

CTL Fellowship 2016-2017
Summary of Activities: Hip Hop Education and the Digital Story

Submitted by:
Seth Markle
Associate Professor
History and International Studies
Seth.Markle@trincoll.edu

Introduction:

In my CTL Fellowship proposal, I state the following:

As a CTL Fellow, I aim to re-design “INTS 344: Global Hip Hop Cultures” in way that transforms undergraduate students into archivists and raises their awareness about the role of ‘The Fest’ to the global hip hop movement and the importance of archiving for the growth and development of Hip Hop Studies. Through this fellowship, I hope to gain a better understanding of theories and practices of archival production, collection and management; to explore through dialogue the limits and possibilities of teaching students how to become trained archivists in the 21st century; to develop an asset map of potential contacts and partners; to formulate and enhance pedagogical approaches to archival theories and applications and new information technologies associated with digitization; and to create practical exercises and assignments that provide students with hands-on experience.

I came into this fellowship with a desire to transform the curriculum of my seminar course [“INTS 344: Global Hip Hop Cultures”](#) for two important reasons. Firstly, after teaching the course three times, I became dissatisfied with the secondary literature on global hip hop movements, which is still in a state-of-becoming and ultimately lacking nuance in arguments and research methodologies. Secondly, as the faculty advisor to [Trinity’s international hip hop festival](#), an annual event that has taken place at the college for twelve years, I became disturbed by the absence of an archive about this incredibly important festival not only for Hartford and the Trinity community, but also the global hip hop community writ large. With these two concerns in mind, I wanted to utilize the resources and dialogic space this fellowship provides and fosters to imagine a course that would turn undergraduate students into archivists-in-training. Together, through theory and practice, trial and error, we could begin to build an archive about “The Fest.” It was a grandiose idea, I admit. Luckily, this fellowship allowed me to think seriously about how I was going to make INTS 344 a course that would foment community learning and the global awareness.

From Archiving to Digital Storytelling: An Overview of the Process

For the months of September and October, I collected and read through undergraduate and graduate course syllabi on archival preservation and education to get a better understanding of the types of learning objectives, assignments and literature. After identifying key texts, I started to brainstorm a list of writing assignments and topics for class discussions.

For my workshop session, I submitted a list of potential assignments both large and small scale:

- Complete a finding aid related to Trinity International Hip Hop Festival TIHHF Archive
- Develop a Mission statement for a potential TIHHF collection in Hartford Hip Hop Archive
- Letter of Request or Inquiry for Permission
- Assessment Report of internet content of TIHHF, and develop potential names of collections, types of collections, websites, hits,
- Compare and contrast two finding aids from archives of choice
- Portfolio + Student Presentations
- Draft of Grant Proposal for Hartford Hip Hop Archive
- Conduct and transcribe oral interviews (Trinity students and alumni, faculty, administration, Hartford artists, educators)
- Assessment Report of a Hip Hop Archive (i.e. Cornell University Hip Hop Collection, Hip Hop Archives NY Folklore Society, Hip Hop Archive and Research Institute at Hutchinson Center, Harvard University, NOLA Hip Hop Archive at Amsted Research Center). (students will discuss structure of the archive, who runs it, how it is run, targeted audience, location, curate a collection of images)
- Digital Storytelling project (scripting, storyboarding, recording/editing, fine tuning and titling)

After receiving feedback from my colleagues in the program, I realized that I needed to narrow down my focus in a way that would not overwhelm the students with high expectations. Therefore, I decided to abandon the idea of having undergraduate students learn how to be archivists and using the course as a launch pad for a Trinity Hip Hop Archive. In relooking at the above list, I was immediately attracted to the idea of digital storytelling not only because I engage with the medium but also I find it to be an intriguing approach to promoting active community learning and creative production in the classroom. More on this later.

