



MUCH 443, Honors: Music, Sound & Video Games

Spring 2024

Class Times and Location:

Meetings in Bishop Hall, C303
T/Th, 9:30am-10:45am

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:

Though a small number of publications on video game sound appeared in the late 20th century, scholarly writing and analysis of game sound exploded in the first decade of the 21st century, from specific case studies in journals such as *Popular Music* to monographs such as Karen Collin's *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music* (2008) to a growing number of dissertations. A decade later, the state of this field is immense, and the term "ludomusicology" has emerged to detail the study of music and sound in, or related to, games. To give a few examples: Ludomusicology, a Videogame Music Research Group organized in 2011, holds annual international conferences on video game music. The North American Conference on Video Game Music will hold its eleventh annual meeting in 2024. And the bibliography compiled by the Society for the Study of Sound and Music in Games contains more than 800 entries.

Drawing on this recent work in ludomusicology, "MUCH 443: Music, Sound, and Video Games" will explore the relationships between music, sound, and video games through an examination of how the concepts of play and gaming have changed over time and an analysis of the intellectual, didactic, physical, and emotional roles of music in video games. To guide our inquiry, we will study foundational writings by play theorists, game scholars, musicologists, and ethnomusicologists. We will investigate how music structures games, particularly in terms of participation/interactivity/adaptivity and non-linearity. Some units will include close listening and analysis of selected works. We will also focus on issues of spectatorship, competition, and racial, class, national, and gender identities.

While this is a musicology class—and therefore reading and analysis comprise a large portion of the classwork expectations—there are opportunities for video game play included in the course design. No one's skill level is important; what is essential is that we think about how sound and music impact these games, our experience of them, and what roles such games play in contemporary media and culture.

During the semester you will develop an individual research project. The topic of music and games is too broad for this class to even attempt a thorough coverage, which leaves plenty of room for you to research a topic that speaks to your particular interests (I will assist you in the expiration of topics). For your final project, you may choose to explore a specific genre or a theoretical issue; various modalities are possible, including composition and performance. You should include personal analysis and observations, as well as discussion of your topic from published scholars (drawn from sources we have discussed in class or further readings you have discovered through your own research). 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 commentary on each other's projects.

Upon successfully completing MUCH 443, you should be able to:

- Articulate foundational theories about play and how those relate to/impact games in general, and video games in particular
- Recognize vocabulary, styles, genres, forms, and individual works from our class units on various aspects of music, sound, and video games
- Think creatively about how this class work influences your relationships with music
- 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 question in order to construct an argument
- communicate your ideas to classmates at various points in the research and writing process
- produce a final project

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.

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 six overall categories: weekly short assignments, in-class work (attendance, participation in in-class activities, discussion, in-class writing, etc), play days/reports, an informance/ performance event, a final research project (which has a number of internal steps), and reflection questions. 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).**

1. Weekly Assignments/ Forum posts on Brightspace – 20%

- a. You'll be asked to either complete an assignment or a discussion forum post on Brightspace at least once each week. Start early, stay on top of it, and it should help us start our discussions from a more interesting place!
- b. However many forum posts/homework assignments I give you—there will likely be about 12 of them this semester—you can miss up to **three** of them with no penalty.
- c. If you miss additional assignments beyond the three freebies, you will lose 10% from your weekly forum post grade for each additional missing assignment/post.
- d. Your grade in this section will consist of your individual grades on each post, averaged over the course of the semester.
- e. I will often give you some specific guidelines or things to think about to help you focus your thoughts a little. I also give you a basic rubric to explain what counts as a "good/thorough" response to a reading (this is the basis for my grading of this).
- f. Your post must be completed before our class, so there's not much flexibility on these assignments.

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 not here. Due to these factors, attendance & participation is **essential** and encouraged through multiple means.

I've tried to build **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. Some days you'll have a forum 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 spring break and February 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 spring, you can miss **FOUR** classes for whatever reason with no penalty. **Use these as you see fit—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 everyone gets 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 which you are participating in our communal work. Except in unusual circumstances, I will **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 spring—crises or anything that significantly impacts your ability to attend the class sessions—please 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 communicate with me and/or Dean Heuser so that we can help you find the right solution.
- 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 work to successfully complete the course (meaning you can't "pass"). 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, any missed work 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 work for that class date.

3. Play Days – 20%

- a. starting around Week 2; there will be individual assignment sheets for each (we'll have ~2 Play Days).

4. Informance/Performance Project – 17.5%

- a. An event featuring some video game music (more info to come about scheduling!); will likely include multiple parts such as submitted topic & plan, performance, and short explanation of performance

5. Final Project (Video or Podcast) – 17.5%

- a. started by Week 6; will likely include multiple parts such as research consultation & initial topic, bibliography, final submitted version

6. Reflection Questions – 5%

- a. Assigned during the last week of classes, with some in-class time to complete; prompts to help you to reflect on our work and help you continue thinking about music/sound/games beyond this class.

**** Single Seat Honors Procedures:** For an embedded single-seat honors course, students will be expected to follow the regular procedures of the class outlined in this syllabus (including course evaluation as noted below). In addition:

1. The honors student (s) will have a two 30-minute one-on-one meetings with the professor during the semester. During these meetings, the student will discuss an assigned reading (s) and engage in a dialogue with the professor regarding the concepts and ideas in the reading and their relation to course material.
2. For the play days, the honors student will have a longer assigned length/wordcount than students enrolled in the non-honors section.
3. For the informance/performance and final projects, the honors student will meet with the professor an additional time to workshop the content and design of their final project; if of appropriate quality, the honors student would have the potential to work with the professor to exhibit their work through the course website, university study day, or other appropriate 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>

- **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 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!).

Do not present text written by AI 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.