

Teaching Reflection

Spring 2023

In spring 2023, due to some course shuffling in the history area, I received 2 hours of alternate assignment. I completed an alternative service assignment to research music history curricula at other universities. My colleague Erica Levenson and I worked on this throughout the spring semester and compiled a report of 35 institutions; we met with the history area, THC chair, and Crane SOM Dean in May 2023 to present our findings and propose choices and work for AY 2023-2024 on curriculum change in the music history area.

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

- For each of my courses, in addition to the online teaching evaluation forms used through Brightspace, 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. For each of my classes starting this spring, I included a reflection questions assignment at the end of the semester, which helped students synthesize their learning throughout the semester. Reading through these, I'll definitely do this from now on—they were incredibly thoughtful culminations of our work together.
- 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. 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."
- 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’ve started a “Guest DJ” program—over the course of the semester, each student brings one piece of music to share with their colleagues in those minutes right around when class starts. I’ve found this to be a wonderfully inclusive way of making sure that it’s clear that all kinds of music are welcome in the classroom, that I care about their tastes, and the selections often connect in interesting ways with other material in the course.

In Music History III I try to vary types of instruction and build in more time for groupwork and further exploration of topics. To give one example, on the Friday of the week we talked about early 20th century piano music and ragtime, I divided the students into 7 groups, gave each a handout gleaned from Library of Congress resources on ragtime, and had each group do a little research on different cultural aspects of ragtime, upload their thoughts to Brightspace, and share with the class. I can share additional Friday activities if desired!

I included four short projects in the course, instead of a larger scaffolded research project. These included an audio program note, short written work on music/power/politics and music & place, and a project focused on assessing musician’s biopics. I loved the biopics project—it was so much fun, and I felt the students had a lot of fun doing it—but I felt the class needed more time to actually delve into celebrity and myth-creation, film analysis, etc. A lot of students produced excellent work, but some seemed to lack the film analysis skills they needed to get at the intent of the project.

I continue to be happy with teaching this class without a focus on chronology, relying instead on a frame of 21st and 20th century musics in the first two weeks, then a series of thematic units. I’ve expanded my coverage of Indigenous music and cultural appropriation via a deeper dive into Jeremy Dutcher and Caroline Shaw’s *Partita No. 2*. I would like to spend more time on the unit on musical complexity, abstraction, and extended techniques—it feels a bit rough so late in the semester.

Music, Gender, and Sexuality, post-1800

This is the third time I've taught this specific iteration of this course, and the first time as a permanently numbered offering! I also worked with Dr. Erica Levenson so that we could make sure to get permanent numbering for both our courses, offered as a fall-spring two-semester sequence (though each course could often be taken alone). Both our courses are popular, with a lot of student interest in this topic. In changing this course each time I offer it, I made changes in both content and in structure.

Among the new content I was happiest to have incorporated in this iteration was a month-long focus on New York City and gender and sexuality—it really allowed us to dig in to the ways gender, sexuality, and music have shaped lives from the 1800s to today. The NYC unit culminated in a collaborative midterm project centered on online archives—the students produced some truly interesting and innovative projects, some of which they think they'll use in their future work as performers and educators.

To note a few student evaluation comments:

Student #1: "I enjoyed how we actually covered a wide variety of music and its relation to gender and sexuality in this course instead of just focusing on a singular composer/genre for weeks at a time. I feel I am better prepared to talk about more genres of music and make connections to music we didn't talk about on my own from what I learned in the class. I enjoyed the no-test approach to this class— it made for a relaxing environment that made me more comfortable to learn and take chances I wouldn't take in discussions/paper writing that I wouldn't have taken if I were being harshly graded."

Student #2: "This course taught me a lot about the parts of music I was less familiar with, as well as the role that I plan in music, whether it be studying or performing. It has helped me developed significant levels of critical thinking on subjects that may be seen as controversial to some, but have direct connections with my life in all aspects."

Student #3: She is very knowledgable in every topic she has taught me, this is my third class with her and I enjoy learning and working with her. I would absolutely take another class with her again. She is also a very kind and caring person and cares about her students so deeply. I also really appreciate her efforts in making sure students in Crane don't go hungry, with her treats in class and the food pantry that is stocked almost entirely by her! I will miss having classes with her dearly and loved every minute of working with her!

Student #4: "This is the second class I have taken with Dr. Brooks, and I would take so many more. She is very knowledgable about all subject areas she teaches about, and changes her classes every year and keeps the same level of knowledge for all classes. She's available outside of class and makes conversation about all events happening in students' lives. I would 100% take a class again from Dr. Brooks if I was here this semester :)"

Student #5: "I am so thankful for the flexibility within this class. We are treated like humans and are given plenty of opportunities to prioritize ourselves over our classwork. Thank you for making this 3 credit class feel possible! And thank you for being understanding and a great person to talk to."

Music in America

This was the first time I've taught this graduate course, although there was a preexistent course with this name on the books taught by a professor who has since retired. I was really excited to teach this course, because it offers such a wide and relevant lens to explore many different topics. I arranged the

course much like most seminars, but in terms of content I made sure to include topics that focused on race, gender, sexuality, movement, and critiquing mystiques of American nationalism. There were some really cool moments, such as exploring military bands through the lens of imperialism and military bands in the Philippines in the early 20th century (I even had a Filipino student who was really inspired to talk to her family and do more research on this topic after we worked on this in class).

In the course of a really broad chronology (from Indigenous histories through today), I made sure each unit includes topics on popular and "art" music, and some kind of topic related to identity. I also made sure to include contemporary history for each unit—when we discussed regional musics, we also talked about regional Hip hop styles from the "dirty South" for example. When teaching Indigenous history, I made sure we not only read writings by Indigenous authors about the histories of early recordings and settler colonial listening, but also that we talked about contemporary Indigenous music making.

Overall I did find the breadth of this class to be challenging at times, but I also think the students got a lot out of the topics. Probably the most difficult thing about this class was the size (16 students) and a marked unevenness in the work submitted. I ended up having 4 students (1/4 of the class!) request incompletes, which I don't think was based on the workload, just on having students who were struggling to balance master's coursework in general. I'm not sure I need to make any changes here, this may have been an unusually mixed bunch, but the number of incomplete requests was difficult to deal with at the tail end of the term.