In October, I met with Jasmin Agosto, which proved to solidify the digital storytelling idea for the course. Jasmin is a graduate of Trinity College (Educational Studies, Class of 2010). During her time at Trinity, she worked closely with historian Susan Pennybacker, formerly of the History Department, on the Butch Lewis Collection and was a 4-year member of the Trinity Chapter of Temple of Hip Hop, the student organization responsible for the past 11 festivals. Jasmin went on to receive her M.A. degree at the Gallatin School of Individualized Studies at New York University where she wrote a thesis on independent artists and sustainability in Hartford. Our meeting was intended to be a catch up. She had just moved back to Hartford, her hometown, and was now working at the Hartford History Center at the Hartford Public Library. When I asked her what she was working on, I learned that she was in the preliminary stages of creating a Hartford Hip Hop Archive. To being that process, she was organizing an exhibition and panel discussion that she wanted me to moderate. I readily agreed and pitched her the idea of working together on digital stories about the history of hip hop in Hartford that would be made available to the public via what we are now calling the ‘Hartford Hip Hop Digital Repository’.

On November 3, 2016 the Hartford History Center and the Hartford Public Library sponsored [“Hartford Hip Hop History: Then and Now”](#), a conversation about Hartford Hip Hop of the 1980s and 1990s and how the culture has evolved to the present. I served as the

moderator of the panel consisting of local hip hop pioneers Juanita Chistom, Myron Moye, Rick Torres, Mike Wilson, Joe Santiago, Tim Wolf and Dooney Bates. In addition to the panel, there was an archival exhibition titled “Hip Hop in Hartford ’81 to ‘91” containing posters, photographs, newspaper clippings, and video footage. Due to the positive feedback received, the HHC is fully committed to building a hip hop archive in Hartford with a focus on digital collections. The event was an overwhelming success and has ultimately set the groundwork for the identification of historical actors for the digital stories for the INTS 344 course.

During the spring semester, in addition to holding important meetings HHC staff, I, along with Jasmin, participated in the CLI’s ["Digital Storytelling for Community Learning"](#) Workshop at Trinity College. Held on March 24, this all-day workshop was also extremely helpful in clarifying learning objectives, process, and assessment. I learned that digital storytelling, also referred to as multi-modal learning, is the practice of using images, video, audio, and computer-based editing software to tell short personal stories that aim to give voice to marginalized communities. For college-based educators, incorporating digital storytelling into the college classroom allows for a transformative learning experience; builds and enhances communication skills; deepens content understanding; helps develop technical and media literacy skills; and strengthens critical thinking through peer reviewing. In my course, students will therefore learn about this unique art of narration by developing interview questions; conducting and transcribing interviews; script writing; camera operating; and editing audio and visual material using multimedia applications such as Audacity, Photoshop and iMovie (all available at the Trinity Library’s Educational Technology Lab Level 2).

My next step was uploading a new course description for INTS 344 for the enrollment period for Fall 2017 courses so that students would have a good grasp of the course’s content and expectations. It reads:

One approach to exploring the global dimensions of hip hop music and culture is through critically interrogating the local. This course will be a close examination of the early history of hip hop in Hartford and the ways in which youth of Jamaican and Puerto Rican descent contributed to the culture’s emergence. By collaborating with the Hartford History Center of the Hartford Public Library, students will work in teams of 2 or 3 and acquire technical skills in multi-media narration in order to create digital stories about Hartford hip hop pioneers. These stories will be made accessible to public school teachers, students, researchers and the general public.

Providing a new course description was not the only step I took to attract student enrollment. I also identified students for the course, mainly recruiting Trinity Chapter of Temple of Hip Hop students, Iron Poets students, and INTS and History majors. Currently, 13 (15 max) students have enrolled in the course. By enrolling in INTS 344, they will become digital storytellers-in-training, being exposed to 1) theories of archival preservation, management, ethics and digitization and 2) Hartford’s rich history of cultural diversity as seen through the lens of hip hop music and culture as a source of creative expression and empowerment for diaspora youth. I also wrote and submitted two grant proposals to the Center for Caribbean Studies (\$1,000.00 received) and the Community Learning Initiative/Educational Technology Committee (\$2,000.00 received) in order to pay for consultancy fees for digital storytelling experts and honorariums for

guest lecturers.

Conclusion:

Over the summer I intend to finalize the syllabus, continue to hold meetings with HHC and Trinity educational technology staff, and secure permissions from digital storytelling subjects. Overall, the fellowship was an enriching experience that allowed me to really think through course content in a constructive and gradualist manner. Through this fellowship I was able to arrive at an idea for course that serves both the International Studies Program and History Department; to get to know colleagues and exchange ideas about pedagogy; and to strengthen contacts with community partners while at the same time establishing new ones.