

Leveraging Digital Pedagogies to Energize Learning
Faculty Vignettes and Collected Experiences
2021 ACS Virtual Summer Working Group Series

Introduction

In March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced ACS faculty to completely revamp the ways in which they engage students and deliver course materials. Despite the sudden change, the pandemic has catalyzed productive experimentation with digital collections and multifaceted interactions both within and beyond the traditional space of the physical classroom. While our collaborative organization may eventually transform into a more permanent group, the goals of our collaborative endeavors were two-fold:

- 1) Develop an ongoing inventory of pedagogical methodologies and digital resources to enhance student learning across the disciplines, and
- 2) Encourage participants to revise their syllabi and classroom norms by incorporating technological resources and capabilities to stimulate new possibilities for teaching, scholarship, and service.

Throughout our monthly meetings, we assigned priority to digital resources readily available at all 16 ACS institutions. In surveying digital resources, moreover, faculty were encouraged to consider collections available through their libraries, as well as the digital environment of their corresponding learning management systems (LMS). For specific external needs, precedent has been given to free or low-cost, open-source tools that can be readily and safely integrated into any curricular experience. In this vein, we have promoted equitable tools that offer immediate enhancement to diverse undertakings in teaching and scholarship without the need for excessive additional funding. We should work to minimize the barrier to learning as much as possible, and digital resources can help faculty and students to push the boundaries of learning to the open frontiers of new media.



Michael Marsh-Soloway, PhD
 Director of the Global Studio, University of Richmond

I feel like the bearer of news that sounds awful, but actually is not. We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment....If we are going to heal, let it be glorious.

~Sonya Renee Taylor

Teaching throughout the pandemic has entailed manifold challenges, worries, and hardships, but I derive unique inspiration and optimism from galvanized commitments forged with colleagues to promote more authentic realizations of community, solidarity, support, and innovation. Covid-19 has served to catalyze changes that were already largely underway in education-- global connections, online resources, and digital infrastructures have transformed from amenities to necessities, and institutions have a reinvigorated obligation to utilize, leverage, and advance the creative ways in which faculty, students, and staff have more capabilities than ever before right at their fingertips on laptops and mobile devices. Aside from the more formal academic evaluation of teaching methods, which coalesced in the ACS working group that we came to view as loosely modeled on the [cartonera](#) movement started in Argentina, thanks to insights shared by Elizabeth Pettinaroli and Claudia Ferman, our discussions highlighted the complex professional and personal dimensions of teaching in the era of Covid-19. For instance, how did we manage the rapid transition to online and HyFlex teaching? What aspects of life did we share, or keep private, in interactions with colleagues and students? Will any of the insights gleaned or practices derived from teaching in the pandemic persist to disrupt traditional pedagogy?

If I were to reflect critically over the last eighteen months, I would view my collected observations as the evidentiary basis of a moderately bold prediction that education stands at the precipice of a new paradigm that emphasizes and reinforces engagement, data-based analytics, empathy, and creative connectivity. At the beginning of 2021, I began collaborating, for instance, on the development of an online teaching and research tool, [Textopian](#), with my friend and colleague, Carlos Alvidrez. The site offers a library of open-source materials to facilitate collaborative and annotation in all languages, while deepening understandings of intertextual allusion and bibliographic references in the same medium of assigned books, articles, and documents. Promoting accessibility and equity, the tool is compatible across all computer and

mobile variants, and provides analytics detailing how students engage course materials, experience presented narratives, and respond emotionally to canonical works.

The largely invisible activity of reading, consequently, becomes visible, as instructors better track how students read, whether they comprehend assigned materials, and how they relate meaningfully to the opinions of authors and peers. The site also measures the quantity of work performed, highlights opportunities for qualitative improvement, and students can export all notes to a consolidated Word document, so the act of reading contributes directly to writing. As teachers use Textopian for class activities, they contribute to a growing body of imaginative interpretation and analysis shared across diverse curricular contexts. Carlos and I are eager for colleagues to test the site to see if it would be beneficial for their courses and research interests.

