

Mary Loader: Welcome to Course Stories, produced by the Instructional Design and New Media Team of EdPlus at Arizona State University. In this podcast, we tell an array of course design stories alongside other ASU online designers and faculty.

On today's course story.

Brendan Lake: ... But yeah, really, thinking about your course as a subscription really was, I think revolutionary for my own thinking. If there were no grades, no requirements, and students wanted to come in, they wanted to log in every day, that was the kind of course I wanted. And that's the kind of course, as a designer now, it's the kind of course I advocate for my faculty.

Mary Loader: Hi, I'm Mary Loder, an Instructional Designer from ASU Online.

Ricardo Leon: I'm Ricardo Leon, I'm a Media Specialist at the same place.

Mary Loader: Yeah, we work together.

Ricardo Leon: Let's get on with the show.

Mary Loader: Okay.

Ricardo Leon: Hey, Mary.

Mary Loader: Hi, Ricardo.

Ricardo Leon: How are you today?

Mary Loader: I'm doing really well. I am stoked to hear this course story today.

Ricardo Leon: Yes, so this is MUS194, a beginning class for guitar for non-majors.

Mary Loader: For non-majors. Very important when you hear the conversation today.

Ricardo Leon: Yeah, Yeah. And so the instructor for this is actually a former colleague of ours, Brendan Lake.

Mary Loader: Yeah. We love Brendan.

Ricardo Leon: Can you tell us a little bit about this course?

Mary Loader: Yeah, the course itself is an online music course, that's kind of clear, it's a beginning class for guitar. And we're with ASU online. But what's really neat about it is Brendan's efforts to build a flexible course and to really create a personalized experience that really meets the students where they are, which I think is kind of difficult to do in a music class, especially for non-majors. So one

thing, it's just hard to think about doing music online, but if anybody can do it, Brendan Lake can do it.

Ricardo Leon: Yeah. And I think he mentioned a little bit about people are watch YouTube videos to learn how to do guitar, but this is cool because he actually can give feedback to his students as opposed to your normal How to Guitar' video.

Mary Loader: Absolutely. And he supports them in a way that you can't get supported from those YouTube videos, like you said, with feedback. But also they get to choose their own music, which I love.

Ricardo Leon: Oh, that's terrific.

Mary Loader: I love that they get to choose the music that they're participating in, it's a big part of Universal Design for Learning, is giving that student choice. And you can definitely tell that Brendan has built his course with Universal Design principles in mind.

Ricardo Leon: Yeah, it's great. And then speaking of choosing your own music, today's episode features music for Mr. Brendan Lake. We appreciate him doing that for us.

Mary Loader: He's so talented. I think we were so lucky when he was in studio playing that day, just such a cool experience.

Ricardo Leon: Yeah.

Mary Loader: We should take the class.

Ricardo Leon: Okay, let's do it. And then we can have our own little two piece band.

Mary Loader: I would love to be in a two piece band. You've already named us, right?

Ricardo Leon: Oh, Cognitive Sludge, which that I think is in a future episode.

Mary Loader: Cognitive sludge. That's right. So stay tuned for that.

Ricardo Leon: Okay. We also have today on this episode, Rowena Luce.

Mary Loader: Oh, Rowena is amazing. She's one of the newest Instructional Design Associates with ASU Online. We are so lucky to have her. She's helped me on many projects, I just love her. And then in addition, her voice.

Ricardo Leon: The accent.

Mary Loader: Oh my gosh.

Ricardo Leon: All of it.

Mary Loader: I could listen to it for hours.

Ricardo Leon: It's wonderful. In fact, I think I'm going to speak like this for the rest of the episode, I can't find it though.

Mary Loader: I was going to say, what is that accent?

Ricardo Leon: You know what? It's very inconsistent, I'm going to abandon that right now. Well, are you ready to get in the episode?

Mary Loader: I cannot wait.

Ricardo Leon: All right. Enjoy.

Rowena Luce: Okay. So I'm Rowena Luce and I'm an Instructional Designer Associate at EdPlus, and I'm joined by Brendan today.

Brendan Lake: Hello, my name is Brendan Lake, I am a Lead Learning Designer with Learning Enterprise, also an instructor with the Herberger Institute as a guitar instructor.

Rowena Luce: Fabulous. So Brendan, would you like to tell us the inspiration for your music course?

Brendan Lake: Oh, it's a long story, but I'll try to make it concise. Basically, it started off as a selfish project, because I just love guitar. I originally started teaching guitar at the University of Minnesota. Very standard, typical guitar course, standard assignments, very standard grading, and I love teaching it, we didn't have anything like that at ASU.

