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In a world of exponentially changing and disparate economic realities, college professors strive to create course projects that help inspire and transform student-learners into informed and active citizens who are prepared for the global workplace, and who have a growing awareness of how various issues impact their region. This paper scrutinizes the design, process, and outcomes of a student media project and reflects upon the best practices for encouraging media literacy and student engagement with course projects in higher education. This article focuses on student media projects created by a global issues course at a two-year college. The project required students in the course to research, shoot, and edit videos regarding regional transportation issues while working with a community partner (a regional transportation authority) as a client and the ultimate destination for the video projects. The choices made, lessons learned and resulting outcomes are presented as potential best practices for those who might wish to follow a similar path in designing a project for their course.

Keywords: Regional engagement, Media literacy, Community partnerships, Service learning

Media projects are, by their very nature, complex undertakings for instructors and for their students. When we, as professors, look to assign photographs, videos, animations, powerpoint slides, and other technology-rich deliverables for students to create, we begin to make choices and decisions that will affect our students and their learning outcomes. Well-designed course projects should both inspire and transform student-learners into informed and active citizens who are prepared for the global workplace. We believe that the challenge of preparing students for success falls to faculty members across disciplines and requires that new modes of learning be employed to build civic (not to mention classroom) engagement while enhancing essential competencies like media literacy. The project described in this paper employed just such an intervention. The choices made, lessons learned and resulting outcomes will be presented as a best practices lesson for those who might wish to follow a similar path in project design for their courses.

Setting and Overview

The course chosen for this project was a sophomore-level global issues class, facilitated by Political Science faculty and is currently an option in the common core social science area. This project was developed by a team made up of the course faculty member, the student media labs coordinator, and community partners with added support from the college office responsible for civic engagement and service-learning. The setting for the project was an urban public two-year college with over 24,000 students. This public college has a majority-minority student body with a large contingent of first-generation and recent immigrant students.

At the time of the course development, the college was expanding media services to

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students with a series of new media labs staffed by technologists with skills in multi-media projects and equipment. This was the first major class project undertaken by the media lab system and a pilot for the implementation of operations. The community partner was identified by the college advancement personnel and planning meetings began in the summer before the term of implementation. The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transportation Authority (MARTA) was the first governmental partner for the college community engagement program as well.

The thirty students in the course were a representative cross-section of students at the institution, with black, white, and Hispanic students as well as students from a number of other countries. The students filled out a questionnaire about their media skills level, experience with Mac computers and editing, and media projects in general. They then began to research the community problem presented by the community partner. They received training on how to plan for, shoot, and edit a media project from media labs staff at the college. They then shot, edited, and turned in finished Quicktime videos of their work, which were given to the regional transportation authority staff.

What follows is a discussion of the relevant literature, a look at the community problem which the media projects were designed to help address, the project design, outcomes and recommendations for the future. Every attempt was made to focus on best practices when designing, implementing, training, and reviewing the project. We, the authors, hope this candid review of our project will assist other faculty members who are interested in creating an effective media project with or without a community partner for their courses.

Media and Digital Literacy and Student Engagement - A Review of the Literature

The first hurdle for many faculty members in deciding whether to create a media project is likely the question of whether a media project is the best vehicle for students to reinforce their understanding of course objectives. A review of the literature regarding the importance of media literacy and technology use in the higher education classroom indicates continued and robust experimentation by faculty with student projects that incorporate a significant technology component. Faculty continue to be intrigued not only by the possibilities of incorporating a multi-media or video project in their courses, they are determined to gauge student expectations, learning, and attitudes after the fact to better understand the role of such projects in teaching and learning. This article finds itself amid many others that seek to understand the best approaches and the outcomes on student understanding, engagement, and learning in general.

Faculty continue to explore innovative ways to reach students who, if not technologically omnipotent "digital natives", are at least familiar with and likely to expect the use of technology incorporated in their courses.

A number of studies argue for the overall importance of technology and its uses in the classroom for a number of reasons. In a 2009 article published in *Teacher Librarian*, Marcoux and Loertscher argue that technology can be used to foster effective teaching and learning in six major ways: efficiency, motivation to learn, deep understanding, learning how to learn (21st century skills), creativity and content creation, and the inclusion of different types of learners (p. 16). Littlejohn, Beetham, and Mcgill (2012). found that using technology such as Flip video cameras instilled a sense of confidence in students "to engage in learning" (p. 554). Safar and Alkhezzi (2013) found that students who created

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a project using some form of Information Communication Technology (smartphone, computer, etc.) did better on standardized tests, turned in higher quality projects, were better collaborators with others, improved their overall communication skills, and came to class more often (p. 618). Oliver, Osa, and Walker (2012) found that technology "facilitates for students the mastery of instructional contents, promotes critical thinking, functioning at higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy, and discovery of knowledge" (p. 293). In a 2012 article outlining their use of a digital video production project in a science course, Jarvinen, Jarvinen, and Sheehan found that students "better understood their concept", felt that the "hands-on project was beneficial to them", increased their "learning in a concept-specific manner" and "thought that others would learn something from their video" (p. 19).

