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ASSIGNMENT - Podcast Episode on a Public Issue of Importance to You

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ASSIGNMENT

Podcast Episode on a Public Issue of Importance to You (and What Listeners Can Do About It)

The course learning goal most central to this assignment is:

Research, analyze, and communicate with the public about a contemporary issue related to your personal, academic, professional, or community interests.

For this assignment, you will:

- research a public issue of particular importance or interest to you.
- research possible actions people can make to take action on the issue.
- interview at least one person who has some expertise about the issue and experience taking action on it (e.g., through lived experience, their job, etc.).
- create a 15-minute podcast episode to share your research with the public.
- listen to and discuss the podcasts created by the class during our scheduled final exam time.

What your podcast episode will focus on:

Your research might answer questions such as the following (these are just ideas—you have latitude to focus on what makes the most sense in the context of your topic, *with the exception of the last question—about how listeners can take action. That information is required*):

- What does the contemporary landscape of this issue look like?
- Why does this problem exist? What are the differing views on it that have allowed it to happen or persist?
- Why is this issue meaningful for people to be thinking about and taking action on?
- How have people organized to address the issue? What is one organization or group of people that is currently doing something to respond to the issue you've identified? (This can be at either the local, state, national, or international level).
- How can listeners take action on this issue?

We will use our scheduled final exam time to discuss the episodes you've created; your "final exam" will be to have listened to and read what your peers have created and to come to class ready to discuss these.

There will be multiple opportunities throughout the term for you to meet with me outside of class and work on your project inside of class time to ensure you have enough time and support to complete a strong project by the end of the term.

EXAMPLE

If you are doing an episode about voting rights in the United States, your information might include historical background about this issue in United States—e.g., the history and current context of voter rights and suppression, the forms these have taken and impacts they've had, the scale/number of people who are affected, which populations are affected most, how different sides have framed the issue, and how laws vary at the state levels to either restrict or expand access. You'll then touch on what organizations or social movements have done and are doing to expand voting rights, etc., and how people can advocate to expand voting rights.

After you've done this background research, you should be well-positioned to have an informed and informative conversation/interview with someone who is part of a related organization about the work they do on this issue, or someone who has lived experience with the issue and can speak to efforts they've been a part of to advocate for change. This part of the project will include conducting an interview (typically about 30 minutes long) with a person of your choice. For example, if you were interested in the issue of voting rights in Kentucky, you might interview someone working with the ACLU of Kentucky, League of Women Voters in Lexington, or a staff member at Kentuckians for the Commonwealth. You'll incorporate segments of the interview into your episode (and you're certainly welcome to conduct more than one if you'd like).

More information about translating the podcast into an op-ed will be given later in the term.

Project Timeline

The assignment is scaffolded into the following steps across the second half of a semester (or longer).

Step 1: Submit a 1-paragraph proposal about the social problem you would like to research for this assignment, along with a list of 2–3 sources that have started to inform you about the issue. The proposal should include a brief summary of what you know about the topic, along with why you are particularly interested in it and why you think it’s important for people to know more about.

Step 2: By the end of class (on a day set aside for research and writing), submit the following:

- A brief summary of what your specific topic is.
- A list of key points you want listeners to understand about your topic.
- A summary of what you know so far from your research about these key points.
- At least one thing listeners can do about this issue if they want to take action on it.
- At least one idea of a person you could interview for your topic.
- Any questions you have for me.

Step 3: Submit the date, time, and location for your interview, and the name of the person you are interviewing. Note that it is important to start arranging this as soon as possible since the first person or people you ask to interview might not be available (or willing) to be interviewed, and for those who are available, it might take a few weeks to find a time that works for both of you.

Step 4: Training in the library on how to download and use Audicity for producing your episodes, as well as how to find and use website with free sound, such as FreeSound (see attached handout for overview of instructions we will follow on that day).

Step 5: Full transcript due.

Step 6: Individual meetings in lieu of class. You will meet with me individually this week to discuss your transcripts and any revisions that may be necessary before you complete the first recording of your episode that is due the following week.

Step 7: First podcast recording due (this will undergo editing).

Step 8: Editing workshop. (Note that editing can be the most time-consuming part of this process, so be sure to leave plenty of time for it!)

Step 9: Final recording of podcast due.

Step 10: Listen to and discuss one another’s podcast episodes (these will also be made available to the public through Spotify).

Producing Your Podcast: Overview and Tips

Note: Abby Houston, Berea College Digital Initiatives Librarian, developed the instructional resources from which the information below has been adapted for the purposes of this assignment.

OVERVIEW OF HOW TO PRODUCE A PODCAST EPISODE

1. Be sure to listen to a variety of episodes to get an idea of what kinds of podcasts and features within them draw you in most as a listener. You can listen to examples of winning student podcast from competitions hosted by NPR [here](#) (“Student Podcast Challenge. Accessed April 12, 2024) and the *New York Times* [here](#) (“The Winners of Our 6th Annual Student Podcast Contest.” *New York Times*. 2023).
2. Write a full script of what you want to say so that you can be sure you know exactly what you want to say to your audience beforehand. This will make the recording process go much more quickly.
3. Secure some kind of recording device, and note that smartphones and laptops usually work just fine for this purpose. If your library lends out high-quality recording devices, though, those may be ideal. If using a smartphone, use applications such as Voice Memos on an iPhone, or Audio Recorder on Android.
4. Download [Audacity](#). If you have a digital resources librarian who can provide training on how to use programs like Audacity, that person will be a wonderful resource to work with for this project. If you don’t have someone like this at your institution, tutorials are available at the [Audacity website](#), [YouTube](#), and (if free through your school’s IT department) [LinkedIn Learning](#).
5. Think about what kinds of audio you want, and search for free music and sound effects to include in your episode at sites such as [Freesound](#), [UppBeat](#), and [Pixaby](#).
6. Once all recordings are complete (episode script and interview), upload these into Audacity to produce your episode, along with sound from sites in the step above. At the end, be sure to export what you’ve produced as an .mp3.
7. Share your episode on a streaming platform such as SoundCloud, Buzzsprout, Spreaker, and Spotify.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR PRODUCING HIGH-QUALITY PODCASTS

- Consider what elements to include to make the most of the podcast medium. For example:
 - What will listeners hear first? (Music, a sound effect, your voice?)
 - How will the first moments of the podcast grab their attention?
 - What kind of music and other kinds of sound can you use throughout the episode to give it a polished feel/make it sound like more than just recording yourself talking for 10–15 minutes?
- When citing information you obtained from a source, refer to that source verbally (e.g., “according to the 2020 US Census, 65% of Americans own the home they live in,” or “as sociologist Matthew Desmond found in the research he conducted for his book *Evicted*, many people who’ve been evicted don’t realize what they’ve experienced was an actual eviction.”) Also create a bibliography that you can post along with your episode.
- Conduct all recordings in a space that’s as quiet as possible, and hold your recording device about 6 inches away from your mouth when recording.
- Leave plenty of time for editing since this step is the most likely to take more time than assumed.
- Listen to your audio with a pair of headphones after you’re done recording to make sure it’s free of background sound and the volume is comfortable to listen to.