So in person, I proposed the course to Herberger Institute, they launched it, and that was probably 2013. Flash forward to 2017, 2018, I really wanted to launch it online. I didn't know if it was possible, and it seemed like others didn't know if it was possible. There are just so many issues with trying to teach guitar over an online space. I'd say the first one is, it's historically since the beginning of time, it's a very apprentice based model of teaching. Someone sits next to a student, they play it right and the student plays it and they get immediate feedback by the instructor.

It's a very skills motor based course where you can't just fix a student's finger to be an inch to the left. How do we really foster the right mindsets, when I'm so distant from students? It's like there are so many fixed mindsets when it comes to music. People try to start and they just think, the first song doesn't go well, I guess I'm not a musical person. So how do I as the instructor over online spaces really make that happen? Eventually I just said, "You know what? I want to do this. I want to try how it works. And it can't go too bad, right?" No one's going to get hurt. And again, it was very selfish, I really wanted to do this for myself. But honestly, being a guitar teacher has been one of the greatest honors of my life

besides being a father. And when I think back on my career so far, a thousand plus students play guitar because I've really spread the inspiration, spread the knowledge, and that's an incredible honor that I carry.

And so if I could carry this into an online space, figure out how to do it, because I really didn't know anyone else who was doing this, at least in a formal setting. I realized people were learning over YouTube, that was the future of music learning. So I really thought originally, how can I do this well? So that's kind of the inspiration for the class. To recap, very selfish. But ultimately, I wondered for a long time, why does a guitar course even fit at a university? And I struggled to answer that for a long time. Because, you look at our courses, biology, chemistry, statistics, business management, it all adds up to careers and tangible skills that people walk away with that they have value in. What does it matter if people play guitar? Should we be forcing them into something like nursing, or computer science? But it took a while for me to accept how important music and guitar are to everybody, a society. And I think that's really the underlying mission of a university, is to make a better society.

Rowena Luce: Yeah, absolutely. I even think my day to day life and how much I listen to music. And it gets me through the day, so music's integral for a lot of people. So when we last spoke together, you mentioned that the course, you wanted it to feel like a subscription, which speaks to some of what you've already touched upon, but I'm curious about how you gave it that feel online?

Brendan Lake: Absolutely. And I'll start off by with the mistakes I made. My experience in my undergrad and grad degrees, they were very traditional. Very structured, rigid. It was very authoritative, I'd say you could say in some cases. Where the instructor really dictated everything you did. Every minute was kind of scripted, there was not a lot of agency on the student side. And that's honestly how I built my first courses. And that was maybe what I thought was a necessity, because again, I didn't know if this was possible.

My very first courses were, again, very control driven. I had 30 lessons for students. I had to force students to play with these textbook exercises on a week to week. And looking back, when I've worked with my own students, there's a lot of passion, there's a lot of creativity, there's a lot of flexibility. And in this class, that first semester, my final project was whatever people wanted, and that was amazing, and I can get to that later. But every week I said, "Oh, play exercise two from the textbook, play exercise four from the textbook." And when I watched them play it, there was just none of that fire in their eyes. And at first I didn't know how to do it.

So eventually I came across a lot of, yeah, I guess you could say eccentric learning style books, or learning design books about ungrading, flexibility, control, around teaching. And I realized that if anyone played something they didn't want to, it's not the guitar class I wanted. I wanted people to be inspired in the direction that they wanted, and if they didn't want to play the textbook, I

didn't want to make them play the textbook. So eventually I transitioned to a model, I think gosh, the third time I offered the course, I wanted to try something. And that was, if I didn't make anything graded, what would happen?

I had got such great feedback on my first few courses, even though they were kind of traditional courses, very controlled, people loved it according to the ratings. But I thought it doesn't capture the spirit I wanted. I didn't want it to just stop there at it's a good course. So what I did was I made everything optional and I just said, "You know what? By the final performance, if you can prove to me that you met the objectives, you pass the course." And to my gigantic surprise, students didn't do 80% of the course, they only played the popular stuff. I think most students didn't buy the textbook, which honestly didn't surprise me.

So I realized very quickly, they're probably learning from others, they're probably watching YouTube videos on whatever popular songs they want to, and they're coming back to my class and they're playing what they want to, but they're not really following my lessons. And so my lessons must not be that engaging if students just don't want to do it. So about the fourth or fifth time in the class, I completely redesigned it where that 20% of the class that I knew they did, I tried to expand that into the whole class. And I realized that I wanted the course, as you mentioned, to feel like a subscription.

