Fall 2016

Podcasting as Pedagogy

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Recommended Citation

CHAPTER 5[*]

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Introduction

The podcast has become a pervasive mode of cultural knowledge production—at turns a public radio echo chamber, an alternative to old-fashioned reading, and a trendy vehicle for commentary, comedy, and news. While podcasting is not typically a medium associated with literacy, a podcast assignment presents an opportunity for instruction librarians to harness students' interest in media production and embed critical digital and information literacy skills in their classrooms. Through podcasting, students actively engage in public cultural dialogues, create and share unique digital artifacts, leverage their previous experiences as "content consumers and producers," and apply knowledge and skills they've learned in the classroom.[1]

  This podcasting activity was designed for LIB 1201: Research and Documentation for the Information Age, an undergraduate three-credit library course at the New York City College of Technology, an urban STEM college that offers applied professional and technical associate's and bachelor's degrees. The course is one of several Flexible Common Core humanities and social sciences courses, and as such, LIB 1201 has a curriculum that emphasizes information literacy as integral to individual liberty, civic engagement, and social change.[2] By design, LIB 1201 incorporates "collaborative publishing and social media tools" in order to expose students to technology that they might use in upper-level courses and to encourage students to critically reflect on the sociopolitical and ethical dimensions of their own information-seeking and knowledge production habits.[3] This podcasting activity is a multiliteracy assignment in the sense that students are required to engage with a range of rhetorical and

material genres while collaboratively researching, writing, and producing their podcasts. Through an emphasis on the contextual and dialogic dimensions of information and the knowledge production process, this assignment promotes a constructivist or Freireian problem-based orientation towards learning by bringing "learners' prior knowledge to the forefront"[4] and by "helping to shift the focus from knowledge transmission to knowledge creation."[5]

This activity was introduced to LIB 1201 students early in the semester and was framed as a collective experiment. Because podcasting entails collaborative work, topic development, and informal research and writing, the assignment served to foreground a formal research paper and a group prototyping project. Before podcasting, I introduced students in LIB 1201 to a variety of podcasts and videocasts including a recording of a Brookings Institute panel on social media and governance, a TED Talk by Lawrence Lessig on the sharing economy, and an *On the Media* audio report on First Amendment rights and blogging.[6] As a class we explicitly addressed how different dialogic models are deployed in media and how students might structure their own podcasts to achieve different rhetorical effects. Students generated podcast topics in groups and were encouraged to draw from a course unit on Current Issues in Information and Media (see appendix 5A), which covers a range of topics including *Wikipedia* culture and feminism, social media policies in the workplace, copyright and music sampling, and governmental surveillance.

Instructors implementing this activity should allot two to three classroom hours with the expectation that students will complete much of the planning, research, writing, and reflection outside of class. Collaboration outside of class can be facilitated by any virtual platform that can accommodate resource sharing and discussion. In LIB 1201, which meets twice a week for one-and-one-half hours, I devoted one entire class to audio production and editing and spent forty-five minutes setting up the assignment in the previous class period. This gave students time in between class meetings to conduct research independently, develop a script, find an image to incorporate, and determine what Creative Commons license they wanted to use for their finished podcast. After completing and sharing their podcasts, students were required to listen and respond to classmates' recordings on a course blog for homework.

Learning Outcomes

- Identify and critique how course topics are represented in public discourse and relate to your own life experiences

- Generate podcast topics and think about how to rhetorically present your ideas in a podcast format
- Produce a script and incorporate examples and viewpoints from assigned readings and independent research
- Use audio recording and editing software
- Produce artifacts that exemplify an understanding of intellectual property rights and Creative Commons licensing
- Critique knowledge production experiences and critically engage with classmates' podcasts

Materials

- Computers with Internet access and audio playback capacity
- Audio recording headset and microphone, or smartphone (in a pinch)
- Lightweight audio recording and editing platform (e.g., Audacity)
- Audio hosting and sharing platform, ideally with native capacity to add metadata and a Creative Commons license (e.g., SoundCloud or Internet Archive)—one shared account can be set up by the instructor and used by a whole class.
- Learning management system (LMS), blog, Google Doc, wiki, or other platform to accommodate digital collaboration and student reflection

Preparation

- Create a customized activity prompt that contextualizes the activity in relation to course topics and articulates expectations and evaluative criteria (see appendix 5B).
- Develop a handout with step-by-step instructions for recording, editing, describing, exporting, posting, and disseminating podcasts (see appendix 5C).
- Create slides for a brief technical demo that introduces platform interfaces and login information necessary for recording, editing, and sharing podcasts; basics of recording, editing, and file-exporting processes; file-naming schemas, Creative Commons license designation, and metadata fields for finished podcasts.