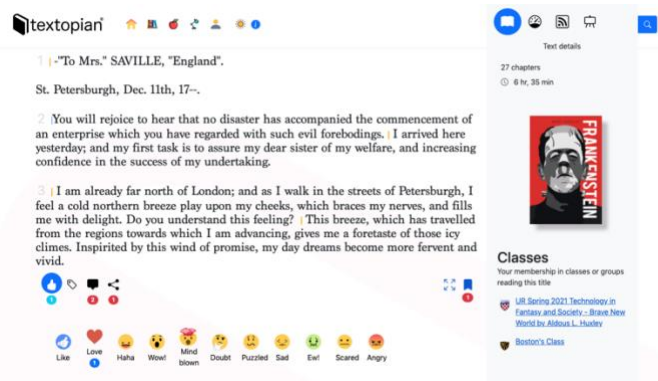
The pandemic has contributed directly, furthermore, to the heightened need for educators to take pedagogical risks. Unusual times call for unusual measures, and there seems to be a pressing void in traditional teaching positions and roles that would explicitly incentivize the adoption, evaluation, and development of methods, assessment criteria, and tools to engage student audiences more meaningfully, even if these items fail initially and require adjusted permutations to perfect. While these kinds of activities could conceivably fall under the broader auspices of ‘scholarship,’ it would be of tremendous benefit for instructors to work with administrators and partners to codify enhancements to teaching, learning, and institutional effectiveness as explicit components of our shared responsibilities, promotion criteria, and career profiles.

One of the greatest realizations that I made throughout the pandemic was the intensified need for community, and the fostering of a sense of togetherness, and I was somewhat awestruck to find that a digital community could cultivate a sense of belonging just as much, if not more, in certain respects, than traditional, face-to-face models. Students in my online 2021 spring first-year seminar, FYS 100-51 *Technology in Fantasy and Society*, came to befriend each other in collaborative course activities that they completed online through JamBoard, Google Docs, and digital storytelling projects. These virtual interactions translated to real-world relationships, and I have a standing monthly lunch event to meet with them in person throughout the fall.

Similarly, teaching and research materials are changing from physical objects to virtual bytes that can be shared, modified, bookmarked, mapped, and analyzed. Digital information connects almost every facet of our lives- from bank accounts to medical records to social interactions and beyond. Digital technology both disrupts and empowers the realization of new practices, industries, and opportunities for individuals and their communities around the globe. What are the costs and benefits of information technology, and how does the business of data sustainably, humanely, and ethically transpire? By asking these kinds of questions throughout the pandemic, I developed the framework for a new Sophomore Scholars in Residence (SSIR) course to be offered at the University of Richmond in the 2022-2023 AY -- *Digital Revolutions: From Book to Byte and Back Again*. By evaluating the ways in which interactive media simultaneously reflects divisions and unities of human interests, political organizations, and ideologies, and by surveying changes in modes of self-expression, this course will interrogate the presentation, perception, and consumption of digital media in relation to dynamic world events.

Although I, like many of my colleagues, applauded the arrival of the Covid-19 vaccine, and the return to the classroom experience, I still believe firmly that we cannot go back. We cannot just

pretend that the pandemic never happened. The cat is out of the bag. Online and hybrid education are no longer just for other peoples' children. These new modalities are here to stay, but that's not to say that they should replace, or work to the detriment of traditional, residential learning. Rather, the modalities should enhance one another, and be used in tandem, at different periods, for different purposes, goals, and contexts. How teachers deploy these modalities may challenge presiding assumptions, categories, and classifications of institutions, but there is tremendous opportunity for universities and colleges to recognize the value that these synergies pose, and our ability to reach students, scholars, and communities at unprecedented scales and magnitude. While the media of recent history might seem preoccupied with fake news, political polarization, and the rejection of science, higher education confronts pervasive distrust in its central mission, but with online and hybrid learning, and the associated digital resources required to bring these modalities to light, the fruits of our research, efforts, and activities can reach more people than ever before. The traditional vision of higher education did not fail society; it just needed to progress to a more dynamic form, and we are only just getting started.



