

A Faculty Learning Community for Contingent Music Appreciation Instructors: Purpose, Structure, Outcomes

ESTHER M. MORGAN-ELLIS, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH GEORGIA

During 2018, I organized and facilitated a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) for our music appreciation instructors at the University of North Georgia. I am the coordinator of music appreciation and am responsible for the content and learning outcomes of forty sections taught by nineteen faculty members across four campuses and online. Before 2018 I had done little more than issue general guidelines. I resisted taking an active approach to the role for a number of reasons, including my own heavy teaching load. Above all, however, I wanted to respect the autonomy and individual expertise of our instructors, who brought to the role a variety of skills, experiences, and interests. Those who were performers had backgrounds in symphonic music, opera, jazz, and military music, while the roster of instructors also included composers, conductors, music theorists, and music historians. Most significantly, the instructors held a variety of statuses within the academy, ranging from part-time to tenured. Of the nineteen music appreciation instructors, twelve (63%) were contingent. Furthermore, these twelve faculty members taught 72.5% of the sections; most of the tenure-track instructors taught only one section during the year. Nearly three-quarters of all music appreciation classes were taught by faculty who were geographically isolated, did not attend department meetings, and had little or no access to professional development opportunities. For the most part, the instructors had not even met one another. Although I considered it best to grant maximum freedom to each instructor to teach the course as they saw fit, I lamented our lack of community and periodically wondered how it might be possible to bring the instructors into conversation with one another. I founded this FLC with the object of connecting and empowering the instructors, improving the instructors' teaching skills, and unifying the curriculum without unilaterally imposing my own values on an already largely disenfranchised teaching staff.

Although the FLC included both part-time and tenure-track faculty, I designed it with the needs of our contingent instructors foremost in my mind. The activities of the FLC included an opening day-long retreat and regular, ongoing online communication, including discussions about pedagogical resources and the sharing of syllabi and other course materials. Four of the thirteen participants also attended the 2018 Teaching Music History Conference and afterwards shared what they had learned with their colleagues in the FLC. At the end of the year, I sought to determine how participation in the FLC had impacted course content and delivery by examining responses to an open-ended questionnaire and quantifying participation in the various activities of the FLC. While a great deal of research on the effectiveness of FLCs has been published in the last fifteen years, few studies have investigated the impact of FLC participation on contingent faculty and none have described or examined a topic-based FLC in the field of music history. In this article, I will introduce the relevant literature on FLCs, describe my particular FLC for music appreciation instructors, and examine the impact of FLC participation at my institution.

Faculty Learning Communities

Milton D. Cox, founder of the Center for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching, & University Assessment at Miami University, was the first to study FLCs. His definitions and descriptions were based on the faculty development programs that had been in place at his institution since 1979, when they were first funded by the Lilly Endowment as part of the Lilly Post-Doctoral Teaching Fellows Program. After the funding period had concluded, support from the Miami administration and faculty allowed the program—rechristened the Alumni Teaching Scholars Program—to persevere and grow.¹ It became a model for other institutions when Cox secured regional and national grants to fund the implementation of FLCs across the country over the following two decades.² By 2004, at least 308 FLCs flourished at institutions in thirty-three states and four Canadian provinces.³ Cox's analysis of the characteristics, goals, and outcomes of the various faculty communities that he had founded, led, and

1. Milton D. Cox, "The Role of Community in Learning: Making Connections for Your Classroom and Campus, Your Students and Colleagues," in *Teaching & Learning in College: A Resource for Educators*, ed. Gary S. Wheeler, 4th ed. (Elyria, OH: Info-Tec, 2002), 13.

2. Laurie Richlin and Amy Essington, "Overview of Faculty Learning Communities," *New Directions in Teaching and Learning* 97 (2004): 25.

3. Richlin and Essington, "Overview of Faculty Learning Communities," 28–30. Savita Kumari Malik, "Engaging in the Beautiful Struggle: Influence of Faculty Learning Communities on Teaching" (Ed.D. diss., San Francisco State University, 2012), 9.

observed over this period resulted in his formal description of Faculty Learning Communities.⁴

The FLC model is intended to address concerns about isolation in the academy, a problem that is most pronounced in the realm of teaching. Research from the 1930s to the present has documented the tendency of college faculty to teach in isolation, even when their research relies on collaboration and networking.⁵ Whatever else an FLC might accomplish, it should focus primarily “on the social aspects of building community” and it must count the formation of relationships among its desired outcomes.⁶ FLCs are therefore most likely to benefit populations that tend to feel the most isolated, including new faculty and adjunct faculty.⁷ Cox describes the power of FLCs to improve outcomes for faculty cohorts that have been “particularly affected by the isolation, fragmentation, stress, neglect, or chilly climate in the academy.”⁸ Although Cox is writing primarily about early-career faculty members on the tenure track, contingent faculty are most frequently subjected to these conditions and, therefore, should be included in FLC programs.

Cox recommends that an FLC constitute a cross-disciplinary team of eight to twelve faculty and staff members. These participants must “engage in an active, collaborative, yearlong program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning.” In order to accomplish their goals, the members meet frequently and engage in a variety of activities that support professional/pedagogical development and “community building.”⁹ He goes on to describe two types of FLCs: cohort-based, in which members share a given status within the academy, and topic-based, in which learning revolves around a predetermined theme.¹⁰

FLCs are examples of *communities of practice*, defined as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”¹¹ All communities of practice have

4. Cox, “The Role of Community in Learning,” 13–14.

5. Milton D. Cox, “Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities,” *New Directions in Teaching and Learning* 97 (2004): 6; Malik, “Engaging in the Beautiful Struggle,” 8.