Session Instructions

Planning and Prewriting (in Class)

1. Invite students to participate in a brief free-association exercise* to generate possible topics for podcasts using class readings, previous discussions, and podcast examples as a starting point.
2. Distribute and review the activity prompt.
3. Based on the prompt and free-association exercise, have students independently write down one idea for the content and one idea for the format of their podcast.
4. Put students in groups of four or five, and have them compare notes.
5. Introduce students to editing and recording software; provide login instructions as appropriate.

Research and Script Development (Homework)

1. Students individually
   a. Review Creative Commons license types
   b. Find one library or Web resource related to their topic
   c. Use Creative Commons image search and find a reusable image
   d. Review recording software and create a login if required
2. Students collectively
   a. Share and discuss library and Web resources and images
   b. Develop a podcast script incorporating selected resources

Technical Production (in Class)

1. Distribute step-by-step instruction sheet for student use during recording session.
2. Conduct a brief software demo with visuals that covers recording and editing basics, audio file formats and exporting, uploading and embedding, and required metadata fields (level of metadata standardization is up to instructor discretion).
3. Students reconvene in groups to record podcasts while instructor offers technical support.
4. Students edit and save podcasts to designated storage area.

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* Free association is a creative problem-solving or brainstorming technique with origins in cognitive psychology. An instructor facilitating a free-association exercise will usually contextualize the goals of the activity and then have students share words or ideas in an unmitigated forum. The process is generative and typically builds to the articulation of ideas that are derived from multiple associations and points of view.

5. Students upload podcast to hosting platform and add metadata, images, and designate Creative Commons licenses.

Reflection (Homework)

1. Students make any final edits, publish, and share podcasts with class (on LMS, blog, Google Doc, wiki, or other platform).
2. Students listen to a classmate's podcast and respond in a brief blog post.

Assessment

Students were given a pass/fail homework grade for participating in each of the four stages of this activity. Since the activity was introduced as an experiment and students were encouraged to play with new technology throughout the podcasting process, they were evaluated based on their level of participation rather than on the technical quality of their finished podcasts. I assessed student learning based on the content of written reflections and by soliciting informal feedback in class discussions about the podcasting process and their reactions to classmates' podcasts.

In the context of LIB 1201, this activity served as a scaffold and prepared students for a multistage research project in which they were required to independently choose a topic, conduct research, critically engage with scholarship, and adopt rhetorical and formal conventions of scholarly writing. This podcasting activity could be turned into a graded research assignment and a rubric could be implemented to assess the quality of student research and writing, technical fulfillment of the activity, students' capacity to correctly cite sources and attribute images, and student selection of appropriate keywords and Creative Commons licenses. Instructors who opt to formalize the activity might choose to have students conduct more research prior to podcasting and should edit the assignment prompt to include a rubric.

Reflections

While some students were initially intimidated by the prospect of using unfamiliar technology, framing the activity as a collaborative experiment helped alleviate student anxieties. As a class, we openly discussed learning objectives and parallels between the podcasting project and our capstone research assignment. While it is difficult to measure whether or not the podcast project helped prepare students to write a formal research paper, students benefited from the opportunity to think about topic development and resource integration processes and to explicitly discuss genre conventions with their peers.

Podcasting is complex but not complicated, and most of the challenges this activity presents are logistical and can be mitigated with some planning. A version of this activity could be adopted in any educational setting where students are expected to think critically about intersections of public identity, social media and technology, and systems for information production and dissemination. Because it is a flexible activity that "provide[s] opportunity for reflection, self-paced and independent learning," the disciplinary parameters, length, and research requirements can easily be modified for use in educational contexts ranging from a middle-school English course to a graduate political science seminar.[7] Librarians who don't teach credit courses can adapt this activity for implementation in a workshop or can partner with teaching faculty who are interested in integrating information literacy or media production into their curriculum but may not have the expertise or technological proficiency to do so. A version of this assignment could also be done with teaching faculty in a train-the-trainer workshop or at a preconference working session.

Final Question

How might podcasting and associated conversations about the dialogic and contextual nature of media sources help inexperienced students understand conventions of scholarship in ways that will help them become better researchers and writers?

