"What will this do for my career?" Teaching Cultural Diversity to Design Students in a For-Profit Institution

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For-profit educational institutions are a growing force on the higher education landscape today. In order to improve the rigor of their four-year degrees, general education and other non-career-specific courses are being added to their curricula. The pedagogy at these schools generally privileges four-hour class blocks, the use of visual materials rather than standard texts, and hands-on practical application of skills, all of which can make teaching a traditional lecture-based class in the career school environment quite challenging. This article analyzes efforts by the author to combine personal experience teaching with web videos and visual blogging in courses at both traditional and for-profit institutions with visual and experiential pedagogy. The goal is to craft a visually-oriented, skill-based curriculum for a proposed cultural diversity course to be offered at a for-profit design college.

For-profit educational institutions (known historically as "career colleges") are a growing force on today's higher education landscape. These institutions and their enrollments have multiplied rapidly, with the University of Phoenix now ranking as the largest for-profit institution in the country. By 2001, it was listed as the largest private university of all degree-granting institutions in the United States (Armstrong 2001:488). Other for-profit chains have proliferated in a similar manner, so the individual schools themselves can be part of larger corporations such as The Art Institutes, Career Education Corporation, or DeVry Education Group or homegrown career schools training certified nursing assistants, information technology workers, or hair stylists. Whether one believes they are valuable resources that increase opportunities for low-income and other non-traditional students, or that they mislead students about their

career opportunities and abuse student loan programs, these schools are here and not going away any time soon.

In an attempt to give their four-year degrees more breadth, some for-profit institutions are adding liberal arts and general education classes to their degree requirements (Floyd 2005; Kartus 2000; Armstrong 2001). These additions of more traditional undergraduate courses are increasingly required by accrediting bodies, both national and regional (Floyd 2005). As for-profit schools make these curriculum changes, more instructors from traditional public and private colleges will likely be hired to teach these classes in general education, liberal arts, and social sciences.

For example, I recently became aware of an opening for a cultural diversity instructor at the for-profit design school where I earned an associate degree in computer graphics and taught graphic design and interactive media design classes for eight years after receiving my degree. This position is a new listing that was likely triggered by regional requirements to increase general education offerings for their four-year bachelor degree students as mentioned previously. Based on my personal experience and scholarly study of cultural and visual anthropology, I was intrigued by this new class and could easily see the need for a diversity course that took into account the specific needs and interests of design students. This prompted me to consider how I might be able to create a diversity course that would be attractive and meaningful to design students, one which would allow them to use their talents in their chosen fields of study. I knew I would need to draw on many of the lessons learned from previously teaching there, as well as those learned from using video pedagogy and visually-based technologies in teaching traditional undergraduate classes in communication and anthropology at other public and private institutions.

In this essay, I look first at some of the demographics and other relevant information regarding the for-profit education industry and the increase in demand for general education classes in this sector. Then I briefly examine the literature on visual, design, and experiential pedagogy, with the primary focus on the use and creation of videos and other visual materials in the classroom, both pro and con. Finally, I will present a condensed account of my personal experiences in teaching with video and other forms of visual materials. Using those experiences and suggestions from the pedagogical literature, I propose a career-focused, skills-based cultural diversity course intended to allow design students to have a more personally meaningful experience than they would in a standard general

education lecture class. Bringing in components from the pedagogy of documentary filmmaking, visual anthropology, and visual literacy, I outline the basics of a class designed to engage students primarily through visually-based texts, while also training them in how to critique and unpack the cultural meanings of these texts. Students will complete projects that meet stated course goals through creative explorations using media of their choice.

Because this essay only addresses concepts for a proposed class, rather than data gathered for a formal study of class effectiveness, quotes from student evaluations and other qualitative data should be considered in that context. The general assumption in proposing this class, in part growing out of my own personal experiences, is that design students will have similar responses based on growing similarities between for-profit and non-profit student populations, in addition to the growing acceptance of video and other visual materials in the classroom.

An Overview of the Non-Profit Education Industry

It is not hard to find advertisements for career training programs and schools. In fact, these institutions have grown dramatically since 1970, when there were 18,333 students enrolled in for-profit degree-granting institutions in the United States. Less than four decades later, 1.85 million students (out of 20.43 million enrolled in all degree-granting institutions) were enrolled in for-profit degree-granting programs—an increase in for-profit enrollment from 0.2 percent of all students in degree-granting schools to 9.1% in 2009 (Deming et al. 2011:1). A slightly earlier study (Floyd 2005:539) stated that the actual number of for-profit degree-granting institutions represents 19 percent of all degree-granting institutions in the United States, and that these institutions award 5 percent of all degrees.

