Assessing the Learning Efficacy of a Hybrid Format Graduate Class

**Part 1: Background**

Graduate Music History classes are mandatory for all students in the M.M. Program. Classes are traditionally held on campus in the evening, 2.5 hours of instruction per week. Classes have consistently received positive reviews; however, some considerations prompted the department to consider experimenting with a “hybrid” format where 50% of the course would be offered online. These considerations included:

- Many graduate students travel long distances to attend the M.M. academic classes. Online components would make it easier for students to complete their requirements with more time efficiency.
- Online components offer a range of activities that might be employed to support or enhance in-class components.
- In their traditional form, graduate history classes rely on a high level of in-class discussion. Some students, particularly those for whom English is a foreign language, find it difficult and / or intimidating to participate in discussion. It is sometimes difficult to assess these students’ acquisition of knowledge and ideas. Online components might provide these students with more opportunities for participation and accurate evaluation.
- History classes must allow students time to listen to many hours of music repertory, plus time for analysis of historical and musicological arguments, per each topic studied. Traditionally, all these elements have been forced into a one-week unit of study. A hybrid format alternating introductory knowledge components (online) with more detailed analytical discussion (in-class) would allow for a two-week structure, permitting a more in-depth study of a single topic.

A SacCT site was developed by Dr. Basini for the Music 208 course. The course was devised as a succession of topics, each comprising a two-week unit. The assignments for the first week allowed the student to become familiar with the repertory and the basic historical facts surrounding it. At the end of the first week, students completed a set of online assignments. The second week was devoted to reading musicological arguments and perspectives. At the end of the second week, the class met on campus for in-class debate; students turned in brief written journal assignments at this time. In order to avoid confusion, all assignments were provided to
students in a Class Reader. Assignments were also available on the SacCT site, along with a calendar of online and class events.

In the past, for in-person courses, assessment has been carried out in traditional formats: written summaries of articles, informal written discussions, formal essays, informal class discussion, formal class presentations. The hybrid class offered the opportunity for expanding the ways in which students learn and are evaluated. Additional forms of evaluation included online discussion board postings and multiple-choice guided reading quizzes.

Part 2: Student Reception of Hybrid Format

The majority of students received the class format positively. Informal comments made to Dr. Basini during the course of the semester emphasized the flexibility that the course format offered to working teachers who needed to travel to music contests during the semester, to students with families, and to students who live far away from campus. One student commented via email that having to post her ideas online made her feel more accountable than she did in class; she needed to attain a higher standard because her writing would appear online.

An anonymous exit survey was given to students during the last week of class. The emphasis of the survey was to compare the efficacy of the online and in-class sessions. Did students consider the online components to be valuable, and how did their experiences online compare with those in class?

Fifteen of the sixteen students took the survey. The results of the exit survey are provided below, with explanatory comments and analysis. All student comments are reproduced verbatim.
The same number of students considered participation in online and in-class sessions to be “good” or “excellent.” More students considered participation “excellent” online.
The overwhelming majority of students agreed that the online components made completing their degree requirements easier.
While most students strongly agreed that the online components were valuable, a few students did not consider the online components valuable. By contrast, no student disagreed that the in-class components were valuable.
While most students agreed or strongly agreed that online components helped them learn, a few students disagreed. By contrast, no student disagreed that in-class components helped them learn.
Students considered both online and in-class assignments to be appropriately challenging.
The majority of students considered both online and in-class sessions to be valuable. Comments emphasized the complementary nature of the learning techniques and assignments.

**Comments**

“Good mix of separate reading time (online) and in-class learning.”

“The hybrid nature of the course allowed for peer interfacing in settings that were comfortable for all. The students who tended not to engage in class were often quite vocal online. Also, being online allowed for more access to resources (RILM etc.) in order to provide more provocative responses.”

“Both were valuable but as far as the student opinions, the online I think was more effective.”

“I liked the format, it was put together very well.”

“I found the online week more informative; but the in-class sessions gave us the face-to-face discourse that was also valuable. I found that I preferred the online sessions because of the flexibility for time and location.”

