



visible knowledge project

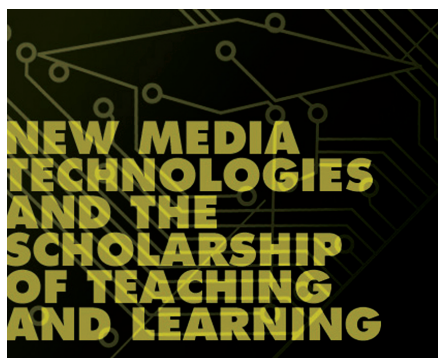
a collaborative investigation of learning, inquiry, and technology



## The Difference that Inquiry Makes:

A Collaborative Case Study of Technology and Learning,  
from the Visible Knowledge Project.

Edited By Randy Bass & Bret Eynon



**"The Difference that Inquiry Makes: A Collaborative Case Study of Technology and Learning, from the Visible Knowledge Project,"** *edited by Randy Bass and Bret Eynon*

Reprinted from the January 2009 issue of Academic Commons on "New Media Technologies and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," edited by Randy Bass with Bret Eynon and an editorial group from the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship (CNDLS) at Georgetown University— Eddie Maloney, Susannah McGowan, John Rakestraw and Theresa Schlafly  
<http://www.academiccommons.org/issue/january-2009>

#### **Academic Commons**

Academic Commons is licensed under a Creative Commons license  
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>)  
Michael Roy and John Ottenhoff, Editors  
Lisa Gates, Managing Editor  
<http://www.academiccommons.org>

**The Visible Knowledge Project (VKP)** was funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, with additional funding from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE); current support for the "Social Pedagogies" project is made possible by a grant from the Teagle Foundation.  
VKP is a project of Georgetown University and the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship (CNDLS).

#### **Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship (CNDLS)**

3520 Prospect St. NW, # 314  
Washington, DC 20057  
<http://cndls.georgetown.edu>

# Table of Contents

## **The Difference that Inquiry Makes:**

A Collaborative Case Study on Technology and Learning, from the Visible Knowledge Project

### **Capturing the Visible Evidence of Invisible Learning (Introduction and Synthesis of Findings)**

*Randy Bass and Bret Eynon*

### **Reading the Reader**

*Sharona Levy*

### **Close Reading, Associative Thinking, and Zones of Proximal Development in Hypertext**

*Patricia E. O'Connor*

### **Inquiry, Image, and Emotion in the History Classroom**

*Peter Felten*

### **From Looking to Seeing: Student Learning in the Visual Turn**

*David Jaffee*

### **Engaging Students as Researchers through Internet Use**

*Taimi Olsen*

### **Trace Evidence: How New Media Can Change What We Know About Student Learning**

*Lynne Adrian*

### **Shaping a Culture of Conversation: The Discussion Board and Beyond**

*Edward J. Gallagher*

### **The Importance of Conversation in Learning and the Value of Web-based Discussion Tools**

*Heidi Elmendorf and John Ottenhoff*

### **Why Sophie Dances: Electronic Discussions and Student Engagement with the Arts**

*Paula Berggren*

### **Connecting the Dots: Learning, Media, Community**

*Elizabeth Stephen*

### **Focusing on Process: Exploring Participatory Strategies to Enhance Student Learning**

*Juan-José Gutiérrez*

### **Theorizing Through Digital Stories: The Art of "Writing Back" and "Writing For"**

*Rina Benmayor*

### **Video Killed the Term Paper Star? Two Views**

*Peter Burkholder and Anne Cross*

### **Producing Audiovisual Knowledge: Documentary Video Production and Student Learning in the American Studies Classroom**

*Bernie Cook*

### **Multimedia as Composition: Research, Writing, and Creativity**

*Viet Nguyen*

### **Looking at Learning, Looking Together: Collaboration across Disciplines on a Digital Gallery**

*Joseph Ugoretz and Rachel Theilheimer*

### **"It Helped Me See a New Me": ePortfolio, Learning and Change at LaGuardia Community College**

*Bret Eynon*

### **From Narrative to Database: Protocols and Practices of Multimedia Inquiry in a Cross-Classroom Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Study**

*Michael Coventry and Matthias Oppermann*

### **Multimedia in the Classroom at USC: A Ten Year Perspective**

*Mark E. Kann*

## *Producing Audiovisual Knowledge: Documentary Video Production and Student Learning in the American Studies Classroom*

Bernie Cook, Georgetown University

From *The Difference that Inquiry Makes: A Collaborative Case Study on Technology and Learning, from the Visible Knowledge Project*<sup>1</sup>, edited by Randy Bass and Bret Eynon

In an interview in the documentary *Hearts of Darkness* (1991), filmmaker Francis Coppola imagined the future impact of increasingly inexpensive and available consumer video technology:

*To me the great hope is that now these little 8mm video recorders and stuff have come out, some... just people who normally wouldn't make movies are going to be making them, and--you know--suddenly, one day, some little fat girl in Ohio is going to be the new Mozart--you know--and make a beautiful film with her little father's camera . . . corder--and for once the so-called professionalism about movies will be destroyed. Forever. And it will really become an art form. That's my opinion.<sup>2</sup>*