While there are various reasons for this growth, a major reason is that these institutions seem to respond quickly to the demands of the career market, as well as to demands from students for more flexible class schedules compatible with the demands of work and family (Floyd 2005:543; Armstrong 2001; Bailey et al. 2001). Many of the marketing statements for career schools tap into such demands, emphasizing the availability of condensed and highly skill-based training taught by instructors who are professionals working in their fields, instead of by lecturers who may not be up-to-date on the latest trends or technologies

(Bailey et al. 2001; Armstrong 2001; Kartus 2000; Floyd 2005).The typical for-profit student body includes a range of ages from recent high school graduates to middle-aged and older adults returning for career retraining. Ethnically, the student body is also diverse, and at my particular institution, immigrant populations from around the world are well represented. Additionally, there is a higher percentage of lower-income students and families in for-profit institutions than in public and private non-profit educational institutions, with the vast majority attending school full-time and working at least part-time (Baum et al. 2011). These observations are corroborated by other studies of diversity in for-profit institutions:

> African Americans account for 13 percent of all students in higher education, but they are 22 percent of those in the for-profit sector. Hispanics are 15 percent of those in the for-profit sector, yet 11.5 percent of all students. Women are 65 percent of those in the for-profit sector. For profit students are older, about 65 percent are 25 years and older, whereas just 31 percent of those at four-year public colleges are and 40 percent of those at two-year colleges are. (Deming et al. 2011:6)

This same study notes that for-profit students are much more likely to be single parents with significantly lower incomes than students in traditional two-year community colleges. They are also twice as likely to have a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) than the community college students. Enrollment in certificate programs is the norm at for-profit institutions at 55 percent. Although only 11 percent of all students in for-profit institutions are enrolled in four-year BA programs, that segment is growing the fastest (ibid.).

In reviewing curriculum and pedagogy in for-profit schools, regional and national accrediting bodies for colleges and universities have begun to require greater attention to general education coursework, in addition to an increase in the number of total contact hours and improvements in library holdings. Many of these requirements have been triggered by increased governmental requirements to show institutional effectiveness in order to keep receiving federal financial aid (Floyd 2005). Students, however, often choose for-profits because they perceive that the education is more career-focused, cutting out what they feel are "non-

essential" liberal studies and general education classes. These students place more value in a shorter, skills-focused education than the other benefits they might get at a traditional institution, such as socialization, sports, and research (Armstrong 2001; Bailey et al. 2001; Floyd 2005).

Institutions seek to balance these conflicting demands by attempting to implement hands-on, practical skill-based projects into every course offered, including the general education requirements. While students may be better prepared for the job market through a skills-oriented curriculum, a study by Caroline Persell and Harold Wenglinsky (2004) suggests that for-profit students show low levels of civic engagement and participation, a finding that seems to be directly related to the more market-driven education model found in for-profit schools. Other studies also bemoan the lack of social science or other humanities offered by design programs, saying that these programs "concentrate largely on educating students about traditional design skills, knowledge and processes" (Rothstein 2002:2; Lackovic 2010).

Design Training and Visual Pedagogy

A design-focused curriculum attempts to train students to take inspiration from visual and aural materials and objects around them, including those from other cultures. The objective is to introduce the skills and processes necessary to solve whatever design problems they are faced with in their careers. The emphasis is placed on creative thinking and problem-solving, and research shows that design students respond better to graphic information in training for these tasks than they do to written texts (Hsu and Chang 2009). Whitney Rapp (2009) and Robert Berk (2009) also found that visual-spatial learners perform much better in educational environments when audiovisual materials are used in the classroom. Several studies highlight the enhanced affective benefits of video technology in triggering emotional responses, creating anticipation, and increasing recall of content in all types of learners (Berk 2009; Jones and Cuthrell 2011; Mitra et al. 2010; Cherrett 2009; Craik and Lockhart 1972). Other studies focus on the potential that visuals have to "bring culture to life" (Bird and Godwin 2006: 285).

While instructors have been using films and other visual materials for many decades now, the easy availability of video material through YouTube (YouTube.com) since its founding in 2005 has turned that site into a major educational tool (Bloom 2009; Jones and Cuthrell 2011;

Mitra et al. 2010). Instructors can not only easily find clips from documentaries and other historical documents but also access news reports about current topics and even "citizen journalism" reports breaking from locations worldwide. YouTube makes it easy for students to search for information that interests them, as well as to make and post their own videos or comment on those of their classmates.

