

Engaging Students with Videos in Integrated Learning Classes

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Paper Submitted for the conference proceedings for

The HUIC Arts and Humanities Conference

January 2012

Honolulu Hawaii

We strive to use teaching methods that inspire our Deaf students who engage in texts and use media to make connections across disciplines. Many colleges are now offering interdisciplinary courses that focus on ways in which distinct disciplines are integrated to create new dynamic teaching opportunities. Newell (1992, 1994), Davis (1997), and Klein (2005) describe ways in which interdisciplinary courses enrich student learning. Newell writes that

the lens through which a discipline views the world is its most distinctive feature, as the incorporation or integration of disciplinary perspectives into a larger, more holistic perspective is the chief distinguishing characteristic of interdisciplinary studies (1992).

As faculty members, we encourage our students to examine the individual disciplines we teach, and then incorporate their new knowledge into a bigger picture of the topics they study. Klein writes that “there is no unique or single pedagogy for integrative interdisciplinary learning” (2005). Interdisciplinary courses “draw from multiple perspectives on a complex phenomenon for insights that can be integrated into a rich, more comprehensive understanding” (Klein). Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt’s (2006) “unshakeable focus on student learning” encourages us to reflect on our teaching strategies to ensure that we are experimenting with engaging pedagogies and challenging students to perform at high standards. Combining the ideas from interdisciplinary pedagogy and quality teaching and learning provide the foundation for our unique courses at Gallaudet University. Our workshop presentation focuses on how our students use videos created in American Sign Language to develop their reading and writing abilities in our interdisciplinary courses.

Gallaudet University, located in Washington, DC, is the only Liberal Arts university in the world for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students. Classes at Gallaudet need to be visually appealing and challenging. In 2007, Gallaudet revised its General Studies curriculum which focuses more on the benefits of integrated learning including student engagement, authentic learning, and schema development. For a complete list of Gallaudet University's Student Learning Outcomes, see table 1. As educators at a Bilingual University, we have sought the best ways to incorporate authentic reading, writing, and language skills in the classroom as well as ways to bridge the gaps underprepared students have. While facing students who often have little interest or motivation in completing traditional assignments, we developed two courses incorporating media (photographs, television shows, blogs, YouTube videos of both Deaf performances and captioned short films) with subject matter that is high interest for our students. Instead of following traditional studies, we hope to encourage educators to think outside of the box and embrace subject areas that students are already motivated to learn about outside of the classroom. While topics such as vampirism and voyeurism have seemingly little in common, they pique students' interests, encourage a willingness to work, and offer new opportunities for the development of critical thinking while students analyze, compare and contrast various perspectives. Two of our integrated courses are described for readers with hopes that other teachers will be able to incorporate some of these suggestions. The first course focuses on vampirism and the second course focuses on ethical decision making and voyeurism.

Table 1. Gallaudet University Undergraduate Students Learning Outcomes.

1. **Language and Communication**
Students will use American Sign Language (ASL) and written English to communicate effectively with diverse audiences, for a variety of purposes, and in a variety of settings.
2. **Critical Thinking**
Students will summarize, synthesize, and critically analyze ideas from multiple sources in order to draw well-supported conclusions and solve problems.
3. **Identity and Culture**
Students will understand themselves, complex social identities, including deaf identities, and the interrelations within and among diverse cultures and groups.
4. **Knowledge and Inquiry**
Students will apply knowledge, modes of inquiry, and technological competence from a variety of disciplines in order to understand human experience and the natural world.
5. **Ethics and Social Responsibility**
Students will make reasoned ethical judgments, showing awareness of multiple value systems and taking responsibility for the consequences of their actions. They will apply these judgments, using collaboration and leadership skills, to promote social justice in their local, national, and global communities.

Source: Gallaudet University, 2011, Web.

Vampires: Their Historical Significance in Literature, Film, and Pop Culture

Our first course is a wildly popular one about vampires and is entitled, *Vampires: Their Historical Significance in Literature, Film, and Pop Culture*. Vampire lore has become both the product and the object of interdisciplinary study and offers a rich opportunity for discussion of issues such as social class, fear of death, gender relations, sexuality, disease, and the relationship between folklore and history. This course focuses on the first three student learning outcomes for undergraduates at Gallaudet University (see table 1). While vampire texts and movies have been argued as a publishing fad, one cannot deny how immortal vampires have become. Kim Newman argues, “other fashions in monstrosity come and go (zombies are “in” at the moment, but serial killers are passé), but vampires remain” (Penzler). As educators at a bilingual university (American Sign

Language and English), we seek the best ways to incorporate authentic reading and writing in courses. While texts and movies such as *Twilight* and Charlaine Harris' Southern Vampire Novels (i.e. HBO's *Trueblood*) have been argued as a publishing fad, one cannot deny how immortal vampires have become. Because of this, we developed a course incorporating media with a subject matter our students were already interested in and encouraged them to bring their own background knowledge and ideas about vampires to the course.