6. Malik, “Engaging in the Beautiful Struggle,” 9; Martha C. Petrone and Leslie Ortquist-Ahrens, “Facilitating Faculty Learning Communities: A Compact Guide to Creating Change and Inspiring Community,” *New Directions in Teaching and Learning* 97 (2004): 64.

7. MaryJo D. Banasik and Jennifer L. Dean, “Non-Tenure Track Faculty and Learning Communities: Bridging the Divide to Enhance Teaching Quality,” *Innovative Higher Education* 41, no. 4 (2016): 335.

8. Cox, “The Role of Community in Learning,” 15.

9. Cox, “Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities,” 8.

10. Cox, “Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities,” 8–9.

11. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Etienne Wenger-Trayner and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, “Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction,” 1, Wenger-Trayner, last

certain elements in common. These include decentralized leadership, reliance on informal and self-directed learning, and high levels of motivation among the participants.¹² Faculty developers describe the individuals who direct FLCs as “facilitators” instead of “leaders,” and their roles—which have been categorized by Martha C. Petrone and Leslie Ortquist-Ahrens as those of “champion,” “coordinator,” and “energizer”¹³—are more collaborative than directive.¹⁴ Furthermore, the goal of a facilitator is not to lead but rather to encourage FLC participants to take on the three facilitating roles themselves.¹⁵ The roles are not discreet jobs that need to be done, but should instead be understood as complementary approaches to supporting and directing the work of the FLC. For this reason, each role can be filled by any number of FLC members, and an individual member can take on more than one role. Participants work together to establish the goals of the FLC, steer progress towards those goals, and, in many cases, complete a clearly defined project of mutual interest.¹⁶

Although the positive impact of FLCs has been thoroughly documented,¹⁷ the impact of FLCs on contingent faculty specifically has not yet been adequately researched. However, two studies point to promising results. First, Nathan Bond’s study of a cohort-based FLC for contingent faculty found that it was successful in building community, decreasing feelings of isolation, introducing participants to new pedagogical approaches, increasing participants’ confidence as teachers, stimulating their willingness to experiment in the classroom, and raising levels of workplace satisfaction.¹⁸ Bond concluded that inviting contingent faculty to participate in existing FLCs is not adequate, and that instead “universities need to offer professional development specifically tailored to non-tenure track faculty.”¹⁹ Second, Haleh Azimi examined a topic-based FLC for contingent faculty at a community college, and likewise concluded that it was successful in building social capital for participants and facilitating curriculum reform.²⁰

updated April 15, 2015, <http://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/07-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf>.

12. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2.

13. Petrone and Ortquist-Ahrens, “Facilitating Faculty Learning Communities,” 65–66.

14. Cox, “Four Positions of Leadership in Planning, Implementing, and Sustaining Faculty Learning Community Programs,” *New Directions in Teaching and Learning* 148 (2016): 86.

15. Petrone and Ortquist-Ahrens, “Facilitating Faculty Learning Communities,” 64.

16. Cox, “Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities,” 9.

17. For an overview, see Cox, “Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities,” 10–12.

18. Nathan Bond, “Developing a Faculty Learning Community for Non-Tenure Track Professors,” *International Journal of Higher Education* 4/4 (2015): 8–9.

19. Bond, “Developing a Faculty Learning Community for Non-Tenure Track Professors,” 9.

20. Haleh Azimi, “Improving Adjunct Faculty Experiences: Implementing a Topics-Based Learning Community at a Community College” (Ed.D. diss., Drexel University, 2016), 122–4.

Most topic-based FLCs revolve around approaches to teaching or assessment and involve an interdisciplinary team of participants, so it is perhaps not surprising that my study of our FLC organized around topics in music appears to be a first.²¹ Although course-based FLCs might in some cases lack interdisciplinarity—a key component of the FLC philosophy²²—an FLC for music appreciation instructors will almost certainly be an interdisciplinary team, insofar as performance, conducting, music education, musicology, and music theory are to be considered separate disciplines. I argue that a course-based FLC can empower faculty to transform curriculum and pedagogy in ways that benefit both instructors and students. This model can be applied to any course that is taught by at least five faculty members, and is probably most applicable to high-enrollment general education and introductory courses.

