Sonatas, Rondos, and Cupcakes: The Efficacy of Collaborative and Creative Project Formats in Undergraduate Music Theory Courses

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INTRODUCTION
This poster details my experience teaching Form and Analysis in the Fall of 2011, 2013, and 2014, and focuses specifically on my evolving approach to designing creative-format group projects.

Differences among my three years designing this project include the class size, group sizes, group selection method, number of group projects assigned during a given semester, time to complete the project, sizes of forms examined, and, most notably, the project format itself (instructor- or student-selected).

Project Designs: Fall 2011, 2013, & 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term:</th>
<th>Fall 2011</th>
<th>Fall 2013</th>
<th>Fall 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Format:</td>
<td>4-page paper</td>
<td>Student-selected</td>
<td>Student-selected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size:</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group size:</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups selected by:</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Instructor (heterogenous ability levels)</td>
<td>Instructor (heterogenous ability levels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of group projects this semester:</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to complete:</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form; instruments:</td>
<td>Binary/ternary; piano</td>
<td>Sonata; symphonic</td>
<td>Rondo; symphonic/chamber</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While group projects across all years were fairly to quite successful, the project designs were also correlated with overall end-of-term content retention.

RESULTS

• Fall 2011:
  1. Group Projects = Fairly successful
  2. Individual Final Papers, Exams = Fairly poor
  3. SLO’s = Marginal proficiency

• Fall 2013:
  1. Group Project = Successful & quite creative
  2. Individual Final Analysis Papers = High quality
  3. SLO’s = Fairly high proficiency

• Fall 2014:
  1. Group Project = Successful & fairly creative
  2. Individual Final Analysis Papers = High quality
  3. SLO’s = High proficiency in content assessed

DISCUSSION
The years in which I utilized creative-format projects for group work (2013 & 2014) were correlated with stronger end-of-term individual papers, as compared to the year in which I assigned standard group paper formats (2011). Moreover, my 2014 end-of-course assessment data show an increase in retention of the content specifically covered in the creative group project, over other content taught in that same year.

CONCLUSIONS
Group work is dreaded by many students; large, open-format creative projects can easily become too vague, subjective in grading, or time-consuming. However, creative, student-driven group projects, when executed correctly, have a net benefit for students. Therefore, we as educators should make more frequent and effective use of them in our courses.