Coppola intended this comment as a criticism of the conglomerated entertainment industry, after his failure at launching an independent studio, Zoetrope Pictures. He imagined a future of in-home media production by non-professionals, working outside of the traditional spaces of media production. For his own purposes, Coppola proposed the "little fat girl in Ohio" as both the next generation of media-maker and as the end of a particular historical practice of media-making. Nearly two-decades later, user-generated digital audiovisual content is a signature aspect of Web 2.0. The explosion of amateur digital media production has significant implications for teaching and learning. Like many others in the 18-35 demographic, university students consume, comment upon, and increasingly create multi-media texts in a variety of online environments. In some cases, users generate original content,

---

<sup>1</sup> About VKP: In all, more than seventy faculty from twenty-two institutions participated in the Visible Knowledge Project over five years. Participating campuses included five research universities (Vanderbilt University, the University of Alabama, Georgetown University, the University of Southern California, Washington State University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology), four comprehensive public universities (Pennsylvania's Millersville University, California State University (CSU)--Monterey Bay, CSU Sacramento, Ohio's Youngstown State University, and participants from several four-year colleges in the City University of New York system, including City College, Lehman, and Baruch), and three community colleges (two from CUNY--Borough of Manhattan Community College and LaGuardia Community College, and California's Cerritos College). In addition to campus-based teams, a number of independent scholars participated from a half dozen other institutions, such as Arizona State and Lehigh University. The project began in June 2000 and concluded in October 2005. We engaged in several methods for online collaboration to supplement our annual institutes, including an adaptation of the digital poster-tool created by Knowledge Media Lab (Carnegie Foundation), asynchronous discussion, and web-conferencing. The VKP galleries and archives (<https://digitalcommons.georgetown.edu/blogs/vkp/>) provide a wealth of background information, including lists of participants, regular newsletters, and reports and essays by participants, as well as a number of related resources and meta-analyses. For this article, the author gratefully acknowledges the students whose work is cited here. All students whose work is included have granted the author permission to use the material.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Ford Coppola, *Hearts of Darkness--A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*, DVD, directed by Fax Bahr and George Hickenlooper (Paramount, 1991).

writing, shooting, and editing video. Many other users are re-editing, re-constituting, and mashing up “found content,” making into a mass phenomenon what was previously a sub-cultural, fan-based practice. In sum, consumer video technology and Web 2.0 have enabled university-aged users to use media to critically and creatively engage their worlds.

However, university students do not become “new Mozarts” simply by picking up video cameras or by uploading video files to the Web. Missing from Coppola’s vision and lost in the new cultural practice of amateur media making for the Web is a critical understanding of the histories and forms of audiovisual media. The strong interest in amateur media-making can be harnessed for higher order learning if carefully integrated into new pedagogies. Media-making in higher education has traditionally been located in production or studio art programs. Often the organization of academic units has segregated media-making from Film and Media “Studies,” which attended to the histories and theories of media. However, in new Comparative Media Programs and in interdisciplinary fields such as American Studies, the practice of making media is being integrated with the study of the histories and theories of media. As a result, students are learning to make media as a critical practice, working on the past and the present in transformative ways.

Over the last five years, I have experimented with making documentary video production the central work of my course entitled American Civilization III: Documentary. This essay seeks to understand the impact of the introduction of documentary video production on student learning in American Civilization III by examining surveys, interviews, and student reflections on the experience of learning in the course. According to the responses of the first cohort (fall 2004), documentary video production expanded and intensified learning by activating students to work critically and originally on historical raw material to create new arguments about the meaning of the American past.

Within the field of Film Studies, historians and theorists long have been interested in questions of spectatorship and audience response. In the psychoanalytically-inflected film theory of the 1970s, scholars sought to understand spectators as textual and ideological effects, focusing on “spectator positions” rather than on actual, historical spectators. In the 1980s and 1990s, film scholars sought to ground spectator theory through archival research into the practices of historical spectators. In my own work on the social meanings of the increasingly graphic violence in American film of the late 1960s and early 1970s, I sought evidence of audience responses and viewers’ attempts to make meaning from complex new representations. In the collection of Sam Peckinpah’s papers at the Margaret Herrick Library, I found response cards distributed by Warner Brothers to audience members at a 1969 preview screening of *The Wild Bunch*. On these cards, individual viewers recorded thoughts in response to the film’s stylized sequences of violence, some recording shock at the slow motion representation of gun violence, others finding pleasure at the aestheticization of the kinetics of violence, still others recognizing in the representation a commentary on the violence of combat in Vietnam, as shaped by the frame of television news. The cards demanded careful analysis and contextualization, their meanings re-created in the encounter between scholar and evidence. Evidence of the processes by which viewers make meanings from film can be found in these cards, and in other sources of information about the activities of film audiences.

