

Digital Collections-based Assignments

- Local history through special collections. In an American music survey, students find an artifact in each unit in special collections, then do a presentation on it. By the end of the term, each student has five “artifacts” they’ve presented to the class.
- Challenge: how do we add digital collection work into the survey?
- One solution: case studies approach, each case using a ton of online resources. Every week, instructor helps guide students through materials, rather than lecturing.
- A possibility for early music surveys: use digitized manuscripts, treatises; set up a sandbox for students to “play” with the object, and build learning on that. So instead of lecturing on clausula, show students the manuscripts, point out a bunch of clausulae and motets, then ask them about the relationship between clausula and motet.
- When covering something like graphic notation/experimental music in 1960s and 1970s, libraries often have great collections of graphic scores. Handling a score makes a huge impact.
- Internet Archive has a big music collection thanks to digitization projects at various libraries. Sometimes they have materials that are hard to find otherwise.

Ungrading

- Student-driven grading. Either self-evaluation, or contract-grading (where students decide how much work they want to do).
- Ungrading is a way of divesting authority/power from professor to give students more agency.
- Framework for delivering meaningful feedback, both from instructor and between students. Also for guided self-reflection to think about *how* learning happens as much as *what* learning is happening.
- Helps abandon labels of “A students” vs. “B students,” which facilitates improved relationships with students.
- Ungrading is liberating: not feeling defensive about what grade you’re assigning on an individual task, because you’re giving feedback, not grades. Also frees students to take risks because “failure” is authentic, not reflected in a grade. Teachers can also “risk” more by being absolutely honest about how good or terrible something else, without the anxiety of assigning an arbitrary number to something or without worrying about devastating a student in terms of their self-esteem or self-efficacy.
- How do exams fit in?
- Several people don’t do exams or quizzes anymore. Those who do, it’s not about what you get right, or how many boxes you check, because you can redo and revise as many times as you want.
- Students may still be skeptical about the new system - they’re still trying to please *you* or still gunning for a particular grade.
- In an ungrading scheme, students might *enjoy* exams, but they’re explicitly about learning (formative assessment) and not about judgment (summative assessment). Especially if they get to resubmit work.
- Ungrading might mean have students grade their own quizzes/exams.
- It’s not impossible that administrators will try to clamp down on grade distributions that are too A and B-heavy.
- Another flavor of ungrading is “specifications grading.” Linda Nilson’s book lays it out. See also <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/01/19/new-ways-grade-more-effectively-essay>
- Ungrading sounds like it means grades are thrown out the window. It’s more about putting the onus on the student to show what they’ve learned, and to connect that to a grade.
- The ultimate argument is that ungrading better approximates real life than traditional grading. No one gets grades in real life. But we do self-evaluate in our jobs. The sooner we can teach students to find intrinsic meaning and purpose in what they’re doing - separate from/despite grades - the sooner we’ll be preparing them for careers and for life.

- Challenges: how to get students to self-reflect in a productive way. It has to be iterative, it has to be structured, and it ought to lead to conversation, rather than be the culmination of the course.
- Could students co-construct what reflection is going to look like?

Chat:

[Prompt: type your favorite digital collections in the Chat]

- NY Phil archives all the way!
- Library of Congress
- Chronicling America (historical newspapers)
- Library of Congress sound archives
- Sheet Music Consortium
- Library of Congress
- (gulp) IMSLP - teaching with/against
- Local college archives!
- Independent Voices (someone on the FB group pointed me to this) — great for independent press
- Lib of Congress for me too
- UMKC's archives
- UAZ Special Collections - Vaudeville
- archival collections, atlanta university center

Other resources shared in the chat:

Blogging American Music History using digital collections prompt:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nKMpPID7HCU9I7a7Gi_1IN9OhIzc_VxJbpQ1Oic2a8s/edit

Explore a historical premiere through primary sources prompt:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XDMT-qR7S0__U5lc_m9rUIK5i7BXFZxuq343NtJP5RI

I used this as a one-off lesson <http://www.musicalpassage.org>

I did a Reacting to the Past activity with the Rite of Spring sources from First Nights pre-Covid — couldn't figure out how to replicate over Zoom, but it was fun

The BSO archives have a pretty big Tanglewood sound archive
(Searching through archives.bso.org → audio from Tanglewood festivals.)

On ungrading:

"I don't do exams or quizzes anymore. All is project based. (But I don't have huge classes!)"

"I was going to ask about how many students is too many to do this with - my classes tend to average about 35-40 students or more."

"You could easily do it with a class of 40."

"My "big" music major is 35-40"

"I'm doing it with 45."

"Super easy with smaller classes. But I admit that I have not tried this in the non-majors 120 people class"

On "specifications grading":

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/01/19/new-ways-grade-more-effectively-essay>