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Access to Media Production Equipment is a Privilege: Using Our Resources to Give Back to the Community

Jennifer Toole
Saint Leo University, jennifer.toole02@saintleo.edu

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Access to Media Production Equipment is a Privilege:
Using Our Resources to Give Back to the Community

Overview and Rationale

With technology such as smartphones, editing apps, and websites like YouTube, anyone can make a movie nowadays. However, students at universities and colleges have a unique opportunity outside of a professional setting to learn and to use professional level media production equipment and software. I find that my students enjoy and appreciate this *privilege*. I use this word *privilege* deliberately; in fact, in my classes I discuss that having access to such equipment is a privilege. This sparks a conversation with students on how we can use these resources to help others in our community. In my classroom, I encourage students to partake in civic engagement as they learn media production skills (Rheingold, 2008).

There are many non-profits/social issues that need a voice and a message, but do not have the resources to hire a production company. While the students are learning media production in my class, they can fill this void and engage in their community by using their talents and resources to create a meaningful message that will be seen by others.

Typically, prior to the start of the semester, I find a local non-profit that is in need of a PSA or promotional video. However, another option is letting the students select a non-profit/social issue that is important to them. One or multiple clients can be used per class. Students are placed into production teams for the project; if one client is used I have each group work on a different video for the same client or if multiple clients are used each group works for a different client.

In addition to wanting my students to engage in the community, I also want my students to have a "real-world" experience in my class. Hands-on experience is essential to the learning process (Kolb, 1984), especially with media production skills. Through the client project, students get this hands-on experience and learn in an environment that is about more than just a grade. Further, the students become invested in the social issue throughout the semester, naturally taking on a sense of responsibility for their work.

I use this project in both my "Audio and Video Production" (introduction level) and "Corporate Video Production" (senior level) courses where students learn preproduction, production, and postproduction processes. Preproduction is the planning stage of a project, production is the actual filming, and postproduction is the editing and final assembly stage (Foust et al., 2012). Students need hands-on experience to learn these skills and this project presents such an opportunity.

While my courses are media production classes, the students walk out of my classroom with more than just media production skills. My students leave class with experience working for a client and with a sense of civic engagement after working with a non-profit in our community. Also, the students know more about the social issue itself. Through a project such as this, college professors can encourage their students to partake in civic engagement as they learn media production skills.

References

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Timeline

Media production students need to learn preproduction, production, and postproduction processes as well as the actual equipment and software. Thus, this is a semester long project.

First, the client must be selected (see the Instructor Summary of Assignment section below for details on how to select a client for your class). Second, the production teams, or groups, are formed. The groups can be self-selected or selected by the professor. Specific roles can be assigned to each student (such as director, camera operator, etc.), or students can be encouraged to rotate and experience each role.

This project is used in combination with other course material and activities. I typically use mini-projects/activities to have students practice filming skills/equipment. For example, we will do a camera activity to practice different shot types (close-up vs. medium vs. wide shot) and an audio activity to practice using different microphones. Once the students have practiced using the cameras, microphones, and lighting equipment, they are ready to put the skills together and work on a larger project, such as this client project. I usually have the students practice these basic skills in between assignments for the pre-production stage of our client project. Students can find paperwork heavy at this stage and are eager to get filming. The pre-production stage also has some back-and-forth between the students and clients awaiting approval to move forward. I find it is best to use that time to practice camerawork, audio, and lighting skills. Then, when we move forward to the production stage the students are ready to film for the project.

During the preproduction stage of the project, the concept for the video is developed and a storyboard and script are put together. The production stage involves using professional equipment to film the project. In the postproduction stage the project is edited and music is added. As I take my students through each stage of creating their project, they also learn the corresponding paperwork, equipment, and software. I also believe a debrief period is important after the project is presented to the client to discuss what was learned and achieved. Thus, I usually divide my semester up into four units: preproduction, production, postproduction, and project debrief. Below I have outlined the four units with a general overview of what is covered and the skills that are learned as part of that unit.

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Preproduction (Weeks one through four)
Overview of pre-production stage:

I.   Client selection (see Instructor Summary of Assignment for details)
  a.   Two options:
    i.   Professor selects a client(s) (Note: One or multiple clients can be used)
    ii. Students select a client based on a social issue they are passionate about
  b.   Regardless of which option selected, the client should be in place very early on (within the first two weeks of the semester)

II.   Group formation
  a.   Two options:
    i.   Self-selected groups
    ii. Professor selects groups

III. Research (see teaching materials)
  a.   The non-profit
  b.   The social issue
  c.   Similar PSAs or promotional videos

