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Playlisting the World: How Music, Technology, and Global Influences Impact the Culture of College Student Listeners

*By Aaron Pergram**

This article presents a case study in STEAM education that leverages global popular music as a platform for cultivating technological fluency, interdisciplinary collaboration, and critical cultural analysis. The redesigned university course, Global Playlists: Music, Tech, and Influence, positions music streaming platforms, playlist curation, and digital publishing tools as central components of a blended learning environment aimed at Generation Z learners. Using a project-based, cohort-driven model, students engage with sociopolitical themes through curated playlists and multimedia deliverables such as electronic press kits (EPKs), distributed via public-facing social media accounts. The course design integrates core tenets of engineering and technology—such as systems thinking, media design, and data-informed interaction—with the creative and reflective practices of the arts. Emphasizing the "A" in STEAM, this approach advances civic engagement, critical inquiry, and expressive communication through technology-centered pedagogy. Outcomes from the pilot implementation demonstrate measurable student gains in collaboration, problem-solving, and cultural competency. This study contributes to broader conversations in STEAM by demonstrating how arts integration within technological platforms can enhance engagement and deepen student learning, while also promoting ethical and globally conscious use of media tools in education.

Keywords: *STEAM Education, Blended Learning, Music Streaming Platforms, Cultural Competency, Technology-Enhanced Learning*

Introduction

My first musical diet of recorded sounds came from cassette tapes. We never had a turntable with a decent needle, so I digested all from cassettes. We had a Realistic CTR-83 tape player that I commandeered when I arrived home from school. My favorite album was *Tchaikovsky: The Nutcracker (Highlights),* recorded by the Berlin Symphony Orchestra under Peter Wohlert. The cover art featured a sparkling Christmas tree adorned with lit candles, shiny ornaments, pearly garland, and the appropriately prominent nutcracker, complete with his glossy boots and long beard. Eventually, the long-overused plastic case broke, and all I had left was the cassette.

LaserLight Digital, a budget label of Delta Music Media GmbH (Discogs, n.d.), released this 63-minute album of 10 tracks in 1989. The duration of track seven, named "No. 12 Divertissement," is 11 minutes and 59 seconds. The track consists of a collection of character dances, split between two sides of the tape. The Spanish

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dance, "Chocolate," was the last sound of side A, and the remainder of the dance suite began with the Arabian Dance, "Coffee," on side B. I distinctly remember this being bothersome. Why wouldn't they just put all of the "Divertissement" together on one side of the tape?

This album was recorded on a C90 magnetic tape cassette, with each side capable of holding up to 45 minutes of music. What I failed to understand as a child was the limitations of recorded time. For me, music was eternal and limitless—rewind, fast forward, flip, listen again, over and over—so I was unable to understand how *they*, whoever they were, could split the dances apart. Though looking back, there were far greater things about this *Meisterwerk*. For example, the names of the tracks included numbers corresponding to the original ballet score, such as "No. 2 March," or LaserLight printed bizarre translations of movement titles like "The Clown" for *La mère Gigogne et les polichinelles*. Furthermore, I did not understand that this work was a ballet, or what a ballet was, or that what I was listening to was merely highlights from the larger work, as the album title suggests.

Beyond my youthful obsessions with this cassette, a more interesting aspect to discuss is how I came to listen to Pyotr Tchaikovsky's music. I am the only musician in my household, born the son of a factory worker and a nurse from a lower-middle-class family. We lived in a small house in a rough neighborhood with some small treasures, like a Realistic CTR-83 tape player. I have no memory of how I obtained the recording or where it is now. But imagine a young boy listening to a European masterpiece from the late 19th century in the basement of a modest home in the American Midwest. And yet, this was my most influential musical memory as a child, and from that moment forward, my life as a musician began to take shape.

Teaching Global Music-Cultures

Fast forward to 2019, I began teaching global sound studies at a large public university in the United States. During my first year at this institution, I inherited a course from the liberal education core that, to my knowledge, had always taught students about global musics through *postcards*. By this, students would spend a week learning about the music of India, followed by a week on Brazil, and so on until the end of the semester. Students were simply hearing cultural soundbites and memorizing the names of traditional instruments, scale systems, and information related to music broadly. There was no rigor, no proper investigation, no deep inquiry. The reduction of music to a flash-fried appetizer, a momentary and bite-sized pleasure far from the main course—it was insubstantial tokenism.

Like a postcard, they only enjoyed a superficial cultural experience, as if each culture were a two-dimensional, lustrous, and plasticized object. I taught this course in such a fashion for one year. When I talked with students at the end of the semester, discussions indicated a residual vague cultural imprint, a flawed characterization of how different global spaces housed music. I was doing a great disservice to my students by teaching in this fashion, evidenced by their recounts of the semester's course material. Even more troubling, students enjoyed the course, and the evaluations were considerably positive.

I reworked this course to help students learn deeply about how musical culture is created, valued, and reflected by a group of people. I attended conferences, read articles, and participated in symposia to better understand music learning. A throughline of these experiences made one thing clear: if I was truly going to bring the world's music to my students, then I certainly needed to use technology to do so (Pergram 2023). By using technology tools, I could adjust the course's content delivery mode and create a native space for deep learning, offering students an accessible gateway to encounter unfamiliar aspects of global music cultures.

In a 2018 study, Viterbo University's "Weaving Words and Music" project utilized music composition to help students understand the personal experiences of Palestinians, thereby deepening their knowledge of global conflict (Haupert 2018). I wanted students to experience this type of meaning-making at the intersection of music and culture, while also making it accessible to both musicians and non-musicians. The result was a podcasting course, featuring in-depth investigations of music along the Silk Road. This course reflected my expertise in Chinese music and allowed me to integrate technology for students who, from my observations, were eager to learn and create something. This refashioning of the traditional global music course was a success. Soon, I would inherit another course in need of a makeover, and that story is the focus of this article.

Transition to Technology-Centered Pedagogy

From 2019 to 2024, I gained years of experience teaching and refining a global music course using evidence-based teaching methods. During the fall semester of 2024, the department tasked me with revamping a second ethnomusicology course dedicated solely to global popular music. Because students widely enjoyed the podcasting element of the first music course, I made technology the centerpiece of my course design for the global pop class.

The shift to technology-centered course design mirrors the classroom populated by typical undergraduate students. Generation Z (Gen Z), roughly those born between 1997 and 2012, use technology natively and would benefit from instructional materials that reflect their world (Regmi 2024). This comes as little surprise, but a more pressing question remains: which technologies should I employ? I knew I could not repeat the podcasting element from my first course, at least not as a primary deliverable for the course project.

Rewind to my *Nutcracker* vignette. According to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), revenues from cassette formats in the United States totaled $3.3 billion, accounting for 50.8% of the total revenue of $6.6 billion in 1989 (RIAA.com). Therefore, it is no surprise that in 1989, I listened to music through the most commonly available and widely sold format, the cassette.

Today, the music streaming market is king. In 2023, 67.3% of all recorded music revenues totaled $19.3 billion, with physical media sales, the second-highest category, accounting for only 17.8% of that revenue (Kays 2025). Clearly, utilizing music streaming services to teach global pop music would be a modern, attractive, and engaging way to deliver course material. Furthermore, there is a clear indication that, with Gen-Z students, social media platforms and interactive media, especially

those accessed through smartphones, would be an attractive and natural choice for delivering potential course content. In the end, playlisting was the most feasible and contemporary option for this popular-sounds course.

The Institution

I teach at a large public university in the United States. Our institution prioritizes excellence in teaching undergraduate students and offers a comprehensive liberal arts education curriculum. This curricular core comprises approximately 40% of a student's academic curriculum, accounting for variations across degree plans and transfer credits. With storied centers on campus, the university is well-respected for academics and leading programs in business, engineering, and technology.

The music department is part of a vibrant arts college comprising 1,500 creatives, along with four other anchor departments, interdisciplinary programs, and a nationally accredited art museum. However, the departments on campus that include science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) often benefit most from funding, donor support, facility improvements, and university-sponsored advertising.

Educators and scholars from various disciplines increasingly argue that integrating the arts and humanities into STEM education (also known as STEAM) can foster greater creativity and innovation across all fields (Guyotte et al. 2014). By incorporating the liberal arts and humanities to promote a holistic educational experience, STEAM represents a much-needed shift in power dynamics that extends from technological innovations to social practices in engineering (Khine & Areepattamannil 2019). STEAM education reflects the modern world through its inherently interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach. Although you hear the marching band at a football game, see intriguing sculptures across campus, walk into a stunning building designed by renowned architects, and attend provocative performances at the main theatre, frustratingly, the arts and humanities are often relegated to the fringes of our campus culture.

Most of the students who take my courses are not creative arts majors; they come from across campus and are primarily studying STEM fields. It is exciting to watch students engage with music-cultures in unexpected ways. With deep appreciation, I learn from them. "A liberal education fosters the ability to distinguish between what is true and what is false, with a number of different analytical perspectives: the scientific, the artistic, the humanistic, the quantitative, and the qualitative" (Scott 2014). In an age where truth and fiction are indistinguishable, the need to add the "A" to STEAM has never been more vital—or more urgent.

Literature Review

I have grouped the resources in this literature review into three main categories. The first group focuses on pedagogy, including materials on teaching approaches and cohort-learning models. The second group focuses on technology and engaged

learning. The third group reflects the literature on music streaming as it relates to the scope of my course content.