The community that I describe below satisfies the essential requirements of an FLC: its primary purpose was to build relationships, its curriculum concerned the enhancement of teaching and learning, it engaged participants for a full year, and the participants steered the activities of the community and established its goals. At the same time, this FLC deviated from the model in three important ways. First, due to geographical concerns we interacted most often online, and as a result I have chosen to describe this as a convergent on- and offline FLC—a designation I have borrowed from music educator Janice Waldron.²³ Our online interactions took place via an Outlook Group that gave participants access to shared materials and a discussion platform. All participants could receive email notifications of discussion contributions. Although it is typical for FLC participants to engage in regular face-to-face meetings, according to a study by Norman Vaughn, 90% of FLCs use an online platform to facilitate discussion.²⁴ Vaughn's study of the effects of computer-mediated communication on FLCs revealed a number of advantages. Participants reported that online discussion was more systematic, more reflective, and more attentive to the perspectives of others than in-person discussion. The investigator hypothesized that asynchronous communication encouraged participants to

21. Reeves Shulstad wrote about her experience developing a plan to improve student engagement in Introduction to World Music for this *Journal*, but the FLC in which he participated was focused on scholarly teaching, not music. See "Student Engagement through Faculty Engagement: Faculty Learning Communities as Professional Development," this *Journal* 4/2 (2014): 276. <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/126>

22. Cox, "Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities," 8.

23. Janice Waldron, "YouTube, Fanvids, Forums, Vlogs and Blogs: Informal Music Learning in a Convergent On- and Offline Music Community," *International Journal of Music Education* 31/1 (2013): 102.

24. Norman Vaughn, "Technology in Support of Faculty Learning Communities," *New Directions in Teaching and Learning* 97 (2004): 105.

reflect at greater length, while the semi-permanency of online communication led them to consider their contributions carefully.²⁵

Second, in addition to our geographical limitations, concern for the rights and autonomy of participants, especially the participating contingent faculty, led me to develop a looser structure for the FLC than is typical. Because contingent faculty are not remunerated for faculty development and could not expect any benefits from participation in terms of raises or promotions, I offered them maximum freedom in deciding when and how to engage with the activities of the FLC. Although on-campus professional development programs are sometimes available for contingent faculty, they report a number of circumstances that prevent their participation, including the lack of online options.²⁶ The Outlook Group helped facilitate this freedom as the group activities online were asynchronous and participants could choose when or if to participate. They were invited—but not required—to attend the retreat and conference. This open structure was unusual, but it served the instructors well. A core group of enthusiastic participants attended the in-person events and drove the online discussion, and others took part intermittently based on interest and availability.

Third, I was disinclined to provide specific goals for the FLC to accomplish. I leveraged my position as coordinator (and as a tenure-track faculty member with access to institutional funding) to bring the FLC into existence, but I sought to decentralize my role and grant as much steering authority as possible to the participants. Although the desired outcomes for most FLCs are clearly articulated before the community is formed, I trusted that a sense of purpose would emerge from our conversation.

This approach—enlisting a flexible community of participants to engage in loosely-defined work—could have resulted in stagnation and collapse, but it did not. Instead, sustained and active participation from FLC members produced extraordinary transformations across the curriculum and set our music appreciation program on a new path.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Other impediments to participating in on-campus professional development include the difficulty of making a year-long commitment, inconvenient scheduling, failure to provide sufficient notice, the fact that food is not provided at meetings, the absence of remuneration or other recognition, and having to pay for parking (Buch, McCullough, and Tamberelli, "Understanding and Responding to the Unique Needs and Challenges Facing Adjunct Faculty," 31; Azimi, "Improving Adjunct Faculty Experiences," 124–5). The director of the University of North Georgia Center for Teaching, Learning, and Leadership reports that, while contingent faculty of all types are invited to participate in Faculty Academies (institution-wide FLCs focused on scholarly productivity and teaching), very few do so (Mary Carney, "Question," email to author, January 21, 2019). Faculty Academies at the University of North Georgia include High-Impact Practices, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Write Now, New Faculty Institute, Research-Based Teaching, and Teaching Conversations.

An FLC for Contingent Music Appreciation Instructors

For several years before undertaking this initiative, I was concerned about the quality and consistency of our music appreciation curriculum and course delivery. My apprehensions did not stem from any doubts about the capabilities of the instructors. They are all highly qualified (most have terminal degrees in music), experienced, and committed. All the same, these instructors faced two significant challenges. First, they were dispersed geographically across four campuses, the two most distant of which are separated by nearly seventy miles. Second, most were part-time employees, a status that impacted their abilities to build and participate in institutional communities, pursue faculty development opportunities, and improve their teaching.

Like other institutions, UNG relies heavily on adjunct faculty, and the needs of the contingent faculty I was supervising were my highest concern.²⁷ Despite the vital services they provide, contingent faculty often find themselves in an unsupportive work environment. Survey and interview data indicate that lack of access to community is the most significant challenge these faculty face.²⁸ One team of investigators reported that “a sense of isolation and disconnect- edness from their departments and colleagues” was prevalent, affecting 32% of study participants.²⁹ Irregular and heavy teaching schedules, frequent com- muting, exclusion from department activities, and social marginalization due to status make it difficult for contingent faculty to make social connections.³⁰

Many of these conditions affect the contingent faculty teaching music appreciation in the University of North Georgia Music Department. To begin with, they have few formal opportunities to interact with their colleagues. Part- time faculty are permitted to attend meetings and retreats, but they cannot vote and are not included in communications about voting items. Most of our contingent faculty have studio instruction responsibilities and therefore a large

27. Currently, contingent faculty make up the majority of the workforce, with estimates ranging from 70% to 79%, and they often teach the introductory courses that determine whether or not a student will pursue a given major (Kimberly Buch, Heather McCullough, and Laura Tamberelli, “Understanding and Responding to the Unique Needs and Challenges Facing Adjunct Faculty: A Longitudinal Study,” *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 16/10 (2017): 27; Bond, “Developing a Faculty Learning Community for Non-Tenure Track Professors,” 1; Roger G. Baldwin and Matthew R. Wawrzynski, “Contingent Faculty as Teachers: What We Know; What We Need to Know,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 55/11 (2011): 1486).

