Digital technologies and pedagogies

By Tracey M. Weis, Rina Benmayor, Cecilia O'Leary and Bret Eynon

New digital technologies and multimedia are transforming how we teach and learn. They are transforming our classrooms from spaces of delivery to spaces of active inquiry and authorship. New digital media are empowering students to become researchers, storytellers, historians, oral historians, and cultural theorists in their own right. Whether constructing their own life stories or interpreting the life stories of others, the digital format transforms students' capacity to synthesize, interpret, theorize, and create new cultural and historical knowledge. In this way, digital formats potentially democratize learning and produce critical subjects and authors.

The four short essays that follow are snapshots of experiments with new media in our respective classrooms. They were presented at the annual meeting of the Oral History Association in San Diego, Calif. (October 2002), to a standing room-only audience.

Tracey Weis' African American History students conduct archival research in Web-based historic sites and repositories, and construct collaborative interpretations in PowerPoint. Through their digital presentations, students become more conscious of, and reflective about, the power and responsibilities of historical synthesis and interpretation.

Rina Benmayor incorporates digital storytelling in her Latina Life Stories class. Students, the majority of whom are Latina/o, author their own life stories digitally, combining voice, music, and images. Then they theorize their digital stories, much the way Latina writers have done, exploring how to create new knowledge and theory.

Cecilia O'Leary's students construct digital histories, many of which are family oral histories. The digital storytelling form authorizes them to lay claim to their own histories, their own voice, and to use primary sources in authoritative ways. Digital history telling enables students to see themselves as citizen-historians.

Bret Eynon works with a predominantly immigrant student body of color. His students conduct oral histories with their peers and develop electronic portfolios, in which hypertext facilitates multifaceted self-representation.

The four of us are principal researchers in the Visible Knowledge Project (VKP). Headquartered at Georgetown University (see the site at http:// crossroads.georgetown.edu/vkp), VKP is a five-year, multi-million-dollar project involving 70 faculty and 21 college and university campuses nationwide. It is one of the most significant projects in technology and learning, and the largest in the humanities,

social sciences, and interdisciplinary culture fields. Through its focus on student learning and faculty development in technology-enhanced environments, faculty investigators are exploring effective pedagogies that incorporate new media technologies. Research projects focus on creating and researching models of teaching and learning that promote distributive learning, authentic tasks, complex inquiry, dialogic learning, constructive learning, public accountability, reflection, and critical thinking.

Within VKP, the four of us comprise a Digital Storytelling Affinity Group. Through videoconferencing, we share our work with each other and with other faculty across the country; we discuss pedagogical strategies and tools, give workshops and conference presentations, and co-author articles such as this one.

Gaining a Claim on the Past: Novice Historians Tell Stories About Race and Slavery at Our Nation's Historic Sites
By Tracey M. Weis

FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS, I HAVE BEEN INCORPORATING NEW MEDIA RESOURCES AND technologies into my courses. The immediate catalyst for this venture was my participation in the New Media Classroom summer institute, held in July 1997 and sponsored by the American Social History Project.

 In retrospect, however, this relatively recent innovation in my teaching had its origins in my experiences as a community organizer in the central Appalachian coalfields 20 years ago. Living in communities characterized by large-scale absentee ownership, environmental degradation, and increasing levels of poverty, coal field residents imaginatively used images of various kinds (posters, photographs, and slide shows) to tell stories of their lives and communities that contradicted "official" versions of events.

Accessible and relatively inexpensive media permitted residents in strip-mining areas (and in gentrifying urban cores) to exchange sets of slides that documented the challenges they faced and the strategies and forms of resistance they employed. Similarly, deploying new media in college classrooms enables students to tell stories of their own lives and communities in ways that allow them to gain an authoritative claim on the past.1[1]

I teach African American History, a course that in its most recent iteration tacks back and forth between the national narrative of Africans in the United States and the local history of African Americans in Lancaster County, Pa. A comparative focus on historic places, as "tangible forms of our legacy from preceding generation . . . (that) embody and reflect the traditions, experiences, ideas, and controversies of our past," connects these ostensibly local and national investigations (Patrick, 1993: 8). In this course, we consider nationally

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[1] For an intriguing exploration of the complex process of memory making in what is arguably one of the nation's most historic places, see Nash (2002).

known historic sites as essentially local sites that are deeply embedded in community and regional economic, political, social, and cultural contexts.