Literature on Pedagogical Approaches

Framings

Entering the workforce, students will often face employer expectations that require command of several key skill sets. As Bear and Skorton state, "More than 80% of employers feel that colleges and universities need to do a better job helping graduates gain cross-cutting skills and knowledge" (Bear & Skorton 2019). In a 2018 report, The National Association of Colleges and Employers stated, "For skills that at least 90% of employers considered essential, those same employers reported that the percentage of new hires who were 'very or extremely proficient' in each was: 77% for teamwork; 56% for critical thinking/problem-solving; 43% for professionalism/ work ethic; and 42% for oral/written communication" (Dyer-Seymour & Battersby 2024). At my institution, and I assume others as well, faculty are asked to focus our attention on preparing students for the job market either directly or indirectly. However, the Greeks did not establish the academy for this purpose.

In the beginning, the curriculum of Plato's Academy in Athens was "divided into the 'trivium' consisting of Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric, (teaching how to express oneself and one's ideas) and the Quadrium consisting of Arithmetic (for Finance), Geometry (Geography), Astronomy (knowing one's place in the Universe) and Music (achieving inner harmony)" (Moscardini et al. 2020). There was no expectation of work readiness; rather, to give birth to wisdom. While universities are not solely responsible for preparing students for the workforce, teachers play an essential role today in helping students sharpen vital skills.

Moscardini et al. describe modern universities as *pathologically autopoietic*. By using the term *autopoiesis* (self-making or self-creation), coined by two Chilean biologists, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, Moscardini et al. describe "a state where the organisation only sees the world in its own terms" (Moscardini et al. 2020). Essentially, an institution's existential need to preserve itself outweighs the truth-seeking, critical-thinking spaces of its foundations. As a musician and teacher-scholar, I do not view my role as preparing students for a future career, though I still dedicate myself to helping students build transferable skills that empower them to find success post-graduation.

In the words of Ruscio, the teacher-scholar model at a liberal education institution "is not an adaptation of the research-university approach to a constrained organizational setting… it is a model with virtues all its own, pursued in a setting that affords advantages unavailable elsewhere" (Ruscio 2013). Our research and creative projects enhance our teaching, making it more effective and engaging. They help us bring novel ideas into the classroom and provide students with a richer learning space, one that is enriched by experiences, peer review, learning, failure, sharing, and experimentation. One factor of teacher and scholar should not outweigh the other: "The dash between teacher and scholar is meant to be a link, not a line of demarcation" (Ruscio 2013). Embracing this model, I reflect on what I can teach students through my multidisciplinary work, and inform them that it is not my role

to raise worker bees, but through my creativity and demonstrated scholarly work, busy thinkers will learn a collection of vital skills, and the student-hive becomes highly productive in a tomorrow-world's garden.

Building on the notion that universities are not vocational or technical schools, I employ my teacher-scholar ideology to emphasize four essential skills I aim to model for my students: project management, critical thinking, writing, and collaboration. I can help students efficiently improve these skills in a music course, even considering the limitations of my time and ability. For maximum impact, I decided on a cohort-based learning approach that would allow students to improve the four identified skills. Working together, students can develop collaborative skills and, ideally, manage course content through skill-building in a low-stakes social environment. As Driskell observed, "Incorporating skills training or labs into our curriculum again can give students the opportunities to build these important soft and hard skills for professional success across a range of career choices" (Driskell 2025).

Generational Changes

Instructors must recognize the impact of generational changes on how students learn. From a 2022 study of work values between generations X, Y, and Z, Mahapatra et al. remarked, "Contrary to the other generations, Gen Z is emerging as a new trend at work, who appear to value the quality of work, transparency and wellbeing-related dimensions rather than high organisation commitment," and goes on to say, "they have greater access to technology, resources and human interfaces across the globe." This pilot study also noted a decline in the mental and physical well-being of Gen Z, particularly among employees, and a noticeable decrease in Gen Z's social skills (Mahapatra et al. 2022). Students in the current generation may benefit from learning how to collaborate more effectively.

In a 2022 study of graduate students, Mauldin et al. state, "literature shows that social connections are crucial to student success," and "while not perfect, the cohort system facilitated making friendships among similar and dissimilar people, and that these friendships endured over time." Mauldin et al. noted that "diversity across age, gender, and ethnicity in the student body may provide an environment in which students from marginalized communities may experience robust social integration" (Mauldin et al. 2022). While this study focused on graduate education, the undergraduate population could equally benefit from a group learning environment. Cohort-based learning is a positive on this front.

Lastly, much has been written about the future of learning across arts disciplines in the face of rapidly changing technologies. In a 2019 study, Artut stated, "As a result of the attempt to make art with the use of machine learning techniques, it is observed that we have limited information about human intelligence functions when we consider the boundaries of the creativity taking place in the arts" (Artut 2019). In 2025, artificial intelligence is redefining the boundaries of art education and dramatically reshaping pedagogical approaches. In a competitive, globalized world, it seems inevitable that all disciplines will adopt some form of artificially generated technology as a commonplace tool, which was once considered a fringe idea.

Literature on Technology and Engaged Learning

Engaged Learning

Selecting the most suitable course delivery modes can significantly enhance an engaging learning experience (Pergram 2023). One form of course delivery that has proven particularly effective is a blended learning approach. In my global popular music course, I employ project-based learning (PBL) within a blended learning delivery model (BPBL). That is, students are placed in cohorts of five and will work together for the entire semester; however, they spend one 80-minute session learning face-to-face with the instructor and one 80-minute session learning as a cohort on their own (hybrid asynchronous learning).

In a recent study at the University of Education, Winneba, researchers divided undergraduate students into two groups: one received traditional classroom instruction, while the other received a blended learning approach. Results strongly favored a blended, project-based learning method. The author of the study remarked, "We strongly recommend institutions strengthen the effectiveness of project management instruction… by strategically leveraging blended learning methodologies, placing a heightened emphasis on the development of critical thinking skills, implementing continuous assessment and constructive feedback mechanisms, and fostering an environment that prioritizes flexibility and student-centric approaches" (Attipoe 2024). This example illustrates the impact of engaged learning among students.

As one study author points out, meticulously designing a BPBL course is key to its success. For students to appreciate the course design, an explanation of expectations and a discussion of how the course will operate are essential (Barbosa 2022). The same is true in my classroom: if students do not understand the intention of a BPBL course design, they may find the course overly complicated.

"Engaged learning is grounded on recent notions of active learning where learners take responsibility for their own learning" (Hung et al. 2006); using BPBL, the entire project's responsibility shifts to the student. "Learners are responsible for their own learning when they are actively developing thinking/learning strategies, and constantly formulating new ideas and refining them through their conversational exchanges with others" (Hung et al. 2006). This statement further supports the notion that engaging learning through a BPBL course design promotes a more stimulating environment with great potential to deepen critical thinking skills.

Learning often occurs in a social environment, and engaged learning provides a platform for students to engage both in person and asynchronously (Hung et al. 2006). Säljö points out, "learning and meaning-making are not general and abstract phenomena, they are always situated in social practices" (Säljö 2023). In Säljö's analysis of learning from participant perspectives, he emphasizes "the value of attending to participant perspectives," paying close attention to how learners engage in a social environment (Säljö 2023). While current learners are experiencing difficulties with face-to-face engagement, there has never been a more opportune time for using engaged learning practices and project-based learning.

Lastly, the physical configuration of an engaged learning environment is essential. When students engage in active learning, they function best in an active learning classroom, also known as an ALC. "Any effort to decentralize the room, with an overt

focus on group dialogue, are likely to increase the individual student's sense of accountability and lead to the learning gains that result from peer interaction" (Cotner et al. 2013).

Technology in the Classroom

The academy should not oversimplify the technology we encounter each day. We live in a postdigital age where "the intellectual restrictions of the digital paradigm are now becoming unavoidable" (Cascone 2000). There has been a natural rhythm to how technology has integrated with our daily lives, and those technologies continue to expand around us. For Gen Z students, technology is a native part of their learning experience. To demonstrate the rapid pace of technological change in the classroom, one study discusses an innovative educational platform that uses AI and a digital canvas to create an adaptive, collaborative learning environment. The so-called FazBoard features a humanoid AI assistant for round-the-clock support and a versatile digital space that mimics a traditional classroom, both of which enhance student engagement and streamline administrative tasks (BenMessaou 2025).

Studies have shown that, across various disciplines in higher education, technology-rich tools significantly enhance learning, engagement, motivation, performance, and attitudes toward learning (Akintayo et al. 2024). In a 2024 study, portraits were examined utilizing new technologies, such as AI and facial recognition software, thereby bridging the gap between art, technology, and identity (Wong 2024).

However, when integrating technology into any classroom or curriculum, "both students' and instructors' perceptions, self-efficacy, and attitudes towards technology play critical roles in determining the success of technology integration in educational settings" (Akintayo et al. 2024). Teachers should be clear about the purpose of technology, and students should have access to resources that enable them to use it effectively. Simply, avoiding tech tools in teaching can be just as problematic as using too many tech tools without purpose or accessibility.