28. Azimi, “Improving Adjunct Faculty Experiences,” 122.

29. Buch, McCullough, and Tamberelli, “Understanding and Responding to the Unique Needs and Challenges Facing Adjunct Faculty,” 30.

30. Buch, McCullough, and Tamberelli, “Understanding and Responding to the Unique Needs and Challenges Facing Adjunct Faculty,” 30–31; Azimi, “Improving Adjunct Faculty Experiences,” 122.

number of irregularly scheduled classes—and many teach on more than one campus. As a result, few part-time faculty members attend the annual retreat or come to monthly meetings. Their opportunities to pursue community and professional development outside of the music department are also limited.

My goal in creating this FLC was to build community around the music appreciation course for the purpose of improving the experience of both instructors and students (although I did not investigate student-centered outcomes in this particular study). Given my hands-off approach to the role of coordinator, there is a great deal of variation between sections. Because I believe that music appreciation courses are best when the instructor teaches the material about which they are passionate, the standards I have put in place allow instructors (myself included) to choose their own texts and craft their own curricula. With this FLC, I wanted to establish a structure within which instructors could build relationships with one another, communicate, reflect on their practices, and develop as educators. I also wanted to provide support in the form of remuneration, development funding, pedagogical resources, and mentorship.

It is important to demonstrate need before implementing an FLC, as faculty tend to flout what they perceive as meaningless administrative structures.³¹ I began by assessing the needs of the faculty; after establishing that there was widespread interest in an FLC, I applied for internal funding. My institution offers competitive support for projects that “promote innovative institutional practices that support the University of North Georgia mission and the priorities established in the Strategic Plan,” with a special emphasis on “improved unit performance” and “learning communities.”³² Through this program, I was able to secure \$5,000. I used this money to provide stipends to instructors who participated in the retreat, fund conference travel, and facilitate several concerts for music appreciation students.³³

Next, I created an online platform using Outlook Groups. I added all music appreciation instructors to the Group and have not restricted access to the activities of the FLC at any point—another unusual characteristic of this FLC. (It is typical for participants to apply for membership, which is then fixed for

31. Gary M. Shulman, Milton D. Cox, and Laurie Richlin Dear, “Institutional Considerations in Developing a Faculty Learning Community Program,” *New Directions in Teaching and Learning* 97 (2004): 42.

32. “Presidential Incentive Awards,” *University of North Georgia*, accessed April 18, 2019, <https://ung.edu/academic-affairs/faculty-awards/presidential-awards.php>.

33. While confirming that the instructors were interested in participating in an FLC, I also asked what other materials or opportunities they would like to be made available for their students. The instructors agreed that their students had inadequate access to live performances. Specifically, they noted a lack on non-Western concert opportunities across campuses and the absence of any live music on the peripheral campuses. The balance of the grant, therefore, funded a chamber music concert on the Oconee campus and performances by a group from the Atlanta Korean Cultural Center on the Dahlonega and Gainesville campuses.

the duration of the FLC.³⁴) However, I wanted to encourage maximum participation, respect the various levels at which members desired to participate, and foster a community that would respond easily to changes in membership as new faculty were hired over the course of the year.

Once funding had been secured, I scheduled our retreat and began curating a library of pedagogical resources. These included seven articles from this *Journal*, three articles from *Journal of Research in Music Education*, three articles from *Music Educators Journal*, and three chapters from Mary Natvig's collection *Teaching Music History* (see Appendix 1 for a complete list). I made these readings available and encouraged participants to peruse them before our retreat. I also collected syllabi and assignments from instructors and made these available online.

The retreat took place in early February on the central campus, and all participants who attended were paid \$100. Six faculty members attended the retreat, all of whom continued to participate for the remainder of the year. (I also met independently with two faculty members who had wanted to attend the retreat but were unable due to conflicts.) During our five-hour meeting we discussed the objectives of a music appreciation course, drafted a list of learning outcomes, shared our concert report assignments, gave brief presentations on specific teaching tools, and reflected on the advantages and disadvantages of various textbooks. I kept careful notes that I later shared via the Outlook Group so that all participants could contribute to the discussion. FLC specialists advise facilitators to regularly communicate their vision by engaging stakeholders in conversation, while at the same time maintaining flexibility and allowing participants to determine the direction in which the FLC develops.³⁵ The retreat allowed me to implement these practices and served to set the tone for our ongoing activities.

In June of 2018, I used grant funds to bring three part-time instructors with me to the Teaching Music History Conference (TMHC). The four of us attended presentations and chatted informally, but I did not provide structure outside of the conference schedule. Following the conference, each of us wrote an account of what we had learned to share with the other participants via the Outlook Group.