I have used YouTube extensively in anthropology classes at the University of South Florida (USF) and in the visual literacy and intercultural communication classes I have taught at the University of Tampa (UT). I find a great deal of content overlap in all of these classes and frequently use some of the same visuals and video sources while structuring the class discussions and projects to reflect differing class goals. Each semester I draw from the vast bank of National Geographic clips found on YouTube that deal with cultural practices worldwide, including family structure, sexuality, religion, health, and dietary norms. I also use various videos dealing with the changing economic climate worldwide, particularly those focused on class differences and resource inequality facing marginalized groups. The effects of globalization and technology are examined with videos created from external, scholarly viewpoints as well as more emic, insider views, and sometimes from hard-to-find anthropological documentaries, which are often sampled on YouTube in a form adequate for class viewings.[3] In all cases, I attempt to show not a single, comprehensive video but to feature several different voices on the same general topic. This reflects a diversity of opinion and allows me to choose the best place during the class lecture and discussions to interject these viewpoints. The following paragraphs discuss examples of some of the media choices I have made when discussing common diversity and visual literacy topics in my classes.

In introducing the concepts of "diversity" and "culture" to classes, one of my favorite sources is the video *Mai's America* (Poras 2002), formerly shown on the PBS website.[4] This film is a documentary about a

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[3] Of course, the legality of this distribution is highly suspect, but in some cases, such as with *Future Remembrance* (from DER), the video is not available for purchase anymore, and likely will not be in the future, so having these smaller clips (and sometimes even the full documentary) available on *YouTube* is highly valuable to instructors and departments on a budget or with limited multimedia resources.

[4] Unfortunately, just as this article was going to press, this film has suddenly become unavailable. It is no longer available for viewing on the PBS website, all links to purchase it appear to be down or missing, and Poras's own website is down. This is

young Vietnamese woman who becomes an exchange student in a Mississippi high school. The video takes the viewer into the unexpected diversity of a small town in Mississippi, including living with both "rednecks" and a young black family, having a transvestite friend and going to gay bars, and engaging the Vietnamese immigrant experience in the American South. Asian stereotypes are also explored, particularly those of duty to family and "saving face" when Mai runs into unexpected problems after enrolling at Tulane University, and those cultural expectations eventually affect the choice she makes so she can stay in America. While the video does have Mai as the primary narrator and focus, it does not appear that she chose what was recorded or ultimately shown in the film, and this raises questions of framing and agency that add to the depth of the class discussion about the movie.

My students have responded very positively to this film, finding it interesting and enlightening, but also funny and "weird," and, ultimately, sad. Based on the discussion board comments from my Cross-cultural diversity class, it put them in a positive mood for learning more about diversity in the rest of the course:

> You would never know that there are transvestites in Mississippi high schools!! I couldn't believe that Mai would become friends with that guy . . . so weird, but it was kinda nice to see that she could be so open-minded. You wouldn't think that a Vietnamese girl would act like that, not being scared of him or of moving around from family to family so much. I really liked this movie, and hope we're going to see others that show us how other groups we don't hear about live. ("Alexa" – student comment board posting)

> Wow, this was a surprise! I didn't think we were going to see a video about America, in this class . . . diversity was supposed to be people from tribes in Africa and South America . . . cool to know we can talk about what's different about all of us here in the States. Now I'm excited for the rest of the class! ("Tony" – student board posting)

disappointing, but highlights the need to keep developing a library of resources of one's own, rather than being dependent on web sources only.

When working with the topic of race and racism, a popular web site with my classes has been the comedy site *Reckless Tortuga* (www.recklesstortuga.com), which features a series of tongue-in-cheek public service announcements (PSAs) dealing with racism. While spiced with some language and situations that could be considered mildly vulgar or profane, I have not hesitated to show them. All students were told in advance if a video had language or visuals that I thought might be offensive to some.

In using these videos in class, I often ask students from different ethnic backgrounds to comment on their own difficult or humorous experiences in dealing with stereotypes. I also use DVDs and materials from the American Anthropological Association's *RACE: Are We So Different?* website (www.understandingrace.org) in this section, allowing students to explore the artificiality of "race" given the biological evidence to the contrary. These videos have been very successful in generating a great deal of class discussion with my students. While some of the more religiously conservative students have questioned the scientific research, most students seem to be more willing to examine their beliefs and prejudices by the end of the semester, which I count as a success for this methodology.

