



COURSE SHARING + COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

.....
TEACHING HIDDEN HISTORY

A COLLABORATION CASE STUDY SERIES

AUGUST 2015



COMMITMENT TO COLLABORATION

As a pioneer consortium in higher education, 4-VA is committed to fostering collaboration across the Commonwealth.

We are also committed to measuring, learning from, and sharing the outcomes of our work. We believe in the importance of assessment and evaluation. When possible, we seek to measure our impact using verified research methods.

Case studies are a research design that involves an intensive study of one or more cases with multiple sources of evidence. Each 4-VA member institution selected a signature 4-VA project, not an entire initiative, for their case study. An analysis on collaborating across universities will be the unifying theme across cases.

The goal of these reports is to share what we have learned through our work across universities and to inform our stakeholders within the Commonwealth about 4-VA initiatives. This work will provide information to (1) promote enhanced processes; (2) share knowledge and best practices; and (3) advance collaboration.

4-VA was launched with leadership support from the Secretary of Education, the Governor, four university presidents, and an industry partner, Cisco Systems Inc. – the first collaborative of its kind in Virginia. The Collaborative is designed to help universities work together to achieve Virginia's goals for higher education.

Kelsey Kirland
4-VA Assessment Coordinator



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study features a course-sharing model from George Mason University's (GMU) Center for History and New Media (CHNM). Faculty created a digital history course entitled *Teaching Hidden History*. CHNM and Virginia Tech (VT) taught the course collaboratively during summer 2015.

Mason and Tech believed that the hybrid, collaborative design would offer a new learning opportunity for students, faculty, and departments. Graduate students enrolled in the course brought diverse backgrounds and perspectives, contributing to a unique "shared experience." The TelePresence technology and course instructors helped create a collegial

community. During the course, each student created an online history module using digital artifacts. They grappled with historical questions and developed a historical narrative.

Faculty collaborators collected evaluation data during the course. The collaborative research findings will be shared broadly and will provide an opportunity to learn from this collaborative course sharing model. Additional university partners are desired for future courses.

A course-sharing model that resulted in collaborative teaching and learning research across 4-VA campuses

ACHIEVING 4-VA GOALS

- 1** Define instructional models, including a clear definition of instructional costs;
- 2** Significantly expand access for all Virginians to programs, preparing them for rewarding careers;
- 3** Increase the research competitiveness of the partner universities; and
- 4** Increase opportunities and enhance the success of students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses and programs.

REACHING AIMS WITH EXCELLENCE

COURSE SHARING



Aims to:

Lead the Commonwealth in thinking about new models for teaching and learning

Increase online delivery and access to Virginia citizens

Focus on program areas with increased employment opportunities in Virginia

Reaching aims by:

- ✓ Piloted a hybrid and cross-campus model for teaching graduate history education courses
- ✓ Expanded educational opportunities while maximizing shared expertise, resources, and efforts
- ✓ Students acquired desired skill sets in digital humanities and online education

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH



Increase prevalence and intensity of research collaboration

Increase funding awarded to Virginia faculty and universities

Increase scholarly impact of Virginia faculty and universities

Increase student participation in original scholarship

- ✓ VT and GMU research collaboration; planning future university collaborations
- ✓ Will seek external funding for expanded research collaboration between universities
- ✓ Presented at a summer conference; will submit for publication in a peer-reviewed journal article
- ✓ Graduate students involved in writing, analyzing, and conducting research

THE NUMBERS

8 FACULTY & STAFF COLLABORATORS

4-VA RESEARCH FUNDS \$45K

3 GRADUATE STUDENT INSTRUCTORS

6 VT GRADUATE STUDENTS ENROLLED

9 GMU GRADUATE STUDENTS ENROLLED

PROJECT OVERVIEW



COURSE SHARING



COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH



A MODEL FOR SHARING GRADUATE COURSES DRIVEN BY RESEARCH

THE IDEA

CREATING A MODEL FOR GRADUATE COURSE SHARING

Teaching Hidden History grew from a positive experience with an earlier project, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, funded by the Virginia Department of Education. Dr. Kelly Schrum, Associate Professor in the Higher Education Program at Mason, and her colleagues at CHNM collaborated to develop an asynchronous online course for K-12 teachers that, “Emphasized iterative learning, primary source analysis, and an active approach to studying history while adhering to state standards of learning” (*Hidden in Plain Sight*).

The course is based around individual learning modules, each centered on a historical object. Schrum and her colleagues found the results so promising that they wanted to expand on the course, engaging graduate students in developing digital learning modules.