“I like being in class more than at home. I still like more of the ‘sage on the stage.’”

“I felt the strong point of the class was the in-class discussions because it immediately gave the students a different point of view of the same concept, which I felt was not achieved online.”

“Even with a class of fifteen, variety in learning / study still exists. I believe having both online and in-person class sessions allows a majority of the class to be challenged.”

“I like that we are able to focus on one topic for two weeks. We can get the background from the online portion and discuss.”

“I simply felt that concepts were solidified for better during class – I feel that I benefit more and learn better through in-class discussions.”

“Each week was a different feel; reading and quiz; reading and summary. Both were equally challenging.”

“More student input online. More instructor input in class.”
Just over 50% of students considered online components aided ease of participation.

**Comments**
“Online components allowed me to have more time to do classwork.”
“Having a family, online components allowed my busy work schedule not to complicated by weekly class. Could do online work while kids asleep. Great!”
“For busy schedules, this was fantastic! I loved reading and discussing online.”
“It was less drive time, and I could participate from my home!”
“I was pretty indifferent to the online components.”
“I live one hour away. Online gave me time to think before responding.”
“It is hard to convey ideas by typing them.”
Just over 50% of the class stated that the online component will be a factor in deciding whether to take a class in the future. 30% of the class stated that online components will not be a factor in deciding whether to take a class.
Further Comments on Class Format
“I loved this format. One thing that would help would be to load links to the musical excerpts / scores onto WebCT.”
“You are an amazing teacher!”
“I think the combination of the half online and half lecture suited to my schedule. And it gave me more time to think. It was a very fun class!”
“I hope you continue this split session style for graduate classes in the future. It was very helpful.”
“Good!”
“I appreciated the variety in not only the course content and materials, but the week to week variety in class sessions kept things fresh for the entire semester!”
“I would like to see this style of class offered every semester at the graduate level.”

Recommendations or Suggestions for Improving Any Aspect of the Course

“Maybe a bit less ‘discussion.’ I enjoy hearing the teacher’s viewpoints, even if I agree or disagree with them.”
“I did have trouble getting ahold of you with questions.”
“I wished to learn more about the individual composers and more stories, scores.”
“It was great having a lot of reading assignments! It would also be great to have class during the day! I cannot think of any areas of improvement, but if I think of some I will let you know!”
“The online was great! I was very excited to do the online discussion. With written discussion, I was able to research, google, formulate, and organize before I said anything. And, if I was struggling with a topic, I could read what others had written to scaffold my learning and response.”
“None. Great class. Challenging, rigorous, just what a Masters’ class should be.”
“Thank you.”
Part 3: Meeting Learning Goals in the Hybrid Format

In the process of completing this Assessment Project, the Learning Goals for Graduate History classes underwent reconsideration. Faculty input on the emphasis of the Learning Goals was solicited via email. Comments included the following.

“I would like to see that our music majors come away with a good understanding of what important musical changes happened throughout the centuries. These changes should include stylistic composition changes, instrument changes, social changes that affected how musicians were able to make a living, performance space changes. I also feel strongly that even more importantly than memorizing specific dates of musicians lives etc... that students understand what else was happening during the musical changes. This would include an understanding of political, social, dramatic, artistic, scientific changes and inventions occurring to create the living environment for each composer or performer in any given country of study.” (Laurel Zucker)

“…it would be great to incorporate repertoire pertinent to student majors in the history courses, where possible. [for example …students] hear about orchestra music and opera, of course, and piano music, chamber music, and occasionally choral music, but almost never anything about music for winds (chamber music, wind band, wind ensemble, wind orchestra, wind symphony). […] great artistic achievement in music is not confined to the realm of strings, symphony orchestra, opera, ballet, or piano. All students are enlightened when their knowledge of the repertoire is not only deepened, but also widened.” (Robert Halseth)

“The history classes can best support the MM in performance by deepening the students' understanding of the lives of the composers' whose music they play and the context in which this music was written. Informed performers lives are made richer and their ability to communicate to listeners more powerful through such classes. The MM classes best serve the students by being more specific and rigorous then the survey classes they take as undergraduates.” (Andy Luchansky)