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) also seeks to identify and analyze evidence of the processes by which students make meaning in response to the design and pedagogy of a course. Both Film Reception Study and SoTL understand meaning to be social and contextual. As Marxist social semiotician V.N. Volosinov argued in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, readers/viewers/students make meanings rather than receive meanings, often working collaboratively and within

social contexts to produce situated meanings.<sup>3</sup> Like my efforts to understand historical responses to “new” film violence, scholars of teaching and learning must seek evidence of a process that often seems invisible and ephemeral.

In this sense, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is itself a documentary practice. In his study of documentary film, historian Erik Barnouw argued that the documentary seeks “to open our eyes to worlds available to us but, for one reason or another, not perceived.”<sup>4</sup> Just as Eadweard Muybridge’s proto-cinematic experiments sought to slow down the motion of a running horse until the movement of all four legs was distinctly visible, SoTL seeks to document student learning by making visible the processes of learning, through finding, collecting, and analyzing evidence. Evidence of student learning has seemed inaccessible for too long, usually figured only in terms of grades or standardized scores. As in a documentary film, scholars of teaching and learning must seek creative ways to represent the seemingly hidden world of student learning. Since my project in this essay seeks to understand the impact on student learning of the introduction of documentary video production on an American Studies course, I am attempting a meta-documentary project that documents the impact on learning of the documentary practice itself. Just as scholars of film reception pushed beyond the intended, implied, or ideal versions of the spectator in favor of documenting the actual practices of real viewers, scholars of teaching and learning seek to go beyond the fiction of the ideal student, the student who learns just as the professor intended her to learn, to focus upon the actual learning outcomes of real students.

When I first began to re-design American Civilization III around documentary work, following a practice familiar to most teachers, I began by projecting my own idealized students, imagining what I hoped they would learn from the course. However, I was not certain that the students would learn (only) what I had intended them to learn. Hoping in addition to understand the meanings that fell short of, diverged from, or exceeded my intentions, I sought to provide opportunities for students to generate and reflect upon evidence of their own learning. Thus, I not only wanted them to learn about the meaning of American cultural history during the period, but I also wanted to learn about the ways in which they learned from doing documentary video production work on historical topics.

In previous versions, American Civilization III had focused upon the cultural history of the experiences of America through attention to literature, painting, material culture, and historical scholarship. I focused the course’s historical period (1890-1945) to coincide with the invention, development, and expansion of cinema, beginning with the peep show kinoscope and its replacement, the cinematograph, and continuing through the “golden age” of American filmmaking following the Depression through the Second World War.

In 1898, Boleslaw Matuszewski wrote *Une Nouvelle Source de l’Histoire* (A New Source of History), arguing for the importance of the emerging image technologies for recording and reflecting on the past.<sup>5</sup> A cinematograph operator working in Warsaw for the Lumière Brothers, Matuszewski shot

---

3 V. N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

4 Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

5 Boleslaw Matuszewski, *Une nouvelle source de l’histoire* (Paris, 1898) [reprinted in *Nowe Źródło Historii* (Warsaw: Filmowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1955), with an essay by Wladyslaw Banaszkiwicz; translated in *Researcher’s Guide to British Newsreels* 3, ed. James Ballantyne (London: BUFVC, 1993)]



short “actualities,” brief films which recorded events from the historical world. Matuszewski’s insight was that these earliest films would serve as important documents for future historians, constituting an image archive, a visual history of the turn of the century. I sought to convey Matuszewski’s insight through the design of my course: the students would learn to analyze documentaries critically as complex representations of the historical past, and they would work to create their own representations using the visual and aural evidence of the past. I also wanted my students to reflect upon and capture their own learning, generating a new set of “actualities” revealing aspects of the processes of teaching and learning.

Building upon this sense of documentary as new source of history (and historiography), the class viewed period films that sought to represent the historical world, and also viewed contemporary documentaries which reflexively sought to theorize not only the past but the use of media to engage that past. In addition, we read a selection of primary and secondary sources from throughout the period 1890 to 1945.

I decided to structure assignments and evaluation in the course around semester-long group documentary video productions. Using video recording and editing technology available at Georgetown, students groups would pitch, research, script, shoot, edit, and screen ten-minute documentary videos about social historical topics from the period. The students were encouraged to develop their own topics in response to the course material, but they had to pitch these to the class, adjusting topic and approach in response to feedback from both peers and professor.

When I decided to redesign and teach American Civilization III, I sought to introduce changes to the course based upon my understanding of the “signature pedagogies” appropriate to the discipline of American Studies. Matthias Oppermann recently has offered a cautious but provocative formulation of some signature pedagogies in American Studies.<sup>6</sup> From its inception in the American academy, and in its development globally, American Studies has embraced broad interdisciplinary approaches, seeking productive intersections with multiple fields. Oppermann suggests that this openness is a signature feature of the pedagogy and interdisciplinary structure of the field. He also identifies the following signature features of the teaching of American Studies: accountability, agency, collaboration, connectedness, criticism, ownership, problematization, safety, and an interest in constructing “contact zones” for productive conflict and negotiation.<sup>7</sup> In a sense, Oppermann demonstrates that these features are signatures of scholarship as well as pedagogy in the field. His article is positioned at the intersection of American Studies and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. I sought to create my new version of American Civilization III in a version of this contact zone, adding Film Studies as a third productive vector.