I've had so many classes and you see so many student evaluations where people just dread signing into the class. They don't look forward to it. And that's the complete opposite of what education is. When you think about how many people around the world would crave this education. And it's something people try to... I think, one of my favorite quotes about education, I'm sorry, I don't remember the author, but "Education must be the only commodity where people try to get as little as they can for their money." And I wanted to completely buck that to where my class was just the ultimate thing that students wanted to sign into. It was a completely anxiety free class, a busy work free class. And this is something I actually even mentioned in my syllabus to say, "If anything in this class feels like busy work, let me know and we will revise it."

Ricardo Leon: Okay. So the quote that Brendan was looking for just a minute ago was, "Education seems to be in America, the only commodity of which the customer tries to get as little as he can for his money." And that quote is from Max Leon Forman.

Mary Loader: That's amazing, and so sad. I'm serious.

Ricardo Leon: Right, right.

Mary Loader: It should be an intrinsic experience. Yeah.

Ricardo Leon: It's kind of that-

Mary Loader: You should want to learn.

Ricardo Leon: Youth is wasted on the young kind of thing. Education is wasted on those who aren't seeking education.

Mary Loader: I guess.

Ricardo Leon: Because it's hard, it takes a lot of work. And sometimes you got to slip in a paper last minute.

Mary Loader: Well, is the paper meaningful, is that why you waited till the last minute? That's where I'm at. Make it fun so they want to do it and it's not like checking boxes. I don't know. I have so many feelings on that, we should do a whole other episode.

Ricardo Leon: On?

Mary Loader: The value of education. What are we doing? Why are we doing it? How can we do it better?

Ricardo Leon: Yeah. Well, I think the whole show is like that, we're looking at people who are doing it better-

Mary Loader: Okay, fair enough.

Ricardo Leon: ... And showcasing them.

Mary Loader: This is the ongoing conversation.

Brendan Lake: And I try to remove all anxiety, students are playing for me, they don't have to play for anybody else. Nothing's really a live performance. If they do poorly, they can just rerecord, which is a beautiful thing about online learning guitar.

But yeah, thinking about your course as a subscription really was, I think revolutionary for my own thinking. Where students would just... If there were no grades, no requirements, and students wanted to come in, they wanted to log in every day, that was the kind of course I wanted. And that's the kind of course as a designer now, it's the kind of course I advocate for my faculty.

Rowena Luce: I think you do a nice job of introducing the course in your welcome video, because you create a safe space with the students, and reiterate, they're only performing for you. They're not having to perform for other students. It's their first time playing the guitar, and it's going to be a space where they can really learn the basics and have that exploration for the first time playing an instrument.

Brendan Lake: Absolutely. Yeah, so my approach to starting out a course, one of my favorite phrases that I've heard about, starting out a course, just in general with video, is you want to connect and not perform. And when students log into a course for the first time, they're not looking at the syllabus, they're not looking at the course description. The first impression they get is very much a feeling and not a knowledge factor or anything like that.

And so the first line on my homepage is, "Hello, and I hope you're doing well." That was something that I've really realized from a lot of great thinkers on Twitter and Academic Twitter, that students, they're not coming to your course as enthusiastic about the subject as you are. When you start at a syllabus, people assume that all the support that's needed is tech support, or content support. But students, they come in and they sometimes don't have enough food to eat. They have a medical issue and they're not sure if they can finish this class, they're concerned about every other priority in their life. And so in that very first video, I don't just jump into, "In this module, in this course, here are my objectives." One of my approaches to instructor presence is just for them to know that I care. And I do very, very deeply.

And in that welcome video, before I introduce the objectives or what students are going to be doing, I talk about how excited I am that they enrolled. How excited I was when I played guitar. How excited I am to hear their unique musical voice. And that I wasn't as concerned about being the next rock star or anything like that. That musical voice is the best thing you can share with somebody when it comes to music and then how every individual that picks up guitar sounds different and has something unique to bring to the world. And I try to carry that all the way through to my class where the very last page of my course is a congratulations. I have an optional activity, it's a bonus activity where I say, "Make yourself a drink, and then log out of canvas" is my last assignment on the course.

But in that very last page, I say, "The world is better with your music in it." And I try to really carry that emotional weight of the course, how much I care about them, what they offer. That's really what the course is about, not necessarily getting all the notes right.

Rowena Luce: So, I'm new to EdPlus, and I originally found out about your course from a colleague of mine when I mentioned a Kalimba. And Meredith said to me, this is my colleague, that you actually build Kalimbas. And I was like, "Who is this person that builds these instruments?"

Mary Loader: I have a Kalimba.

