

## **Collaborative Pedagogy: Teaching (with) the Grateful Dead On Tour, On Campus, and Online<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This essay describes my experiences teaching with the Grateful Dead “on tour” in 1989, on campus in the early 2000s, and online in 2019. Using a life course framework, I discuss how my own development as a teacher, Deadhead, and Grateful Dead scholar and the changing context over time shaped these experiences and how teaching with the Grateful Dead opened a pedagogical space for experimentation that allowed the students and me to take risks and to collaborate despite status differences. Rather than unpacking these experiences entirely, my goal here is to focus on how these three experiences of teaching with the Grateful Dead allowed me to develop and informed my pedagogical approach, particularly my use of technology in teaching.

**Keywords:** Grateful Dead, popular culture, pedagogy, online teaching, technology

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I have taught (with) the Grateful Dead since the summer of 1987 when I supervised four independent study students who distributed a questionnaire to Deadheads while on the East Coast Summer Tour. Those independent studies led to me teaching my infamous pair of 1989 “Deadhead Sociology” classes. The rumor at the time, both in the mainstream press and among Deadheads, was that the students were “getting credit” for going on Summer Tour. As discussed below, there was more to these classes than that (Adams, 1991b; Adams & Edwards, 1990). Two years ago, as part of the University of North Carolina Greensboro’s (UNCG’s) celebration of the 1960s and a subseries of events known as “Another Year of the Dead at UNCG,” these students, whom I have always thought of as “The Class,” held a reunion. During the same semester as this reunion, Spring 2019, I offered a fully online class, *The Grateful Dead Legacy*. The 1989 and 2019 classes, which for different reasons both brought a lot of attention to my university and to me personally, serve as public bookends to my career as a Deadhead professor.

Between those two experiences, however, I have taught with the Grateful Dead in many ways. In addition to teaching a course on campus in 2000 and 2001 about the Deadhead community, I supervised subsequent independent study students and undergraduate and graduate research assistants. A high school student, completing a course requirement, and a recent college graduate, wishing to develop research skills, relocated to Greensboro to study with me. I presented as a guest lecturer to classes and student audiences at my own university and at many other universities. I worked with students conducting research, for example, analyzing audience-development data Grateful Dead Productions collected during Furthur Festival in 1998 and contracted my university to summarize (Adams, 2010/2012). I supervised master’s thesis students who were writing about Deadheads (e.g., Paterline, 2000; Sardiello, 1994). When Jerry Garcia passed away in 1995, a graduate assistant collected as much of the relevant media she could find at the time and an undergraduate research assistant coded the letters I received from Deadheads in mourning (Adams, Ernstes, & Lucey, 2014). During this thirty-year period, more than 400 scholars, mainly students at other universities, have contacted me to discuss their own research on the Grateful Dead. Reviewing the list of my collaborators makes me “smile, smile, smile” because many of these former students are now close friends.

My experience teaching with the Grateful Dead really pre-dates 1987 a bit; a sociology major I never had in class convinced me to think about studying Deadheads when he saw me at the 1986 Box of Rain bust out at Hampton Coliseum. The conversation this student, Matt Russ, and I had in my office the Monday after those shows was really my first experience teaching and learning with the Grateful Dead (or at least with Deadheads). Matt convinced me that studying Deadheads would satisfy my theoretical interest in migrating communities and interest students more than the population I had planned to study (book editors who traveled around the country to attend professional academic conferences). When I asked, “Do Deadheads comprise a community?,” he pulled out photographs of a wedding that had taken place during a set break at a Grateful Dead concert. In that moment, when I realized this student understood my theoretical agenda and that it might be possible to combine my interests in research and teaching, my life was changed forever.

Despite my plans to retire my status as Deadhead professor after spring 2019, my teaching with the Grateful Dead now post-dates 2019 as well. In 2020 and also in 2022, I visited online classes focused on the Grateful Dead at other universities. I was sponsored by another university in August 2021 to present during “the days between” the anniversary of Jerry Garcia’s birth and death. I have met several times with a second-generation Deadhead, Zachariah Brackett, who is interested in young Deadheads; he is not a student at my university but at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. Ryan Waide, now a former UNCG student, has been working not only with me, but with two UNCG librarians, Rachel Olsen and Sarah Dorsey, to develop a Grateful Dead Library Guide (Walter Clinton Jackson Library, 2022) and, in the process, to identify books to order for our collection. Building on the work Olsen, Dorsey, and I had started, his contributions to the Library Guide began as his final project for the Grateful Dead Legacy course; scholarship is after all a legacy

of the Grateful Dead. Not surprisingly, given my previous experience teaching with the Grateful Dead, he has continued this work beyond his graduation.

