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Teaching the promotion of heritage sites: An Interdisciplinary Approach

Students Outcomes

- (1) reflecting on arts and heritage values
- (2) gathering historical information
- (3) assessing the spectacle potential of their location
- (4) designing a site-specific event

Activities

- Readings
- Monument Research Report
- Midterm Research Report
- Event proposal

1. Course

This class is designed for upper division undergraduate courses in marketing, public relations, heritage studies, event management, art history, and arts management. The main goal was to enable students to communicate and design a site-specific event to implement their understanding of the value of heritage.

2. Students Outcomes

Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate the value of historical sites by (1) reflecting on arts and heritage values, (2) gathering historical information, (3) assessing the spectacle potential of their location, and (4) designing a site-specific event.

3. Theoretical rationale

Interdisciplinarity is key to training the professionals of the future (Blair, 2012; Ward, 1981) and provides ways of establishing common ground among the people working as a

team for moving ahead with credible projects (Murthy & Mickie, 2006). In an educational context, interdisciplinarity benefits students through the integration of knowledge, understanding, methodologies, and perspectives derived from multiple disciplines (Yang, 2009). This integration will be extremely beneficial when working on professional projects as part of a team that includes people from diverse backgrounds.

Over time, definitions of interdisciplinarity have emphasized the importance of the integration of different disciplines instead of mere interaction (Franks et al., 2007). This course was developed to embody the idea of interdisciplinarity as integration using content from art history, marketing and communication, tools from public relations, and research methods from ethnography. The implementation of this integration has been designed through a variety of activities.

The activities for the class provide an example of interdisciplinary design (Marchioro, Ryan, & Perkins, 2014). They developed and implemented an integration of disciplines in several ways, exposing students to the knowledge of each discipline and helping them see how they connect with each other. In particular, the focus on *in situ* approach to learning was the main factor that demonstrated the relevance of the integration of different disciplines for understanding reality and for designing meaningful promotional.

4. Activities

During the course, the instructor accompanied the class to conduct six on-site visits: Mercati di Traiano, Terme di Caracalla, Domus Romane, Basilica di Massenzio, Teatro Marcello, and Ara Pacis. This course focused on the Roman Empire, and the six site visits were chosen to expose students to a variety of monuments from that time. Another criterion of choice was the identification of the events hosted at the sites with the intent to select a

range of different typologies: multimedia animation, musical concerts, literary festivals, operas, art exhibits, and corporate events. Initial meetings were held in the classroom to introduce students to the general concepts and to set up the framework that structured the entire course. Students were also required to attend an event of their choice in the evening.

Readings

A set of readings introduced students to issues such as the consumption of the past, arts and marketing, the taste of the public from audiences to participants, and heritage sites and marketing (Foreman-Wernet & Dervin, 2009; Rowan & Baram, 2004). To facilitate class discussion, students were encouraged to pick a few quotes from the readings and bring them to class along with a personal reflection. These readings were from scholarly works in archeology, communication, and marketing.

Monument Research Report

At the beginning of the course, students chose three sites to study thoroughly through a research report. This report was structured into two parts: one to be prepared *before* the visit and including historical information and a description of at least two past events held at the site, and a second report due *after* the on-site visit and including a reflection covering the observations collected regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the site. In particular, this reflection focused on the following: visitors (Who were the visitors? What was their age, gender, and nationality?), space (What was the emotional tone? What were some generative potential characteristics?), and surroundings (In what type of neighborhood was the monument located? What kind of social meaning did its location communicate?).

During the on-site visit, the students who had prepared their reports gave an oral presentation of the information collected to the class. Afterward, the instructor provided

activities that facilitated the ethnographic exploration of the monument, prompting students to pay attention to visitors, space, and surroundings.

Midterm Research Paper

A short midterm paper required students to develop a clear opinion about one of the issues addressed by the readings in light of their experience during the on-site visits. Few questions prompted their thoughts, helping them connect ethnographic observations, historical facts, and class material. Moreover, students were required to use quotes from the reading to support their ideas.

