

Roundtable: New Models for Teaching Music History in the Online Age

During the 2010 meeting of the American Musicological Society in Indianapolis, the AMS Pedagogy Study Group hosted a session entitled “Rethinking Classrooms, Homework, and Learning: New Models for Teaching Music History in the Online Age.” Revised versions of the presentations are collected here along with edited transcriptions of the questions and discussions in the session. As can be seen from the abstract (below), the session was framed as a dialogue between scholars who have been successfully teaching music history using technology and those who are just beginning.

Three major themes emerged from the presentations and discussions: the diversity of approaches to teaching with technology, the suggestion to introduce new technologies in small increments (rather than revising an entire class), and the transformation of the role of the professor in the online age. First, there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution to how to teach music history using the newest technologies. Methodologies that work for distance learning classes at institutions with extensive technological infrastructure will not translate well to small, residential liberal arts colleges. Teaching strategies that work well in class sizes of thirty are impracticable in classes of 170.

From the idea that instructors will have to develop methods suited to their situations, the second refrain from the session was to try new teaching methods and ideas in a small section or module of a class, rather than attempting to revise an entire course at once employing new technologies. This provides the instructor with a chance to evaluate the methodologies on a small scale before devoting the time and energy of revising an entire course.

The third, and perhaps most important, theme in the presentations and discussions is that technology is radically transforming the role of the instructor in the traditional classroom. In the following pages both presenters and discussion participants wrestle with the value of the instructor’s physical presence in a music history class. While the question is most acute in distance learning situations, technology is changing the role of the historian in traditional classrooms—especially when combined with the rising interest of non-lecture based modes of teaching, such as discussion sections in small groups

The Editors would like to thank Kyle Shockey for his work transcribing the questions and discussions.

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and peer-reviewed class work. As online quizzes and lectures recorded as podcasts are freeing up class time and as more communication with students is done as e-mail (rather than in office hours), technology is forcing music historians to re-evaluate their roles both in the classroom and on campus.

The transcripts of the discussions have been edited in several ways. Apart from the presenters, speakers are referred to as participants and given sequential numbers; the following abbreviations are used to identify speakers:

JB	José Antonio Bowen
MC	Mark Clague
JN	Jocelyn Neal
P	Participant

References to the names of specific participants or their institutions have been removed. Sections of the discussion have been transposed chronologically to create logical groupings of topics and some comments during the discussion not directly applicable to the pedagogy of teaching with technology have been excised. Finally, the transcriptions have been edited for readability in grammar.

Session Abstract from the AMS Conference Program¹

Matthew Baumer (Indiana University of Pennsylvania), Moderator

Faced with constant calls for verifiable assessment of learning and greater efficiency through the use of technology, while embracing a more student-centered teaching philosophy, what's a music professor to do? This session strives to present and discuss various methods for navigating this new world of pedagogical research and evaluation while also providing practical and immediate applications for music scholars to use within and outside of the classroom.

Technology has made access to music and music materials much easier and quicker. But while it promises to engage listeners in new and helpful ways, technology has often been used as an adjunct or supplement to the ubiquitous lecture format. Are there other options, especially for large classes? Can the online environment improve our students' ability to learn, or does technology at some point become the master rather than the servant?

This session presents three innovative teaching approaches that imagine various classroom and homework environments. Each has a different relationship to technology as a reflection of larger goals.

José Bowen advises us to "teach naked," that is, without the use of PowerPoint or other electronic means in the classroom, but he also relies on podcasts,

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online testing, and other technology outside of the classroom to enable students to spend most of their class time in discussion.

Mark Clague continues to deliver traditional lectures, enriched by technology in the classroom, but also uses online listening blogs and social networking to improve learning. He sees technologies as extensions of more traditional methods: blogs are the new listening journals, and “Living Music” (<http://sitemaker.umich.edu/livingmusic/home>) is a classroom oral history project gone online.

Jocelyn Neal has heard many objections to online teaching, but has discovered that most either have easy answers in the online world or are equally valid in the conventional classroom. The challenges of designing online courses in music history and theory have helped her to create more effective lectures and to engage all students more equally in class interactions. Moreover, online teaching has drawn her into the students’ modern world of technology—their comfort zone for exploring new ideas. Her experiences continue to point to one question: what, exactly, are the benefits of having the professor physically present in the classroom, and do they outweigh the benefits of online teaching?

The session will begin with a short demonstration of each methodology and the tools it employs. An interactive workshop will follow the introductions, where attendees will take part in a structured learning exercise designed to allow them to develop their own applications of these new technologies and methods firsthand, and to imagine how they might use them in their own teaching. The session will conclude with an invitation to everyone in attendance to discuss the pedagogical effectiveness of the various approaches.