The focus of this essay, however, is not on my experiences teaching with the Grateful Dead between my 1989 and 2019 classes, but mainly on these courses and one other formal course preparation for a writing intensive freshman seminar on the Grateful Dead Community, offered in Fall 2000 and again in Fall 2001. These classes in 1989, the early 2000s, and 2019 were rich experiences, and much about each of them was notable. Describing them fully would fill up much more than one article. Rather than unpacking them entirely, my goal here is to focus on how these three experiences teaching with the Grateful Dead allowed me to develop and informed my pedagogical approach, particularly my use of technology in teaching. The 1989 class met for five weeks on campus but then went “on tour.” The 2019 class was online, but students had the opportunity at the end of the semester to attend an on-campus conference, UNCG Dead Scholars Unite! The Deadhead Community class, the least known but the only one I taught twice, took place primarily on campus, but included some online interaction. Hence the subtitle of this chapter: “Teaching (with) the Grateful Dead On Tour, On Campus, and Online.”

### **TEACHING WITH THE GRATEFUL DEAD OVER THE LIFE COURSE**

Much of my research and teaching relies on a life course perspective as an organizational framework, and it seems relevant here. Recognizing a connection between history and biography (Mills, 1959) and that our lives are structured by age-related role expectations, a life course perspective reminds us that the timing of our birth shapes our experiences, the opportunities we have, and the constraints we face (Stoller & Gibson, 2000). Each birth cohort -- those born during the same time interval -- faces different historical circumstances as its members age and its “cohort personality” is shaped by sharing these experiences simultaneously. From this perspective then, one could argue that my use of technology was shaped by the state of its development and availability in each of the years I taught, my own level of development as a teacher at various ages, and my propensity to apply the technology as determined by the “personality” of my birth cohort (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Despite my cohort’s propensity to like their jobs and see them as opportunities for adventure, however, not all baby boomer college professors like myself have embraced the use of technology in teaching. Furthermore, this general life course perspective does not explain why, when I looked back on my more than 40 years of teaching, it was obvious that I had experimented more with new technology when I was teaching with the Grateful Dead than when I was teaching without them. Deadheads, such as me, form what Mannheim (1952) called a “generational unit,” a sub-cohort in other words, existing vaguely within the boundaries of the baby boomer cohort. I say *vaguely* within the confines of the baby boomer cohort (born between 1946 and 1964) because most of the members of the band and many of their original fans were members of the previous cohort and, of course, many fans joined baby boomers as Deadheads later. The point here is that Deadheads were shaped specifically by the Grateful Dead experience in ways that other people born at approximately the same time were not.

So, what was it about the Grateful Dead experience, their music, and the Deadhead community that led to my propensity to experiment more when I was teaching with the Grateful Dead than when I was not? Although I did not consciously set out each time I taught with the Grateful Dead to experiment pedagogically or to use technology in innovative ways, I nonetheless ended up doing so, sometimes in advance of teaching the course and described in the syllabus and sometimes spontaneously during the semester. Reflecting on my teaching career, as old professors often do, I have realized that teaching with the Dead opened a pedagogical space for experimentation where I, and my students, felt empowered to take risks and to collaborate despite status differences and the ultimate necessity that a grade be assigned. As Deadheads have advised me since I began studying this community, it is impossible to understand Deadheads, and thus in this case to answer this

question, without referencing the Grateful Dead's music. Grateful Dead shows were improvisations within structures; the structure of shows, first and foremost the trajectory of the music but also the social organization of the community, was comforting to Deadheads and allowed them to be adventurous (Adams, 1991a). Others have also noted that the improvisational musical ethos of the band filters down into the everyday praxis of Deadheads (Backstrom, 2013; Cohen, 2020; Kaler, 2013; Tuedio & Spector, 2010). For example, Barnes (2007, 2011) has described how improvisation is important to successful team building and logistics. My point here, resonating with Barnes' approach to business as well as to his teaching, is that when a course focuses on the Grateful Dead, it seems culturally appropriate to develop a plan (i.e., a syllabus) but to remain open to its modification.

Furthermore, as others (e.g., Sardiello, 1994) have noted, a Grateful Dead show is an example of a secular ritual (Turner, 1969). During a show, which is experienced in between what precedes it and what follows it, external statuses become irrelevant. This liminality provides an opportunity for magic to happen and for personal and cultural transformation. Applying this same Deadhead philosophy to teaching allows for what I have previously described as "collaborative research and learning" (Adams, 2000). Reflecting on my experience on tour with students in summer 1989, which is described in more detail subsequently in this chapter, I wrote:

... [I]n the process of our collaboration, the roles of student and teacher and of researcher and subject began to blur. Although many educators now view teachers as people who help students discover for themselves, teachers have traditionally been perceived as those who share knowledge with others. In contrast, social science researchers want to learn from others. It follows, then, that researchers are students, and research subjects are teachers. Social scientists have typically called subjects who served as their teachers "informants." In the Deadhead project, I refer to people who fill this role as "guides," because informant is a term Deadheads reserve for narcotics agents. My students were thus my guides and therefore were my teachers. Similarly, I was a researcher and thus their student. (Adams, 2000, pp. 18-19)

One might initially think that the phrase "collaborative research and learning" is inclusive of collaborative pedagogy, but it is clear from this passage and the text that follows it (not included here), that I meant learning about what I was studying from students as I taught them how to do research and other skills. I had realized that by teaching on the topic I was researching and by attracting students who were interested and knowledgeable about the topic, I no longer had to neglect my teaching while focusing on my research or vice versa. By "collaborative pedagogy," which is the focus of this chapter, however, I mean something slightly different: that students can also teach their instructors how to teach. Although one of my original motivations for agreeing to supervise the independent study students in 1987 was to learn about the Deadhead community from them, it is only after reflecting on a lifetime of teaching with the Grateful Dead that I have realized how doing so has contributed to my pedagogical development, especially my use of technology, and has empowered students to encourage me to do so.

### **TEACHING ON 1989 SUMMER TOUR: DEADHEAD SOCIOLOGY**

Building on the success of the independent studies, which confirmed my interest in studying Deadheads further, my department chair, James Skipper, who studied blues musicians, and the Dean of the Division of Continual Learning (DCL) John Young Sr. offered me an opportunity to pursue my new interest by offering a class as part of what they hoped would become UNCG's American Institute of Popular Culture. This idea, in and of itself, was innovative, as popular culture was not yet accepted widely as an appropriate topic for serious

study. One course became a pair (SOC 501/502: Qualitative Research Methods and Applied Social Theory), and enrolled students were required to take both simultaneously. Twenty-one students, two graduate assistants (Robert Sardiello and Jon Epstein), five members of a video crew, a photographer, a bus driver, and for the second leg of Summer Tour, my husband and daughter comprised “The Class.” The earliest description of this pair of courses that has survived is dated February 2, 1989 and, as the first class was on June 12, it must have been a draft of a passage used to advertise them. It pretty much accurately summarizes how they unfolded:

The students in this class will act together to explore the social world of [D]eadheads. In so doing, they will learn how to think sociologically and how to discuss the Dead, some background on the 60s and early 70s, some ways of thinking about [D]eadheads, how sociologists look at the world, and how to do sociology. Then we will go on Tour for a couple of weeks to observe and learn by participating in [D]eadhead subculture. At concert sites, we'll separate, each of us having our own experience. On the bus, we'll write about these experiences, discuss and interpret what we've seen and heard, and make plans. After we get home, each student will write a paper about the social world of [D]eadheads based on their own observations, conversations, and experiences.

These courses have been discussed extensively elsewhere (e.g., Adams 1991b, 1998, 2000; Adams & Edwards, 1990; Meriwether, 2009), but the role of technology in this class has only been discussed in passing. Although computer technology played a minor role in planning the course and subsequently in coding and analyzing the data collected that summer, recording and transportation technology were central to class pedagogy. I did already own a personal computer, though the University provided computer access only in laboratories. Later that summer of 1989 I subscribed to *rec.music.gdead*, the Usenet group for Deadheads, and began using email primarily to communicate with them. If this pair of courses had been offered a year later, it is possible I would have required students to engage with Deadhead subculture electronically. The required text, however, was available in print only; according to the syllabus (June 10, 1989), it consisted of a “Two Volume Collection Prepared for this Course and available at Kinko's (401 Tate Street) for \$40.20.” Students were instructed to “Ask for Packet #23.” The syllabus alludes to the use of copying machines rather than printers, encouraging students to operate as a research team and “to xerox copies of . . . observational reports and interview transcripts,” including “those of your classmates to use as data for your own research papers.” I provided students with both my office and home phone number, asking them to call the latter only before 9 pm.

Recording technology, both audio and visual, was, however, central to “The Class” experience. It was of course common practice in sociology to audio record interviews, and I had become interested in visual sociology in the early 1970s while taking an undergraduate course in research methods myself. Because the students paid higher-than-usual tuition for this course, the Dean of the DCL provided me with an ample budget, making it possible to incorporate technology into pedagogy.

Each student was issued a microcassette recorder primarily to use to record research interviews. The instructions for the practice interview the students completed before going on tour started with a suggestion from one of the students, Robert Freeman, to “make sure your tape recorder is on before you do anything!” I added to this document, validating his contribution to class pedagogy: “It sounds like a good idea to me” (June 14, 1989). The syllabus also warns that although class attendance and participation will be ungraded: “you will never survive in this class if you aren't there and ready to discuss the material almost every day. If, for any reason, you miss a class, be sure to arrange to have someone tape the session and listen to it before class the next day.” As it turns out, one of the students in “The Class,” Kristen Huff, recorded the sessions every day. I doubt any of the students ever listened to these recordings and, quite frankly, I do not remember any of the students ever missing class though surely some of them must have.

Emily Edwards, then UNCG Assistant Professor of Broadcasting and Cinema, and her video crew, including two independent study students of her own, taped many of the class meetings on campus and subsequently went with us on tour. This idea was not mine, but the brainchild of Bolton Anthony, a member of the DCL staff. Although the video crew's primary goal was to produce a documentary about Deadheads (Adams & Edwards, 1990/1995), a secondary goal was to do a video about the class itself (Adams & Edwards, 1990). Edwards also provided each student with a souvenir, a 6½-minute VHS recording, *Deadbeat* (Adams & Edwards 1989). Much of this footage of class meetings, along with the rest taken on tour, was destroyed by a roof leak on campus. What remains documents a highly engaged and empowered class. The first day, which I remembered clearly before reviewing the video recordings, the students raised ethical questions as part of their introductions. I went home that night and obsessed over my notes for the next day. I had never had students who were this engaged, and I was terrified I was not prepared to teach them. It is only in retrospect I have realized that what really terrified me is that they were prepared to teach me. It is interesting with this hindsight that the class, once again at Robert Freeman's suggestion, subsequently adopted a lyric from the Grateful Dead song, Black Throated Wind, as its tagline: "You Ain't Gonna Learn What You Don't Want to Know." Another student, Alyce Wimbish (now Gray) arranged to have class t-shirts made with that quote on the back. And thus, the students began their work.