Students conduct a virtual field study at the beginning of the semester to identify and evaluate the practical and theoretical advantages of using historic sites (or places) as "laboratories" for learning history. Working in teams, they combine their observations as virtual visitors to selected historic sites with additional research to produce and present PowerPoint presentations, complete with narration.[2]

The implicit objective of this exercise is to encourage students to compare and contrast the content and tone of interpretations presented by public historians in historical sites and academic historians in scholarly journals. This inquiry, then, invites students to situate themselves as participants in the ongoing debate about the significance of race and slavery in American history and culture.

I am especially interested in understanding how novice historians develop and refine narrative authority and historical sensibility. I hoped that the multimedia format and presentation (the juxtaposition of text, image, and recorded voice) would prompt students to be more attentive to the components of "good stories." I suspected that the act of preparing a script and recording their own voices would encourage them to develop a point of view about historical events and processes.

 More specifically, I wondered if the digital format would encourage them to present the essential elements of effective and engaging historical interpretations in sharper relief than is possible with conventional historical essays. In other words, I wanted to test my hypothesis that the act of producing a multimedia project would allow them to "see" and to represent the relationships between evidence and argument with more sophistication and subtlety.

The exercise began with paired online exploration of four historic sites that interpret the colonial and early national periods: Monticello, Mount Vernon, Colonial Williamsburg, and the National Park Service.[3] To complicate the reading of the original Web sites (and to forestall conventional responses such as "no one questioned slavery in this time period," "everyone accepted it," or "the Founding Fathers had no choice"), each group was asked to examine a second Web site that presented an alternative or contradictory

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[2] They used the online index, America: History and Life, to locate recently published scholarship related to the sites they investigated.

[3] Monticello,The Home of Thomas Jefferson, http://www.monticello.org/; George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens, http://www.mountvernon.org/; Colonial Williamsburg, http:// www.history.org/; CaneRiver Creole (Louisiana), http://www.nps.gov/cari/; Fort Mose Site (Florida), http: //www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground/fl2.htm; British Fort (Florida), http: //www.cr.nps.gov/ nr/travel/underground/fil.htm; Robert Stafford Plantation (Georgia), http://www.cr.nps.gov/seac/arch79.htm.

narrative of race and slavery. For example, the Mount Vernon group examined an online biography of Ona Judge Staines, a bondswoman who escaped from George and Martha Washington in June 1796 while the Washingtons were in residence in Philadelphia.[4]

By consulting America: History and Life, an online periodical index, these students found pertinent information that they could use to support both George Washington's defense and Ona Judge Staines' accusations for their presentation, "Mt. Vernon: A Slave's Haven? Or Hell?" George Washington defended himself against charges of harsh and cruel treatment by pointing out that enslaved men and women on other plantations endured worse living and working conditions.[5]

 Ona Judge's allegations were bolstered by observations made by visitors to Mt. Vernon, among them Henrietta Liston, the wife of the British ambassador.[6] "Everyone knows George Washington," the students acknowledged at the beginning of their presentation, "but what about Ona (Judge Staines)?" Ona Judge Staines' courage in fleeing slavery and her refusal, despite repeated entreaties from the Washingtons, to return to Mount Vernon, raised vexing questions about "good" masters and encouraged students to rethink benevolent paternalism.