The Outlook Group replaced face-to-face meetings and even video conferencing due to the complexity of participant schedules and locations. Instead, we used it to communicate throughout the year, thereby establishing our identity as a convergent on- and offline community. I strongly encouraged participants

34. Cox, "Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities," 8–9.

35. Shulman, Cox, and Dear, "Institutional Considerations in Developing a Faculty Learning Community Program," 43–44; Petrone and Ortquist-Ahrens, "Facilitating Faculty Learning Communities," 68.

to share questions, concerns, ideas, and resources, and I periodically started conversations on relevant topics, especially following our in-person interactions at the retreat and conference. However, I did not lay out a formal program of discussion topics, and I did not participate personally in every discussion. In fact, I did little more than create a space in which instructors could consult one another and then provide periodic reminders that the space was available. These discussions—which I will describe in greater detail below—constituted the primary activity of our FLC.

Outcomes

The outcomes of this FLC were significant. I will address them from three angles. First, I will provide data concerning participation in the online discussions. Second, I will share the results of a questionnaire-based study that I conducted at the end of the year. Finally, I will outline the current activities of the FLC, which themselves provide meaningful insight into what was accomplished in the first year. I have chosen not to discuss evidence from course evaluations because our institution uses an instrument that has not been normed and therefore cannot be assumed to provide meaningful data.³⁶

Over the course of 2018, members of the FLC made eighty-one contributions to fifteen discussion threads. Of these threads, eight were started by me, one was started by another tenure-track faculty member, and six were started by part-time faculty members. While all nineteen instructors were included in the Outlook Group and therefore might have read any or all of the contributions, thirteen members actively participated in online discussion. These included five tenure-track faculty members and eight part-time faculty members. Naturally, I was the most active participant, with twenty-three contributions. The other tenure-track participants made an average of 4.5 contributions each, while the part-time participants made an average of 5 contributions each. These numbers are skewed, however, by the four part-time faculty members who participated in only one or two discussions. The remaining four part-time participants were responsible for 56.9% of the 58 contributions that did not originate from me, and made an average of 8.25 contributions each. The second-, fourth-, fifth-, and sixth- most active participants were all part-time faculty members. In short, part-time faculty members were on average the most active in the discussion, and some engaged with great enthusiasm.

Discussion topics included course objectives, popular music examples for demonstrating music fundamentals, topical source readings to assign in class,

36. Satish Nargundkar and Milind Shrikhande, "Norming of Student Evaluations of Instruction: Impact of Noninstructional Factors," *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education* 12, no. 1 (2014): 55–56.

the concert review assignment, the Teaching Music History Conference, how to structure a course schedule, Reba Wissner's gallery walk exercise,³⁷ pedagogical technology, cover versions of classical repertoire, and the creation of a new textbook. I also used the Outlook Group to schedule the retreat, promote the resource library, share information about the Teaching Music History Conference, and advertise concerts that I had organized for music appreciation students. None of these communications are included in the above statistics.

Interestingly, the contents of these discussions closely aligned with the types of activities characteristically pursued by any community of practice, which can be viewed in Appendix 2.³⁸ These included documenting projects ("Can someone compile all the links in a folder on the team site?"), seeking experience ("This week I am doing a section on concert etiquette... Any [...] suggestions, success stories, sources I can add to my collection?"), reusing assets ("I can also share the PowerPoint files if anyone wants to use these"; "I'm sending my course outline again, but with added links to my Prezi slideshows"), discussing developments ("I've been wanting to create a writing assignment in which students compare settings [musical interpretations] of the same text by multiple composers"), and mapping knowledge/identifying gaps ("I'm wanting to revamp my approach to Music App next semester. Do you know of any textbooks or sources that organize music into 'moods' [for lack of a better term]?"). Many of these quotations also exemplify the activity of growing confidence, which I believed to be particularly significant. This last question, for example, came from an instructor who ended up abandoning his textbook and redesigning his course from scratch. His work and enthusiasm in turn inspired the ongoing textbook project. Overall, participants engaged in a variety of meaningful exchanges that apparently helped them to improve their own teaching and thinking, evidence of which came from their end-of-year reports.

At the end of the fall semester I asked participants to complete an open-ended questionnaire containing ten items (included as Appendix 3). This study was undertaken with the approval of my Institutional Review Board. I had initially intended to conduct a focus group, but this was impractical due to the same circumstances that prevented us from meeting regularly in person or via teleconference. I received six responses, for a response rate of 32%. Two responses were from tenure-track faculty members and four were from part-time faculty members. I coded the open-ended responses using descriptive

37. Reba Wissner, "Using Gallery Walks for Engagement in the Music History Classroom," *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy*, vol. 6, accessed January 22, 2019, <http://flipcamp.org/engagingstudents6/essays/wissner.html>.

38. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, "Communities of Practice," 3.

and values methods, and I took note of significant trends as they emerged.³⁹ All of the responses came from participants whom I would describe as heavily involved in the activities of the FLC, although not all were involved in the same ways; for example, four were frequent discussion participants, averaging 13.25 contributions each, while two were not, averaging 2.5 contributions each. In general, however, the data represents a particular faculty type: the individual who is eager to participate in professional development and to take on the accompanying challenges. These individuals are also likely to have been the most impacted by their participation in the FLC. We must take into account, therefore, the fact that these responses tend to represent one extreme, and that other participants probably had less meaningful experiences with the FLC.

