Creating Smarthistory-style Videos for Flipping a Class on Russian Art

Description:

During the summer of 2010, as part of a trip to Russia for dissertation research, I visited several important museums of Russian art. I had just finished teaching an upper-division course devoted entirely to Russian art and had experienced first-hand the dearth of accessible material available for teaching this material to undergraduates. Inspired by a website called "Smarthistory," which featured videos documenting casual conversations about canonical works within the history of art, I recorded a series of fifteen conversations in English held in front of some of the most significant works in the history of Russian art. Those audio files have gone untouched since returning from that trip. This project will edit those files and create micro-lecture pedagogical videos, featuring images of the works of art discussed as well as images from Russian culture for context, in preparation for teaching my Special Topics Art History course on Russian art in the fall of 2015 at Kent State University at Stark. The videos I produce, along with museum exhibition websites and selected readings from scholarly articles and books, will serve in lieu of a textbook for this course.

Goals:

My project will advance teaching excellence by introducing new pedagogical methods and content to upper-division students at Kent State University, primarily in Art History and Russian Studies. José Antonio Bowen (2012) notes, "Technology, largely used outside the classroom to deliver content, can be an important tool to prepare students for classroom discussions and to increase the class time available for those discussions and other active learning." Bowen gives a plethora of examples of resources available online for implementing such content-delivery outside the classroom, and notes that, "The role of the professor in the future will be less about creating new presentations of old content and increasingly about curating, assembling, and guiding students through existing materials." I take Bowen's prediction to heart in my own pedagogical approach. I employ online content available through resources like Pearson's MyArtsLab in my Renaissance to Modern survey course. In upper-division courses like Early 20th-Century Art, I have created compilations of online materials to replace textbooks, a strategy which I have written more about at the Art History Teaching Resources (AHTR) website: http://arthistoryteachingresources.org/2013/09/curating-a-virtual-textbook-for-early-20th-century-art-history/ .

However, at present, the resources available online for delivering content about Russian art in the English language are not sufficient for teaching a course on the topic. My project to produce these videos will begin to redress that situation by providing accessible, conversational forays into critical material in this content area in order to compliment the currently available, more advanced material from museum websites as well as even more challenging readings from scholarly sources.

Bowen, José Antonio (2012). *Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve Student Learning*. San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass.

Impact on student learning:

ARTH 42095 Special Topics: Russian Art is a course that fulfills requirements for Art History majors and minors, Fine Arts and Crafts majors, and Art Education majors, as well as serves as a general elective available to any students who have successfully achieved junior or senior standing. It is a new course in the Kent State curriculum and will add geographical diversity to the current regular offerings of the Art History division in the School of Art, which has not previously offered courses in the history of Eastern European or Eurasian art. Additionally, it will complement the current program in Russian offered by the Department of Modern and Classical Language Studies.

Although the number of students initially impacted by the fruits of this project will be relatively small, as I anticipate enrollment in the upper-division class, *ARTH 42095 Special Topics: Russian Art*, to range from six to twelve students, the materials will be freely accessible to other instructors and learners who wish to use them, not only at Kent State but around the world. The production of these videos is critical work necessary to broaden the art historical canon, a task which has been at the forefront of scholarly conversations in this discipline for several decades and is one of the core issues in current debates regarding art historical pedagogy.

The course, which this project supports, will facilitate competencies required by the NASAD accreditation of the Stark BA in Fine Arts, addressing the necessity for students to acquire, "An ability to address culture and history from a variety of perspectives," as well as, "Some familiarity with the works and intentions of major artists/designers and movements of the past and present, both in the Western and non-Western worlds." Additionally, these videos will address NASAD competencies for Liberal Arts Degree with a Major in Art History, including, "A general knowledge of monuments and principal artists of all major periods of the past, including a broad understanding of the art of the twentieth century and acquaintance with the art history of non-Western cultures;" several of the videos will deal with works from the twentieth century, and the overall context of Russian culture lies outside traditional art historical paradigms of Western culture. The course these videos support will provide students the opportunity for, "study in greater depth and precision of several cultures and periods in the history of art and concentration in at least one area to the advanced seminar level," in a culture which is rarely taught in the United States in this great of depth or detail.

This project is directly applicable to furthering four of Kent State's Strategic Goals:

> *1. Ensuring Student Success: 1.1. Embed the four pillars of a 21st century KSU graduate – Knowledge, Insight, Responsibility, and Engagement – across the curriculum: Implement purposeful, intellectual, and social development to enhance the understanding of diversity, to include global awareness and global citizenry*

This project will enhance the global diversity of the offerings in Art History at Kent State by supporting a course on Russian art history, which is rarely, if ever, covered in the standard offerings of the division.

