



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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THE COMMEMORATIVE CD: STUDENT INVOLVEMENT THEORY IN ACTION

Research by Alexander Astin and others has proven that students who interact and bond with each other stand a better chance of staying in college and doing well with their grades than those who do not. With this reality in mind, I have long sought ways to get students in my two-year college English and communications classes to know and care about each other from the beginning of their time together.

For a few years, I took digital photographs of students as they conferred in discussion groups, conducted peer editing, and gave speeches. I would post printed versions of these pictures on bulletin boards and send them by e-mail to everyone in class.

The pictures did help generate a sense of community, but my way of taking and sharing them suffered from a couple of deficiencies. First, it took a lot of time and work on my part. Second, it relegated the students to a passive role.

A couple of years ago, I initiated a new method for gathering and disseminating images and recollections of classes: the commemorative CD. In the 25 classes I have taught since launching this method, students have produced and distributed 22 of their own commemorative CDs.

Step-by-Step

Step One: In the first two weeks of class, I introduce the concept of "student involvement theory." I summarize Astin's views on the topic and commend the students for beginning to get to know each other as much as they already have. Then I announce the commemorative CD project, showing on-screen and hard-copy samples from previous students.

Step Two: I hand out RFPs (Request For Proposal) to anyone who is interested in applying to produce a commemorative CD (this gives me an opportunity to explain how grants are awarded in academic and

governmental circles). Here are some excerpts from the RFP I prepared one quarter when I was teaching composition and public speaking:

Overview

One student from each class section of English 101 (English Composition) and English 103 (Business and Professional Speaking) may produce and present a commemorative multimedia/PowerPoint CD which includes photographic images, sounds, and text of class activities. The CD will be as creative, comprehensive, and representative as possible so as to serve as a valued memento of the quarter's study. (Teams of two or more candidates may be considered.)

- English 101 students whose proposals are successful will automatically receive 200 points for their final out-of class writing assignment and collaboration.
- English 103 students whose proposals are successful will automatically receive 100 points for their portfolios and present their CDs in class.

Nature of the Final Product

- The commemorative CD will portray major activities and learning experiences throughout the quarter and include images of all students in the class.
- The producer/presenter(s) will "burn" a master CD of the media production and provide the instructor with a copy of the CD at the end of the course.
- The producer/presenter(s) will offer to "burn" copies of the CD and make them available at cost to anyone in the class who wishes to acquire them.

Application Process

Anyone interested in producing and presenting a commemorative CD should complete an application form and return it to the instructor by **4:30 p.m., Thursday, 13 January**, in e-mail or hard-copy form.

Step Three: Over the next 7-8 days, student applicants write answers to the brief questions on the RFP, which gauge their skills and attitudes, and provide me with the names of two references.



Step Four: I review all the completed proposals, call all the references, and decide which students to allow to produce the CD for each class. Rarely have more than two students per class applied to be producers, but in those cases I have chosen one person as Executive Producer and allowed him or her to enlist the participation of other qualified applicants as Associate Producers.

Step Five: Every day in class, the commemorative CD producer(s) may use one of our college's digital cameras to take pictures of whatever they want during the hour. I let everyone know that the producer has my permission to use in-your-face techniques such as snapping photographs from right in front of a speaker. After all, I say, when the students become public figures on the basis of what they have learned in our class, they will need to accustom themselves to the glare of media attention!

Step Six: I give all the producers the e-mail addresses of their counterparts in the other classes so they can share ideas and plans with each other.

Step Seven: Within three weeks of the end of the term, I ask each producer to show me a draft of the contents of his or her CD. I may correct typos or factual errors, but I do not interfere with the students' artistic visions or styles.

Step Eight: On one of the last four or five days of the term, every class meets in a computerized writing lab and watches the "premiere" of its commemorative CD. The producer in each class, who is usually distributed a sign-up sheet a few days earlier, gives a copy to every student who asked for one.

Almost all the CDs produced until now have employed PowerPoint as their vehicle for transmitting images and sounds. The size of the complete files has ranged from 5 megabytes to more than 75 megabytes, with up to 150 slides. One Korean student used his own digital camera to take more than 600 pictures in class, which he posted daily on his personal website in addition to using them as the raw material for his CD.

One pair of producers fashioned a 35-minute multimedia show with Windows Media Maker, complete with a dozen interviews conducted in the back seat of a car and accompanied by another student playing the guitar. They used "stripper shoes" as their organizing principle, the reason for which I won't explain here.

Producing a commemorative CD requires students to employ initiative, creativity, and perseverance. It has been my experience that the challenge of creating such a CD appeals both to young people with strong technological or graphic talents and to mature, returning students who enjoy building a record of what they have accomplished in class.

Regardless of who produces it, though, at the end of a course, a commemorative CD leaves everyone with something tangible they can look at later, when time permits, to recall the good relationships they enjoyed with one another. I have kept many of these records in digital format and would be happy to e-mail samples to faculty who would like to try something similar at their colleges.

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