

Teaching Reflection

Spring 2022

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

- For each of my courses, in addition to the forms provided by the provost and/or online teaching evaluation forms used through Moodle, I also include a separate page of feedback more specifically tailored to music history courses. I always ask the students to reflect on things they found useful—particularly in terms of their musicianship and pedagogy—and for feedback on their favorite/least favorite assignments and aspects of the course.
- 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 through all of my classes, whether it is teaching a course such as “Music and Disability Studies”—where I stress intersectionality of disability with race, gender, class, and other factors—or in the music history core, where we can 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.
- 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. In my syllabus, I include the following statement (thanks to several scholars including Andrew dell’Antonio who shape all kinds of thinking about this!): “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. We learn each other’s needs and try to meet them as best we can, so that we can all participate as much as possible in this classroom space. 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.”
- During summer 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>

- 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.

Music History III: Music Since 1900

Throughout my eight semesters of teaching this course, I have consistently stressed the importance of critiquing the musical canon and have worked to think about inclusion and exclusion. 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 have any sort of time constraints on exams (all exams are online, open-book, and untimed), and most assignments have some kind of potential re-do possibility if you did not achieve the learning outcome. I tried to vary types of instruction and build in more time for groupwork and further exploration of topics. So most weeks there would be reading/listening homework on Monday with a class lecture based on musical style, Wednesdays would have a homework video about more cultural aspects and a lecture similarly focused on broader cultural issues, and then Fridays would have no homework and would be some kind of more group-oriented in-class activity. To give an example, during the week we discussed music in early 20th century Germany and Austria, I pulled about 30 names from Kira Thurman's new book *Singing Like Germans: Black Musicians in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms*, had each student research a specific individual and upload some biographical detail to Moodle, allowing us to launch a discussion about both multiracial spaces and encounters in this period but also contemporary racial frameworks about music in general (and German music in particular). I can share additional Friday activities if desired!

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 yielded the most diverse repertoire I've taught in this course to date (see "course schedule" in appointment dossier for specifics), not just works by artists I already tended to incorporate—such as Nadia Boulanger or Florence Price—but composers such as José White Lafitte, Manuel Ponce, May Frances Aufderheide, Ethel Smyth, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, and quite a few others. I thought this kind of framework worked really well, and made questions about representation a quintessential focus throughout the semester.

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

Student #1: "I have never been so sure that music is political as I am now after taking this class. In my opinion, one of the most important musical topics to talk about is music that has especially strong political ties. For example, music that is dedicated to world tragedies amidst tumultuous political events - such as Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima - are incredibly important to investigate. The music is not only incredibly interesting to look at contextually, but it also yields a very interesting human response from its listeners. Works like these invite people who are not necessarily musicians but people who enjoy music and are "with the times" to engage with music. This music ties in human experiences that are shared by the world, not just by an individual. It's been one of my favorite parts of this course to hear about music in context with large political or historical events. Second, I believe that important music to talk about in this century is the music from underrepresented groups (minoritized groups, Peoples of Color, women, etc.). They are voices that have been silenced for so long. Especially at Crane, we learn very little about music from underrepresented groups and mostly hear the voices of old dead white guys. Elevating voices, such as those of Carlos Chavez, Cecile Chaminade, and Ornette Coleman, is so important to understand historically. I appreciate you Dr. Brooks in making sure to highlight these voices this semester. It continues to inspire Peoples of Color and oppressed people to strive for more and to see themselves within the history of music."

Student #2: I think the first important topic to discuss is how music and politics intersect. We spent a lot of time on this topic, which I appreciate because despite what some people like to claim no music can truly be separated from politics. Music doesn't have to reference or be involved in governmental politics to be political. Music that is said to be absolute is a political statement within the musical world because it is saying that music shouldn't be political, which in of itself can be a political statement. Regardless of that fact music can both influence and be influenced by politics and it is extremely important to be aware of this as we analyze trends and "popular" musics of various areas. We need to understand that music may have been "popular" because the government forced both composer's and listener's to create and consume certain types of music in the name of nationalism or may have been "popular" by some other similar political influence. For example in the USSR composers such as Shostakovich were pigeonholed into composing tonal European Western music and if anything strayed too far from those guidelines they would be severely punished. This led to other musical styles not being represented in the USSR, not because of musical trends, lack of interest, or ability, but because of a government choke hold. Politics influences a large amount of what we do personally, in society, and artistically, and so leaving it out of music history would remove a large amount of critically important context.

Student #3: Dr. Brooks is super flexible and is always honest about her feelings and realizes her student's feelings. I cannot wait to take another course with her!!! My classmates and I appreciated her flexibility and Friday fun activities.

Student #4: Wonderful. Intelligent. Amazing. I loved the course as it presented, and Dr. Brooks' little commentaries on the realities of the situations were my favorite. I have now added Santa Cecilia to my playlist from her DJ moment and I'm loving every second of it. Thank you for being you, and thank you for a wonderful semester. I hope I have another opportunity to have Dr. Brooks as my instructor.

Student #5: I loved the guest dj every class - it showed me a lot of cool new music! I also love that the exams and quizzes are online. Even if I know the test materials, I get a lot of test anxiety so taking it from home releases a lot of that stress and helps me focus more.

Student #6: This was an amazing course and very well constructed. I like that we talked about prominent figures but also lesser-known figures in music. We also talked about teachers and performers who aren't typically discussed in music history courses which were very fun. The class was very engaging

with fun activities and discussions, also brought up very important issues that are still relevant in music today which was very awesome.

Student #7: This course made me love music history - a subject I've hated since high school. Thank you for making it interesting, comprehensive, and representative!