Ricardo Leon: You do?

Mary Loader: I do.

Ricardo Leon: Oh, cool.

Mary Loader: Yeah, Brendan did not make my Kalimba, but it's nice. The sound of a Kalimba is quite relaxing. If you want to know what it sounds like, I found a really, really, really cute-].

Ricardo Leon: It's very cute.

Mary Loader: ... Short sample of what a Kalimba sounds like. And it's a really nice song. And there's a really cute dog. So you could watch that if you want, I'll put it in the show notes.

Ricardo Leon: But listeners...

Mary Loader: Don't read the comments.

Ricardo Leon: Well, I think...

Mary Loader: The dog died.

Ricardo Leon: The dog died.

Mary Loader: It's like a whole series where this guy plays the Kalimba with his dog in the background and they're wonderful and very short, but then... Don't get attached, he's so cute.

Ricardo Leon: All right, listeners, this is why you should focus on the episode at hand and watch that later and maybe have a good cry afterwards.

Mary Loader: Well, he probably lived a really good life. I mean, his owner played Kalimba for him personally-

Ricardo Leon: Right to him.

Mary Loader: ... Every day, it seems. Yeah.

Ricardo Leon: Yeah. And now he's immortalized on YouTube.

Mary Loader: Such is the way.

Ricardo Leon: Digital media, you live forever.

Mary Loader: That makes it better, I guess.

Rowena Luce: Anyway, so she showed me your course and I was really impressed with the design, the three stages you have in the modules for students, along with the flexibility. I'm even thinking about taking the course with my husband. And I just



think it speaks to your course in terms of my initial reaction on seeing it, that I go home and I tell my husband, "Hey, let's take this course together."

So I just think it's important for listeners to be able to understand what you did to create that welcome and pull people in to have that creative space and also that flexibility to be who they want to be as a musician starting out.

Brendan Lake: Absolutely.

Rowena Luce: So you've mentioned that there have been many iterations of the course, and I'm curious about how your strategies with grading specifically rubrics, evolved over time?

Brendan Lake: Absolutely. Yeah, and that's something I'm very passionate about and something, gosh, it's one of my favorite trends in education now. I think one of the terms is specifications grading. It's taken a lot of forms, it has a lot of names. But it's essentially the idea that it's turning more things in your course into pass, fail. There were so many issues in my original iterations when I had rubrics, I struggled so much with the idea of how do I turn something into a number when it comes to this course, and turn it into a score where I can say, "You don't pass because you got a 69, or a 72."

In my syllabus, I'm very clear to students under my grading policy that I say, I don't think grades should be offered in this class. I think the compilation of student achievement, or effort, or their musical voice to reduce it to something like an 85 is a rejection of what it means to be an artist and a human in a deep world. So I start off by saying that.

Now, the first time I tried to completely remove grades, I was very passionate about this and I was really optimistic about it, students struggled with it. They were very confused. Because I just told them at the end, "Play your final performance. I'll give you a grade based on how well I think you met the objectives. And if you didn't come up as well as you wanted, you can resubmit." Which I think it's hopefully a very flexible system, it was very holistic in terms of your guitar achievement and your journey on guitar. But a lot of students struggled with it. There was, I think maybe it caused more anxiety and maybe this was a result of my explanation. But students, they're just not used to it, it's not something they see in their other courses.

And so I think students assume you're going to pull the rug out and say, "Oh, I don't know what my grade is." And just not knowing all of their progress and not having that mathematical structure that they're so used to is very anxiety ridden. And so ultimately, my balance in having a mathematical structure where they would know that they're doing well while having the flexibility of no rubrics. Because to reiterate, I think when I had rubrics on my weekly assignments, students would play the most vanilla boring pieces to make sure they hit all of the aspects of the rubric. And then when I graded them, I would

say, "Oh, if you have three or more mistakes then you get a four out of five" or, "If you're one string out of tune, you lose a point." It's like that's the total opposite of how I wanted to run a guitar, but it's how I was taught originally.

But nowadays, in my pass fail, I have pass fail on all of my assignments. And so it really welcomes a lot of flexibility, I think it's better for diversity, equity, inclusion because people have a lot of interest in music. Maybe they want to play jazz, country, hip hop, different guitar riffs. It allows them to play more. And so if you have less of that rubric, and I remember when I was a student and I would see, oh, I got an 87 on something I'd tried really hard on, and I'd think, God, this instructor is a jerk because I'd worked so hard and I got an 87. But if I say "You passed" and that's all they see initially, it opens their eyes to like, okay, well how was my work evaluated? And then we're talking about learning how to score.