My initial goal with the redesign was to add collaborative documentary video production as a means of activating student learning of American cultural and social history. I wanted students to work together, researching primary history sources, collecting original oral histories, shooting new footage, finding and collecting still and moving images produced in the past, in an effort to work productively on the raw material of the historical past. As I imagined the potential benefits of my redesign, I identified

---

6 Matthias Oppermann, “Does American Studies have Signature Pedagogies? Towards a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning from within the Disciplines,” in *Transcultural Visions of Identities in Images and Texts*, ed. Wilfried Rausert and Reinhard Isensee (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2008), 1.

7 Oppermann, 3.

many of the same features as those identified by Oppermann in his paper. I wanted my students to collaborate on critically-engaged sophisticated interpretations of the meanings of the American past using digital technology to author original multimedia products. I was aided in achieving these goals by the willingness of the American Studies Program at Georgetown to embrace new pedagogical approaches.

### Documentary Video Production

While the use of documentary video production is unusual in the American Studies classroom, documentary as a mode of film (and video) production has a history stretching back to the origins of film in the 1890s. Multiple models exist within the mode of documentary, with different genres of documentary representing different potential approaches. Film Studies has focused scholarly attention on the documentary modes since its inception as a discipline in the 1960s. Thus, in addition to a varied and dynamic body of examples, documentary also offers an historical and theoretical literature to situate and contextualize its approaches.

Documentary video production as pedagogy offers a critical, productive relation to history. In documentary video production, students must engage in traditional means of historical research, but with new ends. For example, in documentary video production, students work with primary sources, both archival material and oral histories, but they approach these materials seeking to understand their value as visual or aural evidence to support or challenge existing histories. In producing documentary videos, students are constrained by the challenges of availability and access to evidence, challenges familiar to more traditional historians.

I asked students to forgo the temptation to provide voice-over narration. Instead, I challenged them to build upon the techniques of oral history collection, to build their audio tracks using multiple voices, speaking from different positions offering different perspectives on the historical past, perspectives that called for interpretation and negotiation. By constructing their audio tracks out of multiple voices, sounds, and music, my students were able to engage the broader world, a world not only of self but of others. Just as documentary production demands a balance between individual and group contributions, documentary as a mode of history demands attention to social as well as subjective truths.

Documentary video uses the principle of cinematic montage to construct visual argument. As articulated by Russian filmmaker theorists like Eisenstein and Vertov, and further developed by theorist videomakers working in the contemporary intersections between media and scholarship, the cinematic montage constructs meaning from visual and aural repetition and difference, generating rhythms and dissonance, point and counter-point, on visual and aural levels. For example, in the student film, *Howard Theater: The Theater for the People* (Davis, Gerli, House, and Smith), the editor intercuts two interviews, one with an academic historian of leisure practices and the other with a local amateur historian and tour guide. By moving between the words and images of these two figures, the film is able to create a dialogue between academic and social history, between "expert" and local meaning. Without any voice-over, editors employing cinematic montage can construct visual arguments, arguments engaging complex questions on multiple levels and inviting audience access and negotiation in multiple ways. The possibilities of visual argumentation have a long history in critical cinematic practice. Documentary video production requires students to learn about and to engage this history of critical production practice.

### The Course and the Documentary Projects

Over five semesters, I have developed some important scaffolds for student learning via documentary work. I have learned over time to assign students into four-person production teams. In order to constitute groups, I typically invite students to indicate several primary and secondary thematic and critical interests in American cultural history during the period, and then create groups according



to the self-reported interests. For this pedagogy to work, students need to have both shared and individual responsibilities. Once the groups are established, I outline the individual and group responsibilities for production. Each group member has a primary role in production, either as writer, director of videography, editor, or producer. Writers and producers are primarily responsible for organizing the group's brainstorming and pitch-development process. The writer is responsible for crafting the pitch, to be delivered by the producer to the class, which provides feedback. The writer is primarily responsible for organizing research, but each group member must make a distinct contribution. Writers create the treatments (narrative proposals of the film concepts) and editing scripts. The director and producer are responsible for building a shooting schedule from the shooting script. The director is in charge of shooting original footage and for collecting existing footage. The whole group typically goes into the field to shoot interviews and location footage, and the whole group joins together to log and capture the footage. The editor works with the producer from the editing script to construct the documentary from the footage and collected sound. The editor produces the rough cut, and responds to feedback from the class and professor. Each student writes a final ten-page reflection paper analyzing the group's documentary, connecting their creative work back to the methods and models introduced in the course. In these ways, I create a structure through which students can learn as they work together to produce a short documentary.