COLLABORATION TIMELINE

2014

CONCEPTION OF
DIGITAL HISTORY
SHARED COURSE

APPROACHED 4-VA
UNIVERSITIES WITH
COURSE SHARING
OPPORTUNITY

GMU & VT
PARTNER TO
SHARE COURSE

GMU & VT APPLY
FOR 4-VA
FUNDING

2015

GMU & VT
AWARDED
4-VA FUNDS

MAXIMIZING SHARED
FACULTY EFFORT &
UNIVERSITY
RESOURCES

UNIQUE UNIVERSITY
NETWORKS RECRUIT
STUDENTS

EXPANDING
EDUCATIONAL
OPPORTUNITY TO
VIRGINIA STUDENTS

CONDUCT 8 WEEK
SUMMER COURSE

ASSESSMENT OF NEW
INSTRUCTIONAL
MODEL

2016

PUBLISH AND
PRESENT FINDINGS

RECRUIT UNIVERSITY
PARTNERS FOR
FUTURE COURSES

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Dr. Schrum heard about the opportunities with 4-VA for course sharing and collaborative research from her colleagues at Mason. Schrum and two doctoral students, Nate Sleeter and Celeste Tường Vy Sharpe, developed the foundations for an online graduate course on historical research, digital humanities, and history education.

Their vision was to teach the course collaboratively with universities across 4-VA. Schrum approached colleagues at Virginia campuses with a focus on “making the course fit” the needs of each university.

Discussions between each university centered around course design and relevance within individual programs. This collaboration required ongoing conversation and clear communication, noted Schrum.

James Madison University and the University of Virginia were unable to participate in the 2015 pilot course due to timing and scheduling issues, but both expressed interest in being part of the project in the future.

Dr. Tom Ewing, Associate Dean for Graduate Studies, Research, and Diversity in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences at Virginia Tech, called a meeting with the History department to discuss the course sharing opportunity. There was interest and excitement around digital history and Dr. Mark Barrow thought that the course would be valuable to the department.

Tech and Mason worked together to finalize and teach the shared course.

TEACHING HIDDEN HISTORY

DETAILS OF THE COURSE

NEW INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL

A hybrid course (online + TelePresence) to teach students about online history modules

The eight-week summer hybrid course covered three main topics through five TelePresence class meetings and a series of online collaborations between peers, student groups, and individual meetings with instructors.

COURSE FOCUS

- 1 Teaching and Learning**
- 2 Historical Research**
- 3 Digital History**

The shared graduate course, “introduces students to the theory and practices of digital history and history education through readings, viewings, and interactive assignments” (an excerpt from Mason’s grant proposal).

HISTORY MODULE

The final course project involved developing an online history module based on historic artifacts

As part of the course, each student created a history education module. They began by identifying the intended audience, such as middle or high school students, undergraduates, or the general public. Regan Shelton, the Virginia Tech instructor, explained that the course project made students step away from the “academic speak” that they have learned thus far, and taught them to write for a broader audience. She mentioned that, “The course project wasn’t an inward reflection of scholarship designed for your own department but it was an outward look at how your work could benefit the field.”

ACADEMIC PORTFOLIO

The history module could contribute and strengthen a students’ academic portfolio

The online history module was created for the public. The module also provided students with a product that they could keep with them at the end of the course. Students and faculty perceived this as a benefit.

FACULTY STORY



Kelly Schrum

Associate Professor and Director of Educational Projects at the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University

// **4-VA provided an opportunity to work together, to reach out, and to connect with colleagues across universities.**

//

Trust between collaborators was established based on pre-existing relationships and expert knowledge. These working relationships helped the project run smoothly. Schrum said that their relationship was strengthened by the 4-VA opportunity to work together on a shared course. Both universities had a shared vision for the course — providing more digital history opportunities to students.



Mark Barrow

Professor and Chair of the Department of History at Virginia Tech

// **We hope to offer a future version of this course during the regular academic year. The TelePresence classroom was also surprisingly effective.**

//

Barrow noted some limited collaborations in years past with Mason but nothing like a shared course project with collaborative research opportunities. He welcomed the expertise of the Center for History and New Media as they have established regional and national recognition for their advanced work in digital media.

DYNAMIC INSTRUCTORS ARE ESSENTIAL TO COURSE SHARING

Nate Sleeter and Celeste Sharpe, graduate research assistants at Mason, were responsible for the organization, content, and structure of the course. They provided technical support for the software that was developed through the 4-VA grant for students to create their online history modules.

Regan Shelton, a graduate student and adjunct faculty member at Tech, worked in collaboration with Nate and Celeste to coordinate the daily activities.

The instructors found that shared courses can be one-sided and they implemented the “**think, pair, share**” teaching strategy to resolve the issue. This strategy worked well to **elicit dialogue on both sides of the TelePresence screens**.

Faculty members were **pleased with the collaborative discussions** that were taking place during class time.

TELEPRESENCE TECHNOLOGY USED FOR COURSE SHARING

The course instructors at Tech and Mason met a couple of times in the TelePresence rooms to better understand the space and the classroom technology. The Mason instructors also **attended a pilot course tutorial** by another faculty member which they found to be very helpful. From these experiences, they determined a spatial arrangement that would **elicit the best classroom dynamic and environment**.