And so, at that point I'll give them feedback on the things that they did well, the things that they didn't, but it's not something I quantified into a score. And when I give feedback, one of my favorite thinkers on arts and education, Liz Lerman, who's an ASU Instructor, one of her quotes from the critical response process is, "Great feedback should inspire students to get back to work." And so that's something I carry forward in everything. It's not just, "You did this well, you didn't do this well," it's "How can I give you the next step and inspire you to take that next step?"

Mary Loader: So, what do you think about that non grading strategy, Ricardo?

Ricardo Leon: I mean, I went through regular school where they gave us grades and all that stuff, so I think it's really neat, especially with something that's a little more abstract and a little more subjective like guitar.

Mary Loader: Yeah, and it's for non-majors, so it's not necessary that they walk away with the same level of learning as the person next to them, it's really their own personal growth, as Brendan said, it's their own journey. So I think it works really well for this class. I just don't know that it would work well for a course where your knowledge matters, like the medical industry or math.

Ricardo Leon: Sure. Sure.

Mary Loader: There are right answers in some situations. But I do wonder how people deal with the non grading strategy in those situations too. It'd be something to explore.

Ricardo Leon: Yeah, and I would love for the listeners to reach out to us and tell us your experience with non grading strategies. How often do you come across these types of courses, Mary?

Mary Loader: Honestly, I think I recall Mary Lou Fulton teaching college using that strategy. I just don't know which courses they're using it in, and if it's for electives or non-majors or if they're using it for their major map courses. I'm not sure. It'd be interesting to talk to one of their designers and find out.

Ricardo Leon: Yeah, Mary Lou, reach out

Rowena Luce: With the feedback, how did you personalize it for students? Because I think you implement a very unique strategy in giving that unique personalized communication, really, between faculty and students in your course. So can you explain to listeners how you did that?

Brendan Lake: Absolutely. So one beautiful thing about Canvas is it allows you to record videos. And I think once we went into Canvas I knew I could offer this course. I don't think I could have offered it in some LMSs. But since I was able to record, my students record video, they submit it to me. And then instead of just having a text where I said, "Great job, John, do these things, which was really difficult on guitar anyway." I'd record a video where I say, "Great job John, I thought it was really beautiful the way you did this." And then I try not to... I know a lot of people try the feedback sandwich of positive, negative, positive, I don't subscribe to that, I don't think it's the best way to do feedback. Honestly, I just talk about what I really enjoyed.

And sometimes, I'll listen to my students three or four times when I'm playing through and I'll tell them that it's like, "Wow, John, that was really beautiful, I actually listened to your recording two or three times." And I think that just inspires them that they hear you're an expert, because a lot of people don't know a lot of expert guitarists. And so they're really inspired. It's the first time that they'll hear like, "Wow, somebody who knows guitar is really inspired by me and how meaningful that was for me when I started." And then after I get past what I really loved and felt inspired by and what I heard in their musical voice and everything else, I really move on to, "Here are some things to consider for your next week of practice."

And I always say to consider because there's no one way to play guitar, just singers, so many diverse Josh Groban, Bob Dylan, very different singers, both very successful. And so for me to tell people, "You should play guitar like this," again is a rejection of what I want in my class. So I tell them, "Here's what I might do, but if you like it the other way, by all means keep doing it that way." But you may find sometimes it's a technical issue, it's like "You may find it gets hard, but if it works for you now try it until it doesn't." And it really welcomes them into space and honors where they're at as a guitarist rather than saying, "You should do these things."

Rowena Luce: So you mention students musical voice in the course and you really want to nurture that. How do you learn about them as people throughout the creative process?

Brendan Lake: Yeah, that's one really important part of the class. By the second or third, because I'm a big tinkerer in my classes, I always try to change 10 or 20% of the class every term. By the second class, I realized it's hard. I have 50 students with no TAs, and that's something I'm very proud of and I can actually maybe even have more, but don't tell the Herberger Institute that yet. But the way I try to learn about my students is I have a survey in the opening module where I ask them about what their goals are, what their background is on music, what their background is on guitar. And then I'll export that, Canvas allows you to export to a spreadsheet survey results. And so when I actually get to the grading, I have 50 students, it's hard to keep track if you don't have a cheat sheet on who John was, or Jill was, or Anna, or Jamal, or anything like that.

