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“Teaching Media Production: Civic Engagement” Editor’s Notes and Introduction

Rebecca Jurisz

University of Minnesota, juri0010@umn.edu

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Teaching Media Production: Civic Engagement

Rebecca Jurisz

Teaching students to be critical *consumers* of media is of course an essential component of media literacy, but it is also important to teach the skills necessary to become critical *producers*. As the Media Literacy Project argues, "just as *literacy* is the ability both to read and write, *media literacy* involves both understanding media messages and *creating* media."* What are we doing to cultivate our students' abilities to produce media, and thus to engage the media sphere as critical, literate citizens?

In this issue the editors of *Teaching Media Quarterly* highlight those teaching in the area of media production. We wanted to know how the insights of media studies are shaping instruction in the practical realm of media production. We pushed our contributors to think about civic engagement as an organizing theme to see how these acts of media making could impact audiences and communities beyond the classroom. Our contributors make compelling use of the theoretical work in media studies to teach practical skills, creating a strong praxis with both pedagogical and broader social value.

In our rapidly changing technological landscape, educators are thinking through established and emerging tools of production in innovative ways. While media production and even broadcasting are becoming increasingly democratized through technologies like periscope-equipped cell phones, we wanted to know how instructors are making use of the resources our institutions have devoted to sophisticated media equipment. Access to tools that range from professional editing software to multi-camera television studios is not unusual in university and college contexts. Our contributors explore the ways in which these privileges can be put in service of encouraging our students to work for justice in their own communities.

Peter Gregg's detailed lesson plan guides students through the production and broadcast of short talk-show style segments to the web. Students interview experts about salient local issues identified through their own research. The semester-long project takes students through conceptualization, pre-production, production, and ultimately live web broadcast. Gregg's focus on the theoretical underpinnings of media literacy and civic education make the lesson an especially valuable resource.

Jennifer Toole's students work with community clients to create a Public Service Announcement. While her lesson makes use of professional level field production equipment and editing software, it can be adapted to work with consumer level technology while still maintaining the professional, client-based focus, which the lesson details well.

Yahia Mahamdi's lesson plan directs students through a ten-week long course with the ultimate goal of producing a short social justice documentary. Students engage with local communities and institutions, develop their own pre-production proposals, undertake two shooting and two editing exercises, and finally produce their own short documentary. Mahamdi's lesson plan is adaptable to less advanced technical equipment and to different communities in need of support. Importantly, his lesson plan works as a transformative process for students who meet and tell the stories of people whose experiences may be tragically different from their own.

Mia Fischer's lesson plan encourages students to engage with the historical context and genre of public service announcements within the framework of critical race studies. Relevant and timely case studies such as Black Lives Matter or the University of Oklahoma fraternity scandal are woven throughout the lesson plan in ways that evokes student self-reflexivity and critically informed production practices. Ultimately, students have the freedom to choose their own topics related to their immediate community while acquiring advanced production skills for multi-camera studios or making use of consumer technology.

*"Introduction to Media Literacy." *Media Literacy Project*. Web. N.d.