Top: Textopian collaborative reading and annotation interface



Middle: Textopian data visualization and collected analytics for instructors to derive the emotional journey of a text based on reactions submitted by students



Bottom: JamBoard activity from *Brave New World* where students imagined the social media presence of key characters



Vince T. Gawronski, PhD
Professor of Political Science
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**Normalizing the Abnormal:
Adapting the Learning Environment to the COVID-19 Global Pandemic**

I study disasters and teach international relations. The viral outbreak in China was on my radar in December 2019. However, I only became genuinely concerned when I heard from one of my seniors majoring in Global and Comparative Studies. During our January 2020 Explorations Term, he traveled to China to gather data for his senior capstone project. In an email, he reported 70 infected people in Yunnan Province, where he was staying, while 5,000 people were infected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province. “The streets are eerily quiet and everyone that goes out wears face masks. I have an app on my phone that provides hourly updates and body counts of people infected and/or dead across the country, and the numbers are rising everywhere.” Needless to say, he had a difficult time getting back to the United States in time to start the spring semester. After quarantining, he arrived on campus more than a week late to give us an early warning of what to expect: “It’s going to be bad, Dr. G. This is not a normal virus outbreak.” Six weeks later, just before Spring Break, we shut down the campus.

Transitioning to online learning began on March 18th, and online courses started on March 30th. I had already completed an online teaching certification course. Therefore, I was not nearly as anxious as some faculty members were. Many senior faculty had never taught online, and some only knew how to use essential features on Moodle, our learning management system. Professors teaching entirely discussion-based courses were incredibly distraught. A few were in tears.

At first, I tried to teach online synchronously. But, with students in several time zones, it became apparent that recorded course content with self-paced learning modules was needed. I strived to create polished Screencast-O-Matic PowerPoint presentations and YouTube videos. However, I was wasting time on the second, third, and fourth takes. Unless I really screwed up, I decided not to worry about minor flubs and my weird gesticulations in the videos. After all, my in-person delivery and interactions with students are rarely scripted and polished. We needed to

be nimble and get through the term as best we could. Additionally, I utilized Poll Everywhere to gauge how my students were coping or adapting and how well they comprehended the course material.

All my students were suffering to varying degrees, so I tried to accommodate their needs. Rather than stressful high-stakes evaluative exams, I created timed, open-book, open-resource low-stakes quizzes, reflections, and online learning activities, some with YouTube videos.

Summer 2020, I taught Environmental Hazards and Urban Social Risks online because of the global pandemic – one big teachable moment. How we prepare for and respond to disease outbreaks is similar to how we deal with other types of geophysical and hydrometeorological hazards. We examined how the pandemic affected physical, direct, symbolic, cultural, and structural violence, how it generated opportunities for criminal entrepreneurs, and how it influenced push-pull migration factors. We comparatively analyzed the performance of specific countries at flattening the curve. I used many YouTube videos, and we played the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction's Stop Disasters!, a simulation game.

It became apparent that trying to teach and take an online course during the lockdown was far from ideal. Students had difficulty focusing on the Zoom meeting as siblings and parents argued in the background. Pets, especially cats, did what they could to interfere with teaching and learning, and the strength of the Wi-Fi connection varied depending on how many people in the household were online at the same time.

By mid-summer, we knew we wouldn't be returning to normal in the fall. Classrooms were rearranged, and venues repurposed to provide social distancing. The administration gave us the option of learning and teaching remotely, hybrid, or mask-to-mask. Since strict testing, contact tracing, daily health checks, and quarantine protocols were implemented, I chose to teach in person.

It was the most stressful semester ever. You could almost smell cortisol in the air. Compounding matters, I taught an overload. As department chair, I was stretched thin. Concerned, anxious, if not frightened, everyone wore a mask, making it a challenge to recognize students. Hand sanitizer dispensers were everywhere. Communication was difficult, as the masks muffled speech. We had no idea which direction the virus was headed. Vaccines were in development. At any given time, one-third to one-half of my students were quarantined for testing positive or exposure to someone with the virus. Several students lost relatives and family friends to the virus. It all seemed insane.

Everything took more time and effort, but we kept our positivity rates low. I tried to accommodate students in quarantine by Zooming them into class. I added Flipgrid videos to my repertoire to see students' faces. I scheduled several synchronous class meetings entirely on Zoom to simultaneously be in the same virtual space and utilize the breakout rooms. Group work in the classroom was prohibited.