Event Proposal

The final project asked students to design an event for one of the monuments visited during the course and to prepare a proposal encompassing a PowerPoint presentation and a press kit. The proposal was presented in front of the class in the form of a press conference. The PowerPoint had three components: the monument (historical information and description of the visitors, space, and surroundings), the event (title, purpose, perspective audience, calendar, and use of space) and a conclusion (a summary of the benefits of the event for the monument). The press kit consisted of a folder containing a monument report, a handout targeting the event to the audience of choice, and a business card.

Final Reflection Paper

After listening to each other's event proposals, students wrote a final reflection paper that compiled what they learned in the different steps of the class. In particular, they were required to articulate at a conceptual level what they implemented with their promotional

strategy through event design. The goal of this process was to be able to promote the value of historical sites.

5. Debriefing

The class attracted students from different majors: archeology, advertisement, marketing, and communication. It created an environment where students could learn from each other's expertise and articulate their disciplinary beliefs to peers who were not so familiar with their discipline.

The activities prompted by the instructor during the on-site visits coached students to interact with space, developing insightful observations. Afterward, students used their observations to assess the place and provide information for future ideas for events. In the event proposal, students developed ideas emerging from their on-site visits, showing different perspectives and original ideas. For example, one student noticed that few to no events for children were offered, so she designed an event for kids. Another student pointed out that one monument, located in front of one of the sites visited with the class, was entirely neglected. Therefore, she decided to design an event that involved both the monuments, drawing people's attention to both of them. These results showed that students not only developed strong ethnographic skills but also that they were able to use the information collected through this method to form their communication strategy.

The final paper pieced together the activities of the course and presented the enduring understanding that resulted from each of these stages. Students explained his or her discovery of the value of heritage with powerful concepts that went beyond the ideas explored with the initial readings. This exercise was a demonstration of how

interdisciplinarity tasks, integrating different fields, allowed students to develop their own understanding of the topic and develop sophisticated promotional strategies.

6. Appraisal

There is no doubt that much of the success of the class was derived from the setting, considering that students were fascinated with the city of Rome and its history. In particular, the class activities were developed for a summer course in Rome. However, they could function as a template for activities that could be carried out in any other community. The choice of historic sites should be linked to the specific history of the area in which the class is offered, helping students to articulate heritage values within particular contexts (Page & Mason, 2004).

Students' comments and reflections also demonstrated the merit of the interdisciplinary pedagogical approach. The readings on communication and marketing topics exposed them to complex ideas, stimulating thought-provoking discussions and insightful reflections about art and heritage. Incorporating ethnographic experiences of the sites within the historical research allowed the students to engage in a meaningful way with space, making their observations and impressions relevant for their communication project and stimulating a growing curiosity for issues of material culture.

Moreover, students praised the knowledge they gained about disciplinary tasks with which they were not familiar. For instance, working on a press kit intrigued marketing students, whereas archeology students enjoyed the ethnographic exercise. They were enthusiastic to be able to interact with a monument through their observations, instead of just studying it through facts and historical information. Finally, communication students were fascinated to learn about the history of the monuments, primarily because in many

cases there was no intuitive understanding of these monuments' original purpose and students appreciated learning about them through historical information.

At the end of the course, a sophisticated understanding of the value of heritage was expressed in a variety of ways, arising from the students' personal views. Among other ideas expressed in their final reflection paper, students noticed how the magic atmosphere of historical sites could create beautiful memories for people experiencing the space together, they were fascinated by the layers of history that can accumulate on a monument, and they realized that sometimes beauty is not apparent upon the first glimpse. Finally, the students were excited by the idea of creating new threads in an old tapestry. These outcomes will likely be the enduring understanding of the class, creating the premise for well-rounded arts and event managers who are able to establish common grounds for successful projects.

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