For my classroom, the following technology tools are most helpful. As I teach large classes, my preferred Student Response System (SRS) is Mentimeter. It is easy to employ and flexible enough for most environments. One study of this technology found overwhelmingly positive results from students (Mohin et al. 2022). Another tool I use is Spotify, where I can create listening assignments for music, playlists, and podcasts. This platform is a powerful tool with shareability features. Finally, I use Google products to transform collaborative writing in class. Because student groups and teachers can collaborate and organize materials with real-time feedback, Google Docs can improve learning outcomes and enhance accessibility (Aldawi & Maher 2023). Between Mentimeter, Spotify, and Google products, I can navigate all the needs of an engaged space without a steep learning curve to command the tools.

Literature on Music Streaming

A considerable amount of research examines the ways people consume music since the advent of streaming platforms. These platforms allow consumers to integrate music into their lives, track after track. In 2025, over 713 million people

will stream music globally (Gantchev 2025). In this article, I focus on how modern music streaming has transformed the listening experience.

The music industry, once dominated by record labels, sold physical products ranging from grooved vinyl records to shiny compact discs. This monopoly allowed labels to maintain control over the market and, often, the technologies (Barata & Coelho 2021). Since 2001, digital downloads and streaming services have quickly become the primary market, giving listeners greater agency over what they listen to (Arditi 2013).

The streaming service Spotify uses the Myers-Briggs personality survey to identify behaviors that could reflect a user's mood. Because the platform aims to personalize user content deeply, it analyzes data from each user and the context in which they consume music. Then, by mapping genres and artists' content to potential personality traits and past listening habits, Spotify delivers personalized suggestions and automated playlists to listeners, ensuring continuous play (Gomes et al. 2021). Ultimately, platforms like Spotify strive to be as accurate as possible with their listener data in the hope that more users will opt for paid subscriptions (Walsh 2024).

The music industry's shift to a primarily streamed experience for younger listeners is evident in a 2021 study, which found that 85% of the sampled respondents aged 18 and above use Spotify, with 75.4% falling within the 18- to 25-year-old age range. Among users who paid for the Spotify Premium experience, nearly 83% are between 18 and 35 years old, with 73.9% of those users between 18 and 25 years old (Gomes et al. 2021). The younger the generation, the more likely they are to subscribe to Spotify.

One notable shift in the music-listening space is the rise of passivity. With algorithmic suggestions and playlists readily delivered to the listener, the exploratory nature of finding new music and the depth to which a listener may engage with a song, artist, or genre is no longer the primary focus of the user. Instead, music is now streamable from any device at any time, exacerbating the passivity of a listener. Now, users can listen to music while at the gym, running errands, and performing chores (Walsh 2024).

Given the limited transparency of algorithms on streaming services, users have less control over filtering or adjusting their algorithms than they may think (Freeman et al. 2022). Streaming services utilize mobile data to track factors such as time of day, location, weather, heart rate, body movements, and nearby contacts. Users are required to share their mobile data with these services to receive personalized recommendations on the platforms (Walsh 2024). As a result, a cycle of numbed, automated responses, accompanied by a severe lack of tools to address this issue, plagues users.

With the prevalence of smartphones, one study of four economic classes at a large public university in the United States found that "students perceived a greater positive impact of podcast use compared to news articles on their learning" (Choi et al. 2024). Furthermore, in a 2019 report, Kalogeropoulos found that when consuming informational material such as news, 57% of people ages 18-24 first used a smartphone, compared to 29% of those over the age of 35 (Kalogeropoulos, 2020). In the same report, the author goes on to say, "... formats like podcasts and explainers may help bridge the divide, but it seems unlikely that younger users will ever be

persuaded to pursue a monogamous relationship with the news or to abandon their platform-based habits" (Kalogeropoulos 2020). I predict that the same could be true of music streaming: platform-based listening habits are likely to remain for the foreseeable future.

As a summary, Hesmondhalgh summarized a great deal about music streaming services and their impact on the industry with these often researched claims: streaming encourages 'functional' rather than meaningful, aesthetic musical experience; streaming encourages bland, unchallenging music; streaming makes musical experience passive and distracted, and music recedes into the background (also known as 'ubiquitous music' and 'ubiquitous listening'); streaming makes music tracks and songs shorter, and musical experience more fragmented; streaming discourages and/or limits musical discovery and adventurousness. Hesmondhalgh has this to say about so-called functional music: "Musical functionalism is surely a certain version of the notion of the autonomous artwork—the idea that art should stand separately from social function in order to achieve its full aesthetic and/or political power" (Hesmondhalgh 2021).

Methods

Building on the three categories of the literature review, a thematic narrative serves as the foundation for a newly cast global music course. These molds—teaching frameworks, engaged learning through technology, and music streaming—not only frame key areas of scholarly focus but also reveal an opportunity to shape my methodological approach to course reconceptualization. The following section outlines how these categories directly influenced the formation and implementation of the revised course structure.

Participants

As discussed earlier, I teach the global pop course in a hybrid, asynchronous learning mode using a BPBL approach. A recent study of second-semester college students at Universitas Negeri Makassar (Indonesia) noted improvements in cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement using a hybrid course delivery mode. Hybrid learning encouraged critical thinking through flexible interactions with course content, and the availability of online resources enhanced understanding of the material. Using online media, such as YouTube and Instagram, fostered more active participation. Ultimately, hybrid learning reduced student anxiety and fostered self-expression, thereby increasing confidence (Nur et al. 2024).

I divided the class into cohorts of five students each. Each cohort was a diverse mix of students from various majors, from first-year to fourth-year. For team building, I spent the first week of the semester leading icebreaker activities from OneHE (https://onehe.org), assigning students a group-work contract-writing assignment, and having them create a shared playlist of music they enjoy. The group work contract proved particularly helpful by establishing a collaborative atmosphere, outlining expectations, and emphasizing shared responsibility (Brannen et al. 2021). The

playlisting exercise introduced course themes and allowed students to share their ideas on music and culture, laying the groundwork for global explorations.

Table 1. *Course Participants*

Category	**Description**
Total Enrollment	55 Students
Academic Standing	Undergraduates, all years
Major Diversity	Interdisciplinary (music and non-music majors)
Survey Sample Size	32 respondents (58.18% response rate)

I grouped the five-member cohorts into two large groups, each roughly 30 students, named Group A and Group B. One group met synchronously on Tuesdays for 80 minutes, while the other group met asynchronously during the same period. On Thursdays, they swapped.

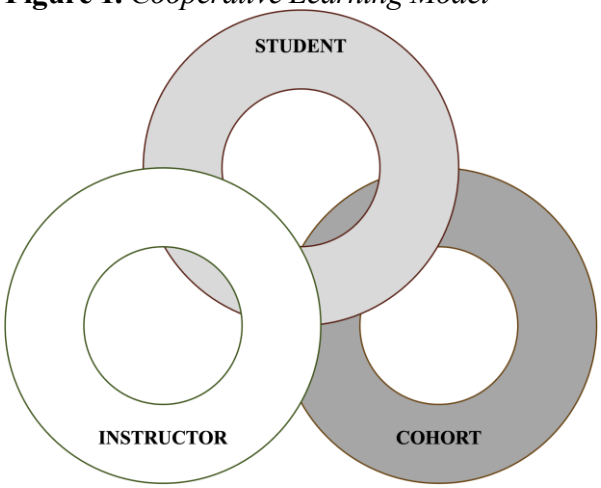
During synchronous sessions, I provided mini-lectures (no longer than 5 minutes), listening exercises, and in-class activities that engaged students. Usually, I gave students 40 minutes of discovery time, during which they investigated a problem, created a playlist, reflected on an issue, or further expounded upon their preparatory work. On synchronous days, I visited each cohort, asked critical questions, helped guide students toward a possible solution, or worked on the issue at hand.

Table 2. *Typical Weekly Structure of Blended Project-Based Learning Model*

Component	**Synchronous Period**	**Asynchronous Period**
Preparation	Guided reading, podcasts, or listening assignments	Guided exploratory period, skimming socials, surfing TikTok
Participants	Large group of roughly 30 students, working within assigned cohorts, instructor present	Unsupervised 5-member cohorts meeting at a place of their choosing, either in person or online
Activity	Mini-lectures with guided listening and discussion	Cohort-centered listening lab, integrating cultural components
Review	Synthesizing information and scenario preparation	Synthesizing individual and group ideas, funneling playlist
Submission	Online submission via LMS	Collaborative, living document
Feedback	Traditional LMS feedback with grade	Instructor comments for guided project feedback

I structured Asynchronous periods through Canvas, a web-based learning management system (LMS). Canvas housed the working documents, of which I mainly used Google Docs, as well as assignments, readings, and critical project information. For most asynchronous days, students understood the expectation to come prepared by listening to a podcast, reading an article, or investigating a specific issue before their scheduled meeting time. Once they assembled in a place and time of their choosing, they had particular tasks to complete, including an asynchronous listening lab. The following cooperative learning model demonstrates how students have agency over their own learning, while simultaneously blending instructor-guided materials and peer contributions.

Figure 1. *Cooperative Learning Model*



Course Design

The following sections detail a careful course reconceptualization of the pop music course. I first reviewed its role within the overall university curriculum, including prior titles and content, to ensure my course design choices both reflected the course's history and provided a new offering to the department's curricular ecology. At one point, the course focused on the iPod, which inspired me to remake it as a technology-focused course rather than a creative arts course. To mirror the postdigital music streaming era, I ultimately chose the title "Global Playlists: Music, Tech, and Influence," focusing on playlisting while exploring the intersection of music, technology, information, and society.

