



Evolution of a U.S. History Assignment—using NYC Museums

Parameters of the course



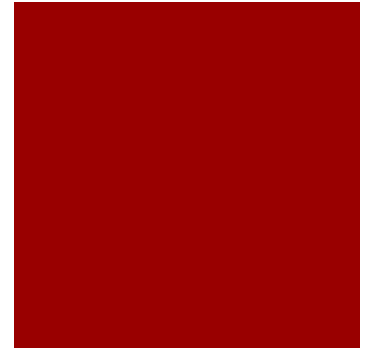
- Introductory course fulfilling a requirement
- American History -- Colonial through the Civil War
- Fulfills a writing requirement
- I have long felt IL depends on getting into the syllabus

13 years ago

- Professor Bernadette McCauley and I started working together.
- She likes to get the students out of their chairs/classroom, believing research is an active, team sport
- She requires such things as:
 - City Tours
 - Visits to Public Libraries
 - Visits to museums



First (early) Efforts



- Small classes—Honors classes-18-25 students
- Assignment design not scalable
- The students pretended to be a researcher for imaginary historical fiction writer

Honors class assignment



- Professor only gave them a hint surrounding a character, i.e.
 - Field Slave, Mississippi, 1840
 - Chinese gold field worker, 1850
 - Boston, house servant, 1790

Students created an annotated Bibliography

- Why not an entire paper?
- Professor felt there was plenty of writing in annotations
- More focus on the research process
 - Long research paper too much for these students



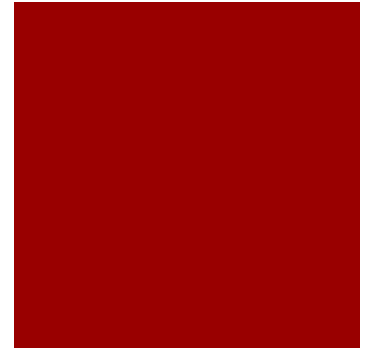
Librarian heaven

- Focus on research process
 - They came to the library for a session and I attended the occasional class
- *Assessing the bibliography*
- Students required to attend session with a librarian



Annotation rubric

- Developed and adjusted over the years
- We looked at:
 - the citation format
 - The choices of sources
 - The source of the sources
 - Provenance, if you will



We scored them

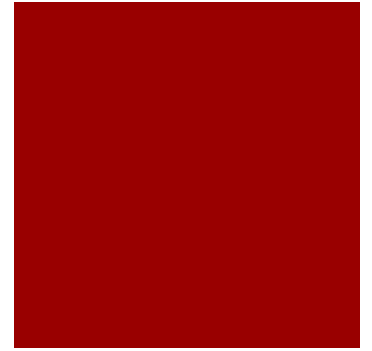


- Point system-
- Not too detailed
- 20 points was “about” the highest scored
- The rubric worked well when tested among several graders working “blind”

But...

Needed a scalable assignment

- Podcasting was hip about 5 years ago
- Collaboration was becoming the latest thing
- Hunter College had some new help in that area—the Teaching and Learning Center



The BIG class

Podcast = radio



- 200 students in 6 Discussion Sections
- Each Section has 5 or 6 “groups”
- There were about 6 “subjects” allowed
 - These included “women,” “slavery,” and other appropriate topics
- The podcasts were to be “news reports” on some aspect of history
 - “This just in...”

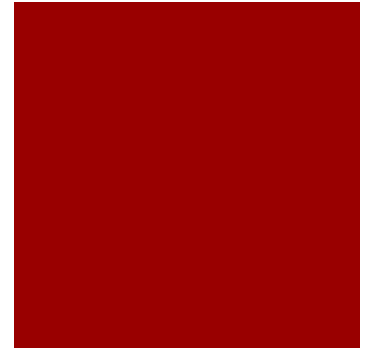
Podcast creation



- 5-7 minutes long and the group created the script
- Overseen by Graduate Assistants
- No extra credit for “techie” additions
 - Thus the content was the focus

And Presentations

- The students presented in their respective Sections
- The GA's, Professor and Librarians scored them
- The best were presented at the lecture session
- The students voted on the best and the winners received some points.



Post mortem

- Each section still had a session with a librarian
- Students enjoyed the podcast contest
- But still too many slackers, or just shy people



Not completely satisfactory



- No individual writing
- Difficult to award individual grades
- Difficult to ascertain the quality of the research
- The professor still felt a paper was needed in addition to the podcasts

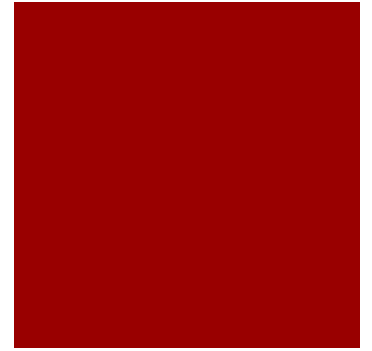
An important aside:

The podcast inspired an assignment for library credit course

- This was added by the librarians to their own course
- They developed an information literacy assessment by having the students podcast their research at the beginning of the semester and another at the end
- Yannotta, Lauren., Lym, Brian., Kung, Shiao-Chuan. "Using Podcasts for assessing information research." *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, 14.1 (2010). 13-17. Print.