Although only two respondents had participated in every activity of the FLC, all had engaged with multiple aspects. Three respondents had attended the retreat and three had attended the conference. Five reported participating in online discussions (although all six did in fact participate), four mentioned reading articles, and four mentioned reading other instructors' syllabi. One had also engaged with other instructors using social media, which was not a formal component of the FLC. While the respondents reported a diversity of experiences, it was clear that they found the retreat and the conference to be the most valuable. Four wrote about how important it was to talk about teaching in person. Other studies have also documented the value of face-to-face communication in FLCs, which has been observed to foster relationships and promote a sense of community.⁴⁰

Participation in the FLC had minimal impact on course delivery in the spring semester, but dramatic impact in the fall. Four respondents completely redesigned their courses in response to new ideas they had encountered as FLC participants. All four abandoned the chronological approach, ceased to use a textbook, and created their own course materials, including slides, listening resources, and assessments. One respondent did not teach in the fall, and one made only minor changes to lectures and content. Respondents also reported integrating new teaching technologies, soliciting regular feedback from students, favoring depth over breadth, and integrating new modes of assessment. FLCs have been previously demonstrated to serve as effective vehicles for the improvement of curriculum and the development of new pedagogical approaches, and the survey results bear out these findings.⁴¹

39. Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 70–71, 89–90.

40. Vaughan, "Technology in Support of Faculty Learning Communities," 105.

41. Cox, "Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities," 12; Jennifer Loertscher, "Cooperative Learning for Faculty: Building Communities of Practice," *Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Education* 39, no. 5 (2011): 391.

Interestingly, participation in the FLC had no impact on the respondents' opinions regarding the purpose of a music appreciation class, which were variously "reinforced" or "reaffirmed." One respondent was "still confused" about the course's purpose. Cox advises that FLC participants "embrace ambiguity,"⁴² and I made no effort during the course of our activities to establish a single theory of music appreciation pedagogy. Participation had varying impact on respondents' enthusiasm for teaching music appreciation. Three reported an increase, while three indicated that they had always been enthusiastic and remained so. Finally, the respondents requested that all facets of the FLC be continued, with a special emphasis on in-person opportunities such as the retreat and conference.

In 2019, the FLC continues to flourish. Seven faculty members attended a second retreat in early January, despite the fact that I was unable to offer stipends this year,⁴³ and during the first two weeks of classes six faculty participated in three online discussions. Informal reports suggest that many of the instructors have adopted teaching tools that they learned about at the retreat (e.g. music visualization videos created by YouTube user Smalin) and conference (e.g. the polling software Mentimeter⁴⁴), and I secured a second Presidential Innovation Incentive Award to fund our continued activities. Part of this award will go to the purchase of ukuleles for use in music appreciation classrooms—another idea we took away from the conference.⁴⁵

One of our early 2019 discussions launched a spin-off book study group. An instructor was seeking advice on how to handle classroom discussions and was interested in identifying a good text on the subject. During 2018, we had read articles about the pedagogical benefits of discussion and been encouraged to incorporate discussion by conference presenters, so this topic was a direct outgrowth of FLC activities. I posted his question to the AMS Pedagogy Study Group Facebook page and shared the recommendations that I received with the FLC. Several instructors were interested in reading one or other of the books and asked for assistance in purchasing them. I applied for and received a \$250 Teaching Circle grant from our Center for Teaching, Learning, and Leadership,

42. Cox, "Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities," 10.

43. Although I secured a second grant, the award schedule changed, and our retreat took place before funding decisions were announced.

44. This tool was presented by Alisha Nypaver in her talk "Engineering Immersive Listening Experiences for Students," which can be viewed here: <https://indstate.yuja.com/Library/a2c2292a-c765-4423-a4d9-ddf53c4a1d51/WatchVideo/1530294>

45. This tool was presented by Paula Bishop in her talk "The Mighty Uke to the Rescue," which can be viewed here: <https://indstate.yuja.com/Library/a2c2292a-c765-4423-a4d9-ddf53c4a1d51/WatchVideo/1530295>

which allowed me to purchase two copies each of four books.⁴⁶ I created a separate Outlook Group for the seven book study participants (all part-time instructors, other than myself) to share their reflections as we read the books in pairs.

Finally, our FLC activities have been significantly more structured as we take on a major collaborative project: the creation of a new textbook to be published under a Creative Commons license and made freely available to students. The idea for this textbook emerged from an online discussion in late March of 2018. It quickly gained support and a number of contingent faculty expressed their interest in being involved in its creation. To this end, I have secured a \$30,000 Affordable Learning Georgia Textbook Transformation Grant. This grant will provide stipends ranging from \$2,250 to \$5,000 to each contributor and cover all costs related to the peer review and publication of our textbook by UNG Press. We are using a series of Google Docs to develop an outline, draft text, provide feedback, and accumulate audiovisual materials. While we continue to discuss general pedagogical concerns using the Outlook Group, nine FLC participants (myself included) are also at work on this project.