For the topics of sexuality and gender, I have used news clips from India covering government action to grant legal rights to *hijira,* men who dress and live as women (whether or not they undergo sexual reassignment) and perform women's roles in their society, especially the performance of special dances and blessings at celebrations for "donations." I also showed short video clips from the United States featuring brief interviews with "two-spirit" persons (a Native American concept similar to the hijira), and news shorts on sexual topics, including demonstrations for and against equal rights for LBGT persons around the world. *Killing Us Softly* 3 (Kilbourne 2000) is another popular film used for this topic section.[5]

When teaching on concepts of identity and representation of self in the Visual Literacy classes, I have shown the Christopher Nolan film *Memento* (2000), as well as the anthropological film *Future Remembrance* (Wendl and du Plessis 1998), a documentary about Ghanian photography and sculpture practices. I have also used YouTube clips about "Print

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[5] This is the version of *Killing Us Softly* referenced in Elizabeth Bird's essay, and the one I have used previously in class. There is, however, a newer version available, *Killing Us Softly 4* (2010).

Club" or *purikura* photography practices of Japanese teens and young women. When we discuss the concept of "the Other" and orientalism, I have shown *Cannibal Tours* (O'Rourke 1986), as well as vintage video and print advertisements (and not so vintage ones) that feature stereotypical depictions of various ethnicities, as well as propaganda posters from World War I and II. Topics of media influence and the military-industrial complex have been addressed through campaign advertising, recruitment posters, and the films *Full Battle Rattle* (Gerber and Moss 2008) and *Wag the Dog* (Levinson 1998).

While none of these classes have been taught exclusively through video, videos serve as a springboard to use when talking about the readings, and help students feel more comfortable with the concepts and how they apply to their own lives. In addition, the videos increase the spontaneity and energy of class discussions both in class and online as students debate the various cultural topics presented. Most recently, I have attempted to bring in more self-created videos from YouTube so that students have a contemporary and inviting platform from which to begin discussing ideas they have likely questioned but may have been hesitant to talk about. Students seem to be more willing to talk freely when they see and hear a "peer" discuss the topic and provide examples on which they can build their own insights and responses.

However, there are still some drawbacks to using video, particularly in the anthropology classroom. Concepts such as ethnocentrism, racism, and gender can go unchallenged by students unless well guided by the instructor. Merely showing a film or a video clip without prior briefing or discussion afterwards can lead to students becoming more titillated than educated, missing the intended message through the distraction of the "exotic," "outdated" or "out of touch." These concerns are supported by an audience reaction study conducted by Elizabeth Bird and Jonathan Godwin (2006) regarding the use of film in an introductory anthropology course. Their results found that large numbers of students simply tuned out during film screenings and that obvious displays of the "exotic" were "often greeted with laughter and derision" (Bird and Godwin 2006: 289). They also found that students did like the use of visuals in the classroom, but when the relationship between the visuals and the class material was not obvious, they became "irritated" and would be more likely to ignore the material (291).

Newer, non-ethnographic videos, such as Jean Killbourne's *Killing Me Softly 3,* were seen by students to be more relevant to them personally.

But these were still subject to negative comments, such as, "I liked the feminist marketing video because it was so damn ridiculous to watch this woman interpret ads however she wanted to. Why are girls in ads and naked? Because naked girls are sexy and everyone likes to see them, that's it" (Bird and Godwin 2006:290). Bird and Godwin also recommend that films be previewed before showing, and that instructors try to anticipate what questions students might ask before framing the films in the context of the class. They also encourage showing shorter clips, rather than whole films, and integrating these clips into discussions so that students are not as tempted to see the films as "entertainment" and tune them out (296). These recommendations pre-date the rise of YouTube, but they anticipate the current educational uses of video, advising teachers to seek out "new, up-to-date media designed to appeal to young audiences" and "look in unexpected places for media" (297). YouTube and newer sources such as the TED Talks video series (ted.com) and the separate TED-Ed series (ed.ted.com), which are short videos and presentations designed specifically for use in the classroom, would certainly qualify as good sources for a wide variety of videos, both professional and amateur. The increasing number of independently produced videos available through such sources can only enhance the diversity of voices and issues that might be accessed.

Design Training Meets "Culture"

While design students are often encouraged by their instructors to go more in-depth to learn about the original cultures and the origin of the design concepts they are drawing from, students often do not take the time to learn this material. Therefore, I believe that the cultural diversity course was added to the institution's curriculum not only as a general education requirement to bolster the four-year degree programs but also as an attempt to try to counteract that uninformed, and potentially stereotypical and exploitative, "borrowing" from other cultures.