During the fall 2004 semester, my students produced four short documentary videos. Following my guidelines, each film engaged larger themes in the cultural history of the period from within local frames and contexts. Each group successfully conceived and produced a meaningful documentary project. While the focus was on the opportunities for learning enabled by documentary video production in an American Studies context, the products themselves were accomplished and successful.

### Evidence of Student Learning

In addition to designing the assignment to promote effective collaboration and engagement in the project, I also sought to design opportunities for the students to record and reflect on their learning. Inspired by colleagues in the Visible Knowledge Project and by work in SoTL, I asked the students to reflect in writing on their roles in the production process and on the relations between their work and their learning in the course. I worked with colleagues in Georgetown's Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship (CNDLS) to design an online survey to be taken by students at the completion of the course. Unlike campus-wide course assessment tools, the online survey was designed to solicit evidence of student learning in response to the introduction of documentary video production to the course. Finally, after completion of the course, I invited members of the class to present their documentaries to various audiences, including University Board Members and faculty and professionals from the greater Washington area. These sessions were videotaped, as were individual interviews with members of the class, generating additional sources of evidence of student learning.

As noted, I designed the course with hopes and expectations for student learning. I had hoped that student learning about America's cultural past and about techniques for engaging that past critically would be fueled by opportunity (and responsibility) for creating an audio-visual product for public presentation. I was surprised and encouraged by the findings suggested by the initial evidence of student learning.

In the survey, I asked the students to report on critical skills developed during the course. This question was adapted from a list of course learning objectives distributed to students at the beginning of the course. After completing the course, ninety-three percent of students described themselves as capable or very capable of taking apart and reconstituting cultural narratives via analysis and creative production, with fifty percent of the class indicating strong confidence in these new abilities by choosing "very capable." I had hoped that students would learn to use digital tools to take apart and analyze cultural narratives, and this evidence suggests that students learned the requisite skills and the methods guiding their use. Moreover, this data suggests that video production offers a

powerful education in cultural analysis, including the ability to de- and re-construct texts. In addition, eighty-three percent of students felt capable or very capable of developing critical attitudes toward representations of the historical past (thirty-six percent felt "very capable"). I had added the production components in hopes that students would learn to analyze visual media more incisively, and these responses suggest a significant benefit for visual analysis and visual literacy from production work. Finally, seventy-eight percent indicated that they were capable or very capable of exploring key historical themes from multiple perspectives after taking the course. In this case, the most significant number of students (fifty-seven percent) indicated feeling "capable" rather than "very capable" at exploring themes from multiple perspectives. From this and other evidence, I understand more work to be necessary in connecting the very productive documentary video work to the more traditional approaches and practices of American Studies.

In response to another question measuring changes in student proclivities, fifty-seven percent indicated that they were much more likely after the course to use primary documents to gain access to the "raw material" of history (another twenty-one percent indicated that they were somewhat more likely). These data suggest that documentary production provides students with important opportunities to learn to work with primary sources, an important goal of American Studies pedagogy. Students reported feeling both able and inclined to continue to approach history through primary sources. Fifty-four percent suggested that they were much more likely to question definitions of "American-ness" over the period (with thirty-one percent indicating that they were somewhat more likely to question definitions). This learning is no doubt connected to prior student learning in American Civilization I and II, the previous courses in the sequence. Since the course introduced video production as a process for doing American Studies work, not as an end unto itself, it is perhaps not surprising that only some members of the course left feeling much more likely to think about constructing history using the video production methods employed in class (pitch, concept, storyboard, shooting, editing, etc.): twenty-one percent indicated "much more likely," with another twenty-one percent indicating "somewhat more likely," and fifty percent indicating their likelihood to be "about the same." It is interesting to note that the three students who indicated great interest in using the production methods learned in the course have begun to consider proposing a documentary video as a senior thesis project, in place of a traditional written thesis.

In addition to the statistical evidence collected in the survey, students provided qualitative reflections on their learning in the course through presentations, interviews, and reflection papers. Through these channels, student indicated evidence of distinct learning benefits from the addition of documentary video production, some anticipated, others surprising. The students indicated that the pedagogy presented some significant challenges—but ultimately significant benefits—for learning. Some students felt considerable unease, even fear, at the unusual nature of the key assignments. In general, Georgetown undergraduates are risk-averse, perhaps typical of high-achieving students at an expensive and elite private university. Students in the American Studies Program are relatively more open to risk, having chosen an interdisciplinary program over a traditional discipline, and having accepted the responsibility for designing and carrying out a significant senior thesis project. Thus, American Studies provided a relatively welcoming context for the new pedagogy of documentary production.

