

Norman Weinberg: Setting the Standard for Online Percussion Course Instruction

By Kurt Gartner

In recent years, universities have experienced explosive growth in the number of courses being delivered online. Many private universities exist exclusively in the online domain, and more public universities are establishing their own stand-alone online school entities. Given the choice between traditional and online course delivery, more students are opting for the online choice. This is true even of traditional, residential students. Certainly, the flexibility of viewing lectures and completing assignments on one's own schedule is an attractive benefit to students.

From the instructor's perspective, there are also advantages to teaching online. However, preparation of course content for online delivery takes a substantial amount of time, thought, and energy. The most successful online courses are those that go beyond the traditional linear method of instruction (read this chapter, listen to this lecture, take this exam) to take advantage of the capacity of the online format to flow with the intuitive learning process of students—moving freely between lecture material, written source material, and multimedia resources such as audio and video clips, score examples, and the like.

Percussionists, who are naturally inquisitive and tend to embrace new technologies, are logical players in the creation of online course instruction in music. Online instruction in applied percussion has been around for some time, but there has been much less of a presence of online instruction in courses comprising academic subject matter. Enter Norman Weinberg, Professor of Percussion at the University of Arizona, who has been at the forefront of music technology for many years. Much of Weinberg's work has brought direct benefit to PAS. Before the Internet became ubiquitous, Weinberg established the World

Percussion Network (WPN), which served the PAS membership, established a whole new means of communication, and shattered barriers of distance and time in communication. In recent years, he began to develop an online course in percussion history and literature. This course can serve as a model to others who are interested in developing online courses of their own.

COURSE TOPICS, ASSIGNMENTS AND GOALS

In this course, Weinberg has separated the study most broadly into instrument histories

tambourine, xylophone, snare drum, timpani, and other instruments.

The literature modules of the course are divided broadly among orchestral, chamber, and solo contexts. The orchestral module is divided into two sections that comprise literature from the 17th century through the present. Similarly, the chamber literature module is divided into two sections, which roughly trace the literature of the first half of the 20th century and the latter half of the 20th century to present, respectively. Segments of the percussion ensemble module are parsed along similar chronological lines. The study of solo literature is divided

among solos and concerti for both multipercussion and keyboard percussion.

Throughout the course, student learning is reinforced and assessed through interim assignments, exams, and a major research project to be completed by each student. The research projects are presented in the form of scholarly papers, as well as oral presentations before the class. Weinberg anticipates the sharing of these oral presentations—perhaps in real time—among cohorts enrolled in the course at various locations.

ONLINE LAYOUT AND CONTENT

By any measure, Weinberg has presented a very thoughtful and thorough treatment of percussion history and literature. A great advantage of the

online format is the manner in which Weinberg has assembled a “virtual reserve shelf” of an exhaustive list of resources that must comprise a study of such great depth and breadth. And, of course, all of the materials are available to all the students at any time.

Several means of learning are available to students for most topics. Typical of each module are specific video lectures. Written documentation such as scholarly articles, to



and percussion literature. First, he provides the context of percussion's classifications among all instruments of relevance to various cultures. Additionally, he provides access to early writings and illustrations regarding percussion, as well as writings on the development of musical notation for percussion and a guide to aural analysis. The course's instrument histories begin with the study of Janissary music and continue with studies of cymbals, bass drum, triangle,

To see a video lecture excerpt on Milhaud's "Creation of the World," visit www.pas.org/publications/May2011webextras.aspx

Web Extra

which Weinberg refers in lectures, often appears as supportive material that is available for viewing. Additional resources include relevant images of instruments, notation, placement diagrams and the like, timelines, score examples, and audio recordings. For example, the first of two segments comprising the chamber percussion literature module contains three separate lecture videos, four required readings, six additional suggested readings, ten files categorized as "supplemental materials" (audio clips, video clips, and an ensemble score in pdf format), as well as scores and recordings of twelve works associated with the lectures and readings. This formidable combination of resources is readily available to students, who may pause a lecture to investigate a multimedia resource, immediately and profoundly reinforcing the acquisition of the subject matter of the lecture.

LICENSING BY OTHER UNIVERSITIES

With the course successfully taught and online components debugged, Weinberg began licensing the course through the University of Arizona to other universities, their instructors, and students. In the fall semester of 2010, Jeff Moore offered Weinberg's course at the University of Central Florida, as did Phillip O'Banion and Temple University. By the following spring semester, the course was also being offered at the University of South Alabama and the University of North Texas. Since the course content is a complete package, an instructor at a licensee university may incorporate any amount of "face time" (live, in-person instruction) in teaching this course, depending upon individual circumstances and objectives.

As mentioned earlier in this article, Weinberg's next steps include collaborative studies

among cohorts of participating universities. Weinberg hopes that his model for online delivery of academic courses in percussion will be used for other courses, emanating from campuses around the globe. Certainly, he has established a high standard in this arena.

To view an online demo of this course, visit: <http://uapercussion.org/HistoryAndLiteratureDemo/index.html>.

Kurt Gartner serves as Professor of Percussion at Kansas State University. As a 2010–11 Tilford Fellow, he is coordinating an interdisciplinary study of Cuban arts. Also, he has served KSU as Special Assistant to the Provost and currently serves as coordinator of the university's Peer Review of Teaching Program. PN

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