So, how do digital tools affect the act and process of telling the story? Using digital tools shapes how novice historians approach the fundamental challenge of establishing temporal order, how to assemble what frequently seems to them to be discrete and unrelated fragments into coherent narratives. For example, something inspired or enabled one team of students telling the story of Colonial Williamsburg to situate its story in the broader context of the evolution of slavery in Virginia and in colonial America. The imperative of a multimedia format forces a greater rigor in deciding what to show and what to tell.

The redundancy, for example, of merely reading the slide is obvious -- if not to the storytellers in the preparation stage, then to the storytellers and the audience in the actual presentation. In their efforts to avoid boring repetition, students are challenged to elaborate a point of view and to develop a perspective about what they are showing. Although students can struggle to fill a slide in the same way they agonize to fill a page, it seems that novice historians can more easily "see" the difference between presenting evidence of various kinds (showing) and explaining the significance of the evidence

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[4] See Evelyn Gerson, "Ona Judge Staines: Escape from Washington" and the Black History section of the SeacoastNH.com Web site, http: //ww.seacoastnh.com/arts/ona.html (November 3, 2002).

[5] Stratford Hall Plantation, the Birthplace of Robert E. Lee, http: //www.stratfordhall.org/ (November 3, 2002).

[6] Peter R. Henriques, "George Washington and Slavery," History 615: The Age of George Washington, George Mason University. At http: //chum.gmu.edu/courses/henriques/hist6l5/gwslav.htm (November 3, 2002).

(telling). Do digital stories tell or reveal in ways that conventional historical essays do not? Less likely simply to report as they do in their papers, novices working with multimedia are more confident and more tentative. They are more convinced that their research has complicated, rather than resolved, the vexing questions posed by the Web sites of the various historic places.

The effect has been to arouse, rather than dampen, intellectual curiosity and to make them more comfortable with assuming a more critical (even if at times a more provisional) stance. They are more inclined to admit uncertainty and lack of resolution, and more inclined to come up with questions rather than definitive answers. In short, researching and retelling these stories about race and slavery persuaded most of these young historians that "reading historical sources directly allows (them) to make their own decisions about the meaning of the past and the intentions of historical characters" (Horton, 2002: 4).

In searching the Web sites of various historic sites for the agency and presence of African Americans, the novice historians discovered their own narrative authority and historical sensibility. As they pondered how the authors of the Web site constructed their relations with their audiences and how the authors constituted themselves as authoritative interpreters of the past, they began to ask themselves fundamental questions about the purpose of history and memory making: What constitutes history? How is historical memory cultivated, perpetuated, deflected, and overturned? What do we need to know about the past and who is entitled to reconstruct it? How does the past help us make sense of the present? Who has the authority to answer these questions?

Approaching these historic sites as visitors and students of history, students in African American History moved from "outside the circle of cultural arbiters" to the inside circle of historic interpreters.[7] They gained their own claims on the past by interrogating the controversies that these "tangible legacies" embodied and by telling more complicated stories of race and slavery than those presented at the sites.

Digital Stories
By Rina Benmayor

IN 1997, I SAW MY FIRST DIGITAL STORY. THREE YEARS LATER, I TOOK A DIGITAL Storytelling workshop and produced my own story.[8] Since then, digital

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[7] In the introduction to First City, Nash acknowledged that his involvement with the exhibition, Vision and Revisions: Finding Philadelphia's Past, "obliged me to confront . . . . the ongoing process of rediscovering and redefining American history" and argued that in Philadelphia (as in every other site of human habitation), the process of constructing memory is "continuously under negotiation," as his questions above suggest (Nash, 2002: 10).

[8] I came to learn about digital stories through the work of the Digital Storytelling Center in Berkeley, California (www.digitalstorycenter.com). Subsequently, we invited them to

storytelling has become a main feature of my "Latina Life Stories" class. Along with reading and analyzing the autobiographical writings of U.S. Latinas (Chicanas, Puerto Ricans, Cubanas, Dominicanas, and mixed-heritage Latinas), my students, who are predominantly of Mexican heritage, write their own autobiographies and they produce their own digital stories. They become authors in their own right, inscribing their own identities and life experiences through this compelling digital format. At the end of the course, each student receives a CD of all the class digital stories to keep.