Student #8: Dr. Brooks is such a kind and amazing teacher. She is very detailed but also concise with her teaching. She cares greatly about her students and makes the class environment comfortable and open. I also like that she is humorous and engaging with students. She is very good at delivering information but also making sure we understand what we are learning. There are no weaknesses in her teaching that I could think of. I would take another course with Dr. Brooks.

Student #9: It was a pleasure to take Music History with Dr. Brooks! She is knowledgeable, engaging, and always created an environment fit for success. Most importantly (especially in these strange in-person adjustment times), she cares about the needs of her students. If I had more time, I would've loved to take more courses with Dr. Brooks.

Music, Sound, and Video Games

Although I've taught portions of this course at other institutions, this was the first time I've taught this at SUNY Potsdam (after hoping to do so for some time!). There was a large amount of student demand and interest in this course, hence why I offered it two semesters in a row (though I plan for every other spring rotation in the future).

I made sure to incorporate a great deal of cultural discussion into the course, parsing not just the technical issues around game sound but questions such as race, gender and sexuality, and sonic stereotypes in multimedia. I was lucky to bring in two guest lecturers (Jerod Sommerfeldt in the fall to discuss technology in video game sound, and Will Gibbons to discuss music and indie games in the spring).

I offered several "play" assignments throughout the semester, where students were instructed to pick a game aligning with certain parameters (a rhythm game, for example), play for at least 30 minutes, then write a response paper to share with the class. These were very successful and a wonderful opportunity to integrate play and critical discussions into curriculum. Each semester culminated in a researched podcast; 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 loved having Dr. Brooks as a professor and it's clear that she is very competent in the subject area as she is always adding useful information and conversation points to our discussions. She is usually quite fair about due dates and making sure the information we are reading about is interesting and relevant. She always kept a good and comfortable class environment in which we could say things in our discussions without fear of being wrong. Overall, I loved having Dr. Brooks this semester.

Student #2: Dr. Brooks is a wonderful instructor! She is really knowledgeable on all of the topics we covered, and she facilitates conversation and discussion between students. She helped us to explore many different topics this semester.

Student #3: Dr. Brooks is amazing, considerate, and a wonderful educator.

Student #4: Very willing to help outside of class. Very communicative and knowledgeable about the

subject. It's obvious through class discussion that she has a lot of different threads that she could pull on to bring up any amount of topics related to the one at hand. I would happily take another course with Dr Brooks.

Student #5: The absolute best! Highly knowledgeable, wonderful speaker, and as involved as involved could be. She cares so so much about what she does, and I look forward to her class every morning I have her.

Student #6: I really liked the instructors teaching throughout this course. She's always very attentive to our comments and always is able to to further our discussion and respond to our comments in an insightful way which really impresses me at 8 in the morning sometimes. Student #7: Dr. Brooks shows an enthusiasm each and every day. Both inspiring and admired by her students, Dr. Brooks is always just an email away from every question and/or concern. Amazing instructor.

Music & Disability Studies

The first time I offered "Music and Disability Studies" was in Fall 2019, with the hope I could teach it regularly as an upper division music history elective with potential crossover to both the special ed concentration at Crane and the new disability studies minor at SUNY Potsdam. Disability Studies is a new interdisciplinary area studying the cultural dimensions of disability across different chronological eras, places, and cultures. Disability studies in music is particularly new, only emerging after 2006. As both a human condition and as a type of identity, disability is shaped by changing perceptions constructed by cultural ideas (from the social to the political). In "Music & Disability Studies," we focused on interdisciplinary approaches of disability studies to examine social and cultural aspects of disability in relation to music. We explored the ways musicians have identified as disabled, how disability has shaped music and reception, and how disability narratives have been used in discourse about musical style.

I was immensely proud to offer this course to Crane students—I think it is a very important area to discuss, for both educators and performers—and I was happy to have this syllabus listed as containing "diversity rich content" through DIAC. In changing this course from its initial offering, I made changes in both content and in structure. Among the new content I was happiest to have incorporated in this iteration was a reading connecting disability and gender studies through the case study of composer Ethel Smyth and her conceptions of her loss of hearing, some insights from my own research on music and polio, a new unit on musicals and disability (which was very well received!), and some helpful terminology revamp from the professional development session I attended via the AMS Music & Disability Study Group back in fall 2021. I also included more of a disability justice lens and greater discussion time devoted to institutional critique (including ableist structures in music schools), which the students found very useful.

To note a few student evaluation comments:

Student #1: I think this is a really great course. I thoroughly enjoyed the content we learned about. I think that this is really great for students who have a particular interest in Special Ed. I think that this is a really great upper division class.

Student #2: I really learned a lot in this class! I don't have any specific comments other than that I really liked the variety of things that we talked about. I liked that we talked about different disabilities, different time periods, different people's receptions of disabilities, etc. I also appreciated that we did a

couple different styles of classes - I like it when class isn't always the same style of lecture so it was nice that we switched things up and did small groups, larger groups, took turns with the reading assignments, etc.

Student #3: I really appreciated that Dr. Brooks would sometimes divide the work for the week between the class to lighten the workload. It also made it more fun to learn about for me by going over it in class and learning about the articles from my peers rather than having to tediously read everything. I liked the flexibility of the final project.

Student #4: I love Dr. Brooks. I think she's just so amazing and teaches this class really well. I think she understands the concepts of what she's teaching really well and it's noticeable that she goes out of her way to study these things.

Student #5: Dr. Brooks is an excellent teacher - I would absolutely take more courses with her. She is one of my favorite professors in crane by far.

Student #6: this was my first class with Dr. Brooks and she is an excellent professor. She is very knowledgeable of the topics discussed in the class and is friendly to students and facilitates classroom discussion well.