designed the course in partnership with Drs. McIntyre and Doran, which was a lot of work and bureaucracy in terms of Gen Ed requirements. I think it'll be easier now that the course exists, though! This semester was also really challenging because I was staffed on a second section of this course rather late in the game, meaning that I now had ~50 students but was also teaching the same class as both a M/W/F course and a T/Th course (which is a nightmare and I should never do that again).

It was really enjoyable to teach freshmen for the first time at SUNY Potsdam, and working with them on speaking and presentation skills had a lot of wonderful intersections with thinking about music and sound. I found some really cool resources to teach in this course, drawing on things I've taught in other music/gender/sexuality courses, but also neat new readings on queer joy and podcasting or voice and technology. Other than the Common Assignments required by the Ways 103 course, I also did a Group Project on New York City. This was a cool idea but I should move it earlier in the semester next time. I also assigned a lot of video speeches, with the intent of lessening in-class time and also attempting to be sensitive about performance anxiety. I think this accomplished both of those objectives, but it also took an enormous amount of my time in terms of grading, so I think I should include fewer recorded speeches next time I teach this course. Finally, I met a lot of wonderful first-year Crane students in these sections, and I'm really excited about getting to work with them in a year or two via their music curriculum :)

To quote from a few student evaluations:

Student #1: Incredibly interesting course with lots of opportunities to learn about different aspects of not only music, but also how it relates to gender and sexuality.

Student #2: I found the course content very enlightening, and it covered a lot of topics I had either never previously thought about or never had the opportunity to deeply delve into before. In tandem with both the course and the professor's approach to guiding us through research, I feel encouraged to research more about these topics even if I may initially struggle with discovering the information I'm looking for.

Student #3: I would absolutely take another course from Dr. Brooks. She is so reasonable with work

quantity and deadlines, and is very approachable if students have any questions or concerns. She cares about her students' success in the course, but also about her students as people, and that is really refreshing.