"What is a digital story?" you are asking. Essentially, it is a three- to four-minute digital multimedia "movie" that combines an original story or script with images, music, and above all, a narration in the author's own voice. We are using this format to tell identity stories and to "theorize" them. We start by turning a personal narrative into a short script (about a page and one-half, double spaced). The author then records her/his script, selects and scans visuals (photographs, video, and creative drawings or clip art), and chooses a music track to run underneath. Although there are many multimedia authoring software packages available, my students use PowerPoint, since they are somewhat familiar with it. Once completed, the stories are converted into QuickTime movies and burned onto a CD disk so that they can be played on any platform.

My purpose, however, is not to elaborate the technological "how-tos." I am more intrigued by digital storytelling as a medium of empowerment, a system of representation, and a pedagogical tool. What are these digital stories about? They are transformational stories that engage histories of resistance, struggle, and survival, and affirm new consciousness in the making.

 For example, Jacinto's story is a tribute to his grandfather, to the many life lessons his grandfather taught him -- above all, how to sing with all his heart and soul. Using the conventions of Chicano humor, Viana tells about "The Day I Became a Chicana," about awakening one morning to suddenly find herself transformed, with an entirely new consciousness. Dawn reclaims her Bolivian identity and heritage, and denounces ways in which she is stereotyped and homogenized by mainstream society. Leon tells about his journey to re-center himself in his indigenous heritage. Carlos reflects on his migration trajectory from rural Mexico to picking strawberries in California, to ESL classes, to community college, and finally, to the university. Emily, whose half sister and brother are mixed race, challenges identity based on color rather than on consciousness. Mary resists being forced to check only one identity box and claims her multiple identities and positionalities. Gabriela and Rocio name the cultural oppressions inscribed upon their bodies.

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give a weekend workshop on our campus. In creating my own story, "Where Do You Come From? " I was able to see how to integrate this medium into my course. Thanks to the unfailing pedagogical commitment and technological wizardry of Troy Challenger, our head of faculty development, and his assistant John Bettencourt, my students receive sustained technological instruction and support to produce their digital stories.

These stories are not born out of the blue. They are inspired by the autobiographical writings of Latinas and by the cultural theories these writings embody -- the concepts of borderlands and new mestiza consciousness (Anzaldua, 1999), hybrid identities that go beyond ethnic heritage (Levins Morales and Morales, 1986), border feminism (Saldivar-Hull, 2000), and feminist latinidades (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

The readings trigger memories and emotions. Students, female and male, begin to voice their own stories in class -- remembrances of painful, difficult, or joyful moments in their lives. For many, this is the first time they have thought about their lives as embodying larger social forces, theories, and identities. Others find that the class unleashes long-held feelings. It provides a context for telling their stories and for drawing upon new theoretical thinking regarding identity, ethnicity, and culture. Students frequently find that they are now telling the story differently, putting it through historical and theoretical lenses they did not have before. Personal experience becomes theorized, situated.

In the class, students also see the digital stories produced by previous classes. Suddenly, they feel authorized to inscribe their voices and create their own digital texts. They begin to envision their own digital contributions to the testimonial literature on cultural identity. Many students find that in constructing this digital story, they are reconstructing a self, resituating their subjectivity within broader social frameworks. The stories link their tellers to real and imagined communities of meaning and belonging.

The digital medium also enables students to produce and "publish" their stories for multiple audiences of viewers and listeners. Digital stories navigate through the Internet, through CDs, through public presentations, in family viewings, and become part of the broader corpus of Latina/o lifestory collections. The medium becomes a tool for constructing a self, but also for contributing new generational perspectives on identity, community, belonging, and selfhood. There is no gatekeeper here, no editorial competition, only encouragement to author life stories.