Appendix 5A: LIB1201 Course Syllabus

New York City College of Technology
Library Department
LIB 1201—Research & Documentation for the Information Age
3 hours, 3 credits
Prerequisite: ENG 1101

Course Description

In this course we will explore issues in research and documentation for text, images, and multimedia. You will investigate where information comes from and how it is organized. We will examine the ethics of information use and determine how to critically evaluate sources. Throughout the course, we will create and present research and documentation projects using traditional and emerging media.

Learning Outcomes

For the successful completion of this course, you should be able to:
- Describe the ways that information is produced and organized in a variety of formats.
- Create and articulate a relevant, manageable research topic for assignments.
- Successfully search for and acquire appropriate information about your research topic in a variety of media and formats.
- Critically evaluate and select information sources for your assignments and projects.
- Use information ethically and responsibly with an awareness of copyright and fair use.
- Synthesize information on a topic from a variety of sources and present your analysis in writing and orally.
- Collaborate with a group to build a prototype of an online resource and document the process.
- Apply documentation methods and citation styles appropriately in your own work.

Course Methodology

This course is a writing- and research-intensive seminar and will be structured as a guided discussion.

Required Materials

Badke, W. B. (2014). *Research strategies: Finding your way through the information fog*. New York: iUniverse, Inc. (ISBN 9781491722336)

Additional required materials to read or watch are indicated in the course schedule below. Reliable access to the Internet and to a computer with word processing software are essential for successful completion course assignments.

Assignments

Citizenship **15%**: Citizenship is something like participation but entails a bit more; it means being a good student: arriving to class on time and prepared; participating in large- and small-group discussions actively, attentively, and effectively; refraining from distracting or negative behavior in class; and consistently engaging and investing in the work of the course and in your own development as a researcher, writer, and thinker.

Blog Contributions **20%**: Short blog posts related to the assigned reading are required throughout the course. These written responses will be used as the starting point for in-class discussion. You can find writing prompts and deadlines on the course schedule.

Research Project **40%**: The research project is comprised of a Topic Proposal 5%, Process Presentation 5%, Annotated Bibliography 10%, and Research Paper 20%. Details and guidelines for each component of the assignment will be posted on the course website and discussed in class.

Prototyping Project **15%**: In small groups assigned by the professor, students will build a prototype of an online resource and collaboratively document their process.

Group Presentation **10%:** Each student group will give a 10–15 minute class presentation on a completed prototyping project.

Required Readings and Viewings

THE INFORMATION LANDSCAPE: MEDIA AND PRODUCTION

Eland, Thomas. "Critical Thinking, Deviant Knowledge and the Alternative Press." Minnesota Association for Continuing Adult Education Update Newsletter (2004): 4–6. 2004. Web.

Freedman, Jenna. "About Zines." *zines.barnard.edu*. Barnard Zine Library, 2005. Web.

Jabr, Ferris. "The Reading Brain in the Digital Age: The Science of Paper versus Screens." *scientificamerican.com.* Scientific American, 11 Apr 2013. Web.

Manjoo, Farhad. "Podcasting Blossoms, but in Slow Motion." *New York Times Online,* 17 Jun 2015. Web.

Mirk, Sarah. "An Epic Feminist Edit-a-Thon Takes Aim at Wikipedia's Gender Gap." Bitch-magazine.*org.* Bitch Media, 24 Jan 2014. Web.

Mod, Craig. "Post Artifact Books and Publishing." *CraigMod.com*, 2011. Web.

"Papyrus to Pixels." *economist.com.* The Economist Essay, 11 Oct 2014. Web.

Postrel, Virginia. "Who Killed Wikipedia?" *psmag.com.* Pacific Standard, 17 Nov 2014. Web.

Sullivan, Andrew. "Why I blog." *TheAtlantic.com.* The Atlantic, 1 Nov 2008. Web.

"Why Does Wikipedia Work?" *TED Radio Hour.* NPR and TED, 12 Jul 2013. Web.

CURRENT ISSUES IN INFORMATION AND MEDIA

"Bloggers Rights." *EFF.org.* Electronic Frontier Foundation, n.d. Web.

Cavoukian, Ann, and Dan Kruger. Freedom and Control: Engineering a New Paradigm for the Digital World. Privacy by Design, 2014. Web.

"Fan Fiction and the Law." *On the Media Podcast.* WNYC, 8 Mar 2013. Web.

"A Blogger's First Amendment Rights and Responsibilities." *On the Media Podcast.* WNYC, 24 Jan 2014. Web.