IV.   Generating ideas/brainstorming
  a.   Complete a non-profit creative brief (see teaching materials)
  b.   Meet with client to discuss (see discussion prompts):
    i.   Main purpose of the video
    ii. Who is the audience
    iii. Any essential messages/slogans that must be included
  c.   Complete a storyboard and script (seeing teaching materials)

V.   Client pitch
  a.   Present storyboard and script
  b.   Seek client feedback/revisions
  c.   Final client approval, move onto production

VI.   Practice exercises
  a.   Let students practice filming skills in preparation for the production stage of their project. This can be done in between the preproduction tasks:
    i.   Learn audio equipment (see textbooks in bibliography for readings)
    ii. Learn camera equipment (see bibliography for readings)
    iii. Learn lighting equipment (see bibliography for readings)

VII. Skills learned in the preproduction unit
  a.   Researching for a client
  b.   Meeting with a client
  c.   Creative brief, storyboards, and script documents
  d.   Learn and practice with audio, camera, and lighting equipment

Production (roughly weeks five through eleven)
Overview of pre-production stage:

I.   Production Schedule (see teaching materials)
  a.   Arranging talent
  b.   Arranging locations
  c.   Setting dates to film

II.   Production

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          a. Filming the project
              i. Refine skills with audio equipment
             ii. Refine camera skills
            iii. Refine skills with lighting equipment
          b. Build in raw footage days to review footage as a class (see discussion prompts)

III.   Skills learned in production unit
          a. Audio equipment
          b. Camera equipment
          c. Lighting equipment
          d. How to plan a production schedule
          e. How to critique and provide helpful feedback on raw footage

Postproduction (roughly weeks twelve through fifteen)
I.   Editing
          a. Editing as an art of assembly (see bibliography for Hitchcock video to watch)
          b. Edit their project together (see bibliography for readings)
          c. Select music (must be purchased properly)
          d. First draft (for class and professor to critique)

II.   Final project
          a. Reveal project to client
          b. Revisions (from client if necessary)

III.   Skills learned
          a. Editing software
          b. How to edit (technically and artistically)
          c. Importance of obtaining rights to copyrighted music
          d. How to receive feedback and make revisions
          e. Presenting final product to client

Debrief (week sixteen)
I always debrief with my students after the final client meeting (see discussion prompts). The students typically spend an entire semester on this project, it is important to have a discussion on what they learned. Usually, students comment on how their favorite part was working with the equipment and a real client. We will also discuss what aspects of production were most challenging and how they overcame challenges while they were filming.

Instructor and Student Assignment Instructions

This assignment spans the course of the whole semester and can be used in combination with other course materials and assignments/activities. Below I provide a more detailed summary of the timeline above for the instructor as well as an assignment sheet for students.

Instructor Summary of Assignment

Client Selection: There are two options for selecting a client: the professor can select a client(s) or the students can have the freedom to select a client based on their own interests. I was aware of non-profits in the area in need of a video, thus, I have always selected the clients for my

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classes. However, there is a huge benefit in letting students select a non-profit based on their own interests. If the students select a client, I would suggest that the professor talk directly to the client prior to the project beginning to make sure the client can devote the time needed to the class (such as coming in for preproduction meetings and approving stages of the projects so the students can advance with their work). Also, the professor should set a hard deadline within the first two weeks of the semester to have a client confirmed for the project. This will allow the students to stay on schedule with their preproduction planning.

Forming Groups and Grading Groups: This project is completed in groups, or production teams. As such, there should be a group and individual component to the grade. I include an individual component to assess if each individual has completed their share of the work (see the attached rubric – the section "Fulfilled your role in the project"). The weight of individual vs. group grading components can be altered by the professor. Individual roles can be assigned (director, camera operator, etc.) or students can be encouraged to rotate roles so they can practice all skills throughout the project.

Preproduction: Students begin by researching about the non-profit and social issue. Part of this research includes seeing what other PSA or promotional videos have been done that are similar in nature to their project. Then, the students brainstorm ideas and complete a creative brief (see attached handouts). After an initial meeting with the client to discuss the creative brief and discuss what that video will be used for (fundraising vs. awareness of the issue), who the audience will be, and any messages/slogans that are essential to include, the students complete a storyboard and script. The storyboard and script are then presented to the client. The client provides feedback and requests any necessary revisions. Upon final approval from the client, the students are ready to move into the production stage.

Production: The students are always eager to get their hands on the equipment and start filming. However, before releasing them into the field, I have a mandatory production schedule (see attached handouts) that must be completed. This helps the students get organized and plan their time throughout the semester. As a class, we learn audio, video, and lighting equipment throughout the semester (see bibliography for readings), they put all these skills together as they begin to film their project. I set a date that they must begin filming by and build in raw footage days to our class schedule. I expect each group to have a few shots to show the class on these days. This keeps the students on schedule and also provides a chance for feedback, both from the professor and the class. The students also learn to critique footage and provide helpful feedback to each other (see discussion prompts). Many teachable moments come out of these raw footage days.