In addition to apprehension, students also were concerned about the exacting nature of the work and the time commitment required to collaborate on a documentary video. Melissa Jara, a junior from Southern California, voiced this concern in a presentation: "The documentaries were a very tedious project. They took the whole semester. We did it bit by bit" (Jara). As with evidence of audience response to film, student reflection on learning requires analysis. Within the honest complaint voiced by Melissa, and seconded by another student, Caitlin Davis, were suggestions of the value for learning of this type of work. Within the humanities, particularly in the study of culture, faculty constantly seek a pedagogy that will enable/require students to slow down their engagement with the text, to analyze closely and with precision. While demanding and time-consuming, the sort of

close attention and expanded duration necessitated by non-linear digital editing of video enabled students to experience the close attention to detail and relation to meaning sought by faculty. While this work is difficult, time-consuming, and can be frustrating, there was overall a transcendent sense of student satisfaction and ownership of the products of their intellectual work. For Melissa and others, the difficulty of the work increased the ultimate sense of accomplishment and investment:

*When we were working on it, I was like, 'I hate this project. It was taking forever, taking so much time away from my other classes. But in the end it was like, I made a documentary! Now I have a digital class where I edited another film by myself.*

Melissa worked through her frustration to a feeling of accomplishment, and she carried this learning forward into her next semester and into another course. According to Oppermann, American Studies has offered students pedagogical opportunities to feel ownership of their work.<sup>8</sup> From analysis of student reflection, I have found documentary production pedagogy to enable strong student investment in their learning and its products.

According to several students, the learning outcome of ownership was related not only to effort (difficulty overcome), but also to other learning values of documentary production: collaboration and shareability. As with the culture of complaint, the social benefits of collaboration seem significant for learning. Multiple students reported learning more from the course due to their close collaboration with classmates during documentary production. Katie Kaiser, a junior from Vermont, reflected at length on the value of collaboration for her learning.

*I worked with three other women from my class and for four months we talked endlessly about this project . . . We argued over every image that is in the ten minutes of footage. Their contributions to my experience were immeasurable, because they each brought three different backgrounds, three different ways of interpreting the footage we were shooting, the interactions with Mrs. Dixon, the history we were studying.*

Katie learned not only from me and my course design, but also from the ways in which documentary production enabled her to learn from her peers. Katie argued that the focus on shared learning distinguishes documentary video production from research paper writing and other more traditional approaches:

*For me, writing is a very isolated process. The ideas are collaborative, but the process itself is not. Whereas, in this project, both the ideas and the projects were collaborative.*

Documentary production as pedagogy provides opportunities for sharing ideas, for confronting and negotiating understandings that produce significant gains in insight and sophistication of argument.

Moreover, because of the shared effort, common learning, and deep investment in their projects, the students want to share their work with others, inside and outside of the class. In American Civilization III, students regularly shared aspects of their work in class, receiving feedback from

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

professor and peers. To a greater degree than I anticipated, however, students shared their work in progress with people outside of the class. Caitlin Davis, a junior from Northern California, reflected on how sharing her work with family and friends increased her learning:

*For me the most significant thing was that this was something I was able to show my friends, show my family, and have them understand what I was learning in my course. I've never come home before and been really excited and shown my parents a paper and said, you should read this. My parents have never seen me so excited by something I've done at school before . . . I would come home and show them different cuts I had done, different edits, where I was in the process . . . It is really exciting to be able to show people what you are learning in a way they can understand. You don't have to know all the textbooks in the class to understand this, we give you the full context.*

Through sharing her work, Caitlin was able to make her learning process visible to herself and others. She extended her learning beyond the classroom, beyond the campus, to reach into her parents' home back in California. Moreover, by demonstrating and discussing her work with others, Caitlin's learning deepened, becoming more reflective and reflexive. Each time she would show her work, she taught others about her group's ideas and learning.

In order to expand this signature value of shareability, I created opportunities for the students to screen and discuss their work. After holding in-class screenings and discussion of the final cut of each documentary, we arranged for a public screening. The students invited peers, faculty, and parents to the special screening. Each group introduced their documentary. Importantly, some groups invited participants in their documentaries to attend the screening, enabling conversation about their choices in filming and editing and allowing them to share their products with the community members. After the public screening, the Georgetown Library agreed to catalog copies of the documentaries in the collection of the Gelardin Media Center. The students work is now viewable by anyone with access to the Library's collections. Students took special satisfaction from being listed in GEORGE, the Library's search engine, as authors of their media projects. This designation became a point of pride, cementing their sense of accomplishment.

Over the years, I have found it to be very important to arrange for public moments of presentation and accountability. For example, in March 2005, I arranged for two of the student editors to discuss their work with the College Board of Advisors during a presentation on learning and technology in the Media Center. Sitting in the editing suites where they had spent so much time the previous semester, Melissa and Caitlin discussed the work and learning of their groups (in the process generating much of the evidence cited in this section). Later in the spring, Katie appeared with me before the spring meeting of the DC Area Technology & Humanities Forum. Before an audience of scholars, graduate students, administrators, and representatives of cultural institutions and technology groups, Katie screened *Nor That Nor This Contains Me* and discussed her learning through documentary production. In both cases, the students served as professional representatives of their collaborative projects, publicly presenting their work. In both cases, question-and-answer sessions forced the students to think and reflect upon their experiences. The shareability of documentary video enables an expansion of learning beyond the semester, outside of the traditional spaces and boundaries of teaching and learning.