Back the Drawing Board



- Historians
- What makes an historian?
- How much can we ask of first-year students?

Minor epiphany

Hunter is in NYC

- On the Upper East Side
- There is great American Art on the Upper East Side
- Hunter's students can easily visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art



Inspired by the renovation of the American Wing (January 2012)



- Nearly everything is available to be seen
- Period Rooms
- Theme rooms
- All the other items are behind glass
 - Row after row of items
- Paintings? All over the place

Required visit to the museum



- Pick an object, any object created before 1865
- Ask Questions-submit to GA's
 - Define potential topics
- Find three research sources relevant to the questions

Assignment



- In a typed **essay** of approximately three paragraphs briefly summarize what you chose (no more than one paragraph of description), and discuss how you might use this as a point for further research about a topic and the person or people who were part of it.
- documented essay of 3-5 paragraphs which answers a historical question which you have constructed

Museum and Library Project

A

- This project has several steps.
final grade of A accomplished the following:
- All Steps along the way completed thoughtfully
- Identified a focused topic revised according to suggestions along
- Identified scholarly sources which included at least one book and only one website which meet scholarly requirements in the final product
- Produced a final essay which presented specific information based on your research and made a conclusion about the findings. What's important to know?
- All information in the essay documented and all citations in *Chicago Manual of Style* format. the way
- Produced a final bibliography in *Chicago Manual of Style* format.

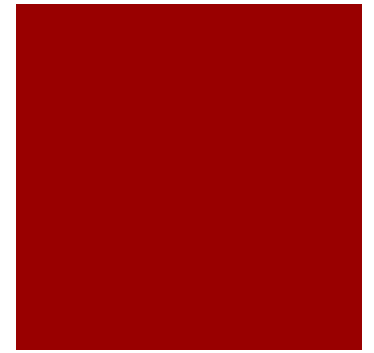


Prepping the students

- A curator from the *Met* spoke to the class
 - Explained one can pay what one wishes
 - Told them where the Museum was located
- The 9 sections were scheduled to visit the library separately for a session with a librarian



The Curator's example



Designing The library sessions



- Several librarians met with Professor and GA's
- Settled on a painting and an object to use as an example in the classes
- Librarians created a LibGuide

The library session



- Text focused:
- **Locate** at least 4 sources that are relevant to your questions. **List your sources** in the correct *Chicago Manual of Style* format. (*Chicago Manual* guidelines and examples on Bb.) (**One, but only one, may be a website.**)
- The students already had a primary source-what they found in the Museum
- The visit to the library was about the same time the students went to the Met on their own

Questions to ask regarding the Curator's example



What was it like for children on a farm at this time?

What was it like for children in cities at this time?

Did early Americans drink a lot of apple cider?

Why?

What other beverages did they drink?

Communication with Professor McCauley-excerpt from an email



- On Sat, Apr 13, 2013 at 8:49 AM, Claibourne Williams <clwillia@hunter.cuny.edu> wrote:
- This looks great—do you have an item from the Met in mind, if asked?
- No but I ll make one up--I wondered who cleaned all that 19th c silver!
- Here is the object

Another example:
An object *made by Paul Revere*



Professor's questions about this object:



- **TOPIC:** The lives of Irish immigrant women in antebellum cities in the United States
- **QUESTIONS:** Did Irish women migrate to cities on their own? Did their reasons for migration differ from those of men? What kind of work was available for them in cities? Was the life they found what they expected?

Sample Bibliography

- Bodnar, John. *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*.
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- Groneman, Carol. "Working-Class Immigrant Women in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York." *Journal of Urban History* 4, no.3, (May 1978): 255-274.
- Harzig, Christine, ed. *Peasant Maids, City Women: From the European Countryside to Urban America*. Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Lynch, Mary. *The Irish Bidget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Work in America*.
Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009.
- Stansell, Christine. *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*. New York: Knopf, 1986.
- Urban, Andrew. "Irish Domestic Service: 'Biddy and Rebellion in the American Home, 1850-1900.'" *Gender and History* 21, no.2 (August 2009): 263-86, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0424.2009.01548.x.

Professor's comments



- Before assembling this list you need to have examined these sources and determined that they will answer your questions. This is not a preliminary list of sources that you think might be useful. (In other words: get off the computer and into the library!
-) These sources are listed in the format of *The Chicago Manual of style* as required by the history

Assessment

- The same rubric from the Honors Class was used
- The GA's gave the librarians a copy of the questions and the bibliography for each paper.
- This is currently being assessed



Exit meeting/interview

- The GA's want the library session earlier next time.
 - The Librarians' first reaction was negative

- The difference between Art History and History is the conundrum
 - This a big deal—
 - Tough to solve—but fun to ponder

