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HIST494 and 5594: Podcasting the Past (taught at the University of Missouri-Kansas City)

Assignment: “Heartlandia: A Podcast about the Midwest”

Digital Humanities tool/method: Hindenburg Audio; Zoom H4n recording equipment; audio archives like *Oyez* and the *Free Music Archives*.

Description:

In this research-based, new media storytelling project students work to produce an eight- to ten-minute piece of what I call “audio scholarship” on some aspect of Midwestern history. To accomplish this, the class is broken into three units. The first unit focuses on the history of the Midwest, with readings on major themes, issues, and turning points. The second third of the class is devoted to the craft of audio storytelling. In this section students learn how to use basic recording equipment and postproduction software, as well as the more abstract practices of interviewing, writing for radio, and story structure. The final third of the class is then given over to the students so they can research and write their own audio stories. Students have to identify a topic, find audio sources related to that topic (which can be either audio archives, oral histories, or dramatic readings of primary sources), interview either a historian or a person who experienced the event (if it’s late enough) and then combine all of this into an audio story that translates historical research into podcast form.

To complete the assignment, the production of an audio story was broken down into incremental parts. Throughout the semester, smaller assignments built up to the production of a full story. These include:

- Recording a sound that “says something” (no voices)
- Creating a montage out of archival audio
- Interviewing their peers
- Outlining podcast episodes
- Narrating the script of a published podcast

In the past I let students pick the topics of their pieces. In the future I may assign topics so that students are able to work on their main topic when doing these intermediary assignments.

Learning outcomes:

The assignment has two primary goals. First is to give students an introduction to the tools and technologies of audio storytelling so that they can add this skill set to their resumes. More broadly, however, the class uses the novelty of audio storytelling as a way to reinforce skills central to the discipline of history such as archival research, oral history, and writing for a broad audience.

Sample assignments:

- Kate Carpenter, “History Foodies”: https://panthers-my.sharepoint.com/:u:/g/personal/cantwelc_uwm_edu/Eb1KEPT-ULNJg2Em19lhFSUBbnC53bYy_5CMGUHPigczog?e=kjFFUe.
- Elizabeth Hartzler, “The Demon Spread”: https://panthers-my.sharepoint.com/:u:/g/personal/cantwelc_uwm_edu/Ecq85kclcapGhKyG6MHI2QsB4Vf4FO0-YCAbGZPRt8FMUA?e=jinTlg.