

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Recording Oral Histories in an Online Class

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

For this innovative teaching practice students in an online American Women's Studies course record oral histories of older female relatives or acquaintances. The instructor uses this project as a summative assessment to help students generalize course content to the surrounding community, while encouraging them to develop deeper personal connections with the material.

This instructor introduces the project using the StoryCorps website: <https://storycorps.org/>. StoryCorps is an independently-funded organization dedicated to preserving the oral histories of ordinary and extraordinary people. The instructor demonstrates StoryCorps' web resources including sample interview questions, tips for success, active listening techniques, etc. The class collectively listens to a StoryCorps interview and engages in a reflective discussion, with the instructor focusing on student reactions and takeaways.

The instructor asks students to download the free StoryCorps app onto their mobile devices and explore the step-by-step guide that helps users through the interview process.

The instructor uploads prior student projects to the course website as models of exemplary work. The instructor also provides a rubric that outlines specific project requirements:

- The interviews should be 15 to 20 minutes long;
- The subject should be older than 50 years of age;
- The questions should be open-ended and relevant to the conversation;
- The interview should include or reference historical perspectives.

The instructor gives students three weeks to complete the project. Every week, the instructor assigns an activity to break the project into manageable parts. The first activity is a six-word memoir encouraging students to focus their oral histories on specific topics or events. An example memoir is "For sale: baby shoes, never worn." Students write and present their six-word memoirs during one class period. For the second activity, students submit interview protocols for instructor approval. Students use instructor feedback to revise their protocols before recording their interviews in the third week using the StoryCorps app.

Notes from the Instructor About This Innovative Teaching Practice:

Many students value the opportunity to talk to an important woman in their lives about topics not normally discussed in everyday settings. Students are able to converse with mothers, grandmothers, aunts, or family friends about personal experiences with pregnancy, birth control, sexual harassment, stigma, or marriage in ways that contextualize and personalize course content.