The University contracted with Lloyd Wolf, a photographer friend from my days as a student at Trinity College, to take photographs relevant to my research. Based on their growing understanding of my theory-based methodological approach (Adams, 2010), the class collaborated on creating a "shoot list" (June 29, 1989) for him, and he joined us on the bus. Some of his still images were incorporated into the video about the subculture that Edwards produced, and he also ended up serving as a member of the video crew. I have used his photographs to illustrate my presentations on Deadheads over the years, and some of them are included in the book I subsequently co-edited with one of the two class graduate assistants, Robert Sardiello (Adams & Sardiello 2000) and in other publications as well. See the UNCG Lloyd Wolf Photographic Collection, which he named Acid Reign; he donated the photographs he took while on tour with the 1989 class to UNCG and a curated collection is available digitally (University Libraries of UNC Greensboro, n.d.)

In addition to conducting interviews, recording their observations, and keeping a diary while on tour, students took turns collecting different types of data. These "rotating observational tasks" included noting the states of license plates and sayings on bumper stickers, interviewing stadium staff, and collecting local newspaper coverage. While we were on tour the students suggested we monitor the environmental impact of Deadheads, so a report on recycling and "keeping the scene clean" was added to the list. All these tasks would have been easier had smart phones existed at the time.

In retrospect, however, transportation technology, not recording technology, was the most important technology used in the class. Deadheads say you are either "on the bus, or off the bus." On July 1, 1989, we got on the bus. Rented from Morgan & Sons Tours, it unexpectedly arrived pre-equipped with a destination sign leftover from a previous client, "On the Road Again." The students saw this as a good omen because the Grateful Dead had performed a song with the same name as the Willie Nelson tune the previous client had been quoting. While we were on tour, the bus "alternated between looking like a flop-house and a study hall" (Adams, 1991b). Each morning as the bus left the hotel, the class taper, Robert Wright, the only one of the original independent study students who enrolled in the class, played a recording of the previous night's concert while we slept or worked or danced in the aisles (Adams & Edwards, 1990). We became a research team, and we learned together.

At the time this class was offered, most instruction took place in classroom settings, bounded not only by physical walls but by metaphorical walls (Goldsmid & Wilson, 1980) such as "our national context, professionalism, the characteristics of the students, and role requirements" (Adams, 1991b). As I wrote soon after teaching this class (Adams, 1991b):

Although we might lament these constraints, they make us feel safe. Leaving the protection of the classroom eliminated more of these constraints than just the physical walls.

Before teaching these courses, my contact with students outside of class was mainly limited to discussions during my office hours with the ambitious and the troubled. On the bus, I was always available to all [sic] the students. One night I stayed up with a student who was in despair for lack of a topic until 2:30 am, and four hours later, I was awakened by another who could not sleep because of his excitement over a great idea. . . Their excitement about their research projects grew. Their competence as researchers quickly developed in response to immediate and virtually limitless feedback. I was teaching around the clock and it was working . . . (pp. 2-3)

Later (Adams, 1998), I reflected that I had:

...learned that not all students are at their best during normal classroom hours. Some students are brilliant at odd times of the day or night. I remember at the time thinking that there was nothing I could do about acting on this insight when I returned to Greensboro; I would be back to teaching on a normal schedule. Since that time, however, this experience has led me to be an advocate of Internet courses and other types of asynchronous learning. (p. 8)

Subsequently, after writing this reflection, and resulting from the good relationship I had developed with the Dean of the DCL who sponsored “The Class,” I served as Assistant to the Dean of DCL, assigned to encourage faculty to teach online. My graduate assistant and I developed a bibliography of online pedagogy and conducted focus groups with faculty about their perspectives on its potential (Adams & Ammons, 2000). Teaching on the bus also foreshadowed my own current experience teaching online, where students often email me in the middle of the night or ask me to Zoom (zoom.us) into their personal environments at various times outside of my regular “drop-in Zoom room office hours.” Teaching on the bus taught me to knock down as many of the metaphorical classroom walls as is professionally responsible and prepared me to teach around the clock, which is now common online if not on a bus.

