

Stella Herzig

# Broadcasting the Framework

## Podcasting in a one-credit information literacy class

**S**t. Ambrose University, where I teach, requires that students take a one-credit graded information literacy course, IL101, geared toward first-year and transfer students and conducted either once a week for sixteen weeks or twice a week for eight. As I prepared for the 2019 school year, I was casting about for new assignments to better demonstrate the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, looking for real-world applications, which, I find, work well for my students, who often believe that they already know how to conduct research and craft a bibliography.

One morning I was listening to a podcast involving several speakers and noticed that the interchange between the speakers was conveying their knowledge and network of conclusions in an especially personal and engaging way. I thought, Why can't my students do the same thing—bounce their ideas off each other in conversation in a podcast? There would be scholarship, multiple perspectives, and social and emotional learning.

I devised a semester-long project for students to create the first episode of a podcast using Soundtrap (to which our library subscribes), with the possibility of further episodes after the course was over. Students get together in groups, each of which decides on an issue and creates a podcast, which can also be broadcast over the university radio station—a real-world expression of their collective work (and an addition to their resumes).

### The process

I begin by creating an online resource bank of lead articles in Blackboard, most from the website *The Conversation*, on topics that I have found are

likely to attract students, such as student debt, mental health, college athletics, and relationships. When I see a topic that I think might appeal to students and work well for the project, I create a Word or Google Doc of the article's contents, which I upload to the bank, along with its citation elements. By being regularly updated, the bank provides students with a growing and evolving collection of topics, and an ever-increasing number from which to select.

Students break up into self-selected groups. I find that three in a group works best, as there are few enough students to keep the group and podcast manageable but enough that if one were to drop the class or slack off, the other two could still collaborate. On one occasion a student ended up alone on the project, and the result was noticeably flatter than others with even one more participant. At each stage of the process, each student earns points for completing that stage's assignment.

Each team agrees on an issue and conceives of a podcast. The team then brands the podcast with a name, a musical or soundscape intro/exit theme, and a logo (with class-wide discussion of copyrights). To accomplish this, each team member creates a Google Doc and shares it with the others in their group and with me (with class-wide discussion of best practices in naming and labeling docs that will be shared with professors and other professionals). Once the doc is

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accepted by the group, I add to it the script outline template, with the word References centered below.<sup>1</sup>

The group collectively chooses one of the lead articles from the resource bank as an introduction to their topic. For a graded homework assignment, each student identifies what they understand to be the article's thesis on a Blackboard discussion thread.

During the next class, the students compare their perceptions, negotiating differences and/or affirming commonalities, define a working group claim to be made in their podcast, and enter it in the script. They also discuss various aspects of the project—for instance whether to focus on the same population or use the same lens as the article.

One group looked at the legalization of cannabis by focusing on the taxation used for reparations, which had not been emphasized in the lead article. The students found an icon for their podcast (others create it themselves or, with my help, find them in Creative Commons) and searched through iTunes and Spotify for a name that was copyright-free. Groups also must include copyright-free lead-in music, but some have composed their own musical intros on Soundtrap.

For homework, each student then writes a one-page narrative about their individual connections with and/or reactions to the topic, including their personal perspectives and possible biases. I later encourage them to look back at this narrative for transitional moments for the podcast, which helps personalize their final product.

Over the next few classes, the group searches for scholarly articles and a primary-data website to use, and discuss the perspectives they find on their topic. As noted in the Scholarship as Conversation frame,<sup>2</sup> experts understand that, while some topics have established answers through this process, a query may not have a single uncontested answer. Experts are therefore inclined to seek out many perspectives, not merely the ones with which they are familiar." One student wrote to me, "I believe that we explored this objective the most in depth as we worked on our podcast in a way that isn't often as deeply explored in other classes." Every podcast must also include a suggested action the audience can take, which reinforces the idea that producing the podcast can be a service to other students.

After the gathering stage comes what I have found to be the most satisfying part of the class. The groups sift through their findings, pull quotes (and cite them

with in-text citations on the script template), and create storyboards using the script templates to make them flow with a narrative arc. The discussions tend to be lively, and the students see that they can't simply list things. Halfway through this class session, I have them listen to a few minutes of prior student podcasts (or short professional ones). This often spurs the students to try to be at least as good, if not better than what previous students have done.

The podcasts must also include a recommendation of a book that can be found in our university library catalog—whether on the shelf, as an ebook, or ordered from our consortium of Iowa college libraries. This inclusion, from which they do not quote, is a blatant plug for our library and the importance of books.

