

My Voice / My Story

What is your idea?

Introduction

In January 2018, our university hired its first diversity professor to teach a required “Diversity and Media” class to advertising, journalism, public relations, and tele-communication students at a primarily white institution. One assignment I have them do is an assignment named, “My Voice / My Story”! This assignment is an oral history, where students produce a segment for an Online Radio program titled “My Story/My Voice”. The segment is to be formatted as an audio feature story told by an interviewee. The interviewee should be a person from the community that has overcome an issue with diversity. The assignment challenges students to identify a subject that has a compelling story about diversity.

What are the goals?

Rationale

Many universities in urban context, talk about immersing their students in the community as a way to “expose” them to the “realities” of the sights and sounds they often miss. These immersive efforts often fail because student negotiate their assignment to work within the safe confines of their own context. This university community is 81 percent Caucasian, with 69 percent of the household incomes below 50K. 30.7 percent of the community are persons below poverty line. These demographic present a social economic pictures that is much different than our student population where only 23 percent of the students in this class are first generation students.

There are five primary goals for the “My Voice / My Story” assignment.

- 1) Have the students get out of the university bubble and learn about their community;
- 2) Have the students research and identify members of the community that have a compelling story regarding an issue related to diversity;
- 3) Have students develop an argument as to why their subject is worthy an interview;
- 4) Have the students apply their learned technical skills in a new media context;
- 5) Have the students contribute to the knowledge of the community by developing community media repository that is shared with the community.

These five goals challenge each student to go into the community identify a subject, use their technical skills, and develop a final podcast presentation.

How does it work?

Implementation

This assignment has three levels of completion. The first level is preparatory. The second level is training and interviewing. The third level is editing and submission. Specific details on each level are below.

Level One:

- Students self-select a partner to work with this assignment. (They work in groups of two.)
- After selecting their partner, each group will discuss and brainstorm people they may or may not know in the community that have a compelling diversity story. (I intentionally, leave the term “diversity” vague so students will critically think about their lectures and meanings for the term.)
- They then identify a community leader or subject member outside of the university community to interview.
- After agreeing on an interviewee, the group completes a google doc “My Story/My Voice” Diversity Interview assessment form.
- I then review the Diversity Interview assessment form for each group and give feedback. (The overall challenge was students that wanted to negotiate to interview persons on campus.)

Level Two:

Because this assignment made for students with varying audio and editing technical skills I frontload the class by developing a training module (see below). For the level two section, I also prepare the students for their interviews and review the equipment. I teach basic Zoom microphone skills and how to conduct mock interviews.

This module includes:

- examples of previous interviews,
- a link to download the free Audacity audio editing software,
- an Audacity training and quick keys worksheet,
- a Lynda.com Learning Audacity training video,
- and an instructor video on how our students should submit their edited presentation on Soundcloud.

The interview: (condensed instructions)

- 1) You must interview the person face to face. Have a list of questions and topics to cover.
- 2) You must be in a fairly quiet location so that the conversation is the main thing heard in the recording.
- 3) The interview should be approached as a journalistic interview. It should not be rehearsed. Be conversational!
- 4) The subject must be about the person you are interviewing. The program is an exercise in humanizing the interviewee to community.
- 5) Have the interviewee state their name and position in the community after your brief introductory statement (see notes above).

Level Three:

- 6) Edit the interviewee content into a coherent story so that the interviewee introduces the story's subject. Select segments of the interview(s) that help you piece together a coherent story.
- 7) Students will add the Intro and Outro audio bumpers to their segment for class consistency.
- 8) The groups finished audio segments must be between 14 minutes, 25 seconds (14:25) and 14 minutes, 30 seconds (14:30).
- 9) Submit their final interview on Soundcloud.

Conclusion

How have students reacted? What are the take-aways for students?

Initially when students were given this assignment they hated it. They stated that they didn't see the value of the assignment. After completing their interviews, the majority of the groups expressed an appreciation for the innovative assignment. Below are a few student responses about the assignment.

- My Story/My Voice is a great exercise. Because we had to go out there, find the right person, do research, create the right questions, decide what was worth keeping of the information and present it in the most successful way possible.
- The My Story My Voice one was pretty spot on. It helped me realize just how much diversity the world has.
- My story my voice - I complained about this project because I did not feel prepared at all for it. I have never edited audio before, so it was a learning experience. I learned a lot though and enjoyed the interview.
- My story/my voice. I thought it did a great job of getting us into the community to see how diversity plays out in the environment we live in. We can't say "it doesn't happen here" because we get stories that contradict that.