Once I had decided on the key attributes of the course, I shifted my focus to content. From a technological perspective, students chart the history of recording music. We consider music containers from human transmission to digitization, making stops along history at essential inventions such as engraved stela, paper, printing press, phonoautograph, gramophone, magnetic tape, vinyl Long-Play records, Compact Cassette, Compact Disc, Moving Pictures Experts Group Audio-1 Layer 3 (".mp3"), iPod, and finally the ever-popular digital streaming. At each moment of innovation, we consider the various recorded musics, who recorded it, why it was collected, and the purpose that is served in society (from whom and for whom). We also consider

the abundance of unrecorded artists, songs, and genres of history—those silent stories are oftentimes the loudest ringing moments of reflection.

From this point forward, this course provides a critical examination of contemporary sociocultural phenomena, with a particular focus on lyrics, soundscapes, and technological influences. Following this format, instructors can easily update the content. By situating music within broader cultural and historical contexts, students can engage in scholarly inquiry that considers how power systems shape both individual experiences and collective identities across time. Today, students can create playlists of music from a time when digitalization did not yet exist, thus bringing music back to the future.

With the main ideas in place, a central focus of this newly minted course is to avoid the plasticity of passive listening; therefore, these investigations illuminate how such forces are reflected and contested through musical expression. If students could understand what musicians were trying to convey during a particular world event, they could engage in critical thinking about the musical elements within a cultural context.

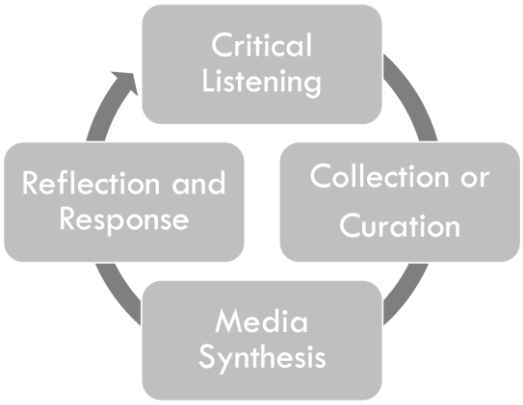
Another primary objective of the course is to analyze the evolving landscape of musical genres and styles and identify emerging trends within global music scenes. By doing so, students are better equipped to understand the cultural orientations of future audiences and the dynamics that inform their musical engagement, drawing lessons and examples from both the past and the present. By examining music in a cross-cultural context, students transform from musically soulless automatons into advocates of active listening, inoculating themselves against the algorithmic plague of culture-zapping deathbot conformity.

Asynchronous Listening Lab

The design of this collaborative, scaffolded assignment guides student cohorts in developing curated scenario playlists during asynchronous sessions. Each asynchronous workday culminates in the submission of the cohort's listening lab report, which documents the group's research, analysis, and final selections.

Students work together to explore how popular music reflects and responds to sociocultural phenomena, particularly the influence of power systems on individuals and communities. Using a shared lab report spreadsheet, each cohort member contributes three to five relevant music tracks, analyzing the lyrics, soundscape, and cultural context while also responding thoughtfully to their peers' entries. Required readings, lectures, and the weekly playlist listening assignments serve as reference points for musical selections and analytical insights.

Figure 2. *Four Key Stages in Refining the Playlist*



Each lab requires teams to synthesize findings, cite sources where appropriate, and evaluate which tracks best embody the scenario's themes. The exercise not only promotes critical listening and cultural analysis but also encourages constructive dialogue and peer collaboration, particularly when working with non-native language materials. The labs support key student learning outcomes related to the cultural impact of global music and the power of sound and lyrics within diverse sociopolitical contexts.

Playlist Scenarios and the Electronic Press Kit

Lectures, readings, assignments, and listening labs are all scaffolded exercises that lead to the three major scenario projects. Each playlist scenario culminates in the creation of a streamable playlist accompanied by an electronic press kit (EPK). These playlists represent the cohort's curated responses to contemporary global themes explored in class.

I designed the EPK component to integrate academic analysis with public-facing creative production. This curated multimedia portfolio accompanies a streaming playlist, drawing on industry-standard promotional practices and reimagining them as tools for scholarly engagement, interdisciplinary research, and digital storytelling.

Each EPK serves as an interpretive frame for a playlist built around each of the three scenarios. Students publish their playlist alongside the EPK using a publicly viewable Instagram account. The EPK serves as both an archival object and an outreach tool, designed not only to showcase musical selections but also to convey the music's significance, the rationale behind the curation, and the cohort's brand identity.

The required EPK content reflects typical music industry conventions—artist bios, music samples, press clippings, visual media, and discographies—but is adapted to emphasize critical inquiry and cultural relevance. Students publish at least 20 posts, employ a cohesive visual aesthetic, and link directly to their scenario playlist. The account biography describes the cohort's curatorial focus, and musical elements—such as lyrics, instrumentation, and cultural references—are embedded into posts and captions. Various media formats are expected, including pinned posts, reels, and interactive content, to enhance viewer engagement. Students are

encouraged to tag artists, link to external materials, and maintain a consistent posting schedule that reflects the intentionality of their work.

The assignment requires each cohort member to contribute equally to both the playlist and the EPK, ensuring accountability. In addition to expectations, I provide students with strategic guidance on effective branding, building a cohesive aesthetic, leveraging features such as Stories and Reels, and expanding visibility through hashtags, collaborations, and user-generated content. Emphasis is placed not on commercial metrics but on meaningful engagement—fostering dialogue, community, and critical reflection in a public-facing space.

This assignment is an effective bridge between classroom learning and real-world application. It provides students with an opportunity to practice interdisciplinary research and collaborative authorship while also cultivating skills in digital literacy and audience awareness. The EPK project allows students to explore the global dimensions of music as both cultural text and social practice, elevating their work into an active, dynamic conversation with the world.

For the spring 2025 semester, I provided three scenarios for the course. The first scenario focused on three specific uprisings that were impacted by music. These revolutions include the Arab Spring (circa 2010-2012), the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement (2014), and the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan (2021—). The global impact of these uprisings led to the overthrow of regimes in some countries and further repression by political or military forces in others. In this scenario, students examined how music and technology have lasting effects on the individuals and groups who witnessed these tumultuous events. Additionally, we discussed the critical role that social media and YouTube played in fueling such revolutions.

The second scenario focused on censorship, propaganda, and appropriation. We examined how the lyrics and musical sounds are formed by, or reflect, the societies, institutions, and systems in which they are created. We investigated cultural spaces within the Sinosphere, including Inner Mongolia, select minority groups in Mainland China, and media, such as television broadcast specials distributed by China Central Television (CCTV). As students designed their playlists, I asked them to consider a cumulative response that outlined a pattern within these spaces.

The final scenario examined popular music from Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, focusing on how sounds and lyrics shape the relationships between cultures, institutions, and systems. It explored both the positive and negative effects of these musical connections, including the rise of K-pop, musical commodification, internationalism, and the impact of the streaming market. Subtopics included a closer look at influencers, plastic surgery, product placement, marketing, royalties, and cultural soft power.

I encouraged students to move beyond superficial playlisting and instead approach each musical selection as an artifact rich with cultural, emotional, and political significance. For example, I ask students to consider: What message does the song convey? Who is the intended audience? Perhaps they examined how language—whether poetic, provocative, or understated—serves to uplift, incite, or resonate with listeners.

Equally important is attention to genre and musical style. I challenge students to think critically about how these sonic choices shape both the message's meaning

and its reception. Genre carries embedded cultural codes; they influence who listens, how a song circulates, and create the expectations for future music. Thus, understanding genre is crucial to understanding both the audience and its impact.

In exploring platform dynamics, I ask students to compare Spotify and YouTube as listening environments. While Spotify curates music based on mood, genre, and algorithmic personalization, YouTube offers a broader context, including visual storytelling and user comments. These platforms attract different listenerships, and this variance should inform how students think about the audience for their playlists: Who is listening, why, and in what setting?

The concept of soundscape is another analytical entry point. What is the sonic space—urgent, nostalgic, celebratory, resistant? Who might be drawn to this auditory world, and what shared sentiments or collective memories might the music evoke?

Finally, students must situate their playlists in context: Where and when would someone listen to this? Is it a soundtrack for protest, a moment of solitude, a gathering, a border crossing? These questions inform our course materials deeply—readings, lectures, and supplemental media—which provide theoretical and historical frameworks for thinking about music as both personal expression and global discourse.

Gamification

I have integrated a gamified learning model to encourage collaboration and creativity, which is an excellent way to promote engaged learning. Each student cohort participates in a friendly competition to earn course currency, which I call *Currents*. Simulating the music streaming industry, where the real-world traction and influence of an artist generate cash flow, student cohorts will earn *Currents* based on followers, likes, shares, and upvotes on scenario playlists and related media posts (EPKs). The goal of this simulation is to understand the dynamics of cultural production and circulation in digital spaces, while incorporating an element of playful strategy.