### **TEACHING ON CAMPUS: THE DEADHEAD COMMUNITY IN THE EARLY 2000S**

During the early 2000s, freshmen in the College of Arts and Sciences at UNCG were required to enroll in a writing-intensive seminar. Writing-intensive courses required students to revise and resubmit at least one assignment and to conduct peer reviews. The content varied across these courses and was intended to be especially interesting to students. At the request of David Pratto, my department chair, I developed a course on The Deadhead Community (FMS108W) to be offered as part of this program. The proposal for this course stated that “[t]hrough an examination of the foundations of the Deadhead community, this course will introduce basic sociological concepts, theoretical concepts, and methodologies.” The course description used to advertise the course further detailed that the students would examine “how it was possible for a community to form and persist without a permanent shared territory.” This course not only counted as a writing-intensive course; it also “carried” general education credit, satisfying a Behavioral and Social Science requirement under the All University Learning Education Requirements. For this reason, students were expected to “learn the value of research” and “how to think analytically about the forces shaping their lives.”

This course was taught for the first time during the second year that I “web-enhanced” my classes. “Web-enhanced” meant that materials could be accessed from my webpage. For example, one of my graduate assistants, Matthew Hembree, identified web addresses for as many jam bands as he could, starting with the

list that was included in Dean Budnick's then recently published 1998 book on this topic. Students could click on the links and visit the webpages for these bands. They were amazed.

Furthermore, for years, my research assistants, almost 20 Deadheads and non-Deadheads, paid and unpaid alike, downloaded the conversations from the Usenet group, rec.music.gdead, known as "Dead-Flames-Digests" (Kraitch, 1993). Eventually, I received a \$3300 instructional grant from UNCG's DCL to develop a searchable database of more than a decade of these online discussions among Deadheads. UNCG's Instructional and Research Computing staff developed the search engine. The students used this database to do primary research for their term papers. Ironically, all this work was rendered moot when Google search engines were developed and all the original posts became accessible publicly. During the two semesters this class was offered, however, my students were privileged in a way that most Deadhead researchers were not.

For the second year in a row, I was also requiring the students in this class and others to participate in threaded discussions using the learning management software, Top Class. Although now similar software is used in almost every course, both online and on campus, it was new then, and most students had no experience with it. Other technological highlights included a requirement that the students develop a "webliography" for their research papers (a list of relevant websites), that they purchase two computer diskettes formatted for a PC (these would have been 5 ¼" floppy discs), and a class period was scheduled to meet in the computer lab in the building where my office was to complete a practice writing prompt, to participate in an online discussion, and (here is the funniest goal for this class meeting) to "send an email message to Rebecca Adams." The following fall, the second and last time this course was offered, the only real change to the technology available itself was that UNCG had already switched learning management platforms and was using Blackboard instead of TopClass.

This course was designed to complement and support my research on the Deadhead community. The course syllabus echoes the then current working outline of my still-as-yet-unpublished monograph about its foundations. As the course evolved over the course of the first semester, it also provided a context for collaborative pedagogy. The most striking example from this course occurred the first time it was offered, Fall 2000. The students were required to attend a Dead-related concert. Furthur Festival, with the anchor band The Other Ones, consisting of most of the remaining members of the Grateful Dead, was scheduled to play at the Greensboro Coliseum on September 21 (coincidentally my 48th birthday). Dark Star Orchestra (DSO), the leading Grateful Dead cover band, was scheduled to play earlier at Ziggy's in Winston-Salem on August 29.

Many of the students opted to attend this earlier concert, which at first I found disappointing because many of them had never heard any of the original members of the Grateful Dead perform. What I did not anticipate was how attending this cover band concert would energize the students. One of them (I so wish I could remember which one) suggested that we invite a member of DSO to participate in our online discussions. At a subsequent concert, I left a note at the band merchandise table asking if anyone in the band would be interested. Much to my surprise, Scott Larned, DSO's keyboard player who has since passed away, responded enthusiastically. He had been a high school teacher before he joined the band and was interested in participating in a class using new online technology. The students posted questions to him online through Top Class, and he responded asynchronously. I recently realized I had saved a copy of the transcript to my hard drive (September 20, 2000).

This approach was such a success that the students wanted to invite more guests. *Deadhead Social Science: "You Ain't Gonna Learn What You Don't Want to Know"* (Adams & Sardiello, 2000), an anthology co-edited with one of my Summer 1989 graduate assistants, had just been published and was the main textbook for the course. This anthology was a collection of master's theses and other student research, hence the course description stated "[r]eadings include publications authored by Deadhead students." Although none of the chapters was based on work completed as part of the Summer of 1989 class as has been stated elsewhere



(e.g., Meriwether, 2009, Szatmary, 2000), I did know all the authors, was still in touch with them, and was able to arrange for many of them to “visit” the class by responding asynchronously to questions the students posed via the class management software. It was surprising to me how enthusiastically the students read the material and participated in these asynchronous class discussions. Realizing that virtual guests were a possibility and prompted students to prepare more extensively for class discussions changed my teaching forever. Furthermore, their enthusiasm seemed to energize and empower them to engage with the materials more extensively than was typical of my students otherwise. My first conversation with Sarah Dorsey, now the Director of the Music Library and one of the contributors to the Grateful Dead Library Guide, was when she called me to tell me that “my Deadheads” were sitting all over the floor of the Music Library reading material I had placed on closed reserve to supplement the materials on electronic reserve, a then new option. She wanted me to “come over right away and see what was going on.” I thought she was angry, so I jumped up from my desk and ran across campus to do her bidding. When I arrived, she was far from angry; she was excited, happy, and enthusiastic. She said, “Look. They are learning! Isn’t it wonderful?” And in the process, they had taught me how to be a better teacher and had introduced me to a librarian who has supported my teaching and research since.