Finally, the evidence of student learning confirmed the appropriateness of documentary video as pedagogy with special value for American Studies. Katie understood the new approaches to be closely connected to the methods and approaches central to the discipline:

*This approach was particularly pertinent to an American Studies class because that is what we do as a discipline. We are interdisciplinary. We draw information from English, from History, from Government, from Theology, from Philosophy. And so the use of different forms, media of knowledge was an interesting parallel to what we do on a scholarly level.*

Echoing Oppermann's argument about the signature pedagogies of American Studies, Katie connects the details of the documentary production assignment back to the broadest methodological questions of the field. In her final producer's paper, analyzing choices involved in producing The Howard Theatre project, Kate House, a junior from Virginia, explicitly linked the pedagogy of documentary production to the central concerns of American Studies as a discipline. She begins by acknowledging frustration, before analyzing the meaning of the difficulty faced by her group during the research phase.

*Researching the Howard proved frustrating at best, but the continued frustration at perpetually meeting dead ends and coming up empty handed served to pique our curiosity further. We kept hoping to land a "jackpot" of information about the Howard, a "treasure chest" containing a plethora of photos, footage, and interviews; our failure to hit an informational "jackpot," however, was indicative of the Howard's absence from our cultural memory . . . As noted in Amy Gerber's Public Memory, however, what is forgotten is every bit as important as what is remembered thus, we went back to the drawing board and took an approach more suited to the American Studies ideology of finding an "intimate communion with the actual past" and conducted our "research" in the Howard's neighborhood. We found such an "intimate communion" while on a YMCA-led tour of historic U-Street when we happened upon John C. Snipes, the unofficial mayor of U-Street. A lifetime U-street resident, Snipes provided first-hand accounts of his experiences at the Howard as well as its symbolism for D.C.'s African-American community; we listened in as Snipes, in his informal yet insightful commentary, "reclaimed" the Howard's history of his youth, providing us with "an intimate communion" with the Howard not found in a library. In keeping with the idea of approaching the Howard by immersing ourselves in its culture, we ate meals at Ben's Chili Bowl where pictures of performances at the Howard adorn the walls, and we read articles from the Washington Bee, D.C.'s black newspaper from 1882 to 1922 that contained heavy coverage of the Howard. In piecing together our various bits of research and local accounts of a history that spans nearly one hundred years, we essentially followed the methodology set forth in Vernon Louis Parrington's Currents in American Thought, for we were several minds "grappling with materials of American experience, and driven by concentrated fury to create order from them."<sup>9</sup>*

I include this extensive quote because it provides in a student's voice the argument that documentary video production serves as a signature pedagogy for the American Studies classroom, enabling students to work intensively and collaboratively with the raw, primary materials of history, forging not only a specific product, the documentary video, but also gaining deep insight into the intellectual insights of several fields of knowledge. Through producing their own documentary video, these students engaged in the intellectual work of American Studies and Film Studies. Rather than nibbling around the edges of history, they immersed themselves in the contested, conflictual, frustrating, and fruitful work of producing audiovisual historical argument.

---

<sup>9</sup> Gene Wise, "Paradigm Dramas in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement," *American Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1979): 294, 300.

In the Web 2.0 environment, more and more users generate audiovisual “content.” Over five years of teaching and studying student learning in American Civilization III: Documentary, I have learned that students can generate unique historical arguments within specific pedagogical contexts, producing critique rather than simply content. My students have generated, researched, and shaped ideas within contexts. They have shot interviews and footage. They have combined sound, voice, image, graphics, and found materials into structures of meaning. I have been able to begin to document the processes by which students learn from creating documentaries, revealing the work that was hidden by Coppola’s construction and is obscured in the flood of user generated content in Web 2.0. Just as a filmmaker structures his film with intended meaning, only to be surprised by the new meanings forged by actual audience in response to his work, I am surprised by the learning evidenced by my students during and after my course American Civilization III. I understand this evidence of student learning to make visible processes of learning deeper and more complex than I could have imagined or designed. For this reason, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning provides vital perspectives for scholars in the fields of Film Studies and American Studies, scholars who hope to learn from their students’ learning.