Each scenario has a unique metric for how *Currents* are earned and spent, reflecting the assignment's different learning objectives and thematic focus. I outline these details in full within each scenario module on the LMS. At the close of every playlist submission window, I tally the *Currents* according to the specific criteria for that scenario. Importantly, these funds roll over from one scenario to the next, so an early strong performance can give a team an advantage, while consistent engagement can help others catch up.

The most critical aspect of this gamification is considering the opportunity at what cost. In some cases, students may need to add a musical selection to a playlist to increase its popularity and garner more likes, views, shares, or upvotes. That song may be the least engaging, have an unsavory political tone, exploit a situation, include elements of cultural appropriation, rip off another artist, or other such dynamics. Nevertheless, by adding that track to their playlist, cohorts can capitalize on *Currents*. Therefore, students may learn the most significant lessons by understanding music playlisting, the single, music for profit, or peeking inside the assumed inner workings of algorithmic streaming.

By incorporating a course currency, I foster both intrinsic motivation (enjoying meaningful and creative work) and extrinsic incentives (seeing your public engagement rewarded). This dynamic system enables students to experience how audience

interaction influences the musical impact and cultural significance of global popular music, two core themes in our exploration of popular sounds. At the same time, I can highlight some powerful moments in which music, as a force, is stronger than entertainment and cannot be separated from its inherently political nature.

"If music's political power lies in a subtle, internal connection to personal experience (which can't be fully explained), then our attempts to define or locate that power in public or academic discussions might miss the point—at least in theory. Those attempts might still be useful or revealing in real-world contexts, but they won't capture the full truth of music's political role" (Goehr, 1994). Therefore, one could say that Goehr's statement could never be proven in the postdigital era, because if music's political power lies in a subtle, internal connection to personal experience (which can't be fully explained or proven), then our attempts to define or locate that power in public or academic discussions might theoretically miss the point. For students, those attempts might still be useful or revealing in real-world contexts, but they won't capture the whole truth of music's political role.

Regardless, through this analytical lens, the act of playlisting becomes a mode of critical inquiry and cultural translation. It requires students to scrutinize, contemplate, and intentionally make sense of sound. Once cohorts publish their playlists and submit the EPK for review, each scenario project is graded equally for both the individual and the group. I tabulate *Currents* at the end of the semester, and the winning cohort wins a small prize. This past semester, the winners requested I accompany them to a well-known coffee chain for sweets and, as much as I could ever ask for, to debrief and have a good laugh.

Capturing the Spirit of Global Inquiry

This course positions global popular music as a dynamic space for engaging the core values of a liberal education. I emphasize four cornerstones in this course: civic engagement, collaborative practice, critical inquiry, and expressive communication, all of which contribute to an integrative learning experience. I aim to instill in students a critical understanding of the complex power dynamics and systems that shape our world and how art reflects or responds to these systems through the lens of historical, sociocultural, and political-economic forces.

The first cornerstone, civic engagement, is often misunderstood in music, frequently reduced to background music at barbecues, weddings, and in elevators. I needed to convey to students, through the study of musical genres, lyrical narratives, and sonic textures across diverse global contexts, that they could examine how popular music functions as both a reflection of and a catalyst for sociocultural transformation. In doing so, students can explore how music forms communities of listeners, negotiates identity, and responds to power structures, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the sociopolitical significance of musical mobilities, inequities, and cultural exchange.

The second cornerstone, collaborative practice, is best taught through simulation. To demonstrate how musicians think and do, collaboration emerges not merely as a pedagogical strategy but as an essential mode of knowledge-gaining in this learning environment. Musicians work together, often coming to a rehearsal or concert fully prepared to contribute to the overall musical experience. To harness that self-driven

motivation, students engage in playlisting real-world scenarios to facilitate shared authorship and peer-to-peer dialogue. Along with the EPK, playlists underscore innovation in both content creation and how music reaches targeted audiences.

Simultaneously, the course emphasizes the third cornerstone, critical and integrative thinking, by situating popular music within the broader frameworks of globalization, commodification, and technological mediation. Students consider how sound and lyrical content articulate responses to systemic power, and how technological infrastructures shape not only music production but also the sociopolitical messages that travel through them. In this way, musical texts become complex sites for unpacking global flows of influence, resistance, and cultural identity.

The final cornerstone, the act of communication, is foregrounded as a core competency. Through playlist design, audience engagement, and digital storytelling, students utilize technology tools to express nuanced perspectives on music-cultures. Understanding how tools like YouTube and podcasts work alongside playlisting, students consider how modes of dissemination have evolved in tandem with the development of digital technologies. Further, students examine how such shifts influence the construction of identity and community within global musical discourse. It also allows students to study themselves as an audience.

Taken together, these four cornerstones form a cohesive pedagogical structure that not only supports but actively advances the aims of a liberal education. By examining popular music through this framework, students develop the intellectual agility, collaborative ethic, and cultural competency necessary for an interconnected world.

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

Society should never reduce music to a form of passive entertainment. I designed this course to align with student learning outcomes that reflect the intersection of cultural systems, sound studies, and citizenship. The outcomes fall into two domains: those rooted in global citizenship and those grounded in musical inquiry. Within this framework, I embed the principles of the four cornerstones mentioned previously.

Through the lens of global citizenship, I ask students to consider how global forces shape individual and collective identities, particularly as expressed through music and popular culture. They learn to assess how popular sounds and lyrics either build or strain relationships between societies, institutions, and systems, examining the reciprocal impacts, tensions, and resonances that emerge across cultural boundaries. I also expect students to critically analyze the consequences of global musical circulation, recognizing how this dynamic can both empower and marginalize communities, as well as unite or divide them.

From a music studies perspective, students develop cultural competency by engaging with music from unfamiliar geographies, genres, and perspectives. Though it may be challenging to explore the world when chained to the algorithms of a growing globalized society. As Anyang Agbor states, "a hybrid culture has evolved and multiculturalism seems to have moved beyond the mere combination and cohabitation of different cultures to describe the growing phenomenon of cultural annihilation which results from the collision of cultures and which produces the first signs of a future universal culture" (Anyang Agbor, 2015). Yet, by investigating deeply, students move beyond aesthetics to understand how music functions within

power systems, historical contexts, and lived social realities. In turn, they learn to analyze how lyrics and sound structures become expressive forces that both reflect and shape cultural spaces.

These outcomes provide a framework to explore music beyond its art form as a globalized and politicized medium of communication, identity, and resistance. The course encourages students to become critically attuned listeners and culturally competent thinkers, which are essential attributes of the globally engaged student with a liberal education. To summarize, the student learning outcomes (SLO) listed on my syllabus are:

Global Citizenship Outcomes

- SLO1: Describe how global forces impact individuals and collective groups as expressed or formed by popular culture through music.
- SLO2: Determine and assess how popular sounds and lyrics build or degrade relationships among societies, institutions, and systems, including reciprocal interactions, benefits, and costs.
- SLO3: Identify and analyze the powerful consequences of global sounds and lyrics and their impacts on individuals and collective groups.

Music Outcomes

- SLO4: Develop cultural competency by gaining new perspectives on popular music in a global context.
- SLO5: Analyze how sounds and lyrics coalesce musically into a force that impacts or reflects individuals and collective groups within cultural systems.

I strategically design course projects and assignments to balance collaboration, analysis, and reflection. To maximize success, I scaffold the major assignments with smaller, low-stakes ones. The final grade comprises five weighted components, each aligned with specific pedagogical goals.

The Scenario Playlists, comprising 42% of the final grade, serve as the central collaborative assessment. Each submission is evaluated on both individual (50%) and group (50%) contributions, emphasizing accountability, teamwork, and scholarship. Writing Activities, weighted at 20%, encompass a diverse range of individual and small-group assignments, including pre-writes, journaling, discussion boards, and critical thinking exercises. The Electronic Press Kit (EPK), valued at 15%, accompanies each scenario playlist and serves as a media-rich, persuasive collection of materials. For students who enjoy marketing, writing, social media, or design elements, this activity is an excellent creative outlet that will significantly enhance the success of their larger course projects. Not to mention, this element is critical to earning *Currents*. Also comprising 15% of the final grade, the Asynchronous Listening Lab supports individual exploration and peer collaboration during non-synchronous class periods.

At the end of the course, students will submit a Course Reflection, which accounts for 8% of the grade and replaces a traditional final exam. Students cooperatively construct a Miro Board (a digital whiteboard product) that synthesizes key learnings across all course scenarios, articulates thematic connections, and reflects on their asynchronous work (https://miro.com). This final project, also

assessed through a balanced individual and group rubric, emphasizes metacognitive awareness and integrative learning.

While I use a variety of tools for student feedback, I record all grades in the LMS with a three-pronged approach to grading. For low-stakes assignments, I use mastery-based grading. Mastery-based grading is a competency-based assessment method that allows students multiple opportunities to demonstrate command of an assignment, meaning they have completed the objectives and receive either full credit or no credit. One significant advantage of this approach is that students focus on learning material to meet assignment objectives and experience reduced anxiety about points (Townsley & Schmid, 2020). For important mid-level assignments, I use a rubric with detailed descriptions to ensure consistency. These assignments emphasize writing or specific skill-building (e.g., accurate documentation of a lab report). For high-stakes assignments, I use specification grading, which follows pre-planned course outcomes and awards points to specific assignment components. For example, I may award five points for incorporating "a catchy title" for a playlist, and ten points for "having at least three songs incorporated into their playlist that serve the scenario," and so on. One excellent resource for specifications grading is "Specifications Grading: Restoring Rigor, Motivating Students, and Saving Faculty Time," by Linda Nilson (2015).