The concept of "cultural design" challenges designers to examine both "generative" works in the graphic and aural arts (including graphic design, music making, and other creative human outputs) as well as the critical meanings of these items in relation to the types of ideologies and exchange systems where these products circulate. Derek Pardue defines the semiotic practices of cultural design as follows:

> Cultural design as a theory of meaning-making and identification allows one to better understand and explain facets of signification often outside of focal awareness as persons navigate market spaces of ideology, identity formation and entertainment. (Pardue 2005:67)

Pardue's ethnographic study of Brazilian hip-hop CD cover art as cultural literacy supports the case for increasing awareness of the examination of "culture" and "design" together in order to "foster a dialogue which I believe speaks to contemporary life" (ibid.). By focusing on the factors within cultures that shape and are shaped by various creative activities, a design-centric diversity class will allow students to learn how to critique design, apply their particular design skills and training to develop creative solutions to class projects, and learn how to apply this knowledge in the different contexts they will encounter throughout their careers.

Video Action Research and Pedagogy (VARP) is another approach to the study of culture through a hands-on, ethnographic lens that would also encourage critical analysis of design and its relation to larger power structures. VARP is the creation of Maria Lovett, a documentary filmmaker and ethnographic researcher and instructor. In her dissertation, *Creative Intervention Through Video Action Research and Pedagogy* (2008), Lovett explains the underlying reasoning behind this methodology:

> The Video Action Research and Pedagogy methodology simultaneously challenges representation, and exposes or re-exposes fragmented experiences: our own, those of others, and the world in which we struggle. The methodology racks the focus—that is, shifts the attention of the frame (and framed) from one detail to the next, to illuminate what is hidden (or ignored) and potentially intervene in colonial racist, sexist, ageist, classist, and homophobic injustice. . . . A set of processes blending pedagogy, research, art and media production . . . re-frames what we see and think we know, and what we do not, into a methodology designed to operate with paradigms of social justice. (Lovett 2008:20)

While this may seem a lofty goal for a general education class, Lovett has

based this pedagogy on personal experiences with undergraduates as well as with middle and high school students. Her own project detailed in her dissertation is, of course, much more complex and time-consuming than anything we would expect our students to produce, even in a design school. However, the basic focus and structure of the lessons taught through the hands-on use of creative skills mesh well with how I would propose to structure a cultural diversity class and reflect my own personal teaching experience at the institution.[6]

Utilizing the structure of VARP could bring the possibility of connecting design to real-world needs into a cultural diversity class, increasing its value as a "career-related course" for students. Lovett specifically designed the VARP pedagogy with the intent of combining critical pedagogy with technical training in media production.

> From the on-set, the methodology embodies research as practice. Training procedures and technical goals are blended with critical pedagogy and media production to problematize issues of representation and challenge knowledge. . . . Rather than privilege text based representations of information, VARP is a methodology that relies on audiovisual interpretations to make meaning and promote learning. (Lovett 2008:78)

Lovett breaks VARP down into three distinct themes: "representation," "positionality," and "empirical documentation." Each theme shows how the topic can be studied from a slightly different angle, but they are interconnected. For example, "representation" focuses on "how the marginalized Other is visualized, discussed, spoken about, represented and signified across multiple texts and modalities" (48). "Positionality," while closely related to representation, is addressed more in reference to the subjects themselves—"how one claims and *defines* his/her position, and the position of the author/producer in the *act* of representing." And lastly, "empirical documentation" examines the "accepted" ways in which the Other is marginalized or trivialized, and packaged into an "experience" for consumption (ibid.). This last step is where Lovett says visual pedagogy meets visual research, suggesting that through attention to representation

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[6] In this case, I am thinking of documentary video production, but Lovett does discuss other artistic forms as being valid for this process.

and positionality in artistic research, changes can be made in how artists create experiential information (50).

Lovett also explores visual pedagogy theory addressing the need for "action oriented learning and meaning-making" (2008:51). Referencing Brian Goldfarb (2002) and Stuart Hall (2005), she makes a case for empowering students as authors, producers, or researchers, turning them into civically engaged citizens who can understand the basics of visual literacy. She positions students as creative problem-solvers and "teachers," allowing students to "de-code the world in which they live—preparing them as cultural producers, to later re-code their world" (Lovett 2008:56).

While the theoretical basis of VARP is divided into three frames, there is also a practical production-based, four-stage division of labor that relates to research and creation: pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution (Lovett 2008: 56). This division of labor relates well to the general structure of most design courses, even non-video production ones, and is a process that design students would recognize and easily adapt to. During pre-production, a topic would undergo questioning and critical reflection. In production, research and the creation of initial materials (video, artwork, audio, etc.) would take place. Post-production would involve assembly of various materials and research into a whole, while distribution would involve the process of reproducing the final product and getting it into the hands of those who could utilize it.