Conclusion

My objectives for this FLC were to connect and empower the instructors, improve the instructors' teaching skills, and unify the curriculum. However, I could not possibly have foreseen the dramatic ways in which progress toward these goals was to be made. I had been concerned about trespassing on contingent instructors' time and asking them to perform uncompensated labor, but they have demonstrated continued eagerness to engage in a variety of enrichment activities. Many participants gave me the impression that they had been waiting for permission to transform their courses. Before participating in the FLC they had felt disempowered and cautious, but the opportunity to engage in conversation and steer curriculum development left them confident and inspired. As a result, students across sections likely benefitted from a revised curriculum, up-to-date teaching tools, and revitalized instruction. Although further research would be required to fully understand the impact of the FLC on students, I am happy to report that one of our contingent instructors recently won an institution-wide teaching award. While I don't credit this

46. Based on instructor interest, I purchased Stephen Brookfield's *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*, Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana's *Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions*, Jose Antonio Bowen's *Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve Student Learning*, and Jennifer H. Herman and Linda B. Nilson's *Creating Engaging Discussions: Strategies for "Avoiding Crickets" in Any Size Classroom and Online*.

instructor's success to his active participation in the FLC, the experience must have strengthened his application. We have certainly begun to develop a culture in which pedagogical growth is supported, encouraged, and rewarded by a network of engaged teachers.

The current activities of the FLC promise to further benefit instructors, who will have the opportunity to shape a new textbook for use in their courses, and students, who will have access to a no-cost text. The textbook—although not part of my initial vision for the FLC—will achieve my goal of standardizing the curriculum through a collaborative process. In addition, it has provided a significant source of additional income to contributors. The book study group—another initiative that did not originate with me—has also proved valuable and inspiring as we take on the challenge of improving classroom discussion as a teaching community. Students are again poised to profit from the incorporation of improved discussion techniques in many of our music appreciation classrooms.

I also could not have anticipated the impact of this FLC on my own teaching and academic work. I had not imagined at the outset that I would so fundamentally reconceive the purpose and structure of my own sections of the course. Following two redesigns (one in the spring and one in the fall), I settled on a sequence of non-chronological topics, incorporated about 50% new material drawn from popular and non-Western repertoires, reweighted my assessment schema to favor online discussions over knowledge exams, placed discussion at the center of my class meetings, incorporated regular in-class polling, and shifted the focus of the course from knowledge acquisition to critical listening and thinking skills. My course evaluations have improved markedly. Unlike the other participants in the FLC, who responded most strongly to in-person conversation, I was primarily influenced by the readings I completed, especially the 2013 collection of essays titled “Current Trends in Teaching Music Appreciation: A Roundtable” that appeared in this *Journal*.⁴⁷ However, it was the community in which I was participating that inspired me to take on this substantial project, and I derived support from my frequent interactions with enthusiastic colleagues and from the knowledge that I was not alone in tackling a conceptual redesign.

I was surprised to discover—both by means of the questionnaire-based study and informal conversation—that instructors valued opportunities for

47. The individual essays I supplied to FLC participants included: Steven Cornelius and Mary Natvig, “Teaching Music Appreciation: A Cultural Approach,” this *Journal* 4, no. 1 (2013): 139–150, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/104>; Thomas Forrest Kelly, “Music Then and Now,” this *Journal* 4, no. 1 (2013): 151–156, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/115>; and Robin Wallace, “In Favor of a Skills-Based Approach to Music Appreciation: Pedagogy and Personal History,” this *Journal* 4, no. 1 (2013): 157–164, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/117>.

in-person interaction so highly. I had initially designed the FLC with a minimal emphasis on face-to-face meetings, hesitant to demand additional time and labor from our contingent instructors. Those same instructors, however, have requested more face-to-face discussion time. It is clear that they place a high value on community not only in the sense of connection and communication but also as an act of physical copresence. In the future, therefore, I plan to schedule a retreat at the beginning of each semester (instead of each calendar year), and I will be experimenting with video conferencing. While our convergent on- and offline model was successful, it seems that online, text-based discussion cannot replace face-to-face conversation and that in-person meetings are worth the additional effort.

The loose structure of the FLC paid significant dividends. A discussion thread started by one of our contingent instructors sparked the idea that is becoming our open-access music appreciation textbook—a project that will have a major impact at our institution and hopefully beyond. The book study group also grew out of a discussion thread started by a contingent instructor. At the same time, the loose structure brought challenges. Discussion activity was not consistent throughout the year. As might be expected, participation has been enthusiastic at the beginning of each semester, but has flagged in the final month. Perhaps this is not a problem—there is no question that our instructors are overloaded with academic and performance responsibilities in December and April, and it might be best to allow the activities of the FLC to take a natural hiatus. However, a formal schedule of discussion topics or deadlines would address this concern. Greater structure might also heighten the participation of instructors who prefer assignments and deadlines. It is likely that some of the FLC members were inclined to prioritize concrete tasks over engagement with the fluid and low-stakes activities of the FLC, with the result of missed opportunities for them and their colleagues.

The results of this study are preliminary, and might be strengthened by the use of focus groups, student surveys, or analysis of retention and performance data. There are also a number of additional questions that might be pursued. It is clear that some FLC participants changed their approaches to teaching music appreciation, but how did those changes impact students? I will be seeking to answer this question in part next year when I work with a colleague to determine the effect of our new textbook on student learning outcomes. While this FLC was successful in promoting community and pedagogical growth, what impact might it have on participants' careers in the long term? It will be interesting to see whether contingent members are retained at a higher rate, or whether they have greater success in securing full-time employment, whether at the University of North Georgia or at other institutions.