One note about peer reviews. In the case of course components that split grades between individual and group work, such as the playlist scenarios, I utilize a peer survey through Google Forms. Essentially, I ask students to complete a short peer review of how their cohort members participated in high-stakes assignments. They must rate themselves and their peers, along with some short written comments about collaborative takeaways. Overall, the process proves positive. In one study, students reported a transformative effect on their understanding of how learning occurs, and many commented on the value and clarity they gained from writing their own reviews (Mulder et al. 2014). Only in rare instances, when a group experiences a significant breakdown of collaboration, will I reduce a group grade. Regardless, the peer review process is a brilliant and effective way for students to communicate, build mutual respect, and maintain accountability.

Together, these weighted components reflect a pedagogical commitment to multimodal learning and collaborative authorship. These grading methods also incorporate the four cornerstones of my course, encouraging students to learn in a supportive environment. Through project-based learning, I aim for students to develop or improve their transferable skill sets, such as communication, project management, collaboration, and critical thinking, which may enhance their professional success in the workplace.

Data Collection Instruments

The primary data collection tools for this case study were surveys. Using Google Forms and Mentimeter, I collected both quantitative and qualitative data from students to summarize their experience in the course. Examples of survey types include pre- and post-course surveys, weekly exit tickets, and the collection of anonymous data from Mentimeter, including word clouds, open-ended questions,

Likert-scale questions, and simple polls. Google Forms collected student email addresses, while Mentimeter data is anonymous.

Data Analysis

Pre- and post-course surveys asked the same questions to all students, while the weekly exit ticket questions changed to reflect the week's goals. Mentimeter surveys were more concentrated on a specific day's task, such as asking students to respond to a particular listening assignment, reading, or discussion question. I exported quantitative data suitable for universal analysis to Google Sheets. Qualitative data were synthesized using Google Gemini, verified through personal review, and organized into major themes.

Results

I piloted this newly conceptualized popular music course in the spring 2026 semester. While still collecting data, I have some anonymized data to report initially. The course enrolled 55 students of various majors from first-year to fourth-year undergraduates. The survey response rate was 58.18% (32 students). When asked if students in the course were encouraged to share their thoughts, pose questions, and engage in open dialogue, 92% students answered favorably. 79% believed the course challenged them to think, 83.5% agreed that the professor helped them learn effectively, 89.75% agreed that the class demonstrated engaged learning, 81.5% stated they gained a better understanding of course content, and 73.5% of students agreed that this course helped them analyze complex problems. In self-reflection, 78.25% of students reported that their appreciation for this topic increased, and 74.25% reported that their effort in the course was superior.

Qualitative feedback reflected mixed results, but overall, student comments were insightful and thoughtful. Overall, students expressed appreciation for the instructor's deep knowledge, enthusiasm, and passion for the subject matter, particularly concerning music, history, and geopolitics. Many noted that the professor's mini-lectures were engaging and intellectually stimulating, often sparking further independent inquiry. Students highlighted the value of interdisciplinary connections made throughout the course and praised the cohort-based structure when group dynamics were functional.

Several students identified areas for improvement in both course design and communication. A recurring theme was the need for more explicit assignment instructions and clearer project expectations. In terms of workload, students found the combination of reading-intensive modules and asynchronous group work to be heavy. Despite these challenges, many found the course enjoyable, rewarding, and intellectually enriching, crediting much of that to the instructor's evident dedication and expertise.

Discussion

A majority of respondents have a favorability rating of 89.75%-92% for classroom engagement. Based on these responses, my choices of course delivery mode, major assignments, and general approach to BPBL were successful from a student perspective. Students built a community within the cohorts, and other evidence-based classroom practices, such as cohort group contracts, team-building exercises, and planned asynchronous activities, were also well employed.

Based on data on student learning outcomes, assessments, and course cornerstones, students responded favorably, with rates ranging from 73.5% to 81.5%. Although I had hoped for higher responses, several factors may be contributing to this outcome. For example, I could strengthen the connections between course content and student learning outcomes. If my major course projects reflect the intended course outcomes, I could be more explicit in making those connections with my students. I also only had a 58.18% response rate for this pilot. Improving the response rate in future semesters could deliver a more complete view of students' learning perceptions.

Internationally, many institutions recognize student course evaluations as a key mechanism for quality improvement in higher education. Evaluations aim to provide valid and reliable assessments of academic performance; however, research consistently shows that they often fail to meet these standards. Intentional or not, emotional factors can influence student feedback. Despite its prevalence, substantial evidence indicates the evaluation's limited validity, underscoring the need for more reliable, evidence-based evaluation practices in higher education (Sullivan et al. 2023).

83.5% of students agreed that I helped them learn effectively, suggesting I demonstrated sound teaching practices in an accessible manner to support their learning. I challenged students on multiple levels beyond the course learning outcomes, including the development of transferable skills such as project management, critical thinking, writing, and collaboration through various technology tools. I exposed students to new genres of writing and ways of thinking, and pressed them to sharpen their interpersonal and community-building skills. Therefore, an approval rating of 83.5% is strong, given that this is the first time I taught the course.

Finally, on the topic of self-reflection, students gave approval ratings of 74.25% to 78.25% for questions related to increased appreciation of the course material and greater effort in self-evaluation. In class and online, I observed students challenge themselves to redefine what music is, to reorder their understanding that music is not a passive form of entertainment, that music is not, as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said, "Music is the universal language of mankind, —poetry their universal pastime and delight" (Longfellow 1883). Instead, students critically examined music as a powerful cultural force that shaped unity, identity, conflict, propaganda, division, and faith. Through the exploration of diverse musical perspectives, students developed cultural competence essential for their professional and civic futures.

The course fostered self-reflection and intercultural understanding by encouraging students to engage deeply with their own identities and those of others within a global framework. Charging students to reframe music in these terms, to cut against the grain of their collective lifetime's culmination of quick and accessible background noise, is

a monumental lift in 15 weeks. I witnessed great effort, and I am proud of their progress, deliverables, and transformations.

Surprisingly, a few course components did not arise in course evaluations, exit tickets, or other means of teaching effectiveness. I devoted a lot of time to the gamification elements of the course, which students appreciated in real time but did not translate into the quantitative feedback. One could argue that this data is present in either the engaged learning or learning effectiveness results. Another portion of the course that received little comment was the assigned readings, podcasts, or similar materials. Some students made passing comments about the amount of work, but little about the content of these supplemental materials.

Conclusions

In the spring semester of 2026, the first offering of the newly molded global pop music course was a success. Students were enthusiastic about learning global music cultures, as evidenced by their playlisting projects, EPKs, and listening lab reports. Based on class observations, students embraced the challenge of redefining what music could mean in a global context and participated in course activities with reasonable effort.

Students engaged with the course, approving of significant components at 89-92%. Reviewing student assignments, projects, and peer reviews, it is clear that many students improved the four transferable skills I aimed to teach: communication, project management, collaboration, and critical thinking. There was a positive reception to the collaborative, technology-driven, and interdisciplinary learning models I used as a basis for my pedagogy.

Contextualizing the limitations of the initial student response rate to this piloted course is essential. However, there are some clear indications that this course reconceptualization has merit, which I attribute to the implementation of evidence-based teaching practices. Some of the transformative learning gains were promising to observe, particularly the shift from passive consumers of music to critical, culturally aware, and reflective listeners. The steps these cohorts took towards cultural competency through critical thinking and self-reflection in a music-learning environment were impressive, especially the students who documented their understanding of music as a sociopolitical force with vibrant deliverables.

The limited survey response rate of 58% was frustrating, as were comments indicating a lack of alignment between some course components and learning outcomes. There was also minimal feedback on readings, podcasts, and gamification elements, which, as the course designer, I found disappointing. Nonetheless, I have a list of improvements to implement the following academic year.

This course model could easily be adapted across a wide variety of higher education and polytechnic institutions. My example illustrates that students at all levels of undergraduate study, across various majors, can learn about a topic using the BPBL approach. By empowering students to leverage their individual experiences, contextualizing those experiences with those of their peers, and trusting in the guidance of a spirited instructor, the model of project-based cooperative

learning through a hybrid delivery mode can be a powerful tool for innovative teaching and learning.

As I continue to refine the inner workings of this course, I aim to deliver a smoother learning experience for students. I will shorten some assignments, express clearer expectations, and strengthen the explicit connections between course content and learning outcomes. By improving assessment methods and, hopefully, increasing the student response rate, I aim to gain a deeper understanding of how elements like gamification influence student learning.

Regarding future research, I plan to conduct a repeated cross-sectional study to compare the same course outcomes with two more cycles of undergraduate students. Because the department only offers this course in the spring semester, I would complete my first reflective synthesis in 2028. I anticipate that Artificial Intelligence will increasingly impact listener identities through streaming platforms, at a rate greater than currently observed. Therefore, I will construct a series of control questions to chart responses to both the students' perception of streaming algorithms and their intentional choices regarding AI integration in their listening habits.