One technique I have experimented with that supports the goals of VARP in the classroom is that of visual/video blogging, or "vlogging." I have had some of my classes use the social media sites Tumblr (tumblr.com) and Pinterest (pinterest.com), both of which are designed primarily to use graphics and video rather than written text, as the main form of content. By having students keep an online vlog through one of these sites, I intend for them to develop a "digital clip file" of references, images, videos, and other materials essential to completing class assignments throughout the semester. This also allows students to develop essential career skills relating to the pre-production and production components of the design project flow—tasks also reflected in the VARP process delineated above.

Using vlogs throughout the semester helps students organize their thoughts and experiment with creating and critiquing images without the pressure of a "formal" project (Trier 2007). I often start students off on this process by asking them to post five photographs that visually describe

their first week at college. This is a simple exercise, based on one from my graduate visual anthropology course taught by Elizabeth Bird. Students can quickly grasp the essentials of the project, and it only requires a cell phone or disposable camera and the ability to scan or upload photos. They are not allowed to use any descriptive text, only the images. The exercise is not simply a good ice breaker for the class, but the images allow me to start discussing concepts of identity and representation, signs and symbols, and framing. After this exercise, I often continue to post "trigger questions" or topics for each week, and usually require a certain number of posts and responses throughout the semester as part of each student's participation grade.

Blogging or vlogging can be seen as a type of narrative, one connecting language, images, and modern technology (Lackovic 2010:129). Blogs provide users a place to reflect and revise their thoughts, but also to receive critique and feedback on them, fostering "discursive, relational and conversational" learning (130). As future design professionals, students need to learn how to critique visual materials in a meaningful way, and to receive constructive criticism. Vlogging allows them a safe place to practice these skills, create collaborative networks, and explore creative ideas and representations of self and others (Lovett 2008:83).

I have been very impressed with the way my students have adopted this technology and used it to showcase visuals and links which allow me (and their peers) greater insight into their thought processes and contextualization of class topics than I would ever get from class discussion, no matter how active. Requiring weekly reflective posts about the images and their relationship to topics and discussions has worked well for some of my classes, but may be troublesome for instructors to manage. Posting the Tumblr or Pinterest addresses of the entire class and featuring a "vlog of the day" could help encourage active sharing and commentary from other class members. Additionally, for group projects, vlogging will help prepare students to work in a more collaborative way, enabling them to easily share materials and revisions with others, even distance learners.

Basing the cultural diversity course concepts and goals on Perdue's cultural design theory while using a slightly modified version of Lovett's VARP pedagogical methodology (adapted to non-video projects) should work well for this course. Linking this theory and pedagogy with requirements for a virtual, shareable vlog for reflection on class topics and

collection of research materials would allow students to critically explore concepts of diversity through visual media, and address these concepts through creative works relating to their career paths.

New Cultural Diversity Course Objectives and Structure

As a general education elective, the new course needs to present an overview of the concept of diversity and how it applies to students' everyday lives, as well as a sense of how it may affect their personal and professional relationships in the future. However, since the institution proposing the course is a design college, it is also essential for the course to engage with the various visual fields the students are training for, including graphic design, web design, photography, fashion design, interior design, game design, and audio and video production.

The course objectives are based on those of my Cross-cultural diversity course at USF, modified for the specific concerns of this design-centric class:

- Demonstrate understanding of basic concepts of diversity (relativism, globalization, etc.) and their influence on and expression through global design and other creative practices within contemporary society
- Recognize how diverse cultural practices form our modern, multicultural society
- Engage with "different cultures" within the student's own culture, through class interactions and experiential design challenges
- Understand features of social inequality and gain basic skills in using design to challenge those features
- Demonstrate ability to use critical thinking and problem solving skills to address issues of diversity as they may apply to the student's chosen career

These objectives align with Pardue's theoretical concepts of cultural design (2005) in that they connect "culture" with "design" through systematic examination of the origins, influences, uses, and distribution of design within cultures. They also connect with Lovett's Video Action and Research Pedagogy (VARP) by encouraging students to learn how design is used in the creation and representation of "the Other" and in positionality of self, as well as in exploring the market and distribution channels that affect the empirical documentation and experience of a culture or cultural object (Lovett 2008).

The weekly topic structure will be roughly structured around the Conrad Kottak and Kathryn Kozaitis (2008) textbook, *On Being Different: Diversity and Multiculturalism in the North American Mainstream*, the same one I used for my Cross-cultural diversity course at USF. However, I plan on using videos, some chosen by me and others chosen by students as part of their research, as the main pedagogical texts, rather than requiring readings. I made this choice for two main reasons. First, students at the institution are not often required to read textbooks for their skill-based classes. They may be required to do more conventional readings for general education classes, but I believe, as do other authors, that this requirement only adds to the frustration and negative attitude toward general education classes that has been seen in research on lecture-based classes, especially in career schools (Armstrong 2001; Badway and Gumport 2001; Carlisle 2010; Ulbig 2009). And as Lovett reminds us, "Rather than privilege text-based representations of truth, VARP is a methodology that relies on audiovisual interpretations to make meaning and promote learning" (Lovett 2008:78).

