



## Global Interactive Documentary: College During Pandemic

Susan Cardillo  
University of Hartford

Campus Reboot is a crowd-sourced, interactive and collaborative web-based documentary project and course. The project will be an online documentary of the historical times of college during the Covid19 pandemic and its aftermath. The documentary will be populated with student submissions of video, audio and written thoughts about how COVID19 is affecting college campuses. The course was partially designed out of the consideration that schools could go completely online sometime during the following semester. The initial thought was to try to collaborate with as many schools as possible to create an internationally collaborative and crowd-sourced project. At the time of this writing, 15 schools around the world, including the United States, Australia, England and China, are involved.

### The Course:

Students are asked to post video, written or audio submissions about their own experiences with assigned bi-weekly topics arising from COVID restrictions, to be later collated into both an interactive website and a single documentary.

Students are given bi-weekly prompts, which were created by a team of LEAD (Leadership Education and Development) students at the University of Hartford. These prompts are emailed to each instructor who shares them with their students. These

prompts ask questions about what is happening on each school's campus due to the COVID19 restrictions. Students have several ways in which to respond to the prompt. 1) Students can use their cellphones and respond to the prompt as an audio or video blog (Vlog) and submit it to a Dropbox link. These submissions are then aggregated and posted on the Campus Reboot website. Each school has a page on the site where the completed prompts are posted. 2) They can create a project based on the prompt that is more polished with b-roll, interviews (micro-documentary). 3) Students can also post written work on the Campus Reboot Facebook page or directly to the website. 4) Students can upload photos with the hashtag #campusrebootstories for the Campus Reboot Instagram page.

Once the students upload their vlog/project/media, the works are aggregated and placed on the [Campus Reboot](#) website. The students involved with the project can also download other student works to repurpose for their own projects.

Each of the 15 schools have different ways of being involved with this project. For the University of Hartford's course, the students do bi-weekly Vlogs around the prompts and also have 5 Challenges throughout the semester, with each challenge building on their own personal experience. The challenges include; 1) B-roll of campus, 2) a montage 3) an interview with

a faculty/staff/administrator, 4) archival footage or footage from another school and 5) copyright-free music. The final project, which includes a proposal, script and 5-7-minute polished micro-documentary, is the combination of their Vlogs and Challenges.

### The Project:

As planning began for the Fall semester of 2020 it became clear that schools around the world would be working in various ways to accomplish their course learning objectives during a pandemic. Some would be hybrid and others would be totally remote. This project is a good fit for each of these scenarios. After posting a few inquiries on social media and in forums, it was clear that many schools were interested. After numerous Zoom conversations and emails, 15 colleges from around the world, decided to build their courses around this project (list of schools in appendix).

*Campus Reboot* allows students to not only create works that speak to the voice of their generation in the midst of a historical pandemic, but it also allows students to work with the footage from other schools, around the world, to create a broader story of our times.

According to Nichols (2001), documentary projects are about telling stories concerning our shared world and how we want it to be. The new millennium grew in participatory art, video and community to begin the discovery that documentary could be about making purposeful stories with people rather than just about them (Rose, n.d.) This project uses crowd-sourced documentary to tell important stories and create a rich learning environment.

Collaborative, crowd-sourced and interactive sites are all examples of participatory media. Participatory sites such as Youtube have changed the landscape of digital video storytelling. It can also be argued that social media sites are the new breeding ground for both collaborative and crowd-sourced video work. *Campus Reboot* uses Youtube as a cloud-based participatory site for video uploads and currently Wix as its cloud-based website placeholder. We are now preparing to start a social media campaign for the project by posting different schools on our Facebook page each week and collecting the data of likes, follows, shares and comments.

Enabling students to learn and create in this international environment affords them new ways to interpret, understand and engage in the world through the experiences and insights of their peers. Collaborative

documentary allows the scope of the documentary to expand with the addition of user-generated content. User-generated content can be remixed, reworked and built upon to enrich the story (Bhimani, 2012). According to the MIT Open Documentary Lab, collaborative or co-created documentaries interpret the world, and seek to change it, through a lens of equity and justice (Clark & Cizek, 2019).

Crowd-sourced documentary asks users to add content, but the producers never involve users in the interactive architecture or final story of the project (Gaudenzi, 2014). Academy Award winners, Ridley Scott and Kevin Macdonald's *Life in a Day 2020* is a crowd-sourced Youtube project that asks their audience to share a portrait of the world on a single day, July 25, 2020. The *Campus Reboot* project will be edited into a feature length documentary with no input from participants once they upload their footage. *Life in a Day 2020* will appear at the Sundance Film Festival 2021.

Interactive documentary engages viewers to become users. It offers opportunities to explore and interrogate the story and allows participation and re-shaping of the outcomes. With interactive documentary the viewer is invited to become a creative partner in the story. It also enables a global access at any time through many entrances, including social networks (Uricchio, 2019).

All of these documentary styles come together in unison to help both students and instructors work in new and collaborative ways to tell important stories in *Campus Reboot*.