These authors are not alone in giving the impression that technology and the future classroom are inevitably linked and that this relationship is a positive trend with myriad benefits for students. There is an increasing awareness, though, that understanding the factors and variables involved when using advanced technology in the higher education classroom requires additional and nuanced examination.

A 2005 article by Carlson points to one of the by now familiar variables: the students. His article, "The Net Generation in the Classroom" argues that teaching with technology is important for today's faculty because the "Net Generation" or "Millennials", learn differently and therefore require that their professors adapt and learn new methods, many of which include the use of new technologies to successfully engage and teach them. The presumed characteristics of this generation include impatience, smarts, and the ability to process information simultaneously from a range of gadgets (The Millenial Man section, para. 7).

Junco and Mastrodicasa (2007), identify a number of generational traits in those born after 1982, which they refer to as the "Net Generation". The millennial generation is famously over-scheduled with competing commitments in curricular and co-curricular activities. The authors suggest that students in this generational cohort tend to feel pressured by parents in both arenas and these expectations may lead to an increase in anxiety and depression relative to their self-perceived and parental pressure to succeed. Junco and Mastrodicasa (2007), like Margaryan, Littlejohn, and Vojt (2011), Littlejohn et al. (2012) and Jarvinen et al. (2012), found that there is not a uniform readiness in college students for media-assisted learning and further, this digital divide can be exacerbated by demographic differences including race and class.

If the students in this generational cohort are different, what is required to reach them and what role does technology play? In a 2008 article, "The 'digital natives' debate", Bennett notes in a review of studies concerning contemporary students, who are sometimes referred to as "digital natives", that though college students were found to be using a wide variety of technologies in their lives, "familiarity with technology-based tools is far from universal" among college students (p. 778). The perception that a generation of contemporary college students are technologically savvy across the board and with all forms of technology is one that deserves additional study and scrutiny. According to Bennett, socio-economic status, as well as ethnic background, gender and even a student's chosen discipline may all influence the technological sophistication of the students pending further studies (p. 778). Additionally, the author argues that there appears to be "a significant proportion of young people who do not have the levels of access or technology skills predicted by proponents of the digital native idea" (p. 779). Other studies support this assertion as well. Margaryan

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et al. (2011) found that students "with their own devices (laptop, smartphone and other ubiquitous tools) often have no idea how to use them to support their learning, and have rarely explored beyond their basic functionality" (as cited in Littlejohn et al., 2012, p. 552).

A study of a video project in a science course done by Jarvinen et al. (2012) found that students were unaware that they had the technology they needed to edit the videos on their laptops already. "Nearly all...had video-making freeware...yet most had little to no experience using this technology" (p. 19).

These differing findings about contemporary college students that depict them as either fully fledged "digital natives" with technological fluency across boundaries or with a much more limited understanding of available technologies show two distinct ways of looking at students and their needs today.

In order to reach students at all skill levels, the literature calls for the faculty member and her/his support team to provide necessary training and support for students for technology and media projects to be successful. A Partnership for 21st Century Skills study (n.d.) found that "not only do students and teachers need access to...digital tools, but they also require the support to use these tools effectively" (p. 284). Additional time and preparation were requested by students for future media production projects in the study by Jarvinen et al. (2012). "Our evidence suggests that more guidance was needed for some of them to initiate this project; feelings were mixed about the sufficiency of class time dedicated to initial discussions of the project" (p. 19). Recurring throughout the studies listed here is the notion that the faculty member should be part of a team of experts instead of the sole author of information and knowledge regarding the technology aspect of the project in the classroom. Demonstrated expertise with the technology, which can often be found in qualified technology staff who provide targeted training sessions for students and/or the faculty member, is an essential element of successful student media projects created in the higher education classroom. Safar and Alkhezzi (2013) noted feedback from faculty involved in student projects which included a technology component. Among the faculty recommendations was an advisory committee formed of faculty, "instructional technologists, instructional designers, subject matter specialists," who could assist with the training and mentoring of students through the technical aspects of using technology in the project (p. 623). This led Littlejohn et al. (2012) to reference the widening circle of educators who might mentor, train, or help student engaged with a technology project in some way. "Librarians, IT support staff, academic advisers and educational developers, outreach workers, careers advisers and other professionals have been among the first to rethink their roles around the challenges of digital learning, and continue to be critical to the success of many students" (p. 555).

Another common theme mentioned in several studies was the need for reinforcement of digital literacy skills and continued practice with the technologies presented to the students. The introduction of a novel technology or technique a single time as a solitary example does not ensure that all students in a course will be at ease with the use of these increasingly necessary tools. Littlejohn et al. (2012) note that literacies are developed over time, not through a single lecture training session, or other learning event. Finding ways to use the new tools will happen through practice. "Personal styles and preferences will emerge, just as with writing or musical and artistic expression" (p. 550).