The success of a second redesigned global music course reinforces my beliefs in project-based learning, blended delivery formats, technology integration, and the maintenance of an openly creative learning space. Evidence-based teaching practices and engaged learning remain strong guideposts for my development as a teacher-scholar. With courses like these, I demonstrate not only the importance of incorporating the "A" in STEAM but also the vital role of the humanities in fostering creativity, empathy, and cultural competence in our world.

As a closing reflection, I never imagined my life would lead me into the arts. For a boy from a gritty, blue-collar town, becoming a professional bassoonist was perhaps the most improbable of paths. But I did not find my way alone—teachers, mentors, and deeply human moments shaped the journey. I first performed *The Nutcracker* in 2009 with the Oregon Ballet Theatre in Portland, and since then, I've played it over 200 times—always from the unseen depths of the orchestra pit. I've never watched the ballet from the audience's view, yet I carry it in my memory, in the loops of a worn cassette, in the endless rewinding of childhood nostalgia. And somehow, I believe that what I have imagined—what I have dreamed—is more vivid and beautiful than anything could ever be on the stage above.

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Appendix: Course Syllabus

Course Information: MUS186/MUS186H, 3 credit hours
Course Title: Global Playlists: Music, Tech, and Influence
Instructor Information: Dr. Aaron Pergram, Presser Hall 222
Meeting Time: Tuesday/Thursday 8:30-9:50 AM, Hybrid Asynchronous

Overview

Students will explore contemporary sociocultural phenomena reflected in global popular music through the study of lyrics, soundscape, and technology. Throughout the course, students will develop a signature brand as curators for a global music streaming service. The curators are responsible for generating course currency by delivering the most popular offerings for their audiences and topping the music charts.

As curators, understanding the complexities of genre, style, and emerging global music trends is critical to the brand's survival. Catering to the audience of tomorrow requires scholarly explorations of contemporary and historical topics, including investigations of power systems and their impacts on individuals and collective groups that shape musical response.

Ultimately, curators must compile leading-edge musical playlists, complete scenarios, understand consumer demographics, and deliver the best product for their listeners. By upvoting and sharing, the best team of music-savvy entrepreneurs will push their curations to the top of the charts—but at what cost?

Students in this course are divided into two groups of roughly 30 each. Students are divided into five-member cohorts who work together for the entire semester.

The delivery mode for this course is hybrid asynchronous. Group A will have a synchronous class on Tuesdays, 8:30-9:50 AM, while Group B will have a synchronous class on Thursdays, 8:30-9:50 AM. Asynchronous modules are provided after the synchronous sessions. For most class sessions, this will be the structure. Any changes to this schedule will be posted in advance.

Course Materials

The following (3) resources are required. Purchases can be made on routledge.com or online elsewhere (e.g., Amazon). Please purchase the format that best suits you (e.g., eBook vs. paperback).

- Sesigür, Onur. Playlisting: Collecting Music, remediated. New York, NY: Routledge, 2023.
- Sterne, Jonathan. The sound studies reader. New York, NY: Routledge, 2012.
- Walsh, Michael James. Streaming sounds: Musical listening in the Digital age. New York, NY: Routledge, 2024.

Notes:

- A fast Wi-Fi connection is essential for this class, as we will often be streaming audio and video.
- Students should bring their laptops and cell phones to each class period.
- Students should bring AirPods or earphones to each class period.
- Links to additional free course materials (readings, podcasts, media) are provided in Canvas modules.

Goals and Outcomes

This is a general education course that will help you develop relevant, transferable skills. The following four cornerstones, as demonstrated in this course, are vital to upholding the values of a liberal education.

Civic-Mindedness and Social Engagement

By understanding how popular music forms communities of listeners and adapts to changes within those communities, you will recognize the crucial elements that make music a socially engaging form of study. Embarking on investigations of global music, you will gain perspectives on how genre, style, and listening identities shape audiences over generations through the impacts of musical mobilities, inequities, and power dynamics. In the end, you will better understand the elements that fuel popular music consumption and lead to a social exchange of cultural ideologies through sound.

Collaboration and Innovation

You will work cooperatively to curate three scenario playlists within a five-member cohort. In addition to participating in regular in-class activities, you will collaborate with the larger class using technology tools such as Miro, OpinionX, Spotify, YouTube, Google Docs, and Mentimeter. You will conduct peer reviews by listening to others' playlists, upvoting, sharing, and commenting. Finally, your cohort will collaborate on your Electronic Press Kit to market your curations for top-of-the-class currency. Informed by global music research, your audience-seizing curations determine who the savviest pop music scholar will be.

Critical and Integrative Thinking

Framing music as a complex sociocultural force, you will contemplate the power of sound and lyrics delivered through technology today. By analyzing popular sounds and their relationships to power systems, your cohort's projects will reflect the cooperative efforts of critical thinking and powerful group curations. Finally, you will contemplate the various costs of monetization and globalization of world music-cultures.

Communication and Expression

By curating playlists, your cohort utilizes technology to deliver musical messaging and grow a fan base. As you consider changes in the methods of music dissemination, your cohort will analyze the forms of musical expression used by individuals and groups in response to the global power systems that provoke them.

Learning Outcomes

Student Learning Outcomes as Global Citizens

GI-SLO1: Describe how global forces impact individuals and collective groups as expressed or formed by popular culture through music.
GI-SLO2: Determine and assess how popular sounds and lyrics build or degrade relationships among societies, institutions, and systems, including reciprocal interactions, benefits, and costs.
GI-SLO3: Identify and analyze the powerful consequences of global sounds and lyrics and their impacts on individuals and collective groups.

Student Learning Outcomes–Music

MUS-SLO1: Develop cultural competency by gaining new perspectives on popular music in a global context.
MUS-SLO2: Analyze how sounds and lyrics coalesce musically into a force that impacts or reflects individuals and collective groups within cultural systems.

Global Citizenship–Intercultural Consciousness

As a Global Inquiry course, MUS 186 will stimulate critical analysis of global power relations, international systems, and their consequences on music, sound, and lyrics. The emphasis on intercultural learning is executed through a deeper understanding of self and others in a global context.

Signature Inquiry–Technology, Information, and Society

This course will challenge you in areas beyond your primary major(s) and feature authentic, active learning. MUS 186 features interdisciplinary readings, listening materials, activities, and writing assignments that, in part, are designed to benefit non-majors who can apply prior knowledge or skills from these courses in other fields. Regarding Signature inquiry, this course explores how Technology, Information, and Society impact global cultures through music that influences our understanding of "truth" and reality.

Expectations and Grading

A maximum of 100 points is possible for MUS 186. The standard grading scheme outlined by the Office of the University Registrar is utilized in this course.

- There is no term paper for this course.
- There are no formal exams for this course.

Semester Grading Scheme
A 100 to 94, A- <94 to 90
B+ <90 to 87, B <87 to 84, B- <84 to 80
C+ <80 to 77, C <77 to 74, C- <74 to 70
D+ <70 to 67, D <67 to 64, D- <64 to 61
F <61 to 0

Grades will be calculated and averaged through weighted percentages as outlined below.

Scenario Playlists	42%
Writing Activities	20%
Electronic Press Kit	15%
Asynchronous Listening Lab	15%
Course Reflection	8%

Attendance
You must come to class every period. We will be working in cohorts during the semester; therefore, it is vital that, when able, you attend all sessions so that the group can complete projects with your contribution.

- You are allowed 1 absence without documentation or explanation. I do not differentiate between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. An absence is an absence.
- If you miss two or more sessions, you are required to meet with me during student hours and provide a sufficient explanation for your absence.
- If you miss three sessions during the semester, you will be dropped from the course. Exceptions to this rule will only be granted in extraordinary circumstances.

Description of Course Assignments

Writing Activities

Writing activities consist of a variety of individual and group assignments uploaded to Canvas via modules. Examples include traditional assignments, pre-writes, critical thinking exercises, journaling, and discussion boards. These assignments are usually delivered at the beginning of class, though post-class prompts

are possible. Writing activities range from 5 to 10 points, and a grading rubric is provided for guidance.

Electronic Press Kit

There are three main scenarios your cohort will complete during this course. Each scenario requires publishing a streaming playlist. Each playlist must contain an Electronic Press Kit (EPK) that classmates and the professor will review. Specific requirements for the EPK are further explained on Canvas. Kits are worth 20 points, and a grading rubric is provided for guidance.

Asynchronous Listening Lab

You will work with your cohort to develop your playlists on asynchronous days. You will record your findings, take notes, and refine your playlist choices on a document collectively known as the Asynchronous Listening Lab report. Lab reports are worth 10 points, and a grading rubric is provided for guidance.

Scenario Playlists

There are three scenarios in this class. At the end of each scenario, your cohort will submit a streamable playlist with the accompanying EPK. A maximum of 100 points is possible for each scenario playlist. I have outlined these projects in Canvas modules with instructions for all members of the cohort. You will receive an individual (50%) and group (50%) grade for these scenario projects.

Course Reflection

Instead of a final exam, each cohort will be responsible for submitting a Miro Board. This group project will summarize what the cohort understands from each scenario, how course topics interrelate, and outline everyone's experience in the asynchronous listening lab. This project essentially captures the overall course experience by connecting main themes. Students must take thorough notes during the semester and work closely with their cohorts. Check Canvas for detailed information on this project. A maximum of 100 points is possible for the course summary, including an individual (50%) and group (50%) grade.