2. Enhance Academic Excellence and Innovation: 2.6. Create new learning paradigms that focus on learning outcomes

This project employs 21st-century learning paradigms which emphasize the necessity to maximize content delivery outside of the classroom in order to use valuable in-class time for discussion and activities that have been proven* to foster student learning more effectively than a standard in-class lecture format.

*See, for example, Brown, Peter, Henry Roediger, and Mark McDaniel (2014). *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

3. Expanding Breakthrough Research and Creative Endeavors: 3.1. Strengthen and diversify the research and creative portfolio: Continue to develop transdisciplinary academic and research strengths at Kent State

This project bridges the disciplines of Russian Studies and Art History, connecting a program in the School of Art, in the College of the Arts, with a program in the Department of Modern and Classical Language Studies, in the College of Arts and Sciences.

4. Engaging with the World Beyond Our Campuses: 4.1. Incorporate global perspectives into all our educational, research and service initiatives: Internationalize the curriculum among all Kent State campuses

Through the study of Russian culture, this project brings to the Kent State Stark campus a global perspective which is not frequently represented in the curriculum offered at this regional campus.

Activities and Timeline:

July 13-19: Software identification

- Identify best software to employ for audio and video editing (using support of KSU Stark Educational Technology)
- Learn basics of how to use software

July 20 – August 9: Video Creation and Editing

- Approximately one each day

    o Prepare sequence of images for each video
    o Obtain the images
    o Edit the audio
    o Compile the images and audio into video

Aug 10-17: Video Production and Distribution

- Troubleshoot and complete final production
- Upload videos to Youtube
- Contact Smarthistory deans regarding inclusion of the videos in Khan Academy

Communication plan:

I have a three-part communication plan, involving the internal presentation at Kent State University, an application to present at a professional conference, and online submission of the videos for consideration to a discipline-based teaching website. I will be happy to present my work at the Fall University Teaching Council Conference, and I will submit a full report of my project to the University Teaching Council upon completion. Additionally, I plan to submit an abstract to present the work at the annual SECAC (Southeastern College Art Conference) in the fall of 2015, specifically in response to the Call For Papers for the session sponsored by AHPT (Art Historians Interested in Pedagogy and Technology). AHPT is a national organization, and SECAC, although nominally a regional conference, is national in scope, as evidenced by its convening in Pittsburgh in 2015, well outside of its nominal Southeast geographical boundaries.

I also plan to submit the finished videos for consideration of inclusion in the art history section of Khan Academy, an internationally-renowned teaching/tutoring website into which the Smarthistory website, my initial inspiration for this project, has been subsumed. The Smarthistory series of videos have been wildly successful. Many of the videos now have logged hundreds of thousands of views on YouTube; the art history subsection of Khan Academy boasts an annual growth rate of 75%, according to a recent report on the site given at the College Art Association conference; and the Smarthistory project has been awarded tens of thousands of dollars in grants from the Samuel Kress Foundation. I have spoken with Beth Harris, one of the two deans of art history at Khan Academy, about this project, and she has indicated that they are very interested in adding new content. At present, of the over five hundred videos associated with Smarthistory, only three deal with works of Russian art.

Evaluation plan:

On a local level, students in *ARTH 42095 Special Topics: Russian Art* will be required to complete written homework assignments responding to the content in each of the videos. I will examine their writing to evaluate the effectiveness of the content delivery of each of the videos. This will support the School of Art's defined learning competencies for *ARTH 42095* in the following ways:

- *Students will learn and understand the fundamentals of writing and research in art history*
  - Written responses to the videos, employing vocabulary used in the videos, will enhance students' knowledge and understanding of art historical writing

- *Students will understand the differences between the subjective and objective in art historical analysis and be able to develop their own objective analysis of an artwork*
    - The conversations in the videos will model objective art historical analysis to the students
    - The videos will teach content that the students can use to analyze objectively other works of art in in-class discussions
- *Students will be able to identify the approximate time period of a work and interpret the potential metaphorical and symbolic content of the work*
    - As in-depth analyses of individual works of art, the videos will discuss the context and style, as well as metaphorical and symbolic content, of specific works.
    - Through the conversational nature of the dialogue, this will model for students the process of discussing such concepts with others.
    - The videos will teach content that the students can apply to analyzing other works of art in in-class discussions.

On a global level, the number of views of the videos on YouTube will provide evidence of the pedagogical impact of the project.

Professional background: