

The End of the Undergraduate Music History Sequence?

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On Friday morning, November 7, 2014, the AMS Pedagogy Study Group hosted a roundtable discussion about the undergraduate music history sequence. The size of the audience was unprecedented for any pedagogy session at prior AMS Annual Meetings. An estimated 225 to 250 people crowded into the room, and dozens of others who wanted to attend were turned away because they couldn't get close enough to hear the speakers. The session was filmed and posted on YouTube, garnering approximately 900 views in the first two months that it was available.¹ Clearly, the session had struck a chord with the concerns of the Society.

My sense is that the interest in this session is closely tied to the maturation of the discourse on music history pedagogy. The contributions that established the field—most notably the three collections of essays edited by Mary Natvig, James Briscoe, and James Davis—tended to be reflective descriptions of how the authors teach.² They addressed techniques and strategies for the classroom and online environment, assignment design, syllabus/course construction, general concepts and principles of teaching, and specific kinds of courses that are often taught by musicologists. The early volumes of this *Journal* followed a similar path, featuring a strong focus on textbooks and a “Reports and Practices” section primarily devoted to the techniques and strategies that have worked effectively in the author's classrooms. The now-annual Teaching Music History Conference, first held as a study day in 2003, is also largely dedicated to this sort of anecdotal discussion of teaching.

However, while this type of practical conversation will undoubtedly continue to be an important part of the field of music history pedagogy, the past two years or so have seen significant developments in this conversation. Recent scholarly contributions show an increasing awareness of broader literature

1. Available at <http://youtu.be/cf7BTLGDf0A>

2. Mary Natvig, ed., *Teaching Music History* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002); James R. Briscoe, ed., *Vitalizing Music History Teaching* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2010); and James A. Davis, ed., *The Music History Classroom* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

about theories of teaching and learning. José Bowen's writings on "teaching naked," which are collected in his Ness Award-winning book, have become influential texts in discussions of flipped classroom pedagogy.³ In 2013, articles by Robert Lagueux and James Maiello, along with Thomas Regelski's response to Maiello, sought to bridge the distance between music history teaching and pedagogy in other disciplines.⁴ Lagueux's re-envisioning of Bloom's taxonomy incorporates both cognitive *and* affective domains. Maiello's essay seeks to apply praxial philosophies from music education to music history courses. Other contributions to the scholarly discourse are concerned with broader curricular issues pertaining to music history. Matthew Baumer's study in this volume of the *Journal* and this roundtable are complementary in their examinations of the undergraduate music history curriculum.⁵ While Baumer tries to determine what the current state of undergraduate curricula across the country actually is, this panel asks instead what the "traditional" curriculum *might* be.

Douglass Seaton's introduction to the roundtable sets up four essential questions that we should address when thinking about our curricula: How do we think of history? How do we do history? What do we want students to know? What do we want students to do?

J. Peter Burkholder emphasizes the value of chronological survey courses. These courses establish a framework that students can use to understand any music that they encounter throughout their career. Here the focus is less on specific repertoire and more on common themes that recur throughout the span of Western music, such as "the people who created, performed, heard, and paid for this music; the choices they made, why they made them, and what they valued in music; and how their choices reflect both tradition and innovation."

Melanie Lowe's essay describes the new curriculum that was recently put in place at Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music. Rather than taking the traditional chronological approach, faculty members at Vanderbilt have constructed a four-semester sequence of courses that focuses on the teaching of music-historical skills through a series of courses that differ in content, delivery, and organization.

3. José Antonio Bowen, *Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve Student Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

4. Robert C. Lagueux, "Inverting Bloom's Taxonomy: The Role of Affective Responses in Teaching and Learning," this *Journal* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 119–50, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/76/118>; James Vincent Maiello, "Towards a Praxial Philosophy of Music History Pedagogy," this *Journal* 4, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 71–108, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/85/127>; and Thomas A. Regelski, "Music and the Teaching of Music History as Praxis: A Reply to James Maiello," this *Journal* 4, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 109–36, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/100/128>.

5. Matthew Baumer, "A Snapshot of Music History Teaching to Undergraduate Music Majors, 2011–2012: Curricula, Methods, Assessment, and Objectives," this *Journal* 5, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 23–47, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/165/308>.

Don Gibson's essay reflects his experience as both President and Chair of the Assessment Committee of the National Association of Schools of Music. He emphasizes NASM's role in helping individual schools find unique, local ways to meet the standards for accreditation.

We hope that the articles included here inspire readers to evaluate the music history curriculum at their own institutions: to consider how or if this curriculum fulfills broader institutional goals and the extent to which it reflects the unique qualities of faculty and students. And, in the words of Don Gibson, we hope that readers will "make an ongoing practice of revisiting" that curriculum.