## Appendix 1: Student Documentaries By Semester

### American Civilization III: Documentary--Fall 2008

*A Notable, Logical Design*

Patrick Lenihan, Producer

Will Carey, Writer

Carlee Briglia, Director

Katie Jones, Editor

*The Most Important Color in Baseball*

Johanna Barron, Producer

James Grant, Writer

Melinda Ku, Director

Kate Mays, Editor

*A Voice for My People*

Molly Scalise, Producer

Matthew Sheptuck, Writer

Christina Cauterucci, Director

Daniel Back, Editor

*Theater Dreams*

Sam Dippo, Producer

Natalie Murchison, Writer and Director

Margaret Schropp, Editor

*The Bonus Army: In the Shadow of the Nation’s Capitol*

Kate Noel, Producer

Doug Hance, Writer

Kathleen Berggren, Director

William Handke, Editor



**American Civilization III: Documentary--Fall 2007**

*The Saturday Nighters*

Sean McNamara, Producer

Ryan Zhang, Writer

Claudia Gilmore, Director

Meredith Ponder, Editor

*Duncan Phillips: The Power to See Beautifully*

Jim Wade, Producer

Justin Young, Director

Maureen Dolan-Galaviz, Editor

**American Civilization III: Documentary – Fall 2006**

*The Men of Prince Hall Masonry*

John Lupton, Producer

Sheila Grant, Writer

Will Martinez, Director

Nick Berry, Editor

*Chinatown, DC: A Tradition of Change*

Erica Imbimbo, Producer

Dan Mita, Writer

Phil Perry, Director

Mike Hill, Editor

*Eastern Market: The Capital of Capital Hill*

Jen Foldvary, Producer

Deirdre McShea, Writer

Greg Goldberg, Director

Darren Alberti, Editor

**American Civilization III: Fall 2005**

*The Brewmaster's Bride*

Jamie Thalgott, Producer

Seth Lavin, Writer

Jordan Manekin, Director

Alison Noelker, Sound Editor

Katie Jorgenson, Editor

*The Slippers*

Mariel Manzone, Producer

Tessa Moran, Writer

Lynn Van Alstine, Director

Marcel Arsenault, Editor

*Legacy of a Landmark: The Mayflower Hotel*

Meg Benner, Producer

Jenna Borgia, Writer

Cal Watson, Director

Scott Goldstein, Sound Editor

Thomas Schmitz, Editor

*A Georgetown Streetcar Named Nostalgia*

Molly Creeden, Producer  
Noreen Malone, Writer  
Sterling Seery, Director  
Sarah Walk, Editor

*A Forgotten Dynasty: Remembering the Homestead Grays*

Dan Long, Editor  
Christine FitzSimons, Writer  
Sarah Isbitz, Director  
James Viano, Editor

**American Civilization III: Fall 2004**

*Howard Theatre: The Theater for the People*

Kate House, Producer  
Sarah Smith, Writer  
Charles Gerli, Director of Photography  
Caitlin Davis, Editor

*World War II Remembered*

Nick Timiraos, Producer  
Sally Licandro, Writer  
Phil Mause, Director of Photography  
Tony Danielak, Editor

*Nor This Nor That Contains Me*

Katie Kaiser, Producer  
Liz Nelson, Writer  
Erin Zacuto, Director of Photography  
Jackie Mosher, Editor

*Uneven Fairways: The Legacy of Langston Golf Course*

Meghan O'Neil, Producer  
Liam Hardy, Writer  
Mary Liz Casey, DP  
Melissa Jara, Editor

*Howard Theatre: The Theater for the People* (2004) explored the legacies of the Howard Theatre, an important venue for jazz, blues, and rhythm and blues performance during the 1930s through the early 1960s. Located in the Shaw neighborhood of the District of Columbia, The Howard was owned by whites, but staffed and patronized by African Americans, and featured performances by Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Billy Eckstein, and others. In 2004, The Howard is dark, boarded up and unused. The student documentary sought to understand The Howard's place in the cultural history of the District, especially the relations between the theater's clientele and the effort to preserve its history.

*Not This Nor That Contains Me* (2004) explored racial identity in the aftermath of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, focusing upon the slippage of racial categories during this era. The group centered the story of Alyce Dixon, a long-time District resident in her 90s, who had been born an African American woman, but who successfully passed as white after vitiligo blanched her skin. The group connected Dixon's narrative to two other women: actress Fredi Washington and Vassar graduate

April Hennings. The documentary skillfully combined original interviews with voice-readings of archival material by student actors, creating a dynamic, multiply voiced argument about the ambiguities of racial identity during the first half of the twentieth century.

*Uneven Fairways: The Langston Legacy Golf Course* (2004) focused upon the history and significance of the Langston Legacy golf course, the first course in the District allowing play by African American golfers. The documentary explored the history of African American interest in golf, acknowledging the importance of the recent success of contemporary professionals like Tiger Woods, but also recovering a longer, more complex history of African American involvement in the game. The film combined footage of Tiger Woods' historic victory at the 1997 Masters Tournament with a voice-over by the current head pro at Langston, who indicated both the personal and social significance of Woods' win. Elsewhere, the group combined archival still photographs from the 1930s of African American boys serving as caddies with interviews with two of the older regular players at Langston, suggesting that caddying offered African American youth access to the sport despite the economic and political factors restricting play by many non-whites.

*WWII Remembered* (2004) questioned the ways in which the Second World War recently has been remembered, examining cinematic representations, including *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), public monuments like the World War II Memorial on the National Mall, and popular non-fiction such as Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*. The documentary sought to understand how these different cultural texts sought to explain and interpret the significance of memory of the war to the present. The group filmed an interview with a WWII veteran, using his voice as counter-point and corrective to the commercial efforts to recast the war's meanings.