I'll export that spreadsheet to where I see, Oh, Jamal played trombone in high school. And so when Jamal starts playing for me, I can say, "Wow, I can tell your rhythm is really strong, that you have a background in music. I can tell that your skills on trombone are really carrying well." Or if someone plays ukulele or violin, I can tell that their left hand dexterity is very, very fluid. And I'd say, "I'm not surprised because of your background in string instruments." And that really helps them again, feel seen. And in my evaluations every term I think my students say it did not feel like an online class, which I think it's quite a compliment because they really felt like I knew them as people, that I was there for them and they felt well supported.

And hopefully in the future that online has a better reputation, we can build better systems for students. But for now, saying it doesn't feel like an online class is quite a compliment.

Rowena Luce: So, I've seen your sequencing in the course, and I'm curious why you structured it the way that you did?

Brendan Lake: Yeah, so my structure, I would say it certainly has changed like most of the things in the course. One thing I realized very quickly as I was wondering if this course was even possible to do online was, again, there were so many challenges in a motor skills based course. A guitar is so much, it's I think choreography for your fingers, basically. How do I teach that choreography? And every dance instructor who has tried to teach an online course, or yoga course, or any motor skill course knows that feeling. But I realized the traditional models of teaching guitar where you might teach someone a song on their first date, it's not possible, because I'm not there coaching them, catching their mistakes immediately and correcting it.

And so I think the structure of my course, I really tried to get, I think traditional instructional design and instruction is all about how to get students to the finish line the fastest. But I realized for this course I had to, how do I teach this subject with as few questions as possible even if it takes a little longer? And that's how I think I was able to be really successful and deliver this online in hopefully a good way. And so, I think one challenge that I had that's fairly unique to guitar is that

this is not a course you can cram on. People's fingers hurt bad when they're starting guitar. And so most people will work on a weekend. They try to study for six hours, it just doesn't work. And so my original thought was, how do I get people to practice for an hour a day? And some people naturally do that, some people don't think about it.

But I structured it, rather than having all of my learning materials in one list, just do whatever you want, because again, I wanted to have that sense of agency where people explore what they want when they can. I tried to organize my learning materials into lessons, where I had five or six lessons each week designed to be offered one day at a time. And hopefully that kind of supported predicting and planning out, scheduling to say, do one lesson a day. If you skip a day, you can try to do two lessons the next day.

And one other avenue that I really tried to do well was, I mean, so much of guitar is about practice. How can I inspire students to practice? They can watch videos all day long, but it's not going to make them a good guitarist. So how do I really capture that practice? And so every single lesson that I have, each five or six lessons in each module has three sections. There's a learn section at the top where I'll introduce videos. I recorded initially, it was during COVID and so I had a lot of my home videos. And then I eventually built a practice section under that where if it was new concepts, I would have little self-check quizzes or little games.

Or if it was something like a new technique like hammer-ons, pull-offs, I actually recorded five videos of exercises, all the classic intros, 'Wish You Were Here' a lot of Beatles tracks, of me playing five examples of how you can apply that. So students, watching videos, it's one thing, and then here's five examples the way you can practice this. And people don't have to play everyone. If they like the Beatles, they can play that one. If they like Johnny Cash, they can play that track.

And then the last section is questions. And so initially I had a little hack in Canvas where I built all of my lessons in discussions, in the actual canvas discussions. And so in the prompt I would have 'Learn and Practice' and at the very bottom of the screen I would have questions presented in discussion. And that's been very, very helpful. And I think it's that type of interactivity where people see a little bit, they practice, they can immediately ask questions and of course, I'm subscribing so I can respond as quickly as possible, has just been fantastic for me.

Rowena Luce: It's funny though you say that about the guitar, because I was trying to teach myself Norwegian Woods the other day-

Brendan Lake: Oh that's tough.

Rowena Luce: ... And I haven't played in a long time. My fingers were killing me.

Brendan Lake: Oh yeah.

Rowena Luce: And I was like, "Oh, I haven't played enough, because I.." And the sound isn't as good because you can't apply the pressure.

Brendan Lake: I know that very well.

Rowena Luce: Moving forwards, what changes do you plan to make, iterations of the course, it sounds like it's been constantly evolving, so I'm really curious to hear what you plan to do in the future?

Brendan Lake: I think one of the biggest things I'd like to do is improve my media. And I think media is such a critical part of this course in both ways, from instructor to student, student to instructor, and eventually student to student, but I think that's maybe a phase three iteration. But one thing I'd really love to do, I mean EdPlus, and the Tempe Campus' SkySong there's amazing studios and it'll blow my COVID webcam home videos out of the water. And so I'm really looking forward to scheduling some time and trying to redo as many videos as I can, whether I can just do few at a time, video recording takes a while.