Postproduction: We begin postproduction with two important discussions. First, we discuss editing as an art form and a means of assembly, rather than "cutting." We watch the great Alfred Hitchcock explain how editing allows one to assemble a project, versus cutting clips (see bibliography for readings). Students then learn industry standard editing software, such as Final Cut Pro and Adobe Premiere (see bibliography for readings). Second, we discuss copyright issues. Rights to use music must be obtained for this sort of project. As the students are editing they select music, seek the professor's approval, and the music is purchased for the project. Students are required to have a first draft (note: this is not a rough draft) for review in class prior

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to the clients final visit. Much like the raw footage days, the class critiques the project (see discussion prompts) and provides last minute changes for the final draft. The client comes into class and the students present their projects.

Instructor note: This project is flexible and can be changed to suite a variety of classes. In fact, I use this assignment both in an introduction course and a senior capstone course. The structure of the assignment remains the same (preproduction, production, and preproduction), but the level of detail and techniques we cover becomes more complex and advanced in the senior capstone course. While we are lucky at my university to have access to professional equipment, this assignment can also be completed with consumer level equipment or even smartphones and editing apps.

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Assignment sheet for students

Client Project Assignment
MMM 210 Audio & Video Production

Summary and Overview of Assignment
In a production team, you will produce a promotional video package for a nonprofit client. The project consists of the following components:

> 1. Project Proposal– includes: project overview and description of videos, project purpose and goals, description of target audience, production and distribution formats, targeted length, project deliverables, production team responsibilities, client responsibilities, budget estimate, production timeline. It also includes a Script & Storyboard– includes: content outline and shooting script, this will be presented to your client.

> 2. Production Plan – includes: team assignments, production schedule (project research, client meetings, scriptwriting, planning and preparation, shooting, post-production, client review, duplication, packaging and distribution, etc.), production equipment list, talent information (name, contact info., role, schedule), location information (address, directions, contact info., permission letter, description and usage, dates.), additional production assistance (crew, makeup, costumes, sets, etc.), supplies and materials (source, cost, purpose, acquisition

> 3. Status Reports– written reports providing an overview of work completed, in-progress and to be done.

> 4. Video Package – the includes: two videos; one at 30 second version for television or social media distribution, and a 1:30 to 2 minutes promotional video for the company's website.

> 5. Project Budget – Itemized budget showing proposed and actual time and expenses.

> 6. Production Binder– includes: project proposal, production plan, shooting and editing scripts, status reports, project budget, appearance releases, location permission, music releases, and any other project documents.

> 7. Client Evaluation– completion of evaluation forms by client.

Grading
You will be assessed on the quality of your preproduction, production, and postproduction abilities. You are working as part of a production team, and thus, must be a reliable member of the team and work professionally with your clients. You will also be assessed on how you fulfilled this role in your project. Lastly, you will be assessed based on how well your final project met your client's needs and addressed the social issue at hand. See the attached rubric for grading criteria.

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Teaching Materials

Below you will find the following materials:
- Project Rubric
- Client Research Worksheet
- Creative Brief Worksheet
- Storyboard/Script Template
- Production Schedule Template
- Discussion Prompts
- Bibliography of Readings

Project Rubric

Student's Name _____

MMM 210 Audio & Video Production

Category	Unacceptable 0-3	Acceptable 4-7	Exemplary 8-10	Total Points
Video is ready for distribution (in the format the client needs it)	Student does not have the video ready for distribution.	Student does not have the video ready for all required distribution methods.	Student has the video ready in all the requested distribution methods.	
Production binder/production paper	Student does not have the required documentation requested in the proper format.	Student has some, but not all, of the required documentation requested in the proper format.	Student has all the required documentation and it is in the proper format.	
Category	**Unacceptable 0-7**	**Acceptable 7-14**	**Exemplary 15-20**	**Total Points**
Fulfilled your role in the project (i.e. reliable member of the team, worked professionally with clients)	Student does not adequately fulfill his/her role in the project.	Student fulfills some, but not all, necessary tasks.	Student fulfills his/her role in the project and is a reliable member of the team.	
Video quality (including but not limited to camera work, sound, lighting, and editing)	Student correctly responds to 50% or less of the requirement in this section.	Student correctly responds to 50% to 75% of the requirement in this section.	Student correctly responds to more than 75% of the requirement in this section.	
Identifies and incorporates all client requests/needs in the video	Student does not properly identify and incorporate the requests/needs of the client.	Student identifies and incorporates some, but not all of the requests/needs of the client.	Student identifies and incorporates the clients' requests/needs.	
Message related to the social issue	The message in the video does not demonstrate an understanding of the social issue.	The message in the video demonstrates some level of understanding of the social issue, however, the message is not as strong as it needs to be.	The message in the video demonstrates a clear understanding of the social issue and the message is strong.	
				Total grade: /100

Comments:

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Client Research Worksheet

Names: _____

Date: _____

MMM 210 Audio & Video Production

Instructions: Use this worksheet to help you research your client and social issue. Also, include any questions you have for our initial client visit.

