



# EMILY RUTH ALLEN

## Teaching Philosophy

Learning is a crucial part of the human experience. As someone who is constantly processing information, I share my learning strategies with students to help them understand the knowledge that is housed within a given course, or, if you will, co-learn with them. A professional learner, I am always asking questions of myself and my students. I especially ask this question in my classroom—how can we understand something better? One example of this is the discussion that takes place during my Holocaust lesson in the music history course. Many students are shocked at the inhumane way musicians were treated in Europe during that time. I try to explain to them how challenging it has been for me to study that era, and I explain to them how I have grappled with such dark subject matter. My students, or co-learners, and I then discuss how we cannot understand what musicians endured during that time and determine how we can study their music to empathize with them.

In this co-learning process my students must engage with the course material and determine their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, someone might be good at listening but not writing. Or, a vocalist might be able to describe what he or she hears in songs better than instrumental works. In other words, the students must constantly reflect on their strengths and weakness to best determine how to grasp concepts—i.e., learn how to best learn.

I accommodate various learning abilities with different types of assignments (pragmatic vs. conceptual, writing vs. factual recall, aural vs. score analysis) and in-class activities. These assignments and activities are intended to be as inclusive as possible. For example, I cater to introverted and extroverted students by assigning oral and written in-class activities. Sometimes I even do a little of both—I have had students do a written response to a question and then call on some of them to share their responses aloud. However, if a certain activity does not seem to work a given semester, I learn and try a different approach the next time.

An issue I regularly grapple with is the students' retention of content. To help with this I connect new content back to old content in lecture and do a low-pressure review activity in class (an "ungraded" quiz of sorts) every two weeks or so. This helps me see where students are excelling or struggling before a quiz or heavily weighted assignment or test comes up. Whether a major or minor assignment or test, the grades and evaluation are used to equally highlight students' strengths and weaknesses, something I keep in mind as I give students feedback individually or as a class. I do the same in critiquing my teaching approaches—what seems to be working in a given semester? What can I do better? A balanced approach is crucial to the co-learning process, as the students and I cannot grow without praise and criticism.

Balance also needs to be addressed in a broad pedagogical approach, teaching multiculturally. While the traditional Western art music history course is worth teaching, it is equally essential to share other musical traditions as well, even if it is not within one course. I am grappling with this in



my Fall 2018 music appreciation course, as Florida State University recently adopted the textbook *Music: A Social Experience*, which addresses Western art music, “world” musics, and popular musics. Have only taught Western-centric courses up to this point, I am excited to teach a diverse curriculum using the (ethno)musicological approaches I have learned in my graduate career.

In using the teaching approaches I have described, my goal is to enrich students’ historical and cultural understanding so that they can look for similar phenomena in their everyday listening, teaching, performing, recording, and other forms of musicking. For example, with my music majors, I have had them do group presentations on issues discussed in the music history course (technology, class, gender, race, sexuality, economic considerations, etc.) that they see manifesting in the twenty-first century. This resulted in everything from original compositions to documentaries to Disney cover songs—the creative yet clear presentations of the historical issues were a thrill to watch and discuss.

Along with successful projects like that, I have had teaching success beyond the classroom as well. For instance, one of my music history students worked with me on a conference paper for the Undergraduate Music Research Symposium, for which she won the top paper prize. This student later asked me to write her a recommendation letter for graduate school; she is now going on to pursue a master’s degree in musicology in the fall. Having worked with this individual from the beginning, I have learned what is like to collaborate with a student outside of a class. I hope to forge a similar relationship as a mentor for the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program this coming year.

While that and other teaching experiences have been a success, I have had my challenges as well, particularly in determining fair measures of participation and attendance. For instance, at different points I have graded students’ engagement during a given lecture (e.g., cell phone use, talking loudly, etc.) loosely and harshly, both of which have had varying levels of success from semester. Rather than doing it systematically, I have had to learn to adapt those policies from term to term, accounting for the class size, majors, ages, etc. By being more sensitive to what works with a given class, I have had more success in creating better learning environments. For example, with my summer 2018 music appreciation course, I started off the semester with “wordy” PowerPoint slides, and I found that students were taking pictures of the presentation and not paying attention to the lecture. In response I started putting fewer words on the slides. The students stopped taking photos altogether and began asking more questions about the content since they were processing what I said.

Having reflected on the good, bad, and the ugly, I am excited to explore different teaching approaches in the future. My immediate goal is to get students to thinking about their musicking in various social contexts. For example, this fall, I am issuing a “Music & Dance” report to my non-majors, which calls for them to go to a public dance setting and describe that experience based on a set of criteria. Additionally, while having students experience live music, I recognize that students need to actively listen to the platforms that they most often engage with music—media. In an era of convenient listening, it is important to have students stop and think critically about what they normally hear using the historical and cultural parameters that they have learned in my class.