### **TEACHING ONLINE IN SPRING 2019: THE GRATEFUL DEAD LEGACY**

Fast forward to 2019. UNCG had decided to host a series of events celebrating the 1960s, and a committee was accepting proposals. When I heard the Chair of Religious Studies, Greg Grieve, was planning to submit a proposal to invite Amir Bar-Lev, Producer of *The Long Strange Trip*, an Amazon Prime video on the history of the Grateful Dead, to discuss his film, I decided to build on that proposal. I proposed to be released to teach a class on The Grateful Dead Legacy, requesting \$4000 to have my time bought out, which was what my department chair, Melissa Floyd-Pickard, said would be required. I wrote that I realized this request was “above the \$3000 limit for the proposals.” I added, “If it is impossible to fund my buyout fully, but there is otherwise enthusiasm for this proposal, I would like the opportunity to seek supplemental funding rather than having it rejected.” I promised nothing specific but said that if the course were funded, I would work with other faculty and alumni to organize other events focused on the Grateful Dead as part of the 1960s series. I concluded, “This proposal is flexible; so am I. I will look forward to hearing if and how I can help. If the proposal to teach the class is not funded, I will put it back on my to-do list for the future. Elsewhere I have described the Grateful Dead’s music and community as improvisation within a structure. That is how I view this proposal as well.”

The 1960s Mini-Grants Committee allocated \$1000 to fund my proposal. Much to my surprise, the Dean of Health and Human Services, with the approval of my department chair, also provided the release time for me to teach the course. (Later, during my annual review meeting I noticed my chair had a portrait of Jerry Garcia in her office, and when I commented on it, she expressed an interest in singing vocals for the cover band which she ended up doing). I pulled together a committee of most of the Deadheads I knew from across campus, and we began planning a series of events that became known as Another Year of the Dead at UNCG (<https://www.facebook.com/UNCGDead>). Together, we secured additional funding from the Office of Alumni Affairs, departments across campus, including my assigned department, Social Work, and alumni. We held live auditions for a UNCG Grateful Dead cover band, which became known as Spartans Play Dead (organized by Robert Anemone, who was chair of Anthropology, and Charles Frank, an alumnus who was a local music producer); screened *The Long Strange Trip* in three parts, with Bar-Lev presenting at the last gathering; held a psychedelic art exhibition (co-curated by Emily Edwards, the same faculty member who filmed the class in 1989, and Lisa Goble, a staff member who coincidentally had encountered the 1989 class at a

restaurant while we were on tour in Massachusetts long before she came to UNCG; and hosted a photography exhibition, Images of the Grateful Dead and Deadheads, which I co-curated with Lena Dominique-Rodriguez, a recent alumna, and featuring photographs by Lloyd Wolf, the 1989 class photographer, and North Carolina Grateful Dead photographers Robbi Cohn, Chris Nelson, and John Rottet. The photography exhibition and its closing reception took place at Tate Street Coffee House, owned by Matt Russ, the alumnus who had originally talked me into studying Deadheads, and featured music by Jon Walters, who I had met through the Grateful Dead Caucus of the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association (SWPACA), and David Gans, who also participates in the Caucus. That same night, Spartans Play Dead played what was supposed to be their second and final performance; they performed two more times at the request of UNCG administrators later that summer.

The day of this reception, we hosted a mini-academic conference, UNCG Dead Scholars Unite!, which I co-organized with Justin Harmon, who had participated in SWPACA and co-authored about Deadheads with me before joining the UNCG faculty, and Kristen Huff, an alumna who had been in “The Class.” Timothy Cripes, a member of the UNCG staff who had edited a local Deadhead newsletter, *The Lonely Goat* (1998-2002), designed and produced the program, with cover art by Lena Dominique-Rodriguez and approved by Rhino Records. With a few exceptions (e.g., David Gans, Jesse Jarnow, and Mark Mattson), the presenters had connections to UNCG or were from North Carolina. UNCG Chancellor Gilliam gave opening remarks, discussing his experience attending a Dead and Company concert the previous summer.

Of relevance to the discussion of teaching with the Grateful Dead, this conference provided an opportunity for the students from my 1989 class to hold a reunion and for the students from the fully online 2019 Grateful Dead Legacy class to present their final projects on campus in addition to the requirement that they do so online. While the 1989 class presented a panel on their experiences, some of my current students presented at the roundtable session on topics including: Two- and Multigenerational Deadhead Families, Online Communication, Children of the Grateful Dead, and Fashion. This conference was the only structured opportunity these students had to meet each other face-to-face, and interestingly, only a small portion of them opted to attend the conference.

