Workflow, Students and Research:
A Dynamic Trio

By Heather Hankins

"Working alongside student-scholars in community-engaged research experiences has transformed my teaching as well as my research practice..."

There is a new way to conduct research at Kennesaw State University. Jeanne Bohannon of KSU's Department of English just finished her third semester of repurposing a workflow model to teach her students how to conduct meaningful humanities research while also producing high-quality research deliverables every semester.

Humanities research has a history of being siloed—picture a single researcher surrounded by primary sources only connecting with others through email. Not in this new workflow model—Bohannon's WRIT 3150 class works as a collaborative team split into sub-groups that focus on various aspects of research and dissemination of multimodal deliverables for the Atlanta Student Movement Project.

This research project, funded by a grant from the Rich Foundation, is headed by Bohannon, associate professor of English, along with Lonnie King, the project's senior community partner. Through various digital storytelling methods, the project details the history of the Atlanta Student Movement, which included King as one of the leaders during the Civil Rights Movement.

Each student team for the project meets with Bohannon at the beginning of the semester to negotiate a contractor-client agreement. She prepares needed research goals which guide the work of her student researchers, and the teams choose what fits with their skills and interests. The contracts detail what each sub-group team will be responsible for producing throughout the semester and what is needed to obtain a grade of A, B or C.

The students are expected to manage their workflow and communicate within their teams and with the other teams to ensure that the highest quality research is being developed. Teams use GroupMe, Slack, or other workflow platforms to effectively communicate throughout the semester.

Students learn how to manage their time and effort while gaining meaningful humanities research experience.

"Working alongside student-scholars in community-engaged research experiences has transformed my teaching as well as my research practice," said Bohannon. "Using collaborative methods and workflow models create an atmosphere where students thrive in their emerging professional ethos. I have found that these iterative practices also dramatically increase student success."

When implementing a new approach to research, there is always a chance of failure. However, the Atlanta Student Movement Project is flourishing with a fleshed-out approach to digital storytelling that has resulted in videos, podcasts, web content, and social media posts detailing the vibrant history surrounding the Atlanta Student Movement.

The student testimonies are universally enthusiastic. Students are engaged and excited about their work, stating that the project "feels more like a real job than a class" and that the clear expectations and lack of uncertainty regarding grading allows them to focus on the work.

Every semester, old students leave and new students join the project. But thanks to ongoing and archived workflow models, the project runs smoothly.

Students cite that any frustrations they have, such as waiting for other teams to finish before beginning their own piece of work, mirror common workplace frustrations. Students learning how to address and overcome such frustration only prepares them more for life after college.

For more information on the Atlanta Student Movement Project, visit: https://soar.kennesaw.edu/handle/11360/2384

Have a story to tell about the Atlanta Student Movement? Email: *jeanne.bohannon@kennesaw.edu*

"The change in environment can be a shock to some students, but the lessons learned from the workflow model far surpass the acute struggles one could face at first."

– Abi Marmurowicz, junior exercise science major from Milwaukee, WI

"Undergraduate research has substantial benefits besides the learning curve of it. This kind of research is conducted in a professional manner that ultimately prepares students for the work and demands of graduate school and even the professional world. It also gives undergraduates the opportunity to experience a different form of academia that could potentially introduce new career options for them."

– Kiahna Kuykendall, junior English major from Woodstock, GA

"What I found to be most interesting about this project is that we are writing history. The project we are working is not just a checklist of to-do lists, but is helping tell forgotten stories of civil rights to multiple audiences."

– Hannah Queen, senior English major from Woodstock, GA

"I would really like to be a social media manager one day so this project has definitely been beneficial to my career goals. I'm getting some practice and experience in now, so I can really determine if this is what I want to do when I graduate."

– Allison Bashaw, senior communications major from Canton, GA