This first integrated course examines the phenomenon of Vampirism in verbal and visual culture from various historical periods and from both Eastern and Western cultures including Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Russia, Serbia, France, England, Sweden, and the United States. This is the same course which made the Washington Post's 2010 list "The 15 oddest college courses in the DC region" (http://voices.washingtonpost.com/college-inc/2010/09/the_15_oddest_college_courses.html).

As part of Gallaudet's Identity and Culture Learning Outcome, the course focuses on enabling students to understand complex social identities, including the deaf identity in the 1975 film *Deafula*, and the interrelations within and among diverse cultures and groups. Students focus on vampires from a variety of critical perspectives, contextualizing the works in the cultures that produced them, and understanding their influence on society at large. Students read chapters from textbooks, novels, and short stories in order to gain more knowledge about vampires. *From Demons to Dracula* by Matthew Beresford is our main textbook which provides the history of vampires and their rituals (2008). Students also read Karg, Spaite, and Sutherland's *The Everything Vampire Book* which provides them with interesting information about vampires in

popular culture and films. Along with these textbook chapters, students read legends, stories, novels, and watch commercials that focus on vampires. Students also analyze films from the 1922 *Nosferatu* to the contemporary 2008 *Låt den rätte komma in* (*Let the Right One In*), and sequential art including *30 Days of Night*. Students read Richard Matheson's 1954 novel *I Am Legend* which provides a window into the racial dynamics of the time and then students compare that to the 2007 movie. Students become film critics as they compare and contrast films (and novels), synthesize ideas about the works, and express their ideas in film critiques, original commercials, self-generated graphic novels, papers, and presentations. Students explore the following questions: Why do vampires capture the imagination of readers and viewers? What qualities do vampires personify? How do the different types of media portray vampires? Which media messages include vampires and how do those impact audiences? Which historical events and/or customs have prompted interest for depictions of the undead? And, how have these depictions of the vampire evolved over centuries?

Students in our classes learn visually through American Sign Language. As teachers, we want them to focus on various visual images as well as the texts they read for class. Visual literacy is the ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning from information presented in the form of an image. Student engagement is extremely important to us as we want students to become immersed in the two integrated courses we teach. Our students are able to be creative when they are asked to write scripts for short films and then make them visual by making a film in American Sign Language. One of our popular assignments, "Interview with a Vampire", enables students to create short films which includes an interview-style format spotlighting both students' talents in

writing and interviewing as well as their skills in acting, directing, filming and editing. We are always amazed at the short films that the students write, direct, and star in. One student dressed as a professional interviewer and used a film technique that made her interview look old. It has the grainy look of an old newsreel made in the 1930s and 1940s. The following is one still photo from her film (figure 1):

Figure 1. Interview with a Vampire.



Another student created an interview with a great deal of humor as she and her vampire used their theatrical backgrounds to demonstrate how a vampire-human interaction could go awry. Sara and her vampire had a great time during the interview and their humor was clearly shown in their film. The first shot shows Sara dressed in a professional outfit complete with props, her glasses, and a pad of paper and pen to show that she is a newswoman (figure 2).

Figure 2. Interview with a Vampire.



The second shot shows Sara telling jokes with the vampire she is interviewing (figure 3). Perhaps, the funniest part is near the end of the interview with the vampire lunges toward Sara to bite her neck, a cautionary tale for future reporters' attempts at such endeavors.

Figure 3. Interview with a Vampire.



Another student interviewed his vampire with sunglasses on and had a bottle of holy water on hand to make sure that his vampire would not get out of hand (figure 4).

Figure 4. Interview with a Vampire.