The Grateful Dead Legacy class was asynchronous and fully online, offered via Canvas, the online learning software platform UNCG currently uses. According to the last version of the evolving syllabus (March 27, 2019), the course was divided into three sections, “the formation of the Grateful Dead community, the [Grateful] Dead’s music and their fans, and finally the legacy of the Grateful Dead, including their impact on music, business, art, and technology and ultimately on the lives and aging experiences of their million plus fans. Students will explore the band’s direct legacy (through their creative, business, and charitable activities) and their indirect legacy (through their family and fans).”

Like the syllabi for all courses now offered by UNCG are required to do, this one included extensive discussion of UNCG policies and stated formal student learning outcomes. In this case, the learning outcomes reflected the goals of the gerontology curriculum, as do those of a course I teach on baby boomers, similarly designed to provide insight into the culture of older adults. According to the syllabus for GRO 589, after completing this course, undergraduates (graduate students) were to be able to depict the Deadhead community as an example of the lifestyle diversity of baby boomers incubated in the 1960s, (and evaluate its significance); discuss Deadhead identity (across cohorts and the life course); interpret the music and lyrics of the Grateful Dead (and explain their meaning to Deadheads); describe Deadhead culture (and compare it to mainstream culture), including what they value, believe, think, and feel and do, use, and produce; outline the social organization of the Deadhead community (and examine the ways Deadhead identity intersects with other identities); portray the Deadhead community after Jerry’s death (and give reasons for its continued importance to aging Deadheads); identify sources of information on the Grateful Dead and Deadheads,

(demonstrating an understanding the of the difference between facts and myths); and document (synthesize) information on the legacy of the Grateful Dead and Deadheads (and demonstrate an appreciation of how this community has contributed to and created challenges for society).

Each week, for the first eight weeks of the class, students participated in discussion threads and completed a more formal assignment related to the week's topic. For the remainder of the course, discussion threads focused on their own research on various aspects of the Grateful Dead legacy and provided students opportunities to provide input into their classmates' projects. Their final project was to produce a Canvas page much like those I had provided for each topic addressed earlier in the course, linking to information on their topic and published so their classmates could learn from their research.

The course was offered as an "experimental course," meaning that it was not listed in the catalog as part of the regular curriculum. On the Canvas page for the first week of the course, I wrote: "this is an experimental course, and we are going to experiment" and noted that the students would "affect the course just as Deadheads influenced the band's music. The syllabus and Canvas prep will continue to evolve and be developed over the semester. The list of resources on the library guide for the course will continue to grow as the librarians, instructors, and students identify more resources." The course did evolve as the semester unfolded. For example, when Dennis McNally, the Grateful Dead's former publicist, and I could not locate a publication in which he discussed cohorts of Deadheads, I considered inviting him to visit the class as I had Scott Larned do in the class I taught in the 2000s, but I needed the material quickly. In a moment of inspiration, I realized that McNally could leave a message on my voice mail, and I could save it as an MP3 and upload it to Canvas to create an "instant guest lecture." Another way the course evolved was by the addition of student-identified resources to an ongoing discussion thread created to capture them. When Ryan Waide began his work with the librarians on the Grateful Dead Library Guide as an extension of his final project for this class, he started by harvesting the resources his classmates had identified as part of this ongoing discussion thread and noted they were almost all electronic. This led me to realize that even though students could have scanned in print resources to link from their final project pages, they had rarely included resources that were not already available electronically. As a result, realizing that print resources would be of limited value to students if we offered this class again, we instructed Waide to identify electronic versions of any additional publications he discovered whenever possible. For those with a UNCG library account, the Library Guide, which is still growing, includes live links to resources our library owns or those that are available electronically otherwise. The current version is also available publicly, but without live links (Walter Clinton Jackson Library, 2022). This experience will continue to inform my teaching, both on campus and online; I will not require that students consult printed resources unless I require them to purchase them. My realization that electronic resources were more likely to be assigned and read also led me to contact Rowman Littlefield, the company that now owns the copyright to Adams and Sardiello (2000), to request this book be re-released as an e-book, as an iBook, and via print-on-demand. Thanks to my original AltaMira editor, Mitchell Allen, who came out of retirement to advocate for this re-release, this process was completed in Fall 2021.

## CONCLUSIONS

What have I learned from teaching with the Grateful Dead across my life course? How have my aging, the changes in the students as successive cohorts took classes with me, and the periods of history in which I have taught with the Grateful Dead affected my pedagogy?

Certainly, my maturity as an instructor has grown over the years, not only from teaching with the Grateful Dead, but from teaching myriad other sociology and gerontology courses and in contexts outside of courses as well. I received UNCG's Senior Alumni Teaching Excellence Award in 2003 and have continued to

experiment and grow as a teacher since. I have also matured as a Deadhead, learning more about the music and the influences on it, and as a Grateful Dead scholar, attending the SWPACA Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus meetings most years and reading much of the increasing body of scholarship in this area. I still remember Kristen Huff in the Spring of 1989, curled up in a chair in my office, challenging my credentials. She was right to do so, and I was right to be terrified after the first day of class that I was not adequately prepared as a teacher, a Deadhead, or a Deadhead scholar.

