

For my BRIDGE project I chose to take an existing course and improve it. The course was MH350: *Music in the United States*. This course is a seminar of about twenty upper level undergraduates who have completed *Music Historiography I* and *II* which includes a basic framework of Western music history and some introductory research and writing skills.

My goals:

1. Make material more meaningful for students and me by focusing on “big ideas.”
2. Improve critical thinking skills.
3. Improve research, writing, and presentation skills.

BRIDGE readings of particular influence on my thinking were:

- “Making Assignments Worth Grading” (on backward design) by Barbara Walvoord
- “On the Persistence of Unicorns: The Trade-Off between Content and Critical Thinking Revisited” by Craig E. Nelson
- Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Knowledge, Understanding, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation

The revised course was restructured and re-titled to reflect the more thematic nature of the course: MH433: *American Music, American Identity*.

The changes I made can be seen by comparing the grading for each course:

Grading in old course:		Grading in new course:	
1) Research Paper Proposal	5%	1) Research Paper (draft)	10%
Research Paper Rough Draft	5%	PeerMark	10%
Research Paper Final Version	30%	Revised Research Paper (final version)	30%
2) In-class Performance	10%	2) In-class 30-minute Group Presentation	10%
3) Five tests	50%	3) 4 Assignments and Class Discussion	40%

Three basic changes were made; the third is the most important one:

- 1) Research paper
 - a. In the new course, more emphasis was placed on the initial draft of the paper and students took the first draft more seriously.
 - b. In the new course, more emphasis was placed on revision, emphasizing the process of writing. More time was also set aside toward the end of the course to address revisions. Students received feedback from both the instructor and their peers through PeerMark.
 - c. The total weight of the paper increased from 40% to 50%.
- 2) The in-class performance became a more structured group presentation which could still include a performance and that required more research and more careful presentation. Students were given a more detailed grading rubric.
 - a. This helped prepare them for their paper research.
- 3) The most significant difference by far, though, was omitting the five tests in favor of the four assignments and a class discussion grade.
 - a. Data recall was de-emphasized or used to address important ideas of musical meaning.

- b. The assignments required higher-level thinking in a structured sequence and gave practice at research and writing.
- c. Class discussions had long-term, broader goals.

Class discussion was intended to have the students relate the material in the text to six themes (“big ideas”):

- 1) The metaphors of the melting pot and the multicultural salad for American music and culture.
- 2) The relationship between chaos and order in American music and culture.
- 3) The relationship between sacred and secular music
- 4) Music as a mirror of American society
- 5) Music as a mediator of racial tension in American society.
- 6) What is the American identity? Is there an American sound?

The Four Assignments are summarized here.

The goal of the four assignments (consisting of an essay, a group project by major, the finding and close reading of a scholarly article, and another essay) was to connect the course content to the “big ideas” of the six themes, support student goals, and develop more critical thinking, research, and writing skills.

Assignment 1: Three Groups Essay (Chs.1-7: 16th-18th centuries)

Write an essay that describes the music of three different groups of people in the American colonies during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. Consider: What types of music did the groups perform, how, and for what purposes? How do we know about their music? What level of musical interaction took place between the various groups you describe?

The essay should be approximately 1000 words.

You should use chapters 1-7 in our textbook, Richard Crawford’s *An Introduction to America’s Music* and your thoughts based on your own experiences. You do NOT need additional resources. A creative analogy or approach is welcome. The level of detail within the limits of the word count is important. Your audience is: high school teachers and administrators who like music but are not professionals, AND your fellow professional musicians.

Note: Many students chose Native Americans, Africans, and Europeans; others chose subsets like: Calvinists, Anglicans, and Moravians. This assignment allowed me to give them so early feedback on their writing, moved them from simple recall of basic knowledge to synthesis of material, and required us to focus on the more important ideas in the text.

Assignment 2: Major Specific Project (Chs. 8-15: early 19th century)

Work together with classmates in your major to design a project that connects your major to early 19th-century American music. Use chapters 8-15 in our textbook as a starting point for your project. You will also need additional resources to be found using our on-line catalogue, GMO, RILM, Music Index, JSTOR, and Wilson Omnifile. The projects are to be presented in class on the due date assigned. You will have 20 minutes to present followed by 10 minutes of discussion. A two-page summary of the project with bibliography needs to be turned in on the due date.

Suggestions:

Music Education: Design a project that analyzes the influence of Lowell Mason on music education today.

Music Theater: Design a project that displays the relationship between theater, opera, and minstrelsy in early 19th century America

Organ Performance: Design a project that displays the history of organs and organ building in America—which organs were imported and which were built here? Where are they located? What were the types of organs? How were they used?...

Voice Performance: Compare and contrast a 19th century Jenny Lind concert or a 19th century parlor song evening to a present-day recital. Perform some of the 19th century selections.

Sacred Music: Design a project that considers the relationship between southern and frontier devotional music on later hymnody and church practice.