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The Community Problem

The Global Issues class at the target school was originally added to the curriculum as a social science core option in part to serve the college mission to prepare students for a globally inter-connected world. In addition, the college leadership in place at the time of this project was very keen to develop a civically engaged institution and was preparing to pursue Carnegie certification as such. Formal and informal overtures to make connections with community entities and establish partnerships were underway. As part of these ongoing activities, a connection was made between the college and the metropolitan regional transit agency.

In 2010, The Georgia State Assembly passed legislation providing for a referendum on funding for transportation improvements in the metropolitan region across ten counties. The referendum, referred to as T-SPLOST, was schedule for a vote on July 31, 2012. The plan included a 1 percent sales tax that was projected to raise approximately $8 billion with 85% of the funds going to regional transportation projects and the remainder provided to cities for local projects (Hart, 2012, How much would be spent on transportation section, para. 1) . The tax scheme was to remain in place for ten years or until the projected total was raised, whichever came first. The sales tax would need to be reauthorized to continue after this sunset provision. Trains and busses were to receive 52 percent of the funding derived from the sales tax increase. (Hart, 2012, What's in the city list section, para. 1)

Funding for transportation, particularly rail service has been difficult to secure in the metropolitan area. Georgia ranks second to last nationally in terms of per-capita funding for transportation. When MARTA was organized by a bond issue in 1968, counties in the region were not required to fund the rail and bus system. As it stands, only two counties provide funding in the ten county region surrounding this city, although about 11% of the riders come from counties that do not fund the system (Atlanta Regional Commission, 2010, p. 40).

The organizational leaders at MARTA were receptive to the connection between the college community engagement initiatives, particularly because the transportation agency was keen on connecting with a younger demographic in their efforts to educate and advocate for the tax referendum. Based on conversations with representatives from MARTA, there was a desire to provide students with information as to the value of the regional transit system that might translate to increased ridership and support for tax referendum. Of additional interest to the regional transportation system, students would be researching and producing video projects as one of the principle projects in the course. These videos, the community partner agreed, would be used as part of the educational campaign regarding the tax initiative. The students would benefit from having their work exhibited publicly, and the regional transportation authority would have student-produced media products which would enhance the credibility and reach of their educational campaign.

Project Outline and Learning Objectives

After the initial connection with the community partner was made by institutional advancement personnel, detailed meetings followed in the late summer before term start as to the needs and expectations by both parties. Pleased that the project was aligned with organizational goals, MARTA representatives offered support for a service-learning project to be housed in the college's Global Issues course. POLS 2401 is a second-year course that at that time primarily served the program of study for Political Science majors with a few

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registrants from Business and Criminal Justice programs as well. The course is now a core course social science option in all programs of study. Students were informed on the first day of class of the partnership with MARTA and the requirements of the class project.

The MARTA learning project had several components, both in individual and group settings. At the beginning of the term, students were required to submit research papers that provided a base foundation of knowledge on one of several issues surrounding transportation. The issues were settled upon in a democratic classroom exercise that allowed students through discussion to identify the topics that were to be pursued. Students identified the key transportation issues to be quality of life, economic development, sustainability, and the environment. Students then balloted as to which topics were most engaging. Students were placed into four groups based on top choices and media literacy survey outcomes (see next section). Each group's topic determined the individual research paper focus for each student. Students were asked not to discuss paper development in an effort to acquire a wide-ranging expertise within the group. Research papers were employed to ensure that all students developed a baseline knowledge of the regional transportation system and one chosen transportation issue. A common complaint regarding collaborative learning projects is the uneven distribution of work that can develop. Requiring the research to be completed before the video project commences can help mitigate such concerns and make the project a more positive learning experience. Once papers were submitted, collaboration began in earnest on the group project.

The group media project was designed as both a service-learning and media-literacy vehicle to build civic engagement and enhance media life skills. Project-level learning outcomes were designed to serve course and program goals. They are as follows:

As a result of the project, students will be able to demonstrate:

- An increased understanding of global transportation issues that is demonstrable in a regional setting.
- A greater awareness of regional transportation challenges and the policy issues that are related to those challenges.
- Media literacy and knowledge of marketing fundamentals applicable to a local or regional community problem.
- Enhanced collaboration skills with an emphasis on problem solving.
- Heightened engagement with civic institutions.