Spring 2021 was not as stressful. We were getting used to the abnormal situation, and the vaccination was a life-saver. But pandemic protocols disrupted how I've been teaching for over 25 years. During normal times, my "idiosyncratic Socratic" teaching style relies on spontaneity and improvisation. I had to adapt.

Faculty and students who couldn't adapt and were only in coping mode became frustrated. However, those who could adapt had somewhat successful teaching and learner-centered experiences.

It's now Fall 2021, and we're back in the classroom, still wearing masks, of course. The abnormal is becoming normalized while the delta variant rages in Alabama. The hospitals are near or at capacity at this writing, and the seven-day average death rate is more than 75 daily deaths. It's now become a pandemic of the unvaccinated. I expect we'll be dealing with new coronavirus mutations and the new, ever-evolving abnormal for some time to come.

Click the video link below to preview the digital teaching artifact:



Six Features of the State

- Territoriality.
- Population.
- Authority.
- Legitimacy.
- Sovereignty.
- Government.

3:13 16:55 1x



Olivier Delers, PhD
Associate Professor of French, University of Richmond

Many of the classes I teach at the University of Richmond have a strong experiential component. I use community-based learning in my literature courses. For instance, I have designed a variety of projects with community organizations from tutoring K-12 students in reading and writing to forming book clubs led by my students. Before the pandemic, I took a group of students to France every summer for a five-week language immersion program. The restrictions imposed by Covid-19 forced me to think creatively and to trust in the potential of new technologies to make experiential learning possible, both in fully online and in high-flex course.

This past summer, my students were hungry for international experiences and I was approved to run a hybrid program with three weeks of online learning and two weeks of in-person teaching in Copenhagen, Denmark. I recruited very motivated students who were also involved in other intensive summer experiences. During our three weeks of online classes, they were doing research on campus for forty hours a week, working full-time, or completing internships in different parts of the United States, in person or online. Having access to remote teaching technologies was, in many ways, a blessing. I met with the students twice a week for two-hour class sessions in the evening, from 8pm to 10pm—a class time that is rarely used at my residential liberal arts college. In order to create community among the students, I chose to create a dedicated Slack channel where all the readings and assignments were posted, and where student responses were accessible to all. I also offered feedback on Slack that was visible not just to one student but to all students.

This transformed the way that I graded and commented on student writing. Instead of responding to students individually, I picked up elements from several posts and offered feedback that summarized different contributions and encouraged students to go further in their thinking. I validated ideas, questioned assumptions, and posted links for further investigation. It took a little bit of time for students to adjust to Slack: for the first week or so, they wanted to write as they would for traditional essays, instead of taking advantage of the flexibility of Slack as a content-sharing platform. But they progressively started interacting with each other, posting shorter contributions but longer and more engaged comments on their classmates' ideas. Slack is certainly not a fully-integrated course-management system but it has the advantage of taking students out of the traditional classroom (including out of the traditional *virtual* classroom) so that they can experience each other's contributions in more dynamic ways that are closer to the kinds of professional brainstorms and team-projects that they might work on in the future.

In other words, before we experienced life in Copenhagen and interacted with local guest lecturers, we were already engaged in experiential learning online, but as a small community that was excited to think together, to argue with each other sometimes, and to build new knowledge. Before our trip, I was also able to invite guest speakers living in Europe and Africa for Zoom workshops, thus creating new kinds of international experiences that were certainly possible in the past but that have become much more common and natural in the Zoom era. It is clear to me that we should not go back to business as usual, especially to the traditional classroom experience that serves as the core educational model for many liberal arts colleges. We should harness the power of technology and of what we have learned during this pandemic to imagine all sorts of new courses with a mix of in-person and online experiences that, in the end, can only enhance learning by making it more dynamic and real.

University of Richmond students visiting the Copenhill project in Copenhagen



Screenshot from Slack channel

SSA Denmark

#hygge

Hygge - 5D 480p.mov

Monday, July 19th

Tuesday, July 20th

Thread #new-european-ecologies

Lillian Jul 21st at 6:30 PM

Forgot to add this, but I also wanted to raise the question of is Greta popular because she isn't threatening to the privileged class (she's white, young, female, neurodivergent). I'm not saying she's weak, but rather that many patronize her, look at her actions as if they are a hobby. There are many indigenous and Black activists, many of who are marxists, who for years been calling radical change on a number of different political topics, including the climate, yet they are not invited to the UN. In a way it reminds me of how MLK is often praised while Malcom X is villainized.