 In terms of production, the digital story is a more democratic form that enables new voices to emerge through an immediate and self determined process. Creating the digital story has proved to be an empowering and transformative process. Two years ago, our campus was invited to become part of the national Visible Knowledge Project (VKP). As one of the VKP principal investigators, I chose Latina Life Stories and the digital storytelling process as my research laboratory. I am currently exploring how digital storytelling can help students understand, in a more conscious and visible way, the process of building theory from personal experience. I am wondering whether and how digital authoring may demystify theory and empower students to become theorizers of their own historical and cultural experiences.

 I believe that students find it easier to deconstruct and interpret a multimedia text theoretically and conceptually than they do a written text. As generations born and raised in visual cultures, students feel free to use the multiple idioms that new digital technologies afford, the multiple languages of representation -- oral, written, aural, visual,

and technological. The digital story situates the authors as tellers, writers, performers, producers, and interpreters of their own stories.

In recording their narratives, students intentionally tell the story to an imagined audience. The personal voice constructs the "subject," while the nuances of tone, mood, and emotional intent provide clues for interpretation. The visual text also constructs the subject, whether literally, through photographs, video, or by means of symbolic imagery (abstract images, clip art, or drawings). The visual text provides a second "voice," a second signifying track, which in the best stories does more than simply illustrate the spoken word.

For example, one story is told in a *fotonovela* style, playing on the Mexican cultural tradition of the romance comic book. Musical tracks constitute a third signifier, dialoguing with the script, through lyrics and mood. A story about linking back across generations of ancestry places particular song lyrics in dialogue with the narrative, giving the story two interconnected tellers.

We used to end the class with a Digital Testimonio festival, where we viewed all the stories for the first time. Now, I have moved up the production date in the semester to leave three weeks at the end for analysis and theorizing. We are just beginning this process. Through structured reflections, discussions, and group work, students will begin deconstructing their own and each other's stories, articulating connections with the readings and theories, analyzing their visual and aural texts, and hopefully making claims for new understandings and, yes, theories, from their own generational, geographical, gendered, and culturally situated perspectives.

It is my hope that they will become cultural theorists in a more conscious, engaged, and personally invested way. Stay tuned.

Multicultural History in the New Media Classroom
By Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary

HOW CAN WE DESIGN UNDERGRADUATE HISTORY COURSES THAT MAKE HISTORY come alive? How can we facilitate the ability of students to learn history and make history? Inspired by the work in digital stories, I am now teaching digital histories.

I have adapted this powerful new medium to engage students in history making. For two semesters now, students in my course, "Multicultural History in the New Media Classroom," have created digital histories. In this process, I have witnessed their ability to see connections between their own lives and history that their written essays, while important, just do not impart. Students first begin to see themselves as citizen historians as they search for a topic that really matters to them. For example, one student wanted to write about the struggle for farm-worker rights and remembered that her grandfather had marched with Cesar Chavez. She spent hours at the Salinas public library searching

through old newspapers and suddenly came across a photograph of her grandfather, her younger sister in his arms, marching under the United Farm Workers Flag.

"Multicultural History in the New Media Classroom" is framed by the belief that students need to learn history and to be trained to become citizen historians. Although students may not go on to become professional historians, they all will need to know how to bring a historical perspective to contemporary issues as they become our future leaders and teachers. History with a capital "H" -- that is, the history written by professional historians -- does not account for the many different ways that all of us contribute to the social construction of the past. Just as history does not exist in the singular, knowledge and responsibility for communicating information about the past is not limited to the written word or professional historians.

As citizen historians, students grapple with forming a historical interpretation of complex research data and struggle to link personal histories with larger national and global developments. For example, a student doing research on her dual identities as a Latina and a child of immigrants had to learn about the political history of U.S.-backed repression in Latin America when she discovered that part of her family had been rounded up in an anti-leftist sweep of peasants in Guatemala. In her digital history, she presented pictures of repression alongside pictures from her family's scrapbook.