The project requirements included the production of a five-minute educational video that explored the target transportation issue and tied it to the transportation referendum. The videos were then to be provided to MARTA's public information personnel to use in their community information campaign including public presentations. Students were invited by MARTA to attend these sessions and, though no credit was provided for attendance, several students did attend showing their involvement in the issue and commitment to the project. As part of the project deliverable process, groups turned in a variety of smaller assignments preparing for the final video project: a script outline, a final two-column script which depicted exactly what would be seen and heard in industry-standard format, a video rough cut which received feedback from the instructor, community partner, and media lab staff, and a final cut presentation. The students learned about the assignments and the due dates through a video project calendar distributed at term start. At each of these checkpoints,

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senior personnel with video production and post-production experience from the college's media lab were present to guide project development. Students were also provided with a project rubric (see Appendix A: MARTA Video Project Rubric) and submission details including format and document requirements such as legal release forms for public viewing of FERPA-protected course materials. Students were allowed to choose not to submit the legal release but as the project began to gain momentum, students seemed to garner a sense of community purpose for the project and none chose to opt-out.

Media Literacy Survey Results

At the beginning of the term, students were asked to complete a student media literacy survey in order to gauge technical readiness for the media project and to better design training workshops for the best possible outcomes. This survey measured experience with Apple computers, videography, digital photography and video editing skills. At the end of the survey, students were asked to sign a project participation contract, explaining the pilot nature of the program and asking for a pledge of flexible sustained engagement throughout the term. A copy of the survey and contract is at the end of this article as Appendix B. The chart below provides project data showing the students' self-reported readiness for an advanced media assignment. The outcomes from such a survey may vary depending on student populations. The survey below suggests mixed levels of preparation among the students in this urban public collegiate setting, congruent with the literature on readiness.

Table 1: Student Technology Survey n=35

Computing Questions	Macs	PCs	Both
Q1. Have you primarily used Macs or PC's for Computing?	8 29%	23 65%	2 6%
Q2. What kind of computer do you have at home?	5 14%	30 86%	0 0%
Equipment Questions	**Yes**	**No**	**No response**
Q3. Have you ever created videos before?	13 37%	22 63%	0%
Q4. Are you familiar with digital cameras (still)?	29 83%	6 17%	0 0%
Q5. Are you familiar with using digital video cameras?	18 51%	17 49%	0 0%
Q6. Do you have experience editing videos?	8 29%	27 71%	0 0%
Software Question	**Software**	**# of students**	
Q7. List software used.	Movie Reveal iMovie Windows Movie Fraps	1 1 3 1	

While the results must be interpreted as exploratory due to the limits of a sample based on a single class, it is possible to see in this class sample, a variable level of technology proficiency for a media project. To address the reality of a varied level of readiness for media projects, a partnership between the instructor and the college media lab staff was

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undertaken. The college media lab was and continues to be outfitted with state of the art Apple computers. Most of the students had no experience using that platform. While many students had experience with digital cameras, most had little or no experience with digital video cameras or editing programs. This fits with the findings of Jarvinen et al. (2012), Margaryan et al. (2011), Littlejohn et al. (2012), and Bennett (2008) who found that students were not as tech savvy as might be expected or assumed by a reasonable faculty member, even with their own personal technology. More than one student in the class owned a Macbook Pro yet none understood the necessary processes for editing beyond the most rudimentary operation of the editing programs that they owned.

Dividing the class into groups to create a mix of media proficiency among group members seemed to work well as a strategy for creating a level playing field among the groups. By combining less experienced with more experienced students, no group was left without at least one or two students who were experienced with some aspect of the project.

Best Practices in Media Projects

The faculty member scheduled in-class training sessions led by staff members of the media lab for each stage of the project. This attention to and availability of substantial and repeated training as a best practice corresponds with the conclusions reached in studies by Jarvinen et al. (2012), and Safar and Alkhezzi (2013) among others. In addition, the training was designed to mitigate student anxiety as noted by Junco and Mastrodicasa (2007). Though the availability of trained staff and appropriate equipment will vary from campus to campus and school-to-school, every attempt to provide adequate training is, from the review of the literature and our experience, an appropriate and effective use of class time. Approximately five, one-hour and fifteen minute, class sessions were needed for training and feedback with media lab staff. The first training session introduced students to the principles of basic videography techniques and familiarized them in how to use point-and-shoot Flip HD video cameras (see Appendix C). The students were allowed to practice with the cameras during the training sessions and were encouraged to check out the cameras and experiment with using them before students began the project. The staff also familiarized students with the location of the media labs, the hours of operation, and procedures for reserving and checking out equipment from the media lab. The second and third workshops focused on proper techniques for recording audio using a separate audio recorder and strategies for getting good interviews from subjects. Subsequent workshops covered the techniques for importing footage from the video cameras and audio recorders and basic video editing. The lab staff also provided feedback to students during a "rough cut review" before the final version was due and performed one last critique during final screening of the projects.