As previously mentioned, one component of the course is to have students understand complex social identities includes that of the Deaf identity. An assignment that has made our class challenging and fun is when we ask students to watch and analyze the 1975 film entitled, *Deafula* and then remake a scene from this film. Steve Adams is the main character of *Deafula* and the film is about how he struggles with his two identities: as a Deaf man and a vampire in disguise. After 27 people in town have been killed, two detectives focus on the murders and determine that Steve Adams is the killer. This film is interesting for our students since all of the characters in the film are Deaf and use American Sign Language (ASL). It was the first horror film that has ever been made using ASL. Lisa, one of our students, stated this about *Deafula*,

I personally noticed a pattern of mirrors and reflections in the movie. There are many shots of these so I can't help but feel it connects to Steve's identity as a vampire. My argument is that many cultures have superstitions about mirrors, but often one common theme among mirrors is that they reflect our real souls, which includes identities (Craig).

This quotation shows some of the thought processes that our students go through as they analyze films in class. We had discussed the use of mirrors in several of our texts and films, so Lisa was able to relate what we were learning in class to her analysis in her film critique.

After students have analyzed and discussed *Deafula* in class, we ask them to remake one scene from the film. Students have created some interesting and new ways to look at *Deafula*, including students in our current class who created a prequel to the film, *Deafula: The Early Years*, and had a young toddler play Deafula. They posted it on YouTube for everyone.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOMI5sBoaV8><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOMI5sBoaV8>

The students who created this film used film techniques for the title sequence that imitate *Star Wars* (figure 5).

Figure 5. *Deafula: The Early Years*.



[Students in other groups created the following videos and posted them on You Tube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xF5ZYKOjVR8>,

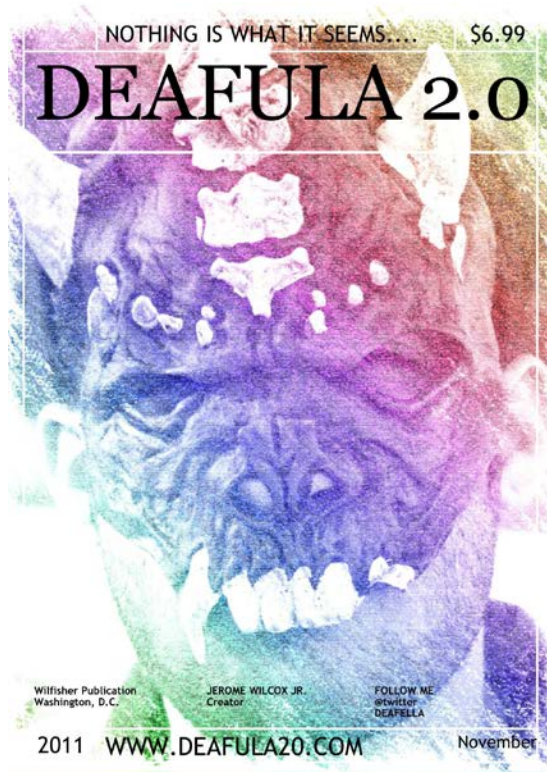
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rua9A5k2SNM>, and

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIeYEvVxYII>].

Our *Deafula* remakes have enabled our students to show their creative talents as they have had to come up with a scene, write a short screenplay, and make the film.

One other assignment for this class engages students as it requires them to create a graphic novel. After they read the graphic novel, *30 Days of Night* (Niles and Templesmith), and watch the film of the same name, students create their own story and illustrate it. One student utilized his graphic design talents to use his scene from *Deafula* for his graphic novel. The front cover of his graphic novel is shown in figure 6.

Figure 6. Jerome's graphic novel cover.



One shot of *Deafula* featured in Jerome's graphic novel which is very well written and includes many details is shown in figure 7.

Figure 7. Deafula.



Students in our integrated learning course on vampires have enjoyed creating videos for class. Some of our current students have even asked to create more videos for extra credit.

Multiple Lenses: Grappling with Reality and Illusion

In the second course, students examine how people look through various lenses as they view events. The texts used provide characters with interesting and unique perspectives on social and ethical responsibilities. After people witness events, what are their interpretations of what happened? Are we looking at reality or are we seeing our own illusions? We focus on the Bystander Effect, the Rashomon Effect, and how these play out in films such as *Rashomon* (Kurosawa, 1950), and *Rear Window* (Hitchcock, 1954). Students create films from their own points of view. These short films lay the foundation for writing activities done for class.