Grey, C.G.P. "Copyright: Forever Less One Day." 2011. Film.

"How Social Media Is Changing Government and Governance Around the World." *Brookings Institute Podcast.* Brookings Institute Office of Communications, 25 Nov 2013. Web.

"Larry Lessig: Laws That Choke Creativity." *TED.com.* TED Talks, 2007. Film.

Newman, Abraham L. "What the 'Right to Be Forgotten' Means for Privacy in a Digital Age." Science, 347.6221 (2015): 507–508.

Slater, Derek. "Illegal Art." News. *creativecommons.org.* Creative Commons, 2005. Web.

Seaman, Andrew. "Learning from Gawker's Attempt to Erase the Past." Code Words: The SPJ Ethics Committee Blog. Society of Professional Journalists, 20 Jul 2015.

"Timeline of NSA Domestic Spying." *EFF.org.* Electronic Frontier Foundation, n.d. Web.

"Timeline: Privacy and the Law." NPR Special Series. National Public Radio, 28 Oct 2009. Web.

United States. General Services Administration. "GSA Social Media Policy." *gsa.gov*, 17 Jul 2009. Web.

HOW INFORMATION AND MEDIA ARE ORGANIZED

"APA Formatting and Style Guide." *owl.english.purdue.edu.* Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL), 2009. Web.

Cohen, Joshua. "Letter of Recommendation: Alternative Search Engines." *New York Times Online*, 25 June 2015. Web.

Dye, Jessica. "Folksonomy: A Game of High-Tech (and High-Stakes) Tag." EContent, 29.3, (2006): 38–43. Web.

"MLA Formatting and Style Guide." *owl.english.purdue.edu.* Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL), 2009. Web.

Pariser, Eli. "Introduction." The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You. New York: Penguin Press, 2011. 1–20. Print.

Shirky, Clay. "Ontology Is Overrated: Categories, Links, and Tags." *shirky.com*, 2005. Web.

Weinberger, David. "Building the New Infrastructure of Knowledge." Too Big to Know: Rethinking Knowledge Now That the Facts Aren't the Facts, Experts Are Everywhere, and the Smartest Person in the Room Is the Room. New York: Basic Books. 2012. 173–196. Print.

Wright. Alex. "Family Trees and Trees of Life." Glut: Mastering Information through the Ages. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 2008. 22–38. Ebook.

RESEARCH AND CRITICAL EVALUATION

"About." Unredacted. *nsarchive.org.* The National Security Archive. George Washington University, n.d. Web.

Carr, David. "Journalists Dancing on the Edge of Truth." *New York Times Online*, 19 Aug 2012.Web.

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Meszaros, MaryBeth. "Who's in Charge Here? Authority, Authoritativeness, and the Undergraduate Researcher." Communications in Information Literacy 4.1 (2010): 5–11. Web.

FUTURE OF INFORMATION

Buckels, Erin E., Paul D. Trapnell, and Delroy Paulhus. "Trolls Just Want to Have Fun." PsycEXTRA Dataset (2014): 97–102. Web.

Carey, Benedict. "Learning to See Data." *New York Times Online*, 27 Mar 2015. Web.

Kestenbaum, David. "How College Students Battled Textbook Publishers to a Draw." *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio, 9 Oct 2014. Web.

Ronson, Jon. "How One Stupid Tweet Blew Up Justine Sacco's Life." *New York Times Magazine*, 12 Feb 2015. Web.

Vaidhyanathan, Siva. "Google's Ways and Means." The Googlization of Everything. University of California Press, CA, 2010. 51–81. Print.

Wong, Alia. "The Renaissance of Student Activism." *TheAtlantic.com*. The Atlantic, 21 May 2015 Web.

Appendix 5B: Sample Activity Prompt

Podcasting Activity Guidelines

In the *Brookings Institute* panel, "How Social Media Is Changing Government and Governance around the World," one panelist characterizes social media activists as "people formerly known as the audience." Over the course of the next two classes, we will engage in this kind of social media activism by participating a sociopolitical conversation, creating new knowledge in the form of a podcast, and sharing it in a public digital space.

Requirements

In assigned groups of 4–5, develop a 5–10 minute podcast on a topic of your choice that critically engages with the idea of the "people formerly known as the audience." Each group will be responsible for the content, format, and technical delivery of your podcast.

