

Kimberlyn Montford, Music
Mellon Initiative Course Revision Grant Report
Research Project—Early Music Performance Practice
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I modified MUSC 3341 (Music History I—Antiquity through the Baroque). It is the first half of our music history sequence for our majors (Bachelor of Art and Bachelor of Music) and minors. The students get the basic structure of music research techniques (most useful databases, conventions of writing about music, style) in this class. Students are encouraged to take the course during their sophomore year, as it provides the basis for their inquiry into the music for their major instruments, as well as ensemble and pedagogical works. However, with the issues of scheduling here at Trinity, the class will often have juniors and a few seniors.

The course has always had a research component. The music history sequence—the course under discussion and the spring semester course, Music History II (MUSC 3342), taught by my colleague, Carl Leafstedt—is the only opportunity to provide music majors and minors with structured instruction in writing about music, yet it also bears the responsibility for addressing the historical content which is the actual focus of the class. Thus, I have been constantly reviewing and refitting the research component of the course throughout the past few years to make it more efficient and effective. Primarily, I wanted to design a research unit that would be helpful to future musicians and educators, more interest-driven, approaching the topic and techniques in the way that would most closely approximate the reason and use for which the students would encounter such a project.

So, to debrief: The students were more excited about the newly-modified project than students had been in the past when a more traditional term paper had been assigned. In most cases, they chose topics that reflected the issues they would encounter in their majors or primary instrument: For example, one student discussed pedagogical materials in the late Baroque, another the acoustical properties of St. Mark Basilica in Venice and the resulting developing of polychoral music, and another chose to work on the status of women musicians in Italian courts during the late Renaissance. The music that they began to investigate was the result of their focus.

I dedicated a portion of each class (the last 5-15 minutes of each class) to the covering aspects of the research project than I had in previous years, to keep up the idea that this was an ongoing project that was of interest to the research and to be discussed and shared with classmates.

Dealing with the mechanics of research—investigating the particular benefits and drawbacks of the various music-focused databases, the proper way to cite sources in Chicago Manual of Style Notes-Bibliography style, what constitutes a good, descriptive outline, as opposed to a series of headers, and how to translate the process of their research into an easily apprehended presentation—was little different from previous years. Several of the students, I'm convinced, never really saw the point of some of my rigorous examination and grading of their bibliographies and outlines. What I did notice, however, was more ownership of the both the process and the final product by the students as a whole. They talked about their work more easily, had brief, yet cogent descriptions of their project for both musicians and lay conversations.

In terms of the actual papers, I saw great improvement in the quality of the first drafts. And while the depth and quality of thought increased from first to final drafts, the change was not as dramatic as I'd thought it would be. I had gone over how to revise one's work in the face of constructive

criticism at each stage, allowing students to resubmit work, but a couple of students barely addressed my comments at all, changing the 'easy' areas that I'd pointed out and not touching some serious substantive issues that required reconsidering the value of sources and/or even some conclusions. I would say that my deadline schedule most likely contributed to that state of affairs. I will allow more lead time before the submission of the final draft to allow for peer critiques.

I have to say that hands down, one of the most successful elements of the process was peer critiques. I knew that it would be instructive to read and give comments on classmates' work, but I had no idea how useful the students found the process. We examined the rough drafts of each step of the process—with the exception of the final draft—a couple of ways. I had students email their work to a small group and they critiqued each others' work. We also went through one or two drafts in class (with the student's permission). I would put the draft on the document projector and we would focus on two or three major issues.

The biggest surprise was the verve and creativity that students brought to their project presentations. Some took me at word when I told them to treat the project the way they would present the information in what they imagined would be their future use of Music History. I saw high school music lessons, lectures for symphony concerts, and talks a conductor would give to their ensemble before beginning rehearsal on a work. What a blast!

I am definitely including this assignment in future iterations of the course. It was well worth the effort of reworking the course for its inclusion.

Several elements would be strengthened upon repeating the assignment:

1. I will stress the value of the initial search process in the success of the project as a whole. Students often just conducted really wide-ranging searches without thinking what would be useful. While they had the opportunity to redo that segment of the project, with more groundwork at the beginning, they could start thinking about their focus earlier in the process.
2. As mentioned above, I would utilize the peer critique process more systematically, giving students more time to have finished products for review by their classmates. I'd also add more about evaluating the critiques and learning what to follow and what to perhaps consider, but not change.
3. I'd incorporate more discussion of effective revision and how to look at their outlines and first drafts for increased clarity and expression.