The band members have also aged since 1989, with Brent Mydland and Jerry Garcia passing away since then, in 1990 and 1995, respectively. When I took “The Class” on tour in 1989, Jerry Garcia was still alive and the band was still billing itself as the Grateful Dead. By the time I taught the class on campus in Fall 2000, Bob Weir, Mickey Hart, Bill Kreutzmann, Bruce Hornsby, Mark Karan, and Alphonso Johnson comprised the band and were billed as The Other Ones. Finally, when I taught the class online in 2019, Dead and Company was on tour and consisted of Bob Weir, Mickey Hart, Bill Kreutzmann, John Mayer, Oteil Burbridge, and Jeff Chimenti. The aging of the band and its changing composition helped define cohorts of students marked by their own experience with the Grateful Dead as I have been by mine. All but three members of the original class had seen the band play before and identified as Deadheads. In the classes offered in the 2000s, some of the students had seen the Grateful Dead, The Other Ones, or at least members of the Grateful Dead perform, and quite a few of them identified as Deadheads or as the children of Deadheads. Although many of the students in the 2019 class were very familiar with the Grateful Dead’s music (including Ryan Waide who was one of the drummers for Spartans Play Dead), only a few had heard some version of the band play live or identified as Deadheads or children of Deadheads. While many of my 1989 students knew more about the Grateful Dead and Deadheads than I did, I was the expert in the 2019 class until the students developed their own expertise in areas where the Grateful Dead have a legacy.

The broader historical context also framed my experiences teaching with the Grateful Dead. It is interesting to me that all three of these adventures teaching classes with the Grateful Dead were embedded in larger university initiatives and that in all three time periods my department chairs encouraged me to teach them. Some changes have occurred since 1989, however, and some of the metaphorical walls I felt we had escaped by boarding the bus have been removed. Popular culture is now an accepted focus for research and teaching, and the Grateful Dead and Deadheads are far less stigmatized than they were when I taught with them for the first time. Grateful Dead Studies has emerged as a serious field of study; when I taught the course in 1989, I assigned almost everything that had been written about the Grateful Dead. In 2019, the librarians and I were not even able to identify all that had been written on the topic. During my time teaching with the Grateful Dead, instruction has shifted from being mainly on campus to often online, with even on-campus courses requiring students to access at least some electronic resources and to submit or share their work electronically. New technological developments have allowed for pedagogical innovation and made a much wider variety of resources available to students.

Other historical changes in bureaucratic requirements relevant to teaching have limited possibilities, and it is much more difficult to be spontaneous. Approval needs to be obtained for offering courses off-campus or via different delivery modalities. Syllabi are lengthy and are required to include myriad bureaucratic policies. Learning outcomes must be stated in advance and assessed via specifically identified assignments. Nonetheless, creative advanced planning of assignments, such as requiring the students to contribute to the evolution of the syllabus and to share their research electronically, can mediate the constraints imposed by these bureaucratic changes and support collaborative pedagogy.

Ironically, though some of these changes opened new possibilities and encouraged creative workarounds, they also seemed to reduce feelings of solidarity among the students. While teaching the fully online class in Spring 2019, the elimination of required synchronous class meetings and the ease with which

students could access materials without interacting with me or their classmates made me miss the old days and the sense of group identity students developed. Although I still believe it is an advantage to be available to students “around the clock” or at least frequently between class meetings, I now see the value of synchronous meetings as well. When COVID-19 hit in Spring 2020, I was not teaching with the Grateful Dead, but I was teaching online and asynchronously as I had done for the Grateful Dead Legacy course a year earlier. In response to campus closing due to the virus, other faculty moved their on-campus courses online quickly, transferring instruction from physical rooms to Zoom rooms, preserving synchronous interaction. As I have become familiar with Zoom technology, conducting both individual and group meetings with students and others using the platform, it has made me want to set up a course allowing for improvisation within the Zoom structure (e.g. by inviting guests in response to student requests or merely by letting discussion move to unplanned topics). By doing so, the goals would be to preserve the new freedom the historical changes in context have allowed and to encourage solidarity among students who will then hopefully spontaneously teach me to teach. Doing guest “lectures” on Deadheads via Zoom for classes at other universities (i.e., Natalie Dollar’s class at Oregon State University-Cascades and Larry Bitensky’s class at Centre College) has confirmed my interest in undertaking another pedagogical adventure while teaching with the Grateful Dead.

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Rebecca G. Adams, PhD, Professor of Sociology and gerontologist in the School of Health and Social Sciences at University North Carolina Greensboro, has published 5 books and more than 70 scholarly articles and chapters, including more than 15 on Deadheads. *Deadhead Social Science: You Ain't Gonna Learn What You Don't Want to Know*, co-edited with Robert Sardiello in 2000, was released by Roman Littlefield (rowman).

com) as an e-book and print-on-demand in Fall 2021. She has taught about Deadheads on tour (1989), on campus, (2000s), and online (2019); presented at the SWPACA Grateful Dead Caucus, at other professional meetings, and to student audiences; written popular press articles about Deadheads, published a fictional piece situated on Dead tour, conducted audience research for Grateful Dead Productions, and narrated *Deadheads an American Subculture* (1990). She attended her first Dead show in 1970.

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