***Indigenizing the 21st Century Classroom***

***Dr. Paul McKenzie-Jones***

**TYPE -** This OER is a semester-long activity in which students engage and interact with American Indian activist groups or individuals and then produce a weekly blog discussing their particular interactions and what they learned each week of the semester.

**MOTIVATION –** The motivation behind theactivity is to get students to look beyond the textbooks, government reports, and secondary sourced newspaper stories when engaging with indigenous issues. The aim is also to give the students room for intellectual growth as they discover not just the scale of issues in Indigenous communities; from land, water, treaties to the more commonly known drink, drugs, and unemployment; but also the settler-colonial structural reasons why these issues exist and how they are all inter-connected. More specifically I want them to see/hear/listen to the views and concerns about these issues from American Indian perspectives, and learn about the steps being taken to combat them, by directly engaging with Native people and especially activists, on social media, especially Native Twitter on a real-time, as it happens, basis. (Yes, Native Twitter is an actual thing).



**IEFA –** This OER incorporates “Indian Education For All” on several levels. The first, and most obvious is that it deals explicitly with American Indians issues on the content level. The second is that through using social media, the students are exposed to a culturally responsive approach to the issues under discussion, by hearing firsthand from Native people themselves. Third, Native voices are the most authoritative voices on issues related to Native communities and this OER bring those voices directly into the classroom. Fourth, the use of social media also shows the students that American Indian cultures are not static remnants of the past, but vibrant, contemporary, and as tech savvy as their own.

**MATERIALS & TECHNOLOGIES INVOLVED –** All and any components of social media – Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, You Tube and blogs.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES/TARGETED OUTCOMES –** By the end of the semester students should be able to point to several outcomes, including but not limited to:

* Increased awareness of Indigenous issues
* Increased awareness of the societal structures that exacerbate these issues rather than mitigate them
* Increased awareness of steps being taken by Indigenous people to combat these issues
* Greater ability to discuss these issues and forms of activism from a more informed and less judgmental basis
* Engage with multiple concepts of activism that showcase it as a form of thinking as well as action or protest
* Specifically be able to show how activism can take many different forms, from education, to blockades, to revitalization and reclamation (of food, language, cultures)
* Be able to discuss confidently that Indigenous individuals, communities, and cultures, are very much involved in their own empowerment and future sustainability
* 

**ACTIVITY OR MODULE SEQUENCE**

**First Step –** Students should choose several ‘issues’ for the first week’s discussion. Ideally these will be issues that the student personally cares about, to give extra motivation in engaging with the subject.

* + In the first week’s discussion, everyone in the classroom discusses the subjects they have chosen, any people with duplicated negotiate their first and second choices, eventually we whittle it down so that everyone in the room is focused on a different issue – to avoid duplication
	+ Once the issues have been chosen/finalized, each student, with the help of the instructor, searches social media for activists/movements/organizations involved with his/her particular issue.
	+ Any student without a social media presence must set up a twitter account for the semester at the very least to be able to complete the project

**Second Step –** Students are guided through the blog writing process and given the (broad) parameters expected of them within this assignment – I am looking for engagement, understanding, and where possible, involvement with the issues.

**Third Step –** The first blog is a basic introduction as to why the issue was chosen and what the student hopes to find/achieve by the end of the semester

**Fourth Step -** Students are expected to spend at least two hours per week following up on the social media accounts/issues they are following and then an extra hour writing a weekly blog on what they have discovered that week. Are there any new events occurring? Have any developments occurred? Are new programs/projects happening? Who has new ideas/issues? How hopeful is the student that any of these new developments will have the desired/required outcome? If there is nothing new occurring, what was the student hopeful of happening that week? They are also expected to read and interact with each other’s blogs, passing on information/leads etc. that they have discovered that are directly connected to issues that other students are following. The instructor maintains a watchful eye but as little physical presence within the blogs expect to interject in moments of brilliant analysis or exceptional teamwork. Any critical comments must be addressed privately, away from the public blog forum.

**Fifth Step –** Once the student has been following events/issues/activists for several weeks, they are to reach out and engage with people on social media. The level and type of involvement is up to the student to decide. E.G. Can they get involved? How can they spread the word? Can they ask questions? Etc.

**Sixth Step –** Students are expected to discuss whether involvement has altered their perception of the issues at all?

**Seventh Step –** The final blog summarizes the students own perspectives of the previous steps, from choosing the issues to getting involved (whether in a small or big way). It should also analyze what, if anything, has changed within the students own perceptions, attitudes during the entire process? Do they see/engage with Indigenous people/issues any differently than they did at the start of the project? What problems/hurdles did they face/overcome? How has their understanding of activism changed throughout the process?

**Grading System –** In the current format, the entire project is graded out of 100 points based upon a satisfactory combination of the following: ***Quantity/Quality*** – student have posted well and interacted with their own and each blogs on the minimum weekly basis; ***Engagement/Activation*** – with the issue itself, directly with activists/organizations involved; ***Intellectual Growth*** – clearly written evidence of increased awareness of the cultural sensitivity/immediacy of these issues (for example to move from “all women are hypersexualized by society” to “while all women are hypersexualized by society, it is particularly problematic for Native women as these sexualized images are often the ONLY images of Indigenous women that the public see, thus creating a one dimensional hyper-sexualized stereotype of Native women in the public arena that has no visible countering corrective image.”) ***Cultural Relevancy*** – the blogs may refer to issues similar within other races for contextual reference but the majority of content and analysis MUST focus on American Indian issues/people.

**REVISION**

Outcomes cannot be predicted and there will be often be continuous issues at play throughout the semester

* Despite the active engagement component of the project some students cannot get past their own passive expectations that the burden of activism should always be someone else’s – these students tend to abandon the projects. Currently the solution to this aspect is one that I am trying to solve – cajolement, encouragement, and extensions have all so far failed.
* Quieter students who tend not to speak up in class, also tend to self-edit in a blog situation and are often reluctant to post. These students really just need encouragement that their voice is valid and should be heard, and if this can be maintained through the semester, the student emerges more confident and less self-editing at the end of the project. Several students have commented in the past that this was the most empowering exercise they undertook in college.
* Some students also often surprise themselves. Some may enter the project tentatively because they sense the passive observer in themselves only to discover that they have become activated in the process of the assignment and begin projects of their own.
* Most students come away surprised at how accessible the activists are, how much they are willing to educate people about their causes, and about how much activism is less a state of action than it is a state of consciousness.

Overall the exercise does succeed in accomplishing the objectives set out for students to become more engaged and more critically aware of issues within Indigenous communities.

**FUTURE AMENDMENTS**

One amendment that I am considering for the future is to add Google Map component to the weekly blog exercise so that there is a visual locator connected to the week’s event write ups.

The other future amendment will be a ***Revised Grading System*** wherein each weekly blog (and map point) will be worth 5 points per week ONLY if it is written and posted within the weekly range. I.E. If there are no posts for 3 weeks, this will be a terminal loss of 15 points rather than collating the number of blogs written by the end of the semester and subtracting the missing weeks. Hopefully this grading structure will keep students faithful to the real-time dynamics of the project. Over a 15 week semester that will be 5 x 14 blogs, plus an extra available 15 points each for the introductory and concluding blogs to a total of 100 points. Within these weekly points targets, the same grading rubric as above will apply.