Videography

The media lab provided simple-to-use Flip HD video cameras for students to work with during the training session and to reserve and check out for the project. The Flip cameras are extremely simple in design and capture audio and video at the touch of a button using automatic settings such as auto-focus and white balance. There are only a few buttons to push on the outside of the device with the record button being the largest and easiest to access. The initial training session covered techniques such as how-to turn on the cameras, record video, select the video format, and stabilize the camera with a tripod. The training also covered compositional strategies such as using the Rule of Thirds instead of centering,

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proper orientation of the video capture device to avoid "vertical video" with letterboxing on the sides, shot sizes (close up, medium shot, long shot), angle (high, low, eye-level). Students were given the cameras to use during class and video recorded short clips during the training workshop to familiarize themselves with the equipment and approaches. Some of the recordings were then shown to the class and discussed. The media lab staff also briefly familiarized students with the process of reserving and checking out cameras, which could be kept from Thursday to Monday each week.

Editing

Several weeks after the initial videography training, media lab staff returned with five MacBook Pro computers, which were used by groups of students during the editing training. Even with five computers, this left approximately five students sharing one laptop. It would have been optimal to have additional computers or to have the option to schedule the training in a larger lab, but none was available on the campus in question. The media lab staff modeled and then directed students through the process of importing footage from the video cameras to the computers. Working with stock footage clips which the staff had placed on the computers, the students learned how to select and then add segments of video to the timeline, trim off unwanted sections of video, add photos and titles, add stock music and, finally, to export their video as a file on DVD which could be collected by the instructor and shared with the community partner. The media lab staff returned and conducted a second "advanced" training session as a review and question/answer session with the students. Students then had access to the media lab, which was open for twelve hours each weekday to edit their projects. Media lab staff were on duty at all times and helped students with questions related to the training and their projects.

Some of the notable outcomes that media staff reported were that many of the students still had trouble navigating the software even after the training sessions. There also seemed to be some confusion about what constituted copyrighted materials with students including copyrighted songs and photos in early cuts of the project. Substantial feedback during rough cut reviews and/or footage reviews seemed to assist students in understanding the proper place/use of copyrighted materials and proper citation methods. The media lab staff found that it was advisable to schedule the in-class editing training for the students as close to the time they would begin editing their projects as possible. This allowed the students to build on their in-class training and use it in the media labs while it was still fresh in their memories.

Project Implementation

At organizational meetings between MARTA staff and the college faculty and staff, discussion on use of the video projects led to a plan to show the videos on heavy rail vehicles as well as at public information events. This decision meant that students had a dual audience to serve when designing the videos. On the trains, no audio can be heard from the video screens. Riders must be wearing radio headphones and tuned to the appropriate bandwidth to hear the audio. It was determined that a majority of riders would be able to see but not hear the videos. Students attempted to address this challenge by designing programs that could be understood on two levels. If sound was available, as at public events, more detail was to be provided by voiceover . Also, videos would use titles throughout to aid the viewer without audio. This aspect of the project required the most careful application of critical thinking and collaborative problem solving on the part of the

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students.

To enhance civic connection goals and build partnership between students and the transportation organization, MARTA officials generously organized a customized tour of facilities and programs that later made their way into some of the video content. MARTA sent a newly acquired bus powered by natural gas to pick up students on tour day at a designated campus location. The tour of MARTA's state-of-the-art rail maintenance facility, central command center and solar-powered bus maintenance facility inspired student creativity for the upcoming media project and provided an overview of varying career paths in one of the largest transportation authorities in the Southern U.S. According to MARTA (n.d.), it provides $2.6 billion in economic stimulus and 24,000 jobs to the region.

Since this was a first-time collaboration between the college and the agency in a service-learning project, there was a learning curve on both sides of the equation. During planning for the tour, the project was met with its first challenge. Because the command center was considered a vital security target, students were required to go through high-level background checks to be allowed to visit the facility. There were differing requests for this clearance and the final requirements for social security numbers and home address information came from the agency with very little time to comply. With diligence by the instructor, all students were cleared for the tour at the 11th hour but the issue of security concerns would dog the project for the first few months of the term.

Students wanted to record video clips of MARTA trains and buses, sometimes referred to *as B-Roll,* which visually depicts and complements the audio from the voiceover track. Two incidents occurred where students were stopped, questioned and sent away while shooting video outside train stations. Efforts to secure a letter of identification or other authorization for project activities promised during summer planning never came to fruition after repeated attempts to secure the ability of students to have such clearance by the instructor. An offer came from MARTA personnel to organize a shooting window on one particular day at a particular location near the end of filming but it was not practical for students with so many different schedules to participate.

This inability for the community partner to follow through on earlier agreements due to additional considerations, namely security, delayed the filming portion of the project, causing frustration for students and a dampening of enthusiasm for the project. These issues were relayed through college advancement personnel to the agency and directly during visitation by MARTA personnel to the class for a Q and A session. In the end, the goodwill provided by the tour of the facilities and photographs provided for insertion by MARTA did help rebuild the connection between student and partner.

