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Music Department

Project Title

Music Research Methods for Undergraduates: A Peer-Reviewed E-Journal Project

Project Summary

This project involves the redesign of MUSI 2306, a sophomore-level course titled “Introduction to Music History and Literature.” Centering on critical listening techniques and aspects of musical style, MUSI 2306 is required for all undergraduate music majors and serves a foundation for upper-level studies in music history and theory. The redesigned course implements a new semester-long research project, which replaces several shorter, informal writing assignments. In addition to learning general research methodologies and bibliographic practices, topics of instruction previously not represented in the music curriculum, students gain experience with the peer review process and revising their written work.

Methodology

Each student enrolled in MUSI 2306 is given a list of recently published scholarly articles drawn from the field of musicology. After selecting a topic of personal interest, the student is asked to write a formal review (much like a conventional book review in the humanities) supported by secondary sources and applying concepts from the course. From this point, the project involves three stages of peer-reviewed writing. To facilitate thoughtful engagement with their chosen topic, students first submit an abstract. In the second assignment, they compile an annotated bibliography of sources they intend to use to contextualize their review. Following these preliminary stages, students proceed to draft their essay with guidance from the instructor on the format and function of scholarly reviews. A subsequent revised version serves as the student’s final project for the course. The abstract, draft, and revised copy are evaluated by fellow students through a double-blind peer review process (see Assessment and Results below). The highest scoring submissions are selected for publication, and after further review and copyediting by the instructor, will appear in an open-access website.

Student-Learning Outcomes

In addition to the existing SLOs for this course, students:

- A. gain familiarity with the ways in which scholarship in music disciplines is produced, *assessed through weekly assignments and discussions on research and writing methods;*
- B. develop skills in evaluating their peers constructively, *assessed through the application of rubrics and responses to reviews of their own work by peers;*
- C. demonstrate an ability to synthesize a variety of research resources and analytical strategies, *assessed through the final version of their project.*

The Music Department trains future educators, aspiring performers, and budding scholars alike. In terms of real-world applications, band and choir teachers are asked to produce engaging program notes for their concerts, and they frequently serve as adjudicators, a task for which skill in peer review is critical. Free-lance musicians regularly present lecture recitals that combine scholarship and performance, and they write grant proposals to develop and sustain their professional activities. Graduate school applicants are requested to submit formal writing samples for admission, and after acceptance, they must undertake substantial independent research projects. Each of these professional and pre-professional activities stands to benefit from the methods and skills now taught in the redesigned MUSI 2306.

Detailed Project Description

An overview of the stages of the project appears in the methodology section above. Each week, the instructor presents materials relating to some aspect of the research and writing process. Topics early in the semester include critical reading skills, research methodologies specific to music disciplines, and notetaking. Later, students are instructed on how to locate appropriate resources in Jernigan library, to make effective use of online research tools, and how to craft an argument. Toward the end of the semester, the focus shifts to bibliographic style, proofreading, and providing constructive criticism.

Assessment and Results

As noted above, the students' projects consist of three rounds of peer-reviewed writing assignments, which collectively comprise 35% of the final course grade. The abstracts are evaluated both by the instructor and at least two peers through a double blind review process; applying a rubric, students assess each other's work in terms of writing style, organization, clarity, and formatting. While there is no peer review of the annotated bibliographies (the instructor alone provides feedback at this stage), the preliminary and revised drafts are evaluated by fellow students utilizing a second rubric. Peer-assigned grades contribute to the overall mark a student received as follows: 15% for the abstract and first draft of the essay, and 25% for the final version.

Continuation of Project

As it is redesigned, MUSI 2306 does not require any ongoing financial commitment by the Music Department. While Dr. Jones is the primary instructor for this course, faculty members asked to teach the course in the future would be encouraged to adopt the revised syllabus. By incorporating introductory research methods into MUSI 2306, the course redesign addresses a gap in the Music curriculum without the need for a new course. This is crucial for the undergraduate degrees in music education and music performance, which have little room for additional classes whether required or as electives.