Both faculty and students mentioned that they were **very impressed by the technology**. One student mentioned the seamless imaging across TelePresence screens as the desks on either screen appear to connect. The instructors received excellent TelePresence support throughout the semester. The Mason instructors anticipated the possibility of problems given the many new elements of the course, but **“Overall, things went really well!”**

“As far as the TelePresence room here at VT is concerned: Very nice, and for the most part it worked as expected.”

-A comment from the student evaluations

Moving forward, Mason instructors would build in more formal opportunities to learn about TelePresence rooms and engage with the space.

“WE WOULD LIKE TO
PUSH THE
BOUNDARIES OF
WHAT THE ROOM
COULD DO”

- a comment from
Celeste, Mason Instructor

“...I REALLY ENJOYED THE CLASS AND APPRECIATE YOUR TIME AND EFFORT IN PUTTING IT TOGETHER. I BELIEVE A LOT OF THINGS WORKED WELL...”

- A comment from the student evaluations

RECRUITING DIVERSE STUDENTS ADDED VALUE TO THE COURSE

Each faculty member at Mason and Tech focused on recruiting students for the shared course. They pulled from their respective university and department networks to create a diverse group of students. Students who enrolled in the course varied in background, degree, and discipline. Many of the students had areas of study in history and within the college of education.

Faculty, instructors, and students noted that the **different perspectives added value to the course**.

Some of the student comments, collected in a post from the learning management system at Mason, noted that overall the course was enjoyable and useful.

“Overall, a really useful course for me. **I enjoyed the classroom discussions**, and our groups appeared to be fairly cohesive. The class really got me thinking about how to utilize objects in my pedagogy - probably more so towards the end of the class when ideas began to click like crazy in my mind.” - A comment from the student evaluations

INSTILLING COMMUNITY ACROSS CAMPUSES AND UNIVERSITIES

Dr. Schrum described a real sense of **comradery amongst the students** which was largely fostered by the course instructors. The Mason instructors explained that, “This was an experiment and we were all going to figure it out together.” The instructors were honest and open with their students about the technology. Nate and Celeste also described a participatory nature to the course that they believe helped to bridge the divide between campuses.

Regan explained that there was a level of collegiality that the instructors, and the students, tried to instill.

Within the course, **multiple streams of communication** were established. The TelePresence classes, that mimicked a face-to-face experience, were able to strengthen peer-to-peer online support and feedback. Feedback groups were created and were comprised of Tech and Mason students. Group meetings were often conducted through Skype rather than email. The Mason instructors noted that the **multi-campus groups encouraged interaction** during class and created a “whole class” environment.

COURSE ASSESSMENT = COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

With the assistance of a project evaluator, Dr. Schrum and Dr. Barrow have collected course data to assess the effectiveness of the course and the new instructional model.

“The evaluation will focus on student learning as well as investigations of the collaborative processes undertaken by project team faculty and students enrolled in ‘Teaching Hidden History’” – an excerpt from the Virginia Tech proposal.

By gathering and compiling student artifacts, course evaluations, faculty feedback, and instructor reflections, an analysis will be conducted in order to share this unique course experience at academic conferences across the nation. The graduate research assistants as well as the faculty members are looking forward to disseminating their findings to stakeholders, educators, and curriculum scholars.

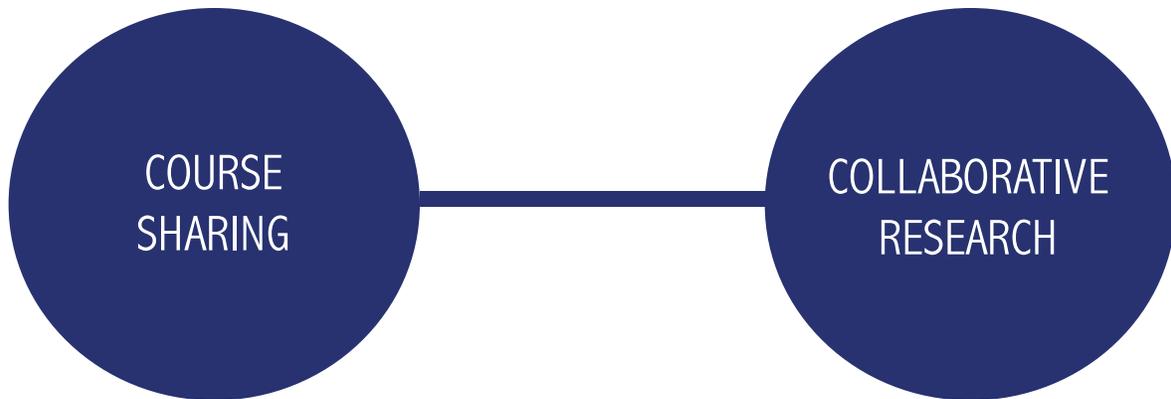
EXAMPLE MODULE

In this course, graduate students made connections to digital artifacts by writing a historical narrative.