Other challenges included student surveys of transportation customers that were subjected to lengthy approval processes when the content was simply to provide examples of riders' perceptions of MARTA's contributions to the community for the video. Riders were not allowed to be videoed. Early in the process a student survey of riders waiting for MARTA buses at the edge of campus was implemented and in the end, that data did make its way into one of the videos. MARTA did provide permission for students to use comments by riders posted on MARTA's website by the community information office in their videos as a source of rider input. A parallel survey project in a Sociology class ran into difficulty and was not completed by term's end.

As previously mentioned, MARTA personnel came to class to provide an overview of MARTA's regional assets, background on the tax referendum and guidance on group

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targeted projects. The visitors also provided each student with a folder full of educational materials that contributed to their core understanding before video development. MARTA personnel returned for the final screening celebration of the videos that included a certificate ceremony and refreshments. Certificates and limited refreshments for service learning project celebrations are provided by the college office for community engagement, now housed within the institutional SACS-COC Quality Enhancement Plan. In a classroom wrap-up reflection discussion, students reported that they were happy with the project outcome, believed that they learned more from this project than a traditional research paper and felt more connected to each other and the instructor. Indeed, 28 of 35 students completed the course which is an outcome that is higher than average at this access institution.

In an effort to track project expected outcomes, course assessments were examined for possible data. Potential outcomes of the project included: increased understanding of global transportation issues demonstrable in a regional setting, a greater awareness of regional transportation challenges and the policy issues that are related to those challenges, increased media literacy and knowledge of marketing fundamentals applicable to a local or regional community problem, enhanced collaboration skills with an emphasis on problem solving, and a heightened engagement with civic institutions.

An investigation of video scripts, an intermediate benchmark assignment of the project, reveals that in a collaborative learning environment, the students were able to identify major multiple course concepts and apply them to the realm of regional transportation by incorporating them into the digital story they created. The five final video projects all suggested an understanding of ongoing policy issues in regional transportation. All groups grasped the digital literacy training and produced a product that met the course rubric standards by the due date. All students reported on peer evaluation forms that their group-members helped shoulder the burden and approached the project with a positive attitude (one of the measures of the peer evaluation). One student group did report to the instructor during the project of some internal group dynamics, namely that two students had disappeared from participation. Ultimately, two students withdrew from the class and failed to complete the course. The group with the missing members was offered the chance to join another, but instead, they met the challenge and remained intact as originally assigned.

An analysis of in-class essay exams at term-end demonstrated that students were able to reflectively synthesize their relationship to the greater global community, with 24 of 28 able to identify seven aspects of their increased understanding of civic institutions and/ or global issues that were identifiable at the regional level. The second essay question measured student knowledge of regional transportation issues in a more specific manner. This time on an individual in-class assessment, (as opposed to the script results) all 28 students were able to identify one of the five regional public transportation issues examined throughout the course and 26 of 28 students were able to provide seven or more facts and concepts to further expound upon the topic.

Community Partner's Viewpoint

The chief spokesperson for MARTA was pleased that the students were interested in this "moving piece of infrastructure." He identified several areas in which a community partner should be attentive when working on a project with a higher education class. Foremost was what he called "being clear about the expectations in terms of what the students want and

what the outcomes are going to be" (personal communication, October 22, 2013).

For example, students were initially planning to shoot video of some of the community partner's equipment and facilities. Due to security concerns, though, students on this project were not allowed to visit or to video record footage in all facilities after all. This created a potential issue for students who were interested in capturing dynamic visuals of the partner's various locations. They were told in their training to capture shots that would tell the story visually. Without access to those visuals and without early knowledge that they would be off limits, some students became frustrated.

The MARTA spokesperson acknowledged the overall success of the project's ability to showcase the benefits the system brings to the region. He also regretted another limitation of this particular project. "It's not enough to do one class. We'd like to develop this into a curriculum," he said. "We did not create some sort of next steps to repeat and improve on this process. I expected for our relationship to be extended" (personal communication, October 22, 2013). Overall, though, the partnership was a successful one in his mind and in the partner's experience in terms of the way it helped build the ridership and possibly future employees for the partner. "It's building on the ecosystem of knowledge and talent and building and creating expertise and having a sense of civic mindedness," (personal communication, October 22, 2013).

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

This community partnership was formed with limited lead-time to design a media project of some use to both the partner and the students. There were several challenges from the outset. Considering this handicap, the positive project outcomes, including the production of five finished videos, outweigh the challenges. At times, the opportunity to partner will come on short notice, but the community problem may warrant an investment in project design on a tight timeline in any case. Students in this project were provided with a collaborative service activity that enhanced media literacy and provided a platform for engaged-learning. Learning outcomes as demonstrated by the video projects included a detailed understanding of regional transportation issues and their impact on the community.