One of the first topics we read about and discuss is the Bystander Effect. Students analyze what the Bystander Effect means after they read a series of articles that discuss this phenomenon. We also ask the students to create short videos about the Bystander Effect and these videos provide a look at how they view this effect and how people who did not know they were creating films, became part of the Bystander Effect. There were four teams of students who created films on the Bystander Effect and all of them were quite good. The students thought of situations in which they could capture this effect, they wrote short screenplays and planned, and then they created their short films. Each group was able to test its hypothesis and some of them were actually surprised when people would stop and help them. In two situations, people stopped and helped our students after they had “fallen.” When one of our students fell down near our campus,

one man stopped and came to his aid. The man even signed the word, “help” to our student and was very concerned. In another situation, when one of our students “fell down,” by a street corner, a person stopped his car and came to his aid. The students were challenged to create situations in which they could get reactions from people without them knowing that it was set up. The students felt as if people do care when people came to help them out of a bad situation.

One of our most fascinating videos was created by a group of our students who went to Washington, DC’s Union Station and made a video about a Deaf female student who is visually impaired walking into the men’s room by mistake. The students found out that no one questioned our student as she walked in, stayed for a few minutes, and then left. When another student, a Deaf male student walked into the women’s room, several women stopped him from entering and told him that he was making a mistake. Our students felt that women were more observant and helpful when they were trying to create their own Bystander Effect to see who would help them out in an odd situation. Their video can be seen on You Tube at – http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPh_1Li9iEg. Even though the next frames are sometimes blurry, viewers have the sense of what the students were trying to do to create a Bystander Effect situation (figures 8 - 11).

Figure 8. One of the title cards in a video about the Bystander Effect at Union Station in Washington, DC.

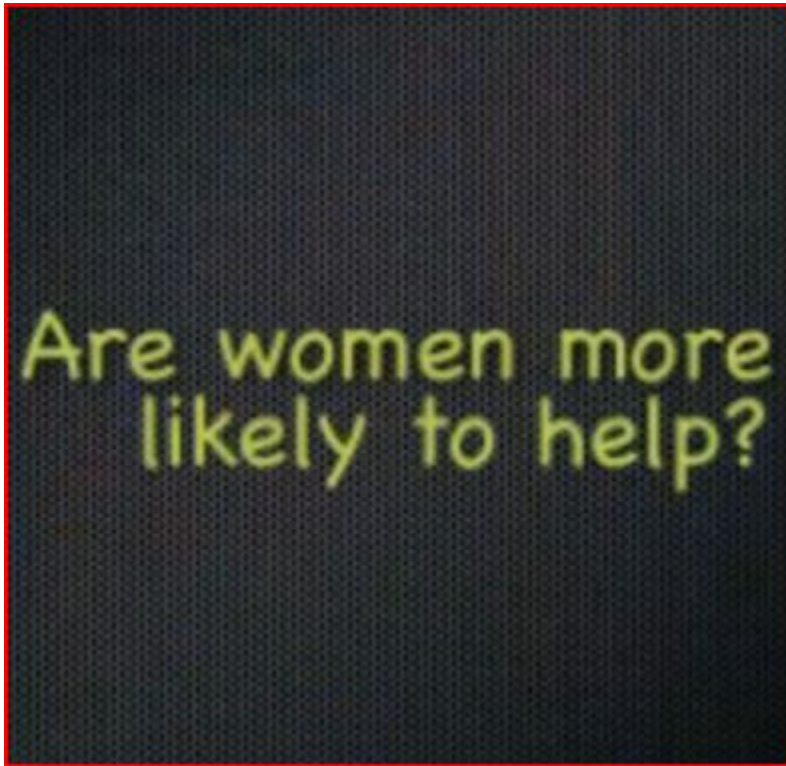


Figure 9. Our students' hypothesis.

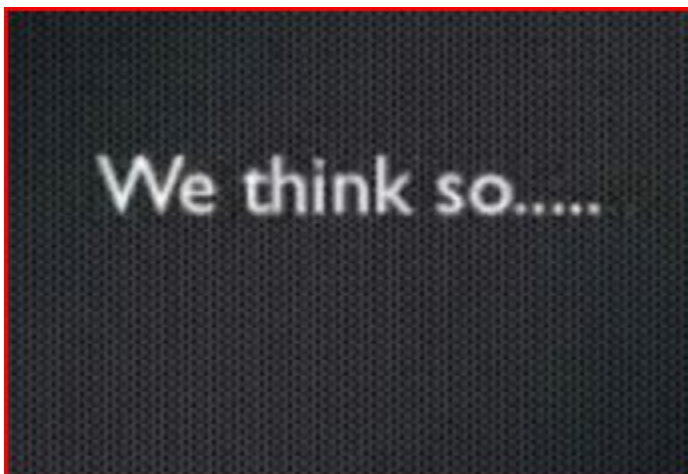


Figure 10. One of our male students heading to the women's restroom.