I also know from personal teaching experience that a fair number of these students struggle with reading literacy. While I was unable to find any statistics on student literacy rates in for-profit schools, I recall having one or more students in each class who could not follow written directions or tutorials without help. I would certainly recommend the textbook for student purchase, as the combination of text plus video has been found to reinforce learning, particularly for students who are new to a topic (Mitra et al. 2010; Matusiak 2012). I would create a topic outline for each class, matching subtopics with specific pages for review of the material, but I believe that careful organization and preparation on my part can allow video to serve as the primary text for this class, as long as students are prepared in advance for viewing, allowed to have discussion afterward, and have exercises that reinforce the lesson through practical application of their media production skills.

The topics to be covered include the following:

- Globalization and Multicultural Places and Spaces
- Ethnicity and Cultural Practice and Identity
- Religious Diversity and Practice
- Social and Biological Dimensions of Race
- Gender Roles and Sexual Orientation
- Health, Fitness, and Age
- Class and Economic Diversity

- Linguistic and Aural Diversity

As previously discussed, the course focus will be on the visual aspects of these topics, particularly looking at the hegemonic uses of visuals and creative works in controlling subcultures, as well as the manner in which some subcultures use these same materials as a form of resistance for gaining a voice in the larger communities of which they are a part. A focus on cultural design, especially visual literacy concepts of meaning-making within each topic, will help the students understand how visual culture and the media can be used to advance or suppress the welfare of diverse groups, and it will ultimately help them understand the ramifications of the choices they make as designers. This understanding is particularly important when they are using visual and aural properties from other cultures as inspiration for their own creations.

In addressing exactly how video and other visuals would be used in the classroom, two main practices will be employed. First, the course will use carefully chosen weekly videos, both long-form documentaries and movies, and short-form clips from YouTube, National Geographic, PBS, and other sources. The accessibility of these videos online will make them easy for students to view if they miss class, and the length of most clips will make them easy for students to download or play, no matter their Internet connection speed. Also, having the videos online will make it easier to quickly revise a playlist based on student interests or issues that arise in class, and will allow the instructor to access materials that may otherwise be nearly impossible to obtain in a timely manner or at a low enough cost to justify their purchase.

Second, the course will employ the concept of visual blogging as a student organizer and project sharing and development tool. As long as expectations for individual student participation are clearly stated (how posts are graded, what an "appropriate" post and response look like, how much of their grade is based on this participation), my experience is that they will participate in a meaningful fashion, inspiring critical examination of course topics among their peers.

With the videos as the primary focus of each class session, I will facilitate a discussion in class to pull out the basic concepts for that week, referencing specific scenes and video clips that were "defining moments" for teaching specific concepts such as hegemony or ethnocentrism, or that examined an area of controversy. A brief lecture to define important terms would follow, and then group or individual activities in class would allow students to put the concepts from that day into practice. Keeping a

cultural design/visual literacy lens on the topics, as well as the design focus of the school and the students' planned careers, the in-class activities would consist of activities requiring them to use some critical thinking and visual literacy concepts to design a response in opposition to predominant ways of thinking about the topics presented. For example, an activity that was originally done in the general anthropology class at USF was to have groups of students design advertisements that went against the traditional marketing techniques focusing on proscribed gender roles, such as marketing engagement rings for men, 4x4s to women, or makeup for men.

Activities such as the above would be a perfect concept for a design-centric class, and the classes are generally long enough to allow for not only a fairly lengthy video or multiple videos and class discussion or lecture but also for valuable small group engagement each week. Issues of creative works as a mode of individual communication and counter-hegemonic cultural expression would be explored through activities both in and outside of class, allowing students to research examples of these works and create their own based on various issues discussed in class.

Even though these students generally prefer to work in visual formats, I do not want to totally ignore the need for them to be able to communicate in a written fashion since this is a skill they will need in their careers, no matter how creative they are in other areas. Therefore, as I have done previously with my Visual Literacy classes, I will also ask them to write a commentary post on their vlog addressing each major course topic in relation to images or videos they choose to share each week. While not formally graded for grammar and spelling, part of the standards for acceptable participation in this exercise would be the expectation of "professional communication." Therefore, the writing would need to be well-organized, with a clear topic and good supporting arguments.