“I would like my grad students to be able to understand how to REALLY use a library. That could, of course, be a slightly different set of goals for a music theorist, historian, composer, or performer---but in their respective areas they must be able to work fluidly in a library. They themselves will soon be teaching, and need to pass this skill on to their future students. I think that the performers need more experience talking about music---perhaps in a lecture/demo, or mini lecture-recital format. This is what they will need to do to get a job, and they need to be articulate about their repertoire. It really does not matter whether a pianist is asked to give a talk on a Bartok orchestra piece or a Liszt Etude---the point is that they get comfortable talking and demonstrating about music in front of an audience. […] I also think that some grad course (one that has some real teeth in it) about pedagogy should remain a must. Most of our students are going to do just that for a living.” (Lorna Peters)

“I would expect that a MM student would have a much deeper understanding of music history at the grad level. […] it would be assumed that the grad level history classes would provide a deeper understanding of the material than the undergrad level as supported through grad level papers, reports, and tests.” (Stephen Blumberg)
Areas of Expertise
As a result of deliberation and consultation with faculty, four areas of emphasis have been defined as critical in graduate Music History classes:

1. Historical knowledge
2. Knowledge of musical repertory
3. Experience of musicology
4. Academic verbal, written, and research skills

Within each area, the following Learning Goals were identified. It is important that each area relates to the students’ chosen field of specialty.

1. Historical knowledge and its application to the understanding of musical works and students’ area of interest
   A. The student will be able to cite, outline, and explain the main historical trends of the period and / or the topic in question (knowledge)
   B. The student will be able to describe, analyze, and appraise past and present historiographical ideas and trends about the period and / or topic (comprehension, application, evaluation)
   C. The student will be able to apply the historical contextualization of works and topics relevant to the student’s special area of interest (knowledge, comprehension, application, synthesis)

2. Knowledge of musical repertory and its application to students’ area of interest
   A. The student will be able to describe, analyze, relate and compare well-known repertory from the period and / or topic through study of the works’ historical contexts, forms and styles, and musicological interpretations (knowledge, comprehension, application, synthesis)
   B. The student will describe, analyze, relate and compare lesser-known music repertory from the period and / or topic through study of the works’ historical contexts, forms and styles, and musicological interpretations (knowledge, comprehension, application, synthesis)

3. Experience of musicological field and its application to the understanding of musical works and students’ area of interest
   A. The student will demonstrate understanding of main musicological trends and ideas about the period and / or topic (knowledge, comprehension)
   B. The student will compare and evaluate different ways of approaching a musical work and historical period, and practice critique of different approaches (knowledge, comprehension, evaluation)
   C. The student will understand and apply the potential applications of musicological ideas to the student’s area of expertise (comprehension, application, synthesis)

4. Academic verbal, written, and research skills
   A. The student will participate in verbal discussion, analysis, and criticism of historical, historiographical, musical, musicological, and analytical ideas – in formal and informal
contexts, e.g. class discussion / formal presentation (knowledge, comprehension, application, synthesis, evaluation)

B. The student will engage in written discussion, analysis, and criticism of historical, historiographical, musical, musicological, and analytical ideas – in formal and informal written genres (knowledge, comprehension, application, synthesis, evaluation)

C. The student will engage in original research about the historical period / topic in question, using standard graduate-level methods and means, e.g. databases, professional formatting, etc. (knowledge, comprehension, application, synthesis, evaluation)