Figure 11. One of our male students being led to the men's restroom.



Our students' hypothesis was that women would be more likely to come to the aid of people than men would in situations like this. In two situations, women stopped our young male students from going into the wrong restroom and in the last frame viewers

can see that the woman plans to lead our student to the correct restroom. This confirmed their hypothesis that women would be more likely to help. Of course, this would have to be replicated many times to be sure, but our students were proud that they had created a situation in which they could test on a small scale.

Students in this class also discussed the Rashomon Effect, named after the short stories by Ryûnosuke Akutagawa and the 1950 Kurosawa film in which several people witness a horrific event and later when questioned, all of them had different versions of what they had seen. This unique film provided the foundation for many discussions in our class and after this in-depth analysis, our students discussed how this film differs from the Bystander Effect. They also focused on both of these effects throughout the class. We did not have the students make films for The Rashomon Effect. However, when we read *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee) and *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini), students examined the events that happened in these novels and discussed whether or not the Rashomon or the Bystander Effect occurred in the story. Our students discussed the rape scene in *The Kite Runner* and decided that the Bystander Effect applied to Amir who watched Hassan being brutally raped, but was unable to stop the attack. Students discussed themes and ethical decisions characters made in both novels.

Students in this class also watched several films that focused on ethical decisions people make. After they watched *Crash* (Haggis), the students focused on how a decision made by one person can affect decisions made by others. The situations in *Crash* were all caused by a single car crash in the beginning of the film which led to viewers examining multiple situations. There are many main characters in this film who focus on racism and abuse of power. Students are fascinated by all of the twists and turns

in this story as they can see how one event started the entire chain of events that take place. Each character appears to be in his/her own small world, but the film shows how each of these worlds collide after a single event starts the ball rolling. Detective Graham Waters (played by Don Cheadle) and his partner are in a traffic accident at the beginning of the film. The story then goes on to relate events that happened to Detective Waters, his younger brother, other policemen, the district attorney in Los Angeles and his wife, a television director and his wife, a Persian store owner and his daughter, and a Hispanic locksmith and his daughter. Each of these characters would not have met had it not been for the original car accident. The film's twists and turns provide lots of themes that students can discuss related to ethical decision making.

Our last major theme in this class focuses on voyeurism. Students read the short story, "Rear Window" (Woolrich) and then watched two films in which the main characters were voyeurs: *Rear Window* (Hitchcock) and *Disturbia* (Caruso). The short story which inspired the two films focuses on a man with a broken leg who is stuck in his apartment for several weeks. Bored out of his mind, the main character, Hal Jeffries, witnesses a murder that takes place in an apartment opposite his. Jeffries, a professional photographer, uses his camera and telephoto lens to capture images that happen to people he watches, including Lars Thorwald who kills his wife. The film, *Rear Window*, shows an apartment building in New York City in which all of the action takes place. Jeffries does become a voyeur, who leads viewers on a journey to find evidence against Thorwald. This classic 1954 Hitchcock film inspired the 2007 film, *Disturbia*, featuring Shia LeBeouf as the main character. Kale (LeBeouf) becomes a voyeur after he is placed under house arrest one summer after hitting one of his high school teachers. Kale and his

friends become voyeurs as they spy on their neighbors, including Mr. Turner, a serial killer. Even though Kale is a voyeur, he becomes the hero when he saves his mother from being killed. Our students enjoyed watching both films and they discussed the ethics involved in situations such as the ones shown in these two films. Is it ethical for people to become voyeurs? We posed this question to our students and had interesting discussions about when being a voyeur, such as in these two situations, can actually be a good thing.

Integrated Learning: Viewing Themes from Multiple Perspectives

Our two integrated learning courses create communities of students who focus on various themes that look at concepts from a variety of perspectives. Each faculty members in these integrated learning courses provide students with different perspectives. Students at Gallaudet University focus on language and communication as well as critical thinking skills in each of these courses. For the first course that we teach, students also focus on identity and culture as they learn vampirism. For the second course, students focus on ethics and social responsibility as they explore the themes of racism, voyeurism, the Bystander Effect, and the Rashomon Effect. For our courses, we incorporate moviemaking and focus on topics in which our students already have a vested interest. Through this, students enjoy learning while continuing to improve their language skills.

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