

Annie Blazer Video Transcript: Podcasting in RELG 100

So the class was a COLL 100 class and, as I'm sure everyone knows, COLL 100 classes are about big ideas and emphasize non-written communication skills. So for this class, my class was called Religion and American Youth.

The podcast ended up being a group project, with about four people who were telling one interesting story about a small group of people on campus. So throughout my emphasis was on basically like this anthropological mission of empathy and storytelling. How do you translate somebody's experience to an audience outside that experience?

And I think that part of it was provocative and successful for the students because they -- they were very scared of interviewing in particular, especially when I'm like, "Well, you need to ask them about like their religious beliefs from their backgrounds" and they're like, "That's personal" but what they found, which is something that I've also found in my own research is that people love to talk about themselves, so interviewing is actually the easiest part of the project, but also was quite enlightening I think for them to be sort of a listener rather than having a dialogue, where like the point of the conversation is not for you also to share but for you to just sort of just listen to someone's point of view. Really they had to handle a lot of different narrative tools in order to do the project, and I did think their work was pretty good -- if I do say so myself.

With storytelling the evidence that you're using to make the argument is people's lives and people's interpretations of their lives, but in other kinds of argumentation you would use different kinds of evidence but you would still have to organize that evidence in a way where it's coherent, it makes sense, it's interesting it matters so the benefit of storytelling is it sort of gives them some tools or some vocabulary for thinking about how to construct an argument in general.

First of all, the Media Center is amazing, and they handled training the students on how to use microphones, orienting them to editing technologies so that they had the bare-bones tools that they needed to do the project. I mean, I want them to pay attention to sound and how sound works -- that's part of the project -- but they're not professionals, they're freshmen. So like just making sure that they understood that my expectations for them were realistic. There's lots of different kinds of podcasts, and some podcasts are just like people having a conversation and that's -- I did not want them to do that.

I really wanted them to do a podcast that was narrative-based, so This American Life is sort of the longest-running example but also Radio Lab is a good example, Planet Money and then there's a -- there's a sort of podcast conglomerate called Gimlet that puts together a lot of different kinds of shows. So I gave them examples and then -- also I'll bring in my prop here -- I assigned this really excellent book "Out on the Wire," which is as a comic book about podcasting, where this woman Jessica Abel interviews who she calls the "Masters of radio," which are Ira Glass from This American Life and then a sort of cast of characters that are

creating the best radio today. And this book is really quite well done, and -- and it gives you sort of like tips and tricks in terms of like here's how to hold a microphone, but also like the big picture stuff, like why is radio special?

The sort of intimacy of sound as a sort of special way of hearing a story, and -- and it's sort of a lovely -- and it's all so lovely that it's a comic book about radio, so it like plays with medium a bit so I found that like a very useful framework for not only like investigating what is a good podcast, but then I use this to develop the rubric that then I use to grade the podcast. So they can like go back to the resource if they need to.