Students' sense of themselves as citizen historians deepens as they uncover new, and at times surprising or disturbing, historical evidence. The weight of being accountable to the people who have lived and died in the past is heightened as they take responsibility for who and what will be included or excluded from the public digital histories they are about to create. For example, one student found two photographs of her grandmother and other family members dressed in Ku Klux Klan robes. She struggled over whether to tell this part of her history and in the end decided that as an antiracist, she would. As students view the digital histories of fellow students, the experience of being taught history by one of their peers is electric.

Digital histories represent a dramatic way in which New Media computer technologies can help students directly contribute to the ongoing project of uncovering and disseminating information about the diversity of our past(s). First, digital histories provide students with tools to creatively narrate their family or community's history in ways that resonate with today's visual culture. Second, the use of popular software, such as PowerPoint, allows students to incorporate different kinds of primary evidence -- from photo albums, newspapers, and artifacts, to songs, oral histories, and film clips. Third, students can easily take a CD copy of their digital history out of the classroom and share it with family, friends, and community.

In a four-minute visual presentation, students combine primary evidence with their own taped narrations of what they have researched. They draw upon their diverse backgrounds and experiences to produce new pieces of history that would otherwise have remained invisible. The project of creating a digital history from their research findings, in addition to writing a scholarly paper, allows students to move their own family and community

from the in-between spaces of history into the center. In the process, they gain the power of voice -- with their own voices narrating, interpreting, and teaching the history they have researched.

As a member of the CSUMB Visible Knowledge Project (VKP) research group, I have focused my research on how digital histories help students become citizen historians. Over the two semesters that I have taught "Multicultural History in the New Media Classroom," I have been able to formulate my research questions, identify the evidence of student learning I plan to collect, and pretest the use of computer instruction in a reading- and writing-intensive class. The course meets twice a week, two hours in seminar and two hours in a computer lab. Students learn to analyze primary and secondary sources from research archives on the Web and from assigned books. After writing a substantial historical essay that locates their family or community history in a broader context, students then must figure out what part of their analysis and narrative they wish to present visually.

Among the steps to making a digital history are scanning images, digitizing sound, and editing film clips. Similar to an outline, students organize their presentation by creating a storyboard that they divide into columns. Scene by scene, students track their own narration, as well as the music and images they intend to incorporate. They are required to scan and digitize the primary materials they have collected. Hands-on instruction and "how-tos" on every aspect of the technical and conceptual process are made available to the class each step of the way. Staff members who are New Media experts assist in the computer lab and I invite colleagues to guest lecture.[9] For example, a colleague from Visual and Public Art introduces students to theories of visual communication. Later, a colleague from Teledramatic Arts and Technology helps them make a critique of the dramatic qualities of an early version of their digital history.

At the end of the semester, students present their digital histories to classmates, other students, and community members they have invited. The digital histories are then burned onto a CD that students can take with them. The CD is also archived in the Oral History and Community Memory Institute at CSUMB. With the student's signed permission, their digital histories can be used by professors for evidence of student learning, in the classroom to teach other students about historical topics, at conferences for scholarly presentations, and by fellow students who wish to learn more about a certain topic. Eventually, Rina Benmayor and I, as co-directors of the Oral History and Community Memory Institute, envision establishing an ever-growing archive of student-

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[9] I create "how-tos" for the class and have students use the "recipes" provided by the Digital Storytelling Center in Berkeley, Calif. (www.digitalstorycenter.com). At this point, my course would not be possible without the support of my chair, Renee Curry, and the technological instruction and support provided by Troy Challenger, the head of faculty development, and his student assistants John Bettencourt and Thomas Freeburg. Thank you.

produced digital histories and digital stories on the Web, which people from around the world will be able to access and learn from.