2 replies

Olivier Delers 2 months ago

Very good point.

Dani 2 months ago

I think she is popular because of her determination and resilience on the issue that



Elizabeth M. Pettinaroli, PhD
 Associate Professor of Spanish
 Modern Literatures and Languages
 Chair of Latin American and Latinx Studies
 Rhodes College

Most of my courses at Rhodes College are conceived and taught from the pedagogical perspectives and practices of engaged learning. Having the privilege of teaching at a liberal arts College in the middle of a thriving and diverse city, Memphis TN, gives me the opportunity to engage a growing Latinx community in a region that scholars now call the “Nuevo South.” Objectives in my classes are reached both in the classroom through traditional teaching, alongside with learning that takes place by working on projects with our community partners in a constant exchange of ideas and knowledges.

Engaged learning has helped us see the relevance of the subject matters we study in real time, allowed us to expand communities of speakers, and change the direction of knowledge that we expect in the interactions between Academia and its surrounding communities. In literary and cultural studies courses, my students engage what they learn with the practices and principles of cartonera publishing houses. The burgeoning cartonera movement gathers cooperative, arts-based publishing and literacy programs that, in their brief span of existence, have engaged literature and art to promote civic agency in tackling problems rooted in inequality and injustice. The movement’s genesis came in the wake of Argentina’s 2001 economic crisis, when young writers responded innovatively to the collapse of publishing by creating Argentina’s first cooperative publishing house, Eloísa Cartonera.

The model was simple and effective: they bought recycled cardboard from downsized workers at fair prices; created a collection of literary works from prominent literary figures (who donated their copyrights), up-and-coming writers, and cartonera authors from displaced communities; and implemented a cooperative model of manufacturing (publishing) and distribution. This project revolutionized how we think about literature’s place in our lives, its model of production and sustainability, and its powerful potential to generate meaningful work for the dispossessed in times of crisis. Proof of the model’s success and influence: its replication across urban Latin America, Spain, and one city in the US.

Based on a course taught in the Spring of 2016, we created a community-based publishing initiative, Memphis Cartonera, which serves to implement the experiential component of my current courses and facilitates academic learning reflectively towards forward-looking problem

solving within our local communities of practice. Right before the pandemic, my students planned to deploy what they learned in class to develop workshops that promote art and literacy in the city of Memphis in collaboration with local counterparts. This participatory action research is inspired by the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, Orlando Fals-Borda, William Barry, and others. The partnerships offer our community a forum to conceptualize, develop, and implement innovative humanities initiatives to address gaps in education and civic representation for local families.

The pandemic brought our work and our plans to a sudden halt. How would we meet with our partners from the non-profits organizations we worked with to undertake the collaborative labor that we had planned? In what way could we foster community and grow close relationships in reading and writing workshops? How would we create handmade books jointly from our remote locations throughout the country and all over the world? And how would our books reach children and their parents in the community? For the second time, we found many of the answers by learning from ideas that came from South America.

The cartonera publishing world, formerly based mostly on practices relying on “ink and paper,” its networks of communication and practice through engagement with technology in creative and resourceful ways. And we followed their example once more. The pandemic brought new opportunities to explore many technologies that, for lack of time or resources, we had never learned about or thought of implementing. We engaged and tested multiple resources: different modes of communication (Whatsapp, Slack, Group me, etc.); tools to coordinate editorial projects (Trello, Asana, Basecamp etc.); platforms to meet virtually (Google Hangouts, Discord, Zoom etc.); and digital bookmaking tools (BookWright, Adobe, Blurb etc.) The uncertainty brought by this new global context opened a window to explore uncharted territory and helped students be more experimental in a “new normal” defined by the unknown.