There are still a lot of outstanding questions that I have about my course. One is, I think about accessibility, and that's something I struggled with quite a bit, I've struggled with since the beginning. Of what are my obligations as an instructor around accessibility in a course that depends on media? And I think it's not necessarily unique to music. What is an art history instructor's obligation to students with visual disabilities? I'm yet to really hammer that out, what that answer is. And how I can support and welcome students. Because I don't want to just say, "Oh well they probably won't sign up for my class." But if a student, even with any kind of visual disability, I want them to be able to take my class and communicate the ideas. And because, again, my class isn't completely about how to be a great guitarist. It's about how to think differently about the world through the lens of music. And implement some of the ideas and have a release at the end of the day through music.

Rowena Luce: There is something you said to me about one of the challenges that you had is in terms of making it a safe space versus a collaborative space, because the videos are only shared with you and not peers, but there's obviously a deliberate reason for that. It's a beginner's guitar class and I would certainly feel the pressure if I knew it was being shared with everyone. So how do you intend to build some collaboration into that class?

Brendan Lake: Yeah, that's another outstanding question I've had is, how should I structure collaboration? Because one of my initial fears, talking about the audience who signs up for this, I have a lot of guitarists who are already dynamite guitarists and they're in there for easy credit. Or because they've been playing for three years but they never had lessons, and so they want to see what lessons look like and what their gaps are.

And so I have students who just, they run circles around all the assignments, they're improvising, they're putting in their own spin, it's really actually incredible. And then I have people who have never picked up a guitar before and those are usually actually my favorite learners because I know what that struggle is like, and I'm so excited for them to take that first leap to play guitar. Initially I thought, oh, it'd be wonderful to have these public galleries of everyone playing their stuff. But again, there's such a fixed mindset often in music where people just give up once their fingers start hurting, or once that chord doesn't sound right. Think I'm not a musical person. That I didn't want that new student to see that advanced student and think, "Wow, I'm not as good as them."

So how do I navigate that sense of collaboration? And I see a lot of new beginners that they would love to see those advanced students. And the advanced students would love to see the beginning students, just like I'm an advanced guitarist who's still learning, but I love seeing beginners too. How do I foster that collaboration and that joy of, because music is ultimately something that is shared from the beginning. Some people play for themselves, but ultimately since the beginning of time it's a social act. And so how do I make this a social act without having that sense of anxiety for those students who are just struggling, or maybe they feel a little bit of shame? Unfortunately, and we come trying to support them out of that shame. But it's very much a part of their journey on guitar. So it's tough. But I think that's one thing I'd love to explore. And maybe it ends up just being a situation where it's optional.

For my final performance, which I'm really, really excited about, it's my favorite part of the term, when people just bring in everything they learned, apply it to what they really want to learn and apply it to their goals. Making an optional private or public way of submitting that video. Where if they want to show off they can, and I'll have a caveat of, some people are really good at guitar coming into this class, everyone's journey is different, comparison is a thief of joy, however I want to explain it. But then if people have that sense of, I don't know if this is good enough to share then that's totally okay too.

Rowena Luce: How might your experience in this course benefit others?

Brendan Lake: Would that be other instructors?

Rowena Luce: Other instructors? Yeah.

Brendan Lake: I would say, if I can impart anything about my class, it would be... I'm going to reframe your question.

Rowena Luce: Okay. Do it. I love it.

Brendan Lake: I'm going to reframe your question into, what do I wish I knew as a beginning instructor that I've learned and I think that might be valuable for others? I would

say, one critical thing I've learned is how meaningful and impactful it is to have in your videos more of that connection, again, returning to that idea of connecting and not performing. That the academia can be such a sterile place. And just the simple acts of, "Hello, I care about you," "Good morning, I hope you're doing well," goes so long. And I think students really see the effort that you put in. I think it really sets up trust in a really, really meaningful way. I think one other aspect of my course that I really try to support instructors in adopting is that sense of practice.

I think Sal Khan's quote about learning is that basically all learning is practice and feedback. And so if you really have to implement those non punitive ways of allowing students to practice to fail, to normalize failure as part of the learning process and then giving them feedback towards that growth. I think if you build your class around that rather than summative assignments, I think it's very, very powerful. And to add to Sal Khan's quote, if he doesn't mind, hopefully, I'm sure he is listening, that it's I think all learning comes from inspiration, practice, and feedback. You really have to start with connecting why this is so magical. Because I think every course that I've ever been a part of, there's some magic in it, there's some magic in the subject. And so I think if you can capture that magic, show off your enthusiasm very, very clearly, start from a place of wonder.