New York Stories: Student Oral Histories and Electronic Portfolios
By Bret Eynon

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS, LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY College may be one of the most international institutions in New York City. Set in a working-class area of Queens, the borough that has emerged as today's immigrant portal, the Lower East Side of the 21st century, LaGuardia serves the city's new immigrant working class, more complex and diverse than ever before.

More than two-thirds of LaGuardia's students are immigrants -- and many of the native born are either African American or Puerto Rican in background. Reflecting the new patterns of global migration, LaGuardia's immigrant students come from 152 countries, and speak 108 different native languages. [10]

These statistics are striking. Walking the halls of the college makes the impact even more visual and immediate. One is immediately immersed in a riot of cultures, colors, and languages, a swirl that mixes traditional heritage with the beat of contemporary music and style. Let us meet some of these students:

• Mamadou Mdoup is 26 years old, from Senegal, and a liberal arts major. He works as a taxi driver to support himself, pay his tuition, and send money back to his family in Africa. A member of the college's Muslim Club, Mamadou recently took advantage of LaGuardia's "Exploring Transfer" program to spend a summer studying at Vassar College. The most difficult part about college for him is balancing his time. "Learning is more than books and tests," he says. "I have made sure I have time for social events, because I learn by interacting with people." When he graduates, he hopes to return to Senegal and work toward social change and a united Africa.

• Santa is 41 years old and came to New York in the late 1980s from Peru, after a short stay in Mexico. "I decided to change my life, to look for opportunities," she explains. When she first arrived in New York, she worked as a housecleaner, 12 hours a day. Then she found work in a travel agency serving a largely Latino community. Studying accounting at LaGuardia, she found that the college's language and literacy tutorial programs made a big difference in helping her learn English and overcome what she saw as the biggest obstacle she faced. The college was also the first place she really got to know people from outside her own community. "I particularly enjoyed the multicultural parties," she explains. "I had never done anything like that."

• Ei Sander Khine came from Myanmar with her family, refugees from the repressive Burmese government. When she was eight years old, the government squashed a wave of

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[10] Parts of this article will also appear in Change magazine.

student demonstrations and strikes, and her memories from that time are filled with "gun shots and blood in the night." Now she lives in Sunnyside, Queens, with her extended family in a household of 18 people. Studying at home is difficult for her, due to noise and crowding, so she often stays in the LaGuardia library until it closes. Her father, who had been a teacher, now works in a restaurant, but she is studying statistics and hopes to go on to a four-year college and become a mathematics teacher one day.

• Esra is 23 and came to New York from Bangladesh four years ago, against the wishes of her family. Small, slight, and shy about speaking in public, she seems to possess an inner strength. Growing up, she was determined to find education and more independence than she felt most women got in Bangladesh. "Just give me a chance," she told her parents. At times, her life still seems poised between two worlds. She lives with her husband in an arranged marriage; meanwhile, she studies computer science and designs course Web pages for LaGuardia faculty. Since her marriage, Esra has worn a headscarf, covering her hair in obedience to religious guidelines; more recently, however, the scarf is often draped around her shoulders, with her dark hair flowing over it.

These stories, which are by no means exceptional, were gathered by LaGuardia students, as part of a course that helps students see the college -- and their own lives -- as a part of major historical changes. "Going Places! Immigration and Education: Change in New York City, 1900-2002" is my version of a Liberal Arts capstone course. In this course, students examine the immigrant experience, past and present, using scholarly articles, films, novels, and Web sites. Their final project is an extended life history interview with another LaGuardia student, plus a 10-page paper that examines the links between that student's life and the themes and patterns studied in the course.

What different experiences do immigrant students have at LaGuardia? How do we as individuals experience and shape the individual, social, cultural, and political changes now framing the 21st century? What do students bring to the college from their families, their work, and their worlds? How does the process of going to college affect their families, their communities and their own identities? These questions guide the project.

The project helps students examine their own experiences and place them in a larger social and historical context. It is a challenging research assignment, requiring students to conduct primary research and integrate their findings with insights from a range of sources. In the process, the students create a rich archive of first-person testimony, documenting and preserving a process of historical transformation.