They discovered and contributed valuable knowledge at every step of the initiative, were proactive and made recommendations about best technologies, and were inspired to bring together their experiences in a collective volume entitled Covid Chronicles, a book that included works of poetry, narrative, and visual art. This work will be published this Fall of 2021. One visual and one literary example of their work follows:



Karrington Knight

“My year has been defined by negative after negative, haunted by a looming fear of something I cannot see; there is an invisible enemy, lurking in the air itself. Though this pathogen has never invaded my system, it has attacked my life as I once knew it. As I test negative again and again, I feel sick with a different set of symptoms. I no longer recognize myself, forever changed by a disease that I have never had but has ravaged me in ways I cannot even begin to comprehend. I will never again see my neighbors, my government, my career, or myself the same. Though I may test negative, I wonder when I will feel positive ever again.”

Starr Milbury

In English and Spanish, through words and images, skepticism, idealism, despair, and hope emerge from contributions informed by a shared pandemic experience. Technologies at the service of learning, with their merits and shortcomings, have helped us work through the hardships experienced in the academic world since March of 2020. They gave us room for experimentation and collaboration beyond traditional spaces of learning through new resources. Moreover, they showed us that, even in the most unimaginable of circumstances such as a global pandemic, our love and drive for learning will render the world boundless.

Claudia Ferman, PhD
Professor Emerita, University of Richmond



The sense that we are all now stuck
in a science-fiction novel that we're writing together—that's
another sign of the emerging structure of feeling.
Kin Stanley Robinson

I-

While documentary film is a language associated with the very roots of the film medium, the digital revolution has undoubtedly provided a new impulse to this film creation, inaugurating new means of communication, new production practices, new communicational objectives and new aesthetics. This type of production, in turn, gave rise to new spaces of critical thought, in which questions are debated that are often specific to it. These may include the experience of collective creation, the practices of political organization and activism, debates on reality versus fiction, and of point of view and subjectivity, among others.

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated processes of educational innovation – virtual classroom and virtual teaching have shown great deficiencies but also an enormous potential. There is no doubt that audiovisual materials will occupy an important place in education in the near future. The good news is that the materials already exist and are produced continuously, and that in many cases these are low-cost or open-source digital resources. This does not mean the acritical consecration of distance education and the disintegration of the educational community, but rather the systematic incorporation of collective multimedia production, giving rise to new educational methodologies. The task today is to think about how the digitalization of content and the digital transmission may contribute to promote meaningful change in the educational environment and the teaching practices in the classroom. In other words, how we can take advantage of the new technologies and their products to promote universal access to education and consequential cultural production, create new conditions for democratization and equality, new ways to confront racism and discrimination, and new opportunities for positive action beyond the classroom.

II-

Documentaries constitute “images of the real” that offer valuable information regarding history, geography, activism, science, languages, cultural diversity, gender, the arts, economic processes, biodiversity, traditional medicine, current research developments, and all the subjects relevant to concerned communities. Beyond constituting a historical “memory”, documentary language is a

complex cultural artifact that presents the current reality of communities and, in general, does so with a collective mode of production.

We define documentary in the classroom in relation to its characteristics of “immediacy” in a multiple sense, and of an agent of “sensorialization” of the educational practice, given the capacity of emotional impact that cinematographic narrative possesses. Documentary language is “immediate” in a temporal sense because it manifests periods of production that are in general much shorter than the tempos of production of printed text; it is spatially “immediate” given that the processes of documentary production shorten the distances between events and protagonists, and those producing the audiovisual artifact; and it is emotionally “immediate”, because in screening a documentary it produces an illusion of closeness that brings the spectator up close, creating an effect of “eye-witness presence”.

Documentary films may contribute to changing beliefs and values, stimulating aesthetic appreciation, and cultivating new understandings of narrative content regarding history, politics, human rights, activism, and social change. Strengthening the collective in the production of knowledge and educational materials, in other words going back once more to foster a new de-centralization in the educational process (Paulo Freire) today under the hegemony of *print-culture*, can be affected if the rich documentary production originated in knowledgeable communities and collectives finds a significant space in the classroom, and we create and systematize the tools for their pedagogic utilization.