Course Currency

In the spirit of gamified learning, cohorts aim to accumulate the most course currency, known as *Currents*. *Currents* are earned through gained followers, likes, shares, and upvoting. Each scenario has a different metric for earning and spending *Currents*. Details for the course currency can be found in scenario descriptions on Canvas.

PART 1	**What is Popular Music & Who is Listening?**
Week 1	**From Phonautograph to Spotify: Technological Advances in Music Recording** Reading ● Sesigür, Chapter 3 "Historical Transformation of Music Containers." ● Sterne, Chapter 1 "Sonic Imaginations." Music Listening: "Au Clair de la Lune" by Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville; "Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64" by Felix Mendelssohn; "Love for Sale" by Eartha Kitt; "The Visitors" by ABBA; "Tom's Diner" by Suzanne Vega; "Groovejet (If This Ain't Love)" by Spiller with Sophie Ellis-Bextor; "I Did It" by Dave Matthews Band
Week 2	**Billboard: Invention of the Chart and Impacts of Monetization** Reading ● Sterne, Chapter 3 "Noise: The Political Economy of Music" (Attali) Listening ● Hirway, Hrishikesh. "Episode 251: Yaeji" Song Exploder. Podcast audio, April 5, 2023. https://songexploder.net/yaeji ● McButter, Matt and Mike Weider. "Ep. 2: The Charts—How Tech is Changing the Charts with Chris Molanphy" Beatseeker. Podcast audio, April 30, 2021. https://www.beatseeker.fm/episodes/episode-02-billboard-charts Music Listening: "Passed Me By" by Yaeji
Week 3	**Contradicting Media** Reading ● Sterne, Chapter 4 "Contradicting Media: Toward a Political Phenomenology of Listening" (Berland) ● Sesigür, Chapter 4 "Collecting Music as Information Management." Listening: ● The Story of Dr. Kildare: Pricilla's Broken Arm ● Herbert Morrison and the Hindenburg Disaster

Week 4	**Commercially Satisfactory: Creating your Label, Electronic Press Kit, and Vibe** Reading: ● Sterne, Chapter 33 "Reading the Sonoric Landscape" (Leppert) ● Walsh, Chapter 1 "User-made Playlists and the Shaping of Social Interaction" (these sections only: Introduction, Managing and nurturing relationships through playlist creation and use) Listening: ● Hirway, Hrishikesh. "Episode 231: Arooj Aftab" Song Exploder. Podcast audio, May 4, 2022. https://songexploder.net/arooj-aftab Music Listening: "Mohabbat" by Arooj Aftab
PART 2	**Three Global Popular Music Scenarios**
Scenario One: Music of Revolution + YouTube	
Week 5	**"Head of State" Hip-Hop and the Arab Spring** Reading: ● Sterne, Chapter 6 "Cassette Sermons, Aural Modernities and the Islamic Revival in Cairo" (Hirschkind) ● Sterne, Chapter 27 "This is the Voice of Algeria" (Fanon) Listening: ● Abdelfatah, Rund and Ramtin Arablouei. "A Symphony of Resistance" Throughline. Podcast audio, May 20, 2021. https://www.npr.org/2021/05/17/997660501/a-symphony-of-resistance Music Listening: "Rais Lebled"by El Général
Week 6	**"Raise the Umbrellas" Hong Kong vs. Beijing** Reading: ● Walsh, Chapter 2 "Platform-generated Playlists are the Curation of Musical Listening" Listening: ● Abdelfatah, Rund and Ramtin Arablouei. "A Borrowed Time" Throughline. Podcast audio, October 17, 2019. https://www.npr.org/2019/10/16/770699746/a-borrowed-time Music Listening: "Raise the Umbrella" by Pan Lo
Week 7	**"Brides for Sale" Afghan Music in the Graveyard of Empires** Reading: ● Sesigür, Chapter 2 "Remediation at the Age of Streaming" Listening: ● Abdelfatah, Rund and Ramtin Arablouei. "Afghanistan: The Center of the World" Throughline. Podcast audio, September 9,

	2021. https://www.npr.org/2021/09/08/1035125396/afghanistan-the-center-of-the-world Music Listening: "Daughters for Sale" by Sonita Alizadeh Project Due: Streaming Release No. 1
Scenario Two: Censorship, Propaganda, and Appropriation	
Week 8	**From Inner Mongolia's Ulan Tuya to Uyghur Music in Xinjiang** Reading ● Walsh, Chapter 4 "The Networking of Music Streaming: Facilitating Interaction and Obtaining Discretion" (these sections only: Introduction; Affording interaction and viewership through friend activity; Strategies for managing networked dimensions of music streaming + one of the following...) ○ Do you share all of your music-listening activity (or don't care who sees what you listen to)? Read: … Relaxed and at ease (pgs. 107-110). ○ Do you selectively share your music-listening data with others? Read: …Selectively sharing (pgs. 110-114). ○ Do you conceal your music-listening data from others? Read: Obtaining seclusion on networked services… (pgs. 114-118). Listening: ● Abdelfatah, Rund and Ramtin Arablouei. "Five Fingers Crush The Land" Throughline. Podcast audio, May 13, 2021. https://www.npr.org/2021/05/07/994895474/five-fingers-crush-the-land Music Listening: "The Scent of Apples" by Ulan Tuya; "Uyghur Girl" by Erkin Abdulla; "Mitiz Meshrep" by Asqar Muxtar; "Standing on the Grassland looking at Beijing" by Ulan Tuya; "The Mother in My Dreams" by Uudam Sonam
Week 9	**Commercialized Minority Music and the Han Consumer** Reading: ● Sterne, Chapter 44 "Laughing Machines" (Smith) Listening: ● Feng, Emily. "The Black Gate: Arresting Your Brothers and Sisters" Embedded. Podcast audio, December 19, 2024. https://www.npr.org/2026/01/01/1254713686/embedded-the-black-gate-episode-3 Music Listening: "The Youngest Sister Lives in the Thirteenth Village"; "FLY" by ANU; "Up the Mountain down the Mountain" by Mountain People; "30 Years" by Mountain People

Week 10	**Spectacle and Impact: Television Broadcast Specials in Mainland China** Listening: ● Abdelfatah, Rund and Ramtin Arablouei. "Editing Reality" Throughline. Podcast audio, December 28, 2023. https://www.npr.org/2023/12/28/1198908351/throughline-12-28-2023 Music Listening: "Red Star Shines on Me as I Go to Battle" by Fu Gengchen; "North Wind is Blowing" from White-Haired Girl by He Jingzhi, Zhang Songru, Qu Wei, Zhang Lu, Ma Ke; "Dreaming of Home" by Liu Huan; "Your Backpack" by Eason Chan Project Due: Streaming Release No. 2
Scenario Three: Fueling Money, Fame, and Status	
Week 11	**"Mojito" Jay Chou as Taiwan's China Wind** Reading: ● Walsh, Chapter 5 "Ubiquitous Music Streaming: Incorporating Music into the Everyday." Listening: ● Abdelfatah, Rund and Ramtin Arablouei. "Silicon Island" Throughline. Podcast audio, October 6, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/10/05/1127015286/silicon-island Music Listening: "Prologue" by Forget the G; "Elimination" by Eason Chan; "Agent J" by Jolin Tsai; "Mojito" by Jay Chou
Week 12	**"Heavy Rotations" AKB48 and the Sex Merchants of Japan** Reading: ● Sterne, Chapter 24 "The Recording Studio as Fetish" (Meintjes) Listening: ● Hirway, Hrishikesh. "Episode 17: Anamanaguchi" Song Exploder. Podcast audio, September 14, 2014. https://songexploder.net/anamanaguchi Music Listening: "Konjikiyasha" by Fujiyama Ichiro; "Onna No Blues" by Keiko Fuji; "I Want You Back" by Tetsuya Komuro; "Hansei" by Prettybwoy feat. Duff & Dekishi (Vocal Mix); "The Wreck of a Once Promising Youth" by Hijokaidan; "My Neighbor Totoro"; "Charm Point" by Keitaro Ujiie; "Pretender" by Official Hige Dandism; "Heavy Rotations" by AKB48

Week 13	**"Blood, Sweat, and Tears" BTS and the K-Pop Revolution** Listening: ● Abdelfatah, Rund and Ramtin Arablouei. "How Korean Culture Went Global" Throughline. Podcast audio, September 8, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/09/06/1121364712/how-korean-culture-went-global Music Listening: "Jjan-jja-ra" sung by Jang Yoon Jeong; My Girlfriend is a Gumiho ("Dong Ju" theme) sung by No Min-woo; BLACKPINK "How You Like That?"; Stray Kids "Chk Chk Boom"; "After LIKE" by IVE; "Blood Sweat & Tears" by BTS. Project Due: Streaming Release No. 3
Part 3	**Topping the Charts**
Week 14	**How the Best Curators Capitalized on You: Analyzing Music Consumption** Listening: ● Abdelfatah, Rund and Ramtin Arablouei. "The Nostalgia Bone" Throughline. Podcast audio, October 14, 2021. https://www.npr.org/2021/10/13/1045812865/the-nostalgia-bone Playlist chart rankings revealed; course currency cash-in; best curator team is crowned winner; class debrief; some class time dedicated to organizing the course reflection project.