Assignment 3: Composer/Musician Article (Chs.16-24: late 19th century)

Search RISM, MUSIC INDEX, JSTOR and/or Wilson Omnifile Full Text to find a good scholarly article related to a composer or musician from the late 19th century such as

Anthony Philip Heinrich
William Henry Fry
Louis Moreau Gottschalk
George W. Chadwick
Amy Beach
Edward MacDowell
George Copway
Alice Fletcher
Reverend Lewis C. Lockwood
Fisk Jubilee Singers or George White
William Henry “Juba” Lane
Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield=“The Black Swan”
Arthur Farwell
Dwight Moody
John Philip Sousa
Other—check with me.

Answer the following questions about your chosen article to demonstrate your understanding.

1. How would you cite this article in a bibliography?
2. What is the thesis of the article? (thesis = the main goal or argument of the article)
3. What kinds of evidence or support does the author use to support the thesis?
4. Are there any terms or vocabulary that are unfamiliar to you? Can you figure out possible definitions from the text or context?
5. Are there any points of view or arguments made that you do not fully understand?
6. Are there any points of view or arguments with which you disagree?
7. What does this article add to your understanding of American music and American identity?

Assignment 4: Six Themes Essay (Chs.25-32: early 20th century)

Choose one topic from the early 20th century and use one of our six themes as the basis for an essay.

For example:

Choose a song of Charles Ives's and show how portrays the tension between chaos and order.

Argue that when white musicians began playing jazz music it relieved or heightened racial tensions.

Show how an American musical served as a mirror of American society.

Demonstrate how the Depression affected American identity and how this was reflected in a piece of music.

The essay should be approximately 1000 words. (Anything between 750 and 1250 words is okay.)

You should use our class discussions, our textbook, and your thoughts based on your own experiences. You do NOT need additional resources.

Your audience is: high school teachers and administrators who like music but are not professionals, AND your fellow professional musicians.

Note: Chapters 33 – 40: late 20th century were also assigned and discussed in class during the last weeks of the semester as the students revised their research papers. They were only graded then on in-class discussion, but reading questions were distributed for each chapter. For example:

Reading Questions for Ch. 37: Melting Pot of Pluralism? Popular Music and Ethnicity

Intro: What is unusually about the introduction for this chapter? Is it effective?

- 1) Who were the main Latin immigrant groups in NYC, Miami, and the Southwest? What other ethnic groups does Crawford mention? What's a "cross-over"?
- 2) Crawford says the history of music in America revolves around _____. Do you agree?
- 3) What happened to the melting pot image of the USA between 1961 and the 1970s? How did the Vietnam War relate to the folk revival and to ethnomusicology?
- 4) Trace Dylan's career from folk revivalist to rock artist. What was the significance of Dylan's *Like a Rolling Stone*?
- 5) Compare and Contrast the Motown and Stax record companies.
- 6) How does Crawford define rhythm-and-blues, soul, and funk? How would you add to his definitions of rhythm-and-blues, soul, and funk? Compare GMO and Wikipedia entries on rhythm-and-blues, soul, and funk. Can you think of examples of performers in each category?

Conclusions:

I think the changes made moved this course toward a better balance between coverage and addressing significant issues. In the past, my second test consisted of multiple choice questions, matching, true/false, and some short answer questions. Some were quite specific even though in my mind they served a larger point. For example:

1. _____ What percentage of royalties did Lowell Mason receive from the 1822 *Boston Handel and Haydn Society Collection of Church Music*?
 - A. Zero per cent
 - B. Ten per cent
 - C. Fifty per cent
 - D. One hundred per cent

All students would also answer some short answer questions like:

1. Describe Jenny Lind's tour in the United States. Consider...
 - a. What was her nickname?
 - b. Who arranged her tour and promoted her?
 - c. What kind of reception did she receive?

- d. What kinds of products were named after her?
- e. Describe her typical concert.

In the new course, students gave more in-depth and meaningful presentations. For example, music education students compared Lowell Mason's teaching philosophies with today's tenets of critical pedagogy for music education, the principles of The National Association for Music Education, and the ideals of teaching from a multi-cultural perspective. While a brief biography of Lowell Mason was included, it was not the focus. Students researched beyond the text including a bibliography in the summary of the project. Voice performance majors gave a more detailed presentation of Jenny Lind.

Students did not all have the same degree of exposure to some topics as a result of the customized projects, but I do think they increased student interest in the course material and the projects added valuable skills.

As a teacher, I felt more freedom and relief from the (self-imposed) pressure to cover material. Our class discussions were more in-depth and more interesting. The text was well-used and appreciated because it was used as a stimulant and aid to class discussion, rather than as material to be memorized. I also was able to identify and help with research and writing problems earlier in the semester.

As a result of the changes, the final papers had stronger theses resulting in higher quality papers and a more satisfying experience for the students. Some of the paper titles were: 1) Where is the American in *An American in Paris?*; 2) Getting Under the Covers with America: An Exploration of the Construction of American Musical Identity Through Cover Songs; 3) *Rhapsody in Blue*: Gershwin's Jazz concerto or Jazzy Concerto; 4) The Use of Satire in American Music; and 5) E. Power Biggs, Virgil Fox, and the Organ in America.