III-

The conviction that documentaries today bring an innovative tool to the classroom, not yet fully understood nor used in its potential, has inspired our current project towards the creation of an interactive scholarly database of documentaries that originate in Latin America or have Latin America related content. Together with Dr. Michael Marsh-Soloway we are working on a database model that will focus on the Latin American region, but that can be applied to any other region or community. This database will offer the blueprint to projects seeking to organize, recover, confer value to and make known documentary films, documentaries that may be segmented in countless collections, public or private, partially catalogued or not catalogued at all, reason why their information is only accessible to specialists, in the best possible scenario. This model database will enable an interactive use of information for educational purposes, widely accessible under the open access model.

Martin Sulzer-Reichel, PhD
 Director of the Arabic Language Program, University of Richmond



Thinking about Digital Pedagogies has been one of the staples of my teaching life for the past eight years; I became part of an initiative to make language courses—in my case Arabic—accessible for students in universities that could not offer those courses. In the framework of the members of the Virginia Foundation of Independent Colleges (VFIC), different language courses were opened to accept students who participated in classes in real time that were taught face to face and at that time still without masks.

The issues we had to deal with were, interestingly, mainly administrative ones: different class time periods, semester starting and ending dates, a general lack of communication amongst the participating colleges about things such as snow days and other reasons for delayed or canceled classes. The big question—whether the students who participated online would actually get the full value of the class like the students who participated in person—was raised when I told my colleagues about the teaching experiment, but never really arose in the actual teaching context. On the contrary, the remotely participating students as a rule were very engaged and excited to have the chance to learn, and the students in class were intrigued by their peers with an entirely different background than their own.

It certainly helped that remote teaching ultimately relies on the fact that our students these days are digital natives. Group work could easily be realized through media such as FaceTime (we mostly worked with videoconferencing software for the transmissions into and out of the classroom) or the phone and video connectivity through media such as Messenger, Skype, or Viber allowed easy communication and were used by the students in their daily lives anyway. Luckily, since it was only in the context of the state, it was possible to integrate the remote students physically by inviting them to come visit when different vacation times gave them the freedom to travel, and I tried to visit the remote students at least once a semester and teach the class from their location, having the in-person class being the recipients of online instruction as well. The result, in my experience, was that the students still all integrated into tightly knit social groups, and contacts between them seem to have persisted on occasion beyond the actual semester in which the classes were taught.

Some of my colleagues did raise the question whether I ensured test taking without cheating through the use of supervisors for tests at the remote institutions. All universities offered proctor services if they were needed within the VFIC context. However, I have long given up on assuming that there will be students who cheat. Some do, no question, but they also find an opportunity to do so in proctored exams. I make it clear to the students that by cheating they in

reality cheat themselves, and I give them incentives by allowing them to repeat tests in which they don't do well to avoid a bad impact on their grade. The consequence is that I have no more issues with cheating students than in any other class and as a rule very honest students when it comes to improving their abilities.

Thus, when the school shut down in mid-semester for in person teaching and went all online, this did not pose much of a problem for me. On the contrary, through direct face-to-face contact, new opportunities arose to concentrate more on pronunciation, for instance, than is ever possible in a classroom setting. And even though I see many of my students for office hours relatively regularly in "normal" times, the ease of Zoom connections clearly motivated more of my students to search direct contact and ask for help. Apart from the ease, it might have been a factor, too, that the semi-quarantine in which students lived in 2020 starved them for human contact and classes became a much larger part of their social lives than they are otherwise.

Now, things are back to face-to-face, and the administration of the university even decided to completely forbid participation in classes remotely. In my view, this is a mistake and a missed opportunity. What we should do is sit down together and analyze our experiences with remote teaching. We should ask questions such as what we can do to use the full potential of remote teaching and how we can educate ourselves in using this medium to its greatest potential. It appears to me that many in the faculty are happy to be able to revert to the old prejudice that remote teaching cannot be as good and as effective as teaching in person. My experiences were entirely different, and I believe we need to use the experiences that the epidemic forced everyone through to develop a new understanding of the chances of teaching with the help of digital pedagogies and to grow our abilities rather than trying to return to something we much too often still consider normal.