1. Who is your client? What does this non-profit do? Be as specific as possible.

2. After visiting your client's website and social media sites, what consistent messages/slogans do you see them using?

3. Research the social issue your non-profit is associated with. Get as much information as possible. Remember, you need to be experts on this topic.

4. What other PSAs or short videos have been done on this social issue? What do you like about them? What do you not like?

5. After doing your "homework" and researching about your non-profit and social issue, what questions do you have for your client?

Non-Profit Creative Brief Worksheet

Client background
- Briefly explain about the client. Include information such as: who they are, what they do, and their mission statement. Include any other relevant information on the client/company.

Social issue background
- Briefly explain the social issue related to this project. What is it? Who is affected by this issue? What are common misperceptions about this issue?

Project objective
- Concisely explain the purpose of this project – why are you filming it? In other words, explain what this project should achieve.

Target audience
- Who are you reaching with this project? Be specific and define this group in terms of demographics (age, background, common interests, etc.).

Promise
- What are you offering the viewer in the video? (Remember, this is a video for a non-profit – so you are not offering a product. Instead you are offering a service, an opportunity to help others, an opportunity for help, etc.) Answer this question in one sentence.

Support for your promise
- What information supports the promise you said you are making to the audience? For example, if you said "Opportunity for help to victims of sexual and domestic abuse" – what services do the non-profit offer that support this promise? Be detailed and specific here.

Key message
- What will your audience be left thinking and feeling after they watch this video? What are you asking your audience to do (donate money, volunteer time, etc.)?

Timing and parameters
- Discuss when the project deadline will be. Also, include what format the project will be delivered to the client (a hardcopy on disc, on flashdrive, etc.). Are there any other parameter restraints that need to be met for the client (such as multiple formats or a file size restraint)?

This worksheet was adapted from the creative brief found at:
http://www.smartinsights.com/digital-marketing-strategy/creative-brief-template/

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Storyboard/Script Template

Group Member Names: _____

_____

Video Title: _____

MMM 210 Audio & Video Production
Storyboard & Script

Storyboard	**Description of Video**	**Audio**
EXAMPLE *Scene 1*	*Establishing shots (WS) of building, with slow pans*	***Voiceover:*** *Welcome to Saint Leo University! Home of the leading Catholic teaching institution that enrolls nearly 16,000 students. Our mission is simple and straightforward: To provide a values-centered education that develops tomorrow's business leaders.* ***Dialogue:*** *N/A* ***Additional audio:*** *Music fades in with the opening shot*

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Production Schedule Template

Group Member Names: _____

_____

Video Title: _____

MMM 210 Audio & Video Production
Production Schedule

Dates/Times	Location	Scene #	Equipment Needed	Crew Needed	Actors Needed	Other
EXAMPLE: Monday 9/1	*Basement in St. Ed Hall on campus*	*3*	*Camera kit, tripod, lighting kit, boom mic kit*	*Full group needed*	*Isaiah, Allison, Mary*	*Props needed: dirty blanket, dirty clothing.*

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Discussion Prompts

First meeting with client:
1. What will the video be used for?
2. Who is the intended audience of the video?
3. Is there a particular message/slogan you want used?
4. *Let students ask questions that they prepared ahead of time.*

Raw footage days:
1. What were the strengths about the group's raw footage?
2. Were there any weaknesses or issues that you saw in the footage?
3. If so, how can we fix the issue (postproduction fix vs. needs to be reshot)?
   a. *Use these issues as a review of production skills – for example – if there is a problem with lighting, have the class discuss how to fix that particular problem.*

First draft viewing:
1. What were the strengths of the group's edit?
2. Were there any weaknesses or issues with the edit?
3. If any problems, what would you recommend doing to fit it?

Debrief of project:
1. What did you learn in terms of media production?
2. What media production skill was the greatest challenge for you?
3. What crew job is your favorite and why?
4. What did you learn in terms of working with a client?
5. What did you learn in terms of the social issue?

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Biography

Jennifer Toole
Saint Leo University
Jennifer.Toole02@saintleo.edu

Jennifer Toole is an Assistant Professor of Multimedia Management at Saint Leo University. She received her PhD from Florida State University in 2014. She teaches courses in the areas of graphic design, video production, and writing for interactive media.