Technological innovations in the fields of digital media, types of distribution and internet access have made creating and sharing digital media content into a simple process that can be accomplished at low cost (Bhamani, 2012). This is evident in *Campus Reboot* where Dropbox is used to collect videos from participating schools, where the videos are aggregated, edited together and uploaded to Youtube. Wix.com is used as the placeholder website where each school has a page and an interactive map is set up, through MapHub that connects to each page.

Although we are collaborating with instructors and sharing content during the "prompt response" phase of this project, the uploaded footage is considered crowd-sourced and does not have collaborative involvement with these schools for the final upload to the site. Schools can use any of the videos from the site to create their own stories, which creates one of

the many interactive aspects of the project.

#### Analysis:

At this point, success can be seen on the website with the variety of thoughts, ideas and style of responses. Students from California State Long Beach have chosen to make their posts on Instagram, which is directly connected to the *Campus Reboot* website. Students from Drake University's magazine and newspaper class have chosen written submissions and The University of Southern Queensland in Australia are sharing weekly videos of their experience as they go into summer. The University of Northern Iowa has opted to create micro-documentaries from their prompts. Miami University has opted for audio blog posts. And the University of Hartford is posting straight Vlog posts that will be repurposed into their final micro-documentary project at the end of the semester.

Another measure of success is the consistent responses from all of the schools involved.

Of the 15 schools involved, nine of them posted an average of 12 responses for each bi-weekly prompt. Instructors send positive feedback on the level of involvement of their students. Several instructors mentioned that their students enjoyed having specific prompts to work from. At the end of the semester there will be a questionnaire in which students and instructors can evaluate their experience with the *Campus Reboot* project. There is a two week turn around for each prompt and the instructors are staying up-to-date with the deadlines. Reviewing the responses, it appears that students are taking the time to consider the questions of the prompts and create thoughtful and interesting responses.

The strength of this project lies in the collaboration with the different schools. Students are able to review peer responses and design projects with a variety of resources. Several of these schools are completely online this semester. Without this project they would be working alone to try to create digital media projects for their courses. The current weakness of this project is the volume of footage that is being uploaded, that must be aggregated, edited and uploaded to the website. This involves a great deal of organization and coordination with graduate assistants. As the bi-weekly prompt deadlines are met, the teaching assistants are assigned five schools to edit. This takes approximately five hours of editing time. Once individual school videos are edited, they are passed on to

be uploaded to the website. This takes approximately six hours to complete.

Once the project is in the post-production stage, the interactive documentary software, Klynt will be utilized to create a more specific interactive documentary to share with the public. The Klynt interactive will have ways for the public to comment, like and share the content. This project will also be combined into a linear documentary video for festival and conference purposes.

This format of teaching digital video can work well for many future projects including Black Lives Matter and the 2020 Election. This format could also work well in other subject areas, such as history, or as an interdisciplinary project with other subjects. Schools, students and instructors from around the world can work together to share the voices and stories of this generation.

#### References:

- Bhimani, J., Mahdia, A., Almahr, A., Shirai, D., & Ohta, N. (2012). Growing documentary: Creating a collaborative computer-supported story telling environment. In *ACM SIGGRAPH 2012 Posters* (p. 1).
- Clark, J. & Cizek, K. (2019). Creative wisdom: Co-creating media within communities, across disciplines and with algorithms. Retrieved from: <https://immerse.news/immerses-collective-wisdom-series-highlights-and-builds-on-mit-open-documentary-lab-s-collective-fe5b4ac1e078>
- Gaudenzi, S. (2014). Strategies of participation: the who, what and when of collaborative documentaries. In *new documentary Ecologies* (pp. 129-148). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Nichols, B. (2001). *Introduction to documentary*. United States: Indiana University Press.
- Rose, M.(n.d.) MIT Open documentary lab. Eight projects curated by Mandy Rose. Retrieved from: <https://docubase.mit.edu/playlist/documentary-as-co-creation/>
- Uricchio, W. (2019). Re-thinking the social documentary. In Glas R., Lammes S., De Lange M., Raessens J., & De Vries I. (Eds.), *The playful citizen: Civic engagement in a mediatized culture* (pp. 73-91). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctvcxmpds.7

#### Appendix:

1. University of Alaska
2. Texas Christian University
3. Rowen College-New Jersey
4. Miami University- Ohio
5. Drake University- Iowa
6. William Peace University-North Carolina
7. McPherson College- Kansas
8. University of Northern Iowa
9. University of Hartford
10. St Francis College- Brooklyn, NY
11. California State University in Long Beach
12. Inderkum School- Sacramento, CA
13. University of Southern Queensland- Australia
14. Bolton University- China
15. University of the West of England in Bristol, England

*Susan Cardillo is at the University of Hartford and focuses on her work in Interactive and Micro Documentary for Social Awareness and Change. She recently completed the documentary "Finding Matilda," about a college student/poet killed during the Holocaust. This documentary was honored in December 2019 with a screening at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia. She is currently in production with "Campus ReBoot," a crowd-sourced, interactive and collaborative documentary about college during Covid19. [scardillo@hartford.edu](mailto:scardillo@hartford.edu)*

©Susan Cardillo, 2020. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.