LaGuardia is in one sense the equivalent of the Henry Street Settlement House, one of the famous institutions of 100 years ago, a border zone between the immigrant world and the dominant culture, a place where differences were negotiated and new cultures created. Historians would be delighted to find a cache of interviews documenting immigrant views of life in the settlement houses. The students of Going Places! are helping to document the complex life of a comparable contemporary institution, the experiences of its members, and, through them, the changes taking place in surrounding communities.

What is particularly significant is that the students, the immigrants, are the ones asking the questions and writing the interpretations.

Certain themes come up repeatedly in the student papers -- and in the reflections of the student interviewers as well. Over and over, students talk about how important education is to them, a route away from the dead-end jobs in restaurants and sweatshops that loom as alternatives. The mix of hope and desperation articulated by interviewers and interviewees is striking. Another common theme of the conversation is the powerful transformation of gender roles taking place in immigrant families and communities, a process fed by cultural and economic factors, as well as by educational processes; a recurring topic for female and male students is the excitement and uncertainty associated with this process. A third common theme is the way in which immigrant students struggle with their identity as Americans. Attracted by America and much that it stands for, LaGuardia's immigrant students are nonetheless ambivalent.

"After doing this interview, I sometimes wonder, what is the point of all the pain of being separated from loved ones, of culture shock, of discrimination," writes Gabriella Guerrero, in the conclusion to her paper. "Yes, we may make more money.... But I believe that we shouldn't be blinded by what the consumerist world offers." Others disagree. "This is where I plan to stay," notes Gurvinder Virk, from Pakistan by way of London. "I'm an American citizen, now. In my head, in my conscience, I'm still Punjabi. But now, I'm pretty much American. I don't feel like an outsider anymore."

Digital technology plays a significant but not fundamental role in the "Going Places" classroom. Students examine Web sites to learn more about immigration, historical and contemporary. They extensively use the discussion board on the course Web site, sharing questions, problems, and ideas. The discussion board also facilitates the exchange of draft papers for peer editing processes, which students rate as one of the most valuable elements of the course. The site also provides a place where students deposit their final projects, creating a digital archive where student papers are available to scholars and other students.

In the future, digital tools will play an even larger role in this process. By 2004, students' Going Places! projects will become a part of their electronic portfolios, as LaGuardia advances with a project now in its pilot phase. The electronic student portfolio, or ePortfolio, is a Web-based presentation of student work, created by the student. The ePortfolio can include research papers and essays, as well as projects that incorporate images, audio, and video. It asks students to analyze the meaning of their work, to reflect on it as a demonstration of their learning. In addition, it offers the opportunity for students to supplement course work with sections on personal interests, family, culture, and career hopes and dreams.

Linking pedagogy, technology, and assessment, the ePortfolio initiative is an ambitious one for LaGuardia. A small but growing number of colleges nationwide have begun to explore the use of ePortfolios. Most of the schools experimenting in this area, however,

are small, liberal arts colleges serving more traditional students. LaGuardia may be the first large, urban community college to institute a significant ePortfolio project.

Coordinated by the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning, which I direct, LaGuardia's ePortfolio project has already attracted major funding. In fall 2001, the U.S. Department of Education awarded the College two multi-year grants that allow the college to plan and launch the project. Having completed a planning year, the college has begun its pilot year, with 20 faculty and 400 students from across the college taking part in a yearlong process of classroom testing of ePortfolio processes.

Building on classes and projects such as "Going Places," the ePortfolio may also provide a unique way for scholars and observers to better understand the changes taking place in 21st-century America. At the same time, the ePortfolio project offers LaGuardia students a chance to build their technology and communication skills, and learn new ways to tell their own stories. In concert with Digital Storytelling and other such projects, it offers students an opportunity to become the authors of the Web, to bridge the digital divide, and to make visible the stories that have been too invisible for too long.

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