

Looking Backward, Bringing Forward: Web-Based Archival Analysis and Presentation in a First-Year Writing Classroom

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Abstract

In this project, students from Shireen Campbell's English 101 course will investigate the causes and/or effects of a major historic event—such as its change to co-education, its desegregation, or the impact of the Civil War--at Davidson College. Their investigation will result in four or five class web pages, one per team, featuring

- A collaborative introduction that contextualizes the event at the college;
- Links to individual student analyses of specific causes or effects;
- Links to selected archival materials relevant to the team project.

Rationale

This project enhances student information fluency in several ways.

1. It emphasizes analysis of primary research materials. Working closely with archivist Jan Blodgett and their class professor Shireen Campbell, students will improve their ability to evaluate source materials as part of the research process.
2. Second, the project promotes strengthened electronic technical skills—specifically, web page authoring and threaded collaboration—for both students and their professor, who will work closely with fellow student Daniel Gerbatch and instructional technologist Kristen Eshleman in preparing for this project and in incorporating Blackboard as a class supplement. Jan Blodgett and Shireen Campbell will attend the Blackboard arena demonstration (April 24) as part of the project. Shireen Campbell will also participate in the Summer Institute for Blackboard training offered to a select group of faculty at Davidson (June 26-28 or July 10-12).
3. The project also encourages a deepened student understanding of web-based writing and accentuates how this medium differs from that offered by a traditional print-based presentation of research. Specifically, non-linear web-based presentation will afford a more complex understanding of the causes/effects of the event.
4. Furthermore, the project will improve both source availability (through web posting of specified sources) and publicize Davidson's considerable archival materials to the campus community.

Description

The project will extend over four weeks of class, beginning in early October 2001, with one day devoted to an extensive tour of the college archives and several days to class analysis of strategies and problems associated with causal analysis and class discussion of evaluating and skillfully incorporating sources. Each team will spend

several days in college archives exploring and subdividing selected topics and several days collaborating with a student technical assistant on web page creation.

In addition to the pedagogical goals related to information fluency described above, the project also would emphasize the importance of effective collaboration. Various strategies will be employed toward the various project goals: for example, students will meet as a class to discuss general issues of source evaluation, then work in teams with the archivist to assess specific sources related to their projects including using Blackboard for follow-up online discussions and exercises, then collaborate to decide which sources to have posted to the project web page.

Each team will have several audiences for its work. Most immediately each team will give a presentation to the Eng. 101 class members on its project. The web pages will be available to the college community as well as to fellow ACS schools.

Plans for Evaluation

Students evaluate each class at Davidson at the end of the semester, and part of their comments will pertain to this project. After the projects are submitted, the course professor, college archivist, instructional technologist, and student trainer/assistant will meet to assess the results of the assignment and discuss how the assignment can be improved for future classes. The web pages will also have links for readers to send comments about the pages back to the archivist. These comments, in addition to any comments generated by responses on the listservs will be incorporated into the discussions and plans for future projects.

Plans for Dissemination

The class projects themselves will be available on-line. The team members will be available to make presentations through the college's Teaching with Technology series, a showcase of exemplary models for enhancing instruction through the use of technology. Notices will also be sent to appropriate listservs (Archives and Archivists, Society of North Carolina Archivists) to announce the project and resulting web pages as models for other college archives to use. The web page will be linked through the Archives web page to the new North Carolina ECHO site, which is designed to encourage educational uses of archives and special collections. We would also be delighted to give a presentation on designing, experiencing, and evaluating this project to an ACS audience.

Timeline

April 2001 – Blackboard demonstration attended by Jan Blodgett and Shireen Campbell (and student if selected at that time)

Summer 2001 - Shireen Campbell participating in Blackboard Workshop at Davidson College