I think when it comes to my guitar class, I think my guitar class is very different. I think a lot of the strategies, they certainly do not work everywhere. Certainly rubrics are a very, very valuable part of a lot of courses. I think my course is flexible because it is an elective, it is for non-majors. And I think there's the endless philosophical debate on education, around growth versus achievement, or growth versus standards. My class is very much built around growth, because I don't need my learners to be great guitarists. It's about the process, process and the effort. And so I want to clarify that, but I really love teaching my class and I hope this podcast is valuable for everyone.

Rowena Luce: Yeah. And I think you overcome that challenge with such a condensed time too, because instructors can be pulled to those summative evaluative pieces, but how do you build in that practice for that formative feedback where students can receive it during the process of learning regardless of the subject. So I like that. I like that you're building that into your course. How does your course story end for students?

Brendan Lake: That's very important for me. One of the lessons I learned in my music career was how you start and end a musical piece are the two most important parts. Because it really ties a bow. The beginning frames the whole process, it frames the impression students have and how they experience everything. And the way you end supports. Because no course ends in week seven, it's a lifelong journey. And so week seven, I really start by talking about planning, reflecting on the whole course process, but also thinking about what are the next steps for you? A lot of my lessons actually build into that to say, what are some great guitar



resources that you found online? What are some great resources in your own life where you can continue to learn guitar? I want to end on a really positive empowering note for my class.

And so my final project is literally whatever people want. And I think under my requirements it just says, 'Play for a couple minutes for me, you can play whatever you want as long as it's aligned with your goals.' And that very first time I offered this class, I think the very first student that submitted that final project was a woman, a mom playing with her daughter in that final performance. Because that was actually her goal, was just connect with her daughter to have something fun to do with her. So it was just an incredible... I was actually brought to tears, that first assignment that I graded. And I was like, it made all of the effort and struggle and frustration of thinking if I could build a class and hoping I could work it out, everything was absolutely worth it from that first student. And so that's really how it ends. It's my favorite part to see people just rock out. People who've been introverts at the beginning, really digging into a punk song, it's a blast.

Rowena Luce: It's fabulous. Thank you so much for your insight into your course. It's very valuable.

Brendan Lake: Absolutely. Yeah. Thank you for all you do and I think this is an incredible podcast and service to others.

Mary Loader: Oh, that was so refreshing.

Ricardo Leon: Yes.

Mary Loader: It's so nice to hear from former colleagues that are actively teaching in the online environment and finding success and applying the strategies that they've learned about through their own experiences and supporting other faculty and seeing that experience in their own classroom, and through reiterate design. This is an exemplary experience for online design.

Ricardo Leon: Absolutely. And a great instructor too. I feel like I want to take this course because I would feel so supported by my instructor.

Mary Loader: Same. Brendan's amazing. And we're so thankful that we had an opportunity to talk with him and also to have Rowena's beautiful voice accompany the conversation and her passion towards guitar as well. Thanks so much everybody.

Ricardo Leon: Oh yeah, Rowena is also learning how to play guitar as well, right?

Mary Loader: She knows how to play guitar. She and her husband play, she says not well, but I have a feeling she knows how to play fairly well, certainly better than me. Probably not as well as Brendan, but my goodness, that's a high bar.

I just want to highlight for anyone who's interested, we are hosting an ASU Online Faculty Showcase, we do it twice a year, so check back if you can't make it this time. But next week we will be hosting Brendan Lake and two other instructors to talk about their successes in their courses. And Brendan's going to be talking about this class as a part of his ASU Online Faculty Showcase presentation. So definitely check in, sign up, register on the Teach Online site for our workshops and webinars to attend the ASU Online Faculty Showcase.

Ricardo Leon: So Mary, what can the listener do?

Mary Loader: Like and subscribe to the podcast, share it with your friends. And then in two weeks come back because we're going to have another show.

Ricardo Leon: Oh, sounds good. Where can they find these shows?

Mary Loader: They can find them anywhere.

Ricardo Leon: Anywhere.

Mary Loader: We're everywhere.

Ricardo Leon: Everywhere.

Mary Loader: Apple, Spotify, everywhere. But you can also come to Teach Online, that's our hub for sharing all of the knowledge that we've accumulated over the last decade with ASU Online. So it's a great spot to dig in and listen to our podcast and maybe read some articles.

Ricardo Leon: Excellent.

Course Stories is produced by the Instructional Design and New Media Team at EdPlus at Arizona State University. Course Stories is available wherever you listen to podcasts. You can reach us at [coursestories@asu.edu](mailto:coursestories@asu.edu). If you're an instructor at ASU Online, tell us your core story and we may feature it in a future episode.

Thanks for listening.