Dealing with a governmental agency requires advance planning due to the bureaucratic limitations of the organizational structure. While frustrations were high at some points in the project, the understanding gained by negotiations with a large bureaucratic organization did provide an excellent learning laboratory for the realities in government structure and hierarchy. However, the understanding gained by the students regarding the limited political and financial support for public transportation infrastructure in this region despite the value it brings to the metro area and beyond was a seminal experience. Many students commented at the end of the term and in their final essays about the need for increased support for public transportation as well as an expressed desire to remain connected to their community.

In a related note on hierarchical issues, in the viewpoint of the instructor and media lab coordinator, the layers of bureaucracy between the course instructor and the Director of Public Information at MARTA hindered efficient and timely communications between the two parties. The instructor initially had to communicate through the college division devoted to institutional advancement and then through lower level MARTA representatives not empowered to execute needed movement on issues. Once difficulties rose to the level of project endangerment, direct communication between instructor and director resulted in

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swift resolution of problems to the degree that MARTA was able given security limitations. All these challenges simply required students to think creatively to design work-arounds when security barriers stopped them from pursuing their initial script plans. While the instructor did explain at summer planning meetings that the timeline was a paramount issue as terms are absolute, timeline deliverables on the partner side of the equation was a hindrance along the way.

This collaboration served as the initial pilot for other student media projects produced in conjunction with the media labs at the college. The experience the staff gained working with the students during in-class training sessions and in the media labs as they tried to complete their projects was a guiding influence on future media project collaborations at the college. Some of the difficulties experienced by the staff will be familiar to faculty members who may have seen similar behavior in regards to assignments. Students at times attempted to complete the editing of their video projects at the last minute, not leaving themselves enough time to learn and understand relatively simple (but still challenging) video editing technology. Other students mentioned the difficulty of coming to campus to work on the projects using the lab computers. The need for numerous and strategically timed training sessions and the importance of review and feedback throughout each stage of the project to catch errors of understanding and/or technical execution were two of the most important lessons learned.

While students expressed some anxiety and frustration with the media project at the outset, the final celebration with the "video premiere" was well received by the students as they shared their work at the end of the term-long project with the community partner. The retention rate for the class from project start to term end was 100%. In a final in-class reflection activity, students suggested that they became knowledgeable about transportation issues in their region and would continue to follow these issues, particularly those related to mass transportation. Indeed, the group video projects were assessed by the instructor at project end to be rich with well-documented content and messaging acumen. Students also gave high marks to the media lab staff for training and project assistance and suggested that the lab partnership was essential in their project success. They voiced appreciation for this support in part, they said, because it helped alleviate the stress of the unknown in a new form of course assessment. Because the students at this urban, majority-minority public institution are more likely to be from high-risk groups, the careful programming to build media literacy into the course design (as recommended by Junco and Mastrodicasa, 2007), paid off in terms of positive outcomes. Additional detailed recommendations from a post-project analysis by the instructor, the media lab coordinator and the community partner have been summarized into key points for future project implementations.

Recommendations for best practices in similar projects include:

- Use of the power of community as laboratory to build engagement and a deeper understanding of learning objectives in a real-world framework.
- Careful pre-term planning with community partners new to service learning to promote a clear understanding of expectations and the reasons for them in terms of expected educational outcomes and the dangers to engagement when serious problems arise.
- Establishment of direct communication lines between instructor and agency leadership with power to mitigate project difficulties from project start.
- Development of educational programming to highlight the community-problem in tandem with the class media project to build competency on this issue.

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- Contact with technology staff well before the project is set to begin in order to arrange schedules and outline the intended schedule.
- Comprehensive in-class training sessions for students covering the technology to be used in order to bridge a possible digital divide and reduce anxiety students may have about project requirements.
- Break the project into a number of smaller assignments, with due dates scattered throughout the semester, providing various benchmarks where the instructor and technology staff can give feedback to students on their progress.
- Communication with students regarding time needed outside of class to work on this project and learn the new technologies involved.
- Clear and concise grading criteria and term-start calendar of all due dates.
- In-class time for rough-cut project review before final version due date.
- Recognition of the importance of celebration as a galvanizing capstone to advance engagement in intricate term-long course projects.

Recommendations for future study include outcomes of additional projects with the community partner, harnessing the additional experience of both parties now that the initial project has come to a conclusion. In addition, a study to measure student persistence after the employment of media-projects might provide interesting data on such course activities as a possible tool for student retention.

As a footnote to this study, the MARTA Referendum was defeated by the metro-area voters in the summer following this course project. The difficulty of finding funding for regional transportation agencies is again underscored by this outcome (T-SPLOST, Defeated in Landslide!, 2012, para 1).