“Now that the class is over, I look at historical images much differently than before... The module allows you to find those hidden themes and allow the reader to truly learn why this event matters.” - A blog post excerpt by Caleb Myatt, a second-year MA student at GMU.



TWO 4-VA INITIATIVES COMBINE TO PROVIDE A NEW INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL FOR DIGITAL HISTORY



- Creating a new instructional model for shared history course
 - Inviting 4-VA universities to share a graduate course
 - Developing course sharing relationships between VT & GMU
 - Developing digital history capacity at VT & GMU
 - Seeking future partner universities for the course
 - Developing new course topics based on local expertise
- Future aspirations
- Strengthening faculty relationships
 - Enhancing new instructional models
 - Conference presentations
 - Peer-reviewed publications
 - Applying for external funding

FUTURE WORK

Dr. Schrum looks forward to expanding the number of participating universities, drawing on expertise across Virginia to develop future courses. As the team works with additional partners across colleges and universities, a growing number of faculty and students will bring new ideas and perspectives.

This course offered Dr. Barrow and Regan Shelton the opportunity to use the TelePresence space at Tech for the first time and they are investigating additional ways to use this space. They look forward to continuing and expanding the collaboration between Mason and Tech.

IN CONCLUSION

George Mason and Virginia Tech faculty observed the enriched classroom experience as a result of the multi university student participation. Schrum noted that the course provided students the opportunity to participate in a unique and valuable “shared experience.”

The student feedback, collaborative discussions, and shared local knowledge enhanced the course experience.

Students were able to receive feedback on their module from Mason and Tech peers in addition to the instructors. Regan observed students trying to make better projects because of the collaboration. The instructors served as a review panel for the final project.

Some of the student modules drew upon local history while drawing connections to broader historical trends which enhanced the perspectives within the course. Other students mentioned how the scope of their module was impacted by the broader audience that was fostered through 4-VA.

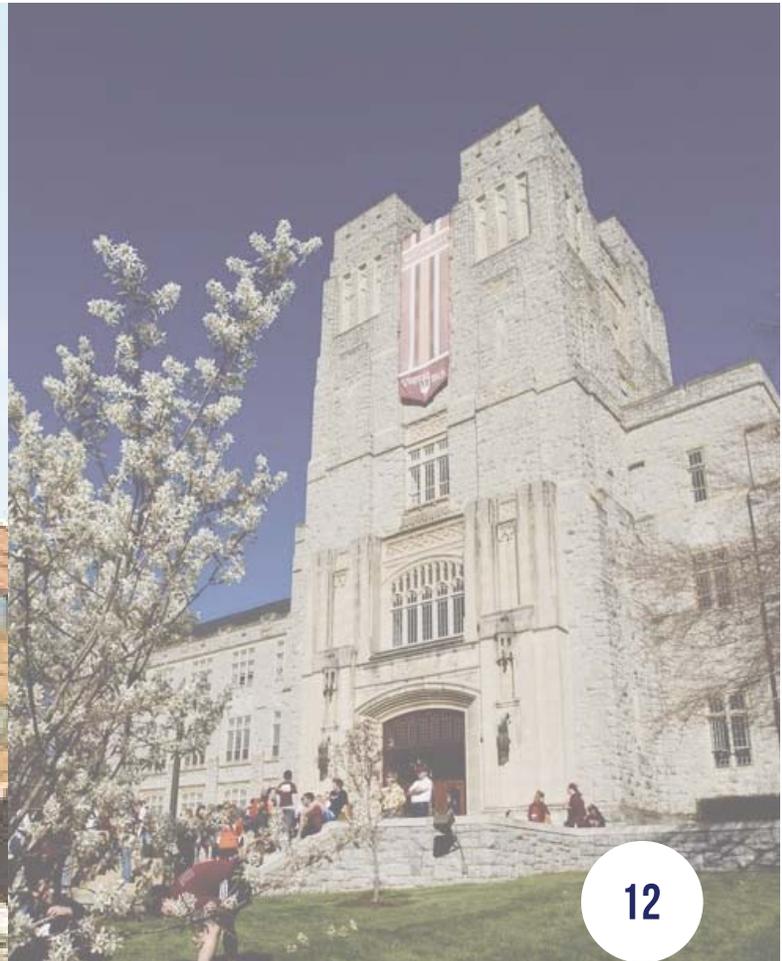


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Mission

4-VA's mission is to promote inter-university collaborations that leverage the strengths of each partner university in order to accomplish much more than any individual university could achieve alone.

www.4-va.org