Class and homework projects would allow students to interpret the deliverables in their own way, based on their own particular talents and interests. Since these classes will likely have a mix of students from different design concentrations and years, it would be difficult to require all of them to complete something that required specific technical skills, such as video production. However, these students should all be able to do basic photography, simple layouts, and basic drawing and graphic communication. Students who are primarily audio production students make up a very small portion of students at this institution, but I do not anticipate that they would have problems with the very basic visual requirements of this class. Nevertheless, I do anticipate that they could use

audio-based materials to complete most class requirements if desired.

Closing Comments

While the specific structure of this proposed course is distinctly focused on the needs of a student population attending a career college, many instructors would likely agree that a considerable number of undergraduates, particularly those taking classes outside of their major to satisfy a general education requirement, can be uninterested, unmotivated, and distracted from doing their best in class. Anthropologists have long used video in the form of documentaries to reach our various audiences, including students. However, these "classics" are not enough to keep today's students engaged, especially when there are much more interesting things happening on that little glowing screen in their palm or on their desk. As has been shown in the literature (Bird and Godwin 2006), students often find our old "standards" boring and irrelevant, and even though I still use some of them myself, I can tell when students are missing the message because they are laughing at the exotic or out-of-date topics or at the physical appearance of the subjects.

While perhaps not a perfect solution, using multiple short contemporary videos such as those found from various online sources could help students of all majors and interests begin to connect the concepts of diversity to their lives in a more meaningful manner. Not all students will have the skills or inclination to do highly creative work such as video production or fashion design, but they all have personal passions that they *can* bring out through small group and individual activities that ask them to engage critically with concepts, turn them on their heads, and "think different," as the old Apple ad asked us all to do. A good basic visual anthropology course for undergraduate anthropology majors could be constructed with a similar framework while including a little more emphasis on the anthropological classics in the field. An introduction to the contemporary clips discussed previously, and to the basic skills and ethics of the creation of "anthropological" media would also be essential for majors. Also, majors would be well-served by being introduced to critical analysis of the process of amateur and "prosumer" video and image creation, especially issues related to technological access and the sources of videos and images we actually get to see. Do they really represent an entire culture? Whose voices are missing or too dominant?

More than a year has passed since I first sat down to research and

design this course, and the job position as an instructor for the cultural diversity class is still listed as "open." Even if I never get a chance to teach this specific course myself, based on my personal experience and the emerging literature on visual pedagogy, I believe the concepts and course organization to be sound, especially that relating to the use of YouTube, blogging, and other audiovisual technologies. I continue to experiment in my classes with having students do much of the video research for the class, sharing their findings and reflections on these videos through vlogs. I have also been gradually reducing the emphasis on textbook readings in most of my classes, because it seems that most students never do them, particularly if the class is project-based and they know they will not be tested on direct memorization of the material. I do, however, continue to try to work reading and writing assignments into these visually-dominant classes by assigning more readings from popular web-based news and culture sites rather than from an official text. I have also lessened the emphasis on writing structure, choosing to emphasize original thought and creative engagement with the class topics instead. Most institutions (including this particular design institution) have writing improvement centers or individual tutors, and I refer students to their services as needed. When students complain that they didn't think they would have to write in a visually-oriented class, I emphasize that as college graduates, they are expected to be able to communicate effectively in all forms of communication; writing to effectively support the visual work they created is a skill they will have to use with employers, clients, and in their professional portfolios. The assigned activities and grading benchmarks are designed to promote critical thinking about how historical and current events relate to specific concepts explored in class, as well as to encourage and reward students' own personal exploration of cultural diversity topics, challenging their own ingrained belief systems and learning the value to be found in increased acceptance of differences.

Whether one teaches at a traditional higher education institution or a for-profit career college, the reality is that the demographic characteristics and educational expectations of these two student populations are becoming more alike (Ashraf 2009). Pressures from students, parents, and employers for a more "relevant" curriculum—and demands from credentialing and governmental bodies for more accountability in meeting instructional outcomes—are forcing instructors to bring current research into the classroom while emphasizing practical applications of that information (Armstrong 2001; Goggin 2012). As

Gerard Goggin states, "The recognition of culturally specific practices and imaginaries of digital technology needs to be combined with similar precise, located accounts of different pedagogical and educational traditions—in order to usefully and democratically develop online pedagogy in different places, rather than assuming global technologies that can simply be rolled out everywhere" (2012:19).

Instructors can no longer afford to ignore these findings. The emerging pedagogical research being done in countries around the world regarding the use of the Internet and mobile technologies is vital to adapting higher education instruction to the demands of our globalized society.

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