## Production

I devote two weeks—four class days—to the recording sessions, when students can use the lab or radio station, practice, time their discussion, and record. I ask that their podcasts be 4–10 minutes in length, and students are usually right inside the limit.

Each group then collaboratively records and edits their podcast, including:

- a musical or soundscape intro;
- discussion of their thesis claim, including an introduction to the topic using personal reflections/stories;
  - the results of a (cited) peer-reviewed journal article from each group member (one of the group's articles must challenge the group's thesis);
  - discussion of the articles, including their dataset and methodology, and a synthesis of the group's conclusion;
  - supporting primary data from a website;
  - discussion of personal engagement and/or experience to transition the above;
  - a recommendation to the audience of a book for further reading; and
  - and a closing call to action.

The students collaborate with our makerspace librarian, using the Soundtrap application and podcast microphones in our small recording room, and the staff of the university radio station assist and supervise them while they are recording. During the last class session, we all listen to each other's podcasts.<sup>3</sup>

Our university radio station also plays the podcasts over the air during Finals Week. Each group decides

whether to state their full names or just their first names during the recording. If anyone balks at having it air, I adjust the groups on the first day so that all group members are in agreement. It has happened a couple of times that the final product was such that all the students in the group and I agreed for various, mostly technical, reasons that the podcast should not air.

## Evaluation and feedback

In addition to their podcast recordings, groups must also submit a color-coded outline of a script or a transcript of the recorded talk, with in-text citations; a color-coded list of references (in APA style), including seven citations (for groups of three): two from each member and one for podcast itself; and, from each student individually, a personal reflection of the entire process, responding to questions I provide and referring to the course objectives.<sup>4</sup>

To address the perennial issues of students in a group not all working equally hard or well, the possibility of one individual “bringing down” the others and affecting their grade, and the difficulty for the instructor of assessing individual students’ work, each group member’s contributions are color coded and graded individually. One of the great things about this group was that the members weren’t all in agreement. Eventually they negotiated a middle ground of a call to action without giving up their positions and saw that both sides had legitimate points and that there were many nuances to consider. Another group, consisting of an international student and two students from underrepresented groups—all first-generation college students—discussed privilege on campus, and one of the group members later participated in a podcast series produced by the Black Student Union.

In their individual final assessments, students have commented positively on their sense of accomplishment and on being assigned a “real-life” task that incorporates learning how to use a software application (Soundtrap) as well as library databases and other resources. On a social and emotional level, several have reported that they made new friends in the process, and, in my favorite comment, one student wrote about how the experience made him think in new ways about disagreements based on diverse perspectives. Another wrote, “Doing the actual podcast bonded us. We had a good time fixing our mistakes, thinking about new ways to say different things, and

adding the music, and listening to our own voices in the podcast was embarrassing and hilarious at the same time!”

## Conclusion

I have found that the assignment activates almost all of the ACRL Framework and that students actively and collaboratively engage in framework-inspired processes. For example, I have seen students “assess the fit between an information product’s creation process and a particular information need,” as stated in the Information Creation as a Process frame.

This semester-long assignment shows students how scholarly articles are organized and engages them in complex thinking, leading to a product they can both present to the public and cite individually in their careers. As stated in *Information Has Value*, they “see themselves as contributors to the information marketplace rather than only consumers of it.”

Overall, the students feel proud of what they accomplish. I saw one group come back in after practicing the timing with a proud “It was seven minutes, and we are ready,” and all their faces were lit up. Listening on the last day to all the podcasts often ends in laughter and applause. Moments like that make my job a lot more fun.

## Notes

1. “Example of real Script/ref Group 3 AI Lads IL101 Spr 21 SAU Instructor HERZIG,” 2021, St Ambrose University, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KB790QMcnNgSglJn5SxGIQC14qOhxMA0uX2ys1Z743Kg/edit?usp=sharing>.
2. ACRL “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education,” accessed May 5, 2021, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>.
3. “Example of real podcast AI Lads IL101 SAU Spring 2021 instructor HERZIG.mp3” 2021, St. Ambrose University, [https://drive.google.com/file/d/12NIBOP5-CMly-wZWbnN\\_uDgQAHDksLim/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/12NIBOP5-CMly-wZWbnN_uDgQAHDksLim/view?usp=sharing).
4. Stella Herzig, “Instructor mock IL101 script & references—look here to see what it should look like for the final project (‘draft deadline’ just needs references and outline with in-text citations),” 2019, St Ambrose University Library, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tyob3bhE EwFOouJpTZXRlTZarE8iMJcTcEcYlq:qXfhM/edit?usp=sharing>. 