Integrative Assignment—Pedagogical Grounding

**PERSUASIVE YOUTUBE VIDEO**
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**DISCIPLINES: COMPUTER SCIENCE AND COMMUNICATION**

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**LEARNING COMMUNITY PURPOSE AND GOALS**

This learning community involved a Computer Science and a Communication course:

**CSCI 199: Six Degrees of Communication**
An introduction to computer based social networks. Six degrees, as a concept, is a figure for the study of networks as the fundamental feature of a connected age. In this class, we will explore the study, science, and application of networks with an emphasis on computer social networks. Particular attention is given to the role of information and communication technologies in social support, and communications media in facilitating interpersonal connectivity.

**COMM 220 Introduction to Interpersonal Communication**
This course, organized into two sections, will examine theory and research on the role of communication in the development, maintenance, and termination of interpersonal relationships. The first section consists of an overview of the major (meta) theoretical approaches employed by communication scholars in investigating relational communication. After this, the course will take on a topical organization, roughly tracking the progression of relationships from initiation through termination. The class will be conducted from a lecture/discussion format. Since virtually everyone in class has both personal and vicarious experience with relationships, the students are encouraged to actively participate.

The purpose of this learning community is to challenge students to examine their world, how they meet, interact in, and develop and end relationships. The community is an interesting blend of self-exploration, application and social science research. Students interact with the campus community and utilize academic resources and student support services at the College of Charleston. By the end of the semester, students should be able to articulate at least four interpersonal communication theories, test and apply these theories to their lives, have a visible improvement in their interaction skills, understand the fundamentals of computer networks, and create simple databases and web pages to aid in technological communication.
ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION:
Students were asked to work in a group to create a YouTube video that used inter-personal persuasion theory to encourage future College of Charleston students to enroll in a learning community. The presentation style (i.e. skits, interviews, dialogues) was student driven. The objectives for the assignment were for students to:

- Use computer hardware and software to develop a multimedia presentation
- Upload the presentation to YouTube
- Format the presentation in prescribed style
- Correctly access their audience
- Correctly incorporate theory or compliance scanning strategies (i.e. social proof, self/other, low-balling, scarcity, expert)

PURPOSE OF ASSIGNMENT:
This capstone project served to merge the two seemingly different courses into one cohesive unit to explain to our freshman the importance of communicating in a technological world. The assignment highlights the College of Charleston’s commitment to an integrative liberal arts education.

QUESTION OR ISSUES THE ASSIGNMENT ADDRESSES:
This project was designed to test students’ ability to utilize new hardware and software to deliver a persuasive argument to the world. We used the assignment to advertise the wonderful opportunities available through learning communities at the College of Charleston.

DISCIPLINARY GROUNDING:
Students in the computing course were expected to gain an understanding of technologies available for communication. They were exposed to different software that insured their computer literacy and proficiency, and they were introduced to the hardware needed and the process of networking computers throughout the world.

In the communication discipline persuasion is a cornerstone element. The discipline evolved largely from the study of propaganda, understanding message design and its effects on audiences. In the interpersonal communication class, we dedicated a unit to the study of persuasion theories and persuasion research, discussing how what you say can impact what others do and think. This assignment was a test of the students’ ability to effectively incorporate persuasion theory to their audience using multi-media as the channel of communication.

STEPS TAKEN IN EACH COURSE TO HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP DISCIPLINARY GROUNDING:
In computer science, we discussed computing ethics and read several ethics papers. Students also wrote a report on a computer ethics case study where they researched the legality and morality of ethical violations using the computer.

Following the persuasion unit in the communication course, the students completed three mini-assignments preparing them for our capstone project. They performed a content analysis of persuasion tactics in an infomercial; they watched a video of the classic
Stanford prison experiment and reflected on the power of obedience; and students went to the mall during the holiday season and identified persuasion tactics in use.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT STUDENTS’ WORK IN RESPONSE TO THE ASSIGNMENT:
(evidence of disciplinary grounding and purposeful integration)
Approximately 50% of the students understood the integrative nature of the assignment. These students did an excellent job of preparing their presentations. They interviewed their professors, classmates and peer facilitators; they videoed and photographed classroom and learning community interactions; they edited their videos, including quality sound and textual information; and they uploaded videos successfully to YouTube that were easily accessible to anyone searching for “Learning Communities” or “College of Charleston.” Their videos showed their understanding of their audience; they effectively incorporated persuasion theory and used the three elements, ethos, pathos and logos, in their message design; and they demonstrated their ability to work in a group to create an integrative, persuasive video.

INSTRUCTORS’ REFLECTIONS ON THE ASSIGNMENT AND STUDENTS’ WORK:
This assignment was a successful first attempt at integrating computing and communication topics. Students were put into self-selected groups one month prior to the end of the semester. The student-driven project included brainstorming of message design and the technology to be used. Student feedback was overwhelmingly positive. They enjoyed the creativity and the challenge of using new media. We used the final exam period as a pizza and movie session for a fun celebration of the success of the learning community. The project samples provided were two examples found after searching YouTube for the aforementioned topics. These videos showed a variety of media while maintaining a common presentation style throughout. Most students used social proof (i.e. popular music, fun pictures and video clips, and text) to persuade their audience to join a learning community at the College of Charleston. One group did a wonderful job of using elements of scarcity to encourage students to register soon as space in the learning community is limited.

In the future, we would like to see students create videos that incorporate more persuasion techniques, are more easily assessable to target audiences, and are delivered in two formats—on YouTube and on a CD/DVD that is not hardware dependent. Next year, we will include a joint rubric, provided to students in advance. We also we will develop an “American Idol” panel of judges to evaluate student videos. This panel will include a computer science faculty member or senior student, a communication faculty member or advanced student, an administrator from the College’s Learning Community staff, and a freshman not involved in a learning community. We realize that self-reflection and evaluation are key components to any good assignment; therefore we will assign a reflections paper on the capstone project experience where students answer questions related to hardware and software limitations, group participation and interaction, the effectiveness of their persuasion tactics, and their personal assessment of their completed project.