The following chart outlines the methods by which each Learning Goal is addressed in the graduate history classes. Methods followed by asterisks indicate methods used only in the Hybrid Format.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING GOAL</th>
<th>EVALUATION METHOD - HYBRID</th>
<th>EVALUATION METHOD - TRADITIONAL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student will be able to cite, outline, and explain the main historical</td>
<td>Online Reading Quizzes*. In-class discussion. End-of-term project.</td>
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<td>trends of the period and / or the topic in question</td>
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<tr>
<td>The student will be able to describe, analyze, and appraise past and</td>
<td>Online Discussion Board Postings*. Written Summaries of Articles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>present historiographical ideas and trends about the period and / or topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>The student will be able to apply the historical contextualization of</td>
<td>End-of-term project.</td>
<td>End-of-term project.</td>
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<td>works and topics relevant to the student’s special area of interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>The student will be able to describe, analyze, relate and compare well-</td>
<td>Online Discussion Board Postings*.</td>
<td>In-class discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>known repertory from the period and / or topic through study of the works’</td>
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<tr>
<td>historical contexts, forms and styles, and musicological interpretations</td>
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<tr>
<td>The student will describe, analyze, relate and compare lesser-known music</td>
<td>Online Discussion Board Postings*.</td>
<td>In-class discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>repertory from the period and / or topic through study of the works’</td>
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<tr>
<td>historical contexts, forms and styles, and musicological interpretations</td>
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<tr>
<td>The student will demonstrate</td>
<td>Online Discussion Board</td>
<td>Written summaries of</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding of main musicological trends and ideas about the period and/or topic</td>
<td>Postings*. Written summaries of articles. In-class discussion.</td>
<td>Articles. In-class discussion.</td>
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<td>The student will compare and evaluate different ways of approaching a musical work and historical period, and practice critique of different approaches</td>
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<td>Written summaries of articles. In-class discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student will understand and apply the potential applications of musicological ideas to the student’s area of expertise</td>
<td>End-of-term Project.</td>
<td>End-of-term Project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The student will participate in verbal discussion, analysis, and criticism of historical, historiographical, musical, musicological, and analytical ideas – in formal and informal contexts, e.g. class discussion/formal presentation</td>
<td>In-Class Discussion (small group and whole-class). Formal class presentation (individual and group).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student will engage in written discussion, analysis, and criticism of historical, historiographical, musical, musicological, and analytical ideas – in formal and informal written genres</td>
<td>Online Discussion Board Postings*. Written summaries and critiques of articles. End-of-term Project.</td>
<td>Written summaries and critiques of articles. End-of-term Project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student will engage in original research about the historical period/topic in question, using standard graduate-level methods and means, e.g. databases, professional formatting, etc.</td>
<td>End-of-term Project. Individual research throughout semester for Discussion Board Postings*.</td>
<td>End-of-term Project.</td>
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The benefits of the two new learning methods, Discussion Board Postings and Online Quizzes, include the following:

- **Online Reading Quizzes**: Each student is held accountable for detailed reading and understanding of articles in a way that is difficult to attain through in-class discussion only (every student must complete the Quiz to receive credit, whereas not every student in class must answer every question). Quiz questions aid the student reader in identifying the main points of the reading; this is particularly helpful for new students, those needing more practice in reading professional-level texts, or ESL students. The Quizzes were designed to emphasize learning rather than testing. They were set up so that students received feedback on their answers after completing the
Quiz; then, if the student wished, he / she could then review the material and re-take the quiz in order to receive a higher grade. Online Quizzes proved an effective and time-efficient way of encouraging and assessing the students’ acquisition of historical knowledge.

- Discussion Board Postings: Each student has the opportunity to participate equally in the discussion – even shy or ESL students. Students who spoke very rarely in class were extremely vocal on the Discussion Board and showed themselves to have skills that would never have been apparent through in-class assessment only. Since students need to formulate some thoughts prior to posting, online writing can in some cases encourage more developed responses to questions. On the other hand, writing about the questions often leads to new insights (“writing-to-think” approach). Students may post from wherever they are located (this semester, this included a student posting from her hotel room while leading a high school trip to an East Coast choral competition, and a student participating in a brief educational exchange in Alaska).

Hybrid Format allowed the retention of “traditional” learning and assessment methods while adding new ways of learning and assessing learning. The quality of student assignments was comparable in both traditional and Hybrid Format classes.

**Part 4: Conclusion**

The Hybrid Format is a viable alternative way of implementing a graduate music history class. Online components provide additional ways of learning and assessing learning, such as Online Quizzing and Discussion Board Posting. The majority of students found online components valuable and expressed interest in taking hybrid format classes in the future.