Experiential Learning Through Classroom-Community Partnerships

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**Target: Upper-level Undergraduates**

For ANT 3573 “Digital Archaeology” I developed hands-on activities to teach advanced undergraduate students how to ethically use digital technologies to solve complex problems and effectively communicate findings to the public.

**Classroom-Community Partnerships & Research-Based Coursework**

One goal was to develop coursework that created a bridge between the classroom and the community/public. A second goal was to immerse students in activities that simulated research projects, i.e. requiring multiple phases of collaborative work with several individuals.

**Public-Centered Experiential Learning**

With UTSA STAR funding, I developed new lab activities and final project for Digital Archaeology. This required me to expand my own skillset as well as establish a partnership with a public-facing heritage institution. My training allowed me to teach cutting edge 3D visualization techniques using Blender. These techniques prepared students to partner with the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) for their final project, which entailed researching and 3D modeling a historic central Texas stoneware collection and digitally recreating its kilns. Students used photogrammetry and library research while at CAR and Blender back in the classroom to create historically-accurate digital models, and then brought their data together in an interactive and educational web-based experience deployed to the public on Sketchfab.com (see QR code).

At the end of the semester, we held a “Virtual Reality Expo” for the UTSA community, organized with the office of Academic Innovation and held in the Digital Experience Laboratory. Students took an active role showcasing their work to visitors and peers on VR headsets.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

Students gained skills in critical thinking, teamwork, communication, & empirical/quantitative methods as they applied their knowledge in a professional setting to produce an educational product for the public.

**Student Benefits and Impact**

The final project expanded the students’ professional skillset and showed them they were capable of creating sophisticated digital and educational products with and for the public. This work “raised the stakes” of their coursework, since their project outcomes were contributing to CAR’s public profile rather than just a course grade.