Hannah Leigh Huber, PhD
Digital Technology Leader and Project Administrator
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Sewanee: The University of the South



From 2017 to 2019 during my PhD candidacy at the University of South Carolina, I endeavored to standardize the online curriculum offered by the First-Year English program. This was, of course, pre-pandemic so specializing in digital pedagogies was still quite niche. Despite knowing that only a handful of the program's courses were online, I built model templates in Blackboard that centered around active learning and online collaboration in the hopes that eventually remote course offerings would expand and that my resources would be useful to emerging online instructors. Meanwhile, I was engaging online archives and employing digital tools for large-scale textual analysis in my dissertation research. Little did I know that these practices would become the new standard (albeit perhaps temporarily—only time will tell) due to an impending global pandemic.

After graduating, I commenced a postdoctoral research position in digital humanities for the Institute for the Humanities and University Library at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where I consulted with faculty on digital humanities projects and developed a digital companion to my book project. My goal was to create a website that would function as a digital archive and text visualization tool (using [Scalar](#) and [Voyant](#)) that enables visitors to interact digitally with my book's findings and to intervene in subtopics of my research focus, U.S. sleep culture during the Progressive Era, that are most interesting to them. Currently under advanced contract with the University of Illinois Press's Topics in Digital Humanities series, my book and digital companion work together to provide both a traditional close reading of literary texts as well as an immersive online experience where visitors can conveniently access digitized, full-length versions of the works analyzed in my book chapters. Upon perusing these texts, readers will gain a sense of my discovery process: With embedded notes throughout each text, these digitized documents feature annotated passages that convey cultural insights about sleep along with strategies for connections between such findings and larger social and cultural sleep-related phenomena, including links to many of the historical, literary, and scientific texts referenced in the book. Overall, my aim for the website is to provide both a reference tool and an exhibition of literary, cultural, and historical analysis deconstructed from the formal mode of scholarly presentation that occurs in traditional print. In this latter sense, visitors can intervene, interrupt, and digress however they see fit and in whatever way their interests in sleep culture direct them. Digital companions like mine provide an exciting opportunity for students in online, hybrid, or HyFlex courses to engage digital archives, practice large-scale textual analysis, and better grasp the research process that underscores traditional modes of scholarship.

In the midst of completing my fellowship, I accepted the role of Digital Technology Leader and Project Administrator at the University of the South, where I would attend to the day-to-day activities of the [Center for Southern Studies](#), consult with southern studies faculty on digital humanities tools in teaching and research, and help manage digital humanities projects in southern studies. Just a few weeks after signing my offer letter, Chicago went under quarantine. Suddenly, I found myself working remotely and serving as a campus-wide resource for quick adaptations to virtual learning. I drew on my experiences as an online instructor and frantically pulled together a repository for [online teaching materials](#). I also facilitated community support by creating an archive that showcased [responses to the pandemic](#) by UIC faculty and members of the Consortium of Humanities Institutes and Centers. By the time I arrived (mostly remotely) at Sewanee in fall of 2020, the nature of my position as Digital Technology Leader had also changed as a result of the pandemic. In contrast to the environment I expected to enter: a tight knit mountain community where in-class learning was a given, I consulted with instructors who were suddenly grappling with HyFlex course models (students were given the option to attend classes in-person or remotely). The Mellon grant that enabled my hiring had inadvertently been ahead of the curve in providing a digital resource specialist, and over the past year my expertise has been especially useful. I worked with faculty and made suggestions for the best digital tools to use in their particular classroom. I might suggest, for example, online publishing platforms to help facilitate collaborative, online student projects, like [Omeka](#), [Google Sites](#), and [Wordpress](#). I also helped lead digital humanities projects, such as [Save Sewanee Black History](#), and managed federal grant funding for exciting digital projects by Sewanee faculty including [Black Craftspeople Digital Archive](#) and [Lone Rock Stockade Project](#). If it were not for the pandemic, I am unsure that I would have found the momentum and enthusiasm for digital work that I have come to expect at Sewanee. While devastating in innumerable ways, the silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic is that its circumstances have encouraged academics to step outside their comfort zones, to experiment with new forms of academic presentation, and to become innovative in new means of engaging students beyond the traditional classroom. Ultimately, let us all hope that this pandemic soon becomes a thing of the past, while these new forays into digital scholarship and pedagogy are only beginning.