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Appendix A :   MARTA Video Rubric

"Tell me a fact, and I'll learn. Tell me a truth, and I'll believe. Tell me a story, and I'll remember it forever" -American Indian Proverb

Student's Name: _____   Course: _____
Date:_____

CATEGORY	Excellent 15	Good 10	Fair 5	Poor 0
Project Purpose & Audience	Establishes a purpose early on and maintains a clear focus throughout. It is clear that the author cares about his/her video and feels that there is something important to communicate. Strong awareness of audience/ viewer in the design. Students can clearly explain why they felt the vocabulary, audio and graphics chosen fit the target audience.	Establishes a purpose early on and maintains focus for most of the presentation. Some awareness of audience in the design. Students can partially explain why they felt the vocabulary, audio and graphics chosen fit the target audience.	There are a few lapses in focus, but the purpose is fairly clear. Some awareness of audience in the design. Students find it difficult to explain how the vocabulary, audio and graphics chosen fit the target audience.	It is difficult to figure out the purpose of the presentation. Limited awareness of the needs and interests of the target audience.
Script Content	Content is engaging -- viewer is left with thought-provoking ideas and/or the story develops in a way that's different from initial expectations. Script is compelling and well written -- concise use of words to make important points. Emotional dimension of the piece matches the story line well. Viewers are encouraged to care about the topic, person, organization, etc.	Content is interesting -- viewer is left with thought-provoking ideas and/or the story develops in a way that's different from initial expectations. Script is well written -- makes important points. Emotional dimension of the piece somewhat matches the story line.	Some surprises and/ or insights, but realization barely differs from the expectation. Script is adequately written, but sometimes is confusing. Emotional dimension of the piece is distracting (over the top) and/or does not add much to the story.	Predictable and not very interesting. Realization and expectation do not differ. Script is difficult to understand & the point is unclear. Emotional dimension of the piece is inappropriate OR absent.

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Video Technical Execution: **1. Audio** **2. Images** **3. Pacing** **4. Editing**	Voice quality is clear and consistently audible throughout the presentation. If music is used, it enhances the piece, matches the story line, and does not overpower the voice. Illuminating: Images create a distinct atmosphere or tone that matches different parts of the story. The images may communicate symbolism and/or metaphors. The meaning of the story is transformed by the use of images. The pace (rhythm and voice punctuation) fits the story line and helps the audience really "get into" the story.	Voice quality is clear and consistently audible throughout the majority (85-95%) of the presentation. If music is used, it matches the story line and is not too loud. Interpretive: Images create an atmosphere or tone that matches some parts of the story. The images may communicate symbolism and/or metaphors. The story relies on images to convey meaning. Occasionally speaks too fast or too slowly for the story line. The pacing is relatively engaging for the audience.	Voice quality is clear and consistently audible through some (70-84%) of the presentation. If music is used, it is not distracting -- but it also does not add much to the story. Illustrative: An attempt was made to use images to create an atmosphere/tone but it needed more work. Image choice is logical. Images are decorative -- the story is not altered by the use of images. Tries to use pacing, but it is often noticeable that the pacing does not fit the story line. Audience is not consistently engaged.	Voice quality needs more attention. If music is used, it is distracting, too loud, and/or inappropriate to the story line. Inappropriate: Little or no attempt to use images to create an appropriate atmosphere/tone. Images interfere or are at cross-purposes with the story's meaning. No attempt to match the pace of the storytelling to the story line or the audience.
Credit	**All** people, organizations, quotes, ideas, music, and contributors are appropriately credited. Permission has been obtained (or Creative Commons license information provided) for images and audio not created by the author.	Most people, organizations, quotes, ideas, music and contributors are credited. Might not include permission or provide license information.	Some people, organizations, quotes, ideas, music and contributors are credited. Might not include permission or provide license information.	Few or no people, organizations, quotes, and contributors are credited.

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Appendix B: Student Technical Skills Survey

POLS 2401
Technical Survey

Student Profile:
Student Name: GPC ID:
Cell Phone: Email:

Technology Survey:
Have you primarily used Macs or PCs for computing?
What kind of computer do you have at home?
Have you ever created videos before?
Are you familiar with using digital cameras (still)?
Are you familiar with using digital video cameras?
Do you have experience editing videos?   List software used:

Class Project Participation Contract:

   I will give my full attention to the POLS 2401 Video Project once it begins. I will be accessible to my instructor and fellow group members via phone and email for the duration of the project. I understand that this project is a pilot program and that there may some adjustments while the project is in process. I will remain flexible and positive to deliver the best outcome I can.

Signed, _____Date_____

Instructor
Use:
Group Number: _____
Topic: _____

Appendix C: Media Project Training Materials

These materials are available for download at https://www.dropbox.com/s/ct7df7gryp26621/Trainingdocuments.zip (For any questions or comments concerning these materials, please contact Jonathan Harris at jonathanharris2@clayton.edu.)

- Audio recording Zoom H1 training
- Basic Videography using the flip ultr HD cameras with tripods and reflectors
- Designing student media projects with the mediaSPOT
- Interviewing 101

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