

# Podcasting and Public Scholarship Pedagogy



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## Introduction and Course Background:

Podcasting has become a popular medium with shows covering politics, film and television, science, and various other wide-ranging topics. Podcasts reach millions and are relatively accessible in comparison to other forms of media. This presentation looks at how we can bring podcasting to the classroom while developing skills around researching and writing.

In Autumn 2019, I taught an Interdisciplinary Writing Program (IWP) course (ENGL 298), linked with Geographies of Environmental Justice (GEOG 272), where students were asked to produce a podcast episode as their primary writing project. IWP offers a range of courses that are linked to other UW courses in the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. This version of ENGL 298 was loosely linked, as we used the basic topic and concepts from GEOG 272, but the writing and assessment were not connected. The course was also a First-year Interest Group (FIG) course, so almost all students were freshmen.

The course was designed as in-depth engagement with writing in the social sciences, with a focus on public scholarship looking at the Geographies of Environmental Justice. The course was centered around one major group assignment that was broken down into several scaffolded assignments. Each group researched, wrote, recorded, edited, and created materials for a podcast episode. Collectively, we ended with a podcast series that examines a variety of environmental justice issues at several geographic scales.

## Learning Outcomes and Goals:

- **Conduct research** by collecting a variety of sources to analyze with a critical social science lens.
- Write clearly and concisely about complex issues while **considering a public audience.**
- **Consider ethical practices** of writing that acknowledge differences and oppression.
- Identify the differences and similarities between various forms of written scholarship and approaches to **sharing information and research.**
- Productively work in groups and be able to co-write and edit in a **collaborative** format.
- Understand and **put into practice** the basic skills of writing, recording, editing, and producing a podcast episode.
- **Deeply engage** with concepts within the discipline of geography and scholarship examining environmental justice at various geographic scales.

## Teaching Writing Public Scholarship and Podcasts:

Podcasting as public scholarship was a good fit for this course, as the issues around environmental justice are deeply connected with on-the-ground activism, local and global communities, and various political arenas. Additionally, the pressing nature of environmental issues makes it important that the general public is part of that conversation. Podcasting is not a traditional assessment of writing, but it challenges students to write in clear and concise ways while communicating complex ideas and research in an easily understood format. This assessment also asked students to consider writing with ethics and accessibility in mind. Ethical writing included reflecting on the use of language and who is being represented. In terms of accessibility students were challenged to follow the script and have that audio match the script so that the podcast was widely accessible. Within the literature we found work arguing both for and against podcasting as pedagogy and specifically I draw on Smith, Frick and Siebel (2019) who argue that podcasting can improve writing and better connect writing and identity formation in students.

The students received an extensive amount of freedom around the podcast but were given specific parameters and goals. These included: the project was a group project, so students were required to work collaboratively; the topic had to be within the geographies of environmental justice; and the students were required to consider a public audience when writing the podcast script. Working collaboratively and writing for a public audience were also framed as future career skills. Students can now demonstrate that they can work well with others and write for a broad audience, which could be listed on a resume along with the podcast episode and described in cover letters. Students were also tasked to create supplemental material for their episode, which was inspired by *Serial* and podcasts from the *LA Times* that commonly reference maps and other materials that are available online. For the course, students were asked to either create a photo album or a map using Google My Maps.

## Podcasting Assignment Sequence:

- Assignment 1: What is Podcasting?
- Assignment 2: Topic Proposal
- Assignment 3: Annotated Bibliography
- Assignment 4: Edited Annotated Bibliography and Script Outline
- Assignment 5: Podcasting Introduction
- Assignment 6: Script Draft One
- Assignment 7: Script Draft Peer Review
- Assignment 8: Script Draft Two with Supplemental Materials Text
- Assignment 9: Audio Files
- Assignment 10: Recorded Episode and Final Script with Supplemental Materials
- Assignment 11: Self-Reflection Essay

Copy of Syllabus:



Copy of Assignments:



## Student Reflections:

- Out of 19 students, only two had limited podcasting experience and when asked at the end of the course, all students felt confident or very confident about the podcasting process.
- While many students were familiar with resources offered by UW Libraries, resources like the Sound Studio, Student Tech Loan Program, and the Media Arcade were new to students.
- In terms of writing all but one student felt the process improved their writing and all students felt the process improved their research skills.

### Student-reported positives of the project:

- Unique assignment
- Improved research and writing skills
- Brought them out of their usual comfort zone especially with collaboration and voice recording
- Self-guided and rewarding
- Appreciated the scaffolded structure including feedback and made the course manageable
- Writing about academic material for a nonacademic audience appealed to them
- In-depth engagement with a topic
- Made an English class "less dreadful"

### Student-reported negatives of the project:

- Too much focus on a single topic for the quarter
- The podcast had to be structured instead of a conversation
- Project was lot of work but overall manageable
- Audacity (audio-editing software) could be a struggle
- More class time devoted to the project

## UW Resources for Podcast Production:

- Sound Studio
- Media Arcade
- Student Tech Loan Program
- UW Libraries
- Audacity: Open Source Editing Software

## Instructor Reflections:

Based on the final podcast, the work during the process, and student feedback, this assessment was overall a success for a writing course. The improvement of writing between assignments was clear to me as an instructor and each group ended with a well-researched episode. When I do this again, I plan on continuing to use the same resources, maintaining the collaborative nature of the project, and using the singular topic model as I found those worked well. In terms of changes, I will increase the amount of in-class work time available for the project and add an opportunity to incorporate a more conversational element.

## You Thought You Were an Environmentalist: An Environmental Justice Podcast

- Episode 0 Introduction by Julian
- Episode 1 From Toxic Schools to Toxic Prisons by Aaliyah & Tisbe
- Episode 2 Pesticide Use and Animal Agricultural Byproducts by Alanna & Katherine
- Episode 3 Power Vs. Health by Alina & Andrew
- Episode 4 Poison in the Air by Aidan & Conner
- Episode 5 Dealing with Waste by Grace & Jenni
- Episode 6 Pirate Fishing Explained by Kailin & Maia
- Episode 7 Climate Change & WOC by Gaby, Mina, & Moe'Neyah
- Episode 8 Indigenous Populations and Climate Change by Monica & Grace
- Episode 9 Overtourism and Under Representation by Sydney & Maddy



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