In addition to creating and editing an audio recording, each group will:

- Strategically incorporate *at least one* relevant resource from the Web or library collection.
- Select an image to accompany your podcast with a license that permits reuse.
- Provide basic metadata for your podcast including *at least three* descriptive keywords.
- Select a Creative Commons license.

This activity will be completed in 4 stages: 1) planning and prewriting; 2) research and script development; 3) technical production; and 4) reflection.

Each stage of the assignment will be worth a pass/fail homework grade. Students will be evaluated based on their level of participation and depth of contribution in this media experiment rather than on the finished podcast.

Appendix 5C: Step-by-Step Podcast Instructions

Technology Needs: USB Microphone Headset, Computer, Audacity (recording & editing), SoundCloud (hosting & metadata)

Set-up

- **Classroom:** Finalize/print podcast script and have a consensus about your podcast: image, title, and the Creative Commons license you want to use.
- **Media Lab:** Plug USB Microphone Headset into your computer workstation and make sure it is recognized as a device.
- Open Audacity from main start menu. Check to make sure that the program recognizes your USB Microphone Headset.

Recording & Editing

- **To record**, hit the red radio button on the upper left menu in Audacity. You can pause, stop, or playback the recording at any point.
- **To record over** something, you can rewind either by using the radio button or by zooming in and manually selecting a point on the recorded track by clicking with your mouse.
- To include multiple people in your audio recording, either you can pause the recording and pass along your headset and then continue, or you can **record different voices as separate tracks**.
- **To record a new track,** click on "Tracks" on the upper menu and select "Add New" and then "Audio Track." New tracks can be selected, copied and pasted into a single continuous track using keyboard shortcuts or the "Copy" and "Paste" buttons under "Edit" on the upper menu.
- This same process can be used to **"cut" parts of a track** that you want to discard.
- You can **selectively re-record a section** of your podcast by creating a new track and "pasting" it into your main audio track.
- **To save your project as an Audacity file**, click on "Save Project As" under the "File" tab on the upper menu.
- You can **edit your Audacity file** on a workstation in the **Media Lab** on the main level of the library.
- You can **experiment with the audio effects** under "Effect" on the

main menu but should **save an undoctored version of your recording** before adding effects to ensure that you don't ruin your recording.
- **To export your podcast** once you've completed recording and editing, click on "Export" under the "File" tab on the upper menu and select the ".wav" file type.
- **Save your Audacity file and your .wav file**.

Upload to SoundCloud

- **To upload your finished podcast to SoundCloud**
  - → Log in: Username: xxxxxx Password: xxxxxx
  - → Select "Upload" on the upper right menu, then "Choose file to upload." Browse for and select your .wav file.
  - → In the "Basic Info" tab, fill in your title, choose 2–3 tags (keywords), and upload the image that you selected for homework.
  - → Save your podcast as a "public" audio file.
  - → In the "Metadata" tab, include a date and select "Creative Commons" under "License," specify the kind of license you want to apply by selecting and deselecting the radio buttons.
  - → Save your podcast.
  - → Copy the code to "embed" your podcast.
  - → Paste the code to the project page of our course website.

Notes

1. Anne Leonard and Maura A. Smale, "The Three-Credit Solution: Social Justice in an Information Literacy Course," in *Information Literacy and Social Justice*, ed. Lua Gregory and Shana Higgins (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2013), 143.
2. For more on the history and pedagogical philosophy of *LIB1201* see Leonard and Smale, "The Three-Credit Solution."
3. Ibid., 150.
4. Heather Kanuka and Terry Anderson, "Using Constructivism in Technology-Mediated Learning: Constructing Order out of the Chaos in the Literature," *Radical Pedagogy* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 3, http://www.radicalpedagogy.org/radicalpedagogy.org/Using_Constructivism_in_Technology-Mediated_Learning__Constructing_Order_out_of_the_Chaos_in_the_Literature.html.
5. Dick Ng'ambi and Annette Lombe, "Using Podcasting to Facilitate Student Learning: A Constructivist Perspective," *Journal of Educational Technology and Society* 15, no. 4 (October 2012): 183.
6. Darrell M. West, Faruk Eczacibaşi, and Zeynep Tufekci, "How Social Media Is Changing Government and Governance around the World," podcast audio, Brookings Institution, MP3, 1:19:46, November 25, 2013, http://www.brookings.edu/events/2013/11/25-social-media-changing-government-governance-around-world;

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7.   Ng'ambi and Lombe, "Using Podcasting to Facilitate Student Learning," 183.

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