Despite unanswered questions, the present results clearly indicate that a topic-based FLC for contingent instructors can produce significant positive outcomes. I strongly encourage tenure-track faculty to leverage their access to institutional resources for the purpose of establishing similar FLCs at institutions that exhibit need. This can be done by individuals or by teaching centers, and can be successful with minimal support; 37% of topic-based FLCs nationwide operate successfully on a budget under \$2000, although FLCs with higher budgets can incorporate more conferences and retreats.⁴⁸ Cox notes that course releases and conference travel constitute the greatest part of FLC budgets across institutions. He concludes, however, that these expenditures are not necessary to the success of an FLC, since treating participants with dignity and respect “earns their generous time commitment, appreciation, and long-term support.”⁴⁹ Likewise, the most important characteristics of an FLC such as I have described here must be respect for contingent faculty as scholars and teachers and the intent to facilitate genuine empowerment.

48. Richlin and Essington, “Overview of Faculty Learning Communities,” 32.

49. Cox, “The Role of Community in Learning” 16.

Appendix 1. Pedagogical Readings Supplied to FLC Participants

- Archetto, Maria. "Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Introduction to Music Course." In *Teaching Music History*, edited by Mary Natvig, 69–76. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002.
- Bisson, Noël. "First Nights: Awakening Students' Critical Skills in a Large Lecture Course." In *Teaching Music History*, edited by Mary Natvig, 95–107. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002.
- Coolen, Michael T. "Appreciation as If It Mattered." *Music Educators Journal* 69, no. 3 (1982): 29–30, 49.
- Cornelius, Steven and Mary Natvig. "Teaching Music Appreciation: A Cultural Approach." *This Journal* 4, no. 1 (2013): 139–150.
- Dirkse, Scott. "Encouraging Empirical Research: Findings from the Music Appreciation Classroom." *This Journal* 2, no. 1 (2011): 25–35.
- Freeman, Robert. "Music Appreciation Because the Future Depends on It." *Music Educators Journal* 70, no. 3 (1983): 62–64.
- Halpern, Jessica. "Effects of Historical and Analytical Teaching Approaches on Music Appreciation." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 40, no. 1 (1992): 39–46.
- Hafer, Edward. "A Pedagogy of the Pedagogy of Music Appreciation." *This Journal* 3, no. 1 (2012): 57–75.
- Huang, Hao. "Music Appreciation Class Broadening Perspectives." *Music Educators Journal* 84, no. 2 (1997): 29–33.
- Hund, Jennifer L. "What Is the Discipline of Music Appreciation? Reconsidering the Concert Report." *This Journal* 4, no. 2 (2014): 255–272.
- . "Writing about Music in Large Music Appreciation Classrooms Using Active Learning, Discipline-Specific Skills, and Peer Review." *This Journal* 2, no. 2 (2012): 117–132.
- Kelly, Thomas Forrest. "Music Then and Now." *This Journal* 4, no.1 (2013): 151–156.
- Roth, Marjorie. "The 'Why' of Music: Variations on a Cosmic Theme." In *Teaching Music History*, edited by Mary Natvig, 77–94. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002.
- Smialek, Thomas and Renee Reiter Boburka. "The Effect of Cooperative Listening Exercises on the Critical Listening Skills of College Music-Appreciation Students." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 54, no. 1 (2006): 57–72.

Wallace, Robin. "In Favor of a Skills-Based Approach to Music Appreciation: Pedagogy and Personal History." *This Journal* 4, no. 1 (2013): 157–164.

Zalanowski, Annette H. "Music Appreciation and Hemisphere Orientation: Visual versus Verbal Involvement." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 38, no. 3 (1990): 197–205.

Appendix 2: Typical activities of a community of practice (from Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Activity	Example
Problem solving	“Can we work on this design and brainstorm some ideas; I’m stuck.”
Requests for information	“Where can I find the code to connect to the server?”
Seeking experience	“Has anyone dealt with a customer in this situation?”
Reusing assets	“I have a proposal for a local area network I wrote for a client last year. I can send it to you and you can easily tweak it for this new client.”
Coordination and synergy	“Can we combine our purchases of solvent to achieve bulk discounts?”
Building an argument	“How do people in other countries do this? Armed with this information it will be easier to convince my Ministry to make some changes.”
Growing confidence	“Before I do it, I’ll run it through my community first to see what they think.”
Discussing developments	“What do you think of the new CAD system? Does it really help?”
Documenting projects	“We have faced this problem five times now. Let us write it down once and for all.”
Visits	“Can we come and see your after-school program? We need to establish one in our city.”
Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps	“Who knows what, and what are we missing? What other groups should we connect with?”

Appendix 3: Items included in the questionnaire.

1. Which training opportunities did you engage in? Please provide details about how you engaged. [Training opportunities included: reading articles shared to the Outlook Group, reading other instructors' syllabi or assignments, sharing your own syllabi or assignments, participating in discussion, attending the retreat, and attending the conference]
2. Which training opportunities did you find to be valuable? Why?
3. How did the training impact your course delivery in the Spring semester?
4. How did the training impact your opinion about the purpose(s) of a Music Appreciation class?
5. How did the training impact your plans for course delivery in the Fall semester?
6. Have you developed any new assignments or lectures in response to the training?
7. How did the training impact your enthusiasm for teaching Music Appreciation?
8. How (if at all) has your course content changed in response to the training?
9. How (if at all) has your text choice(s) changed in response to the training?
10. What (if any) training opportunities would you like to see provided in future semesters?