Proposal for the CODEX Summer Institute 2020

Submitted by
Hanada Al-Masri, Associate Professor of Arabic
Department of Modern Languages and Director of the Middle East and North African Studies
(MENA) program
Denison University

Project Title

America: As an Arab American Narrator Views it

Description & Goals

This project is designed to incorporate digital pedagogy and scholarship to enhance the Arabic curriculum at Denison University. The goal of the project is to create a digital record that documents the context surrounding the first wave of Arab immigrants who settled in America during the 19th century and became known later as Arab-Americans. To achieve this goal, students will capture, understand and document that context through a testimonial narrative of one person: an American woman of an Arab Syrian Christian descent whose family settled in Brooklyn, NY and was among the generation of newcomers during that time.

Using the structure of a testimonial narrative, students will film and conduct three face-to-face interview sessions with Mrs. Homsy-Okeefe who will share her personal perspective through conversations drawn from her memory as well as written and pictorial artifacts. While doing so, Mrs. Homsy-Okeefe will also paint a picture of the historical, political, economic, and cultural environments that influenced and shaped the collective identity of the first wave of Arab immigrants.

For this project to fully achieve its pedagogical goals and outcomes, stated below, it needs to be viewed as two independent, yet related projects that target two groups of students:

Project A - The creation of the digital testimonial narrative record
Project B - The implementation of the project into the curriculum

The first project will be conducted primarily by two student researchers. They will be attending the CODEX summer institute for training, along with the rest of the team. Their tasks include conducting research on Arab immigrants during the 19th century, preparing focused interview questions, filming the interviews, and editing the videos. Overall, they will contribute significantly to the creation of the digital record, supported by the rest of the team. We plan to finish this first project in Fall 2020.

The second project is focused on using the emerging digital record to restructure an existing course entitled *Culture of the Arab World* (ARAB 315). This course, offered in English, contributes to the broad institutional curriculum of general education where it fulfills the humanities requirement

and counts as an elective for students in the MENA program, and those in International Studies and Global Commerce with a regional focus on the Middle East. This project targets students registering for the course, which historically has been populated by 20 students each time it is offered. Unlike previous iterations of the course, the new structure will include digital pedagogy where students learn certain digital tools including GIS Story maps, timeline platforms, textual analysis tools, visualization tools, etc. I plan to teach this course with its new structure in Fall 2021.

Project Objectives

- Introducing students to the literary genre of testimonial narratives and how to portray the life story of the narrator in relation to the environment in which she lived, highlighting different aspects of her life in a chronological order
- Understanding the environment in 19th century America surrounding the first wave of Arab immigrants through a personal narrative
- Developing students' agency as contributors to knowledge creation, thus moving away from the traditional passive model that is solely based on textbooks.
- Developing interview skills, especially asking deep questions, identifying important issues and following up with focused themes
- Increasing students' awareness of their ethical responsibility to verify facts (through research and documentation)
- Creating research opportunities for Denison students in a variety of areas, including but not limited to:

History: Capturing the historical events, through the personal perspective by drawing on conversation taken from memory as well as written and pictorial artifacts.

Psychology: Investigating the impressions, emotions and ethos of the narrator as revealed in the conversations

Economics: Exploring the economic situations at that time and how first wave Arab immigrants developed small family businesses

Cultural Analysis: Exploring how the first wave of immigrants navigated their identities and how they dealt with the identities of other immigrants in the same neighborhood (e.g., the Irish community)

Politics and activism: Investigating why Arab Americans nowadays are identified and classified as "white" in the government's census, and if there is a conscious move towards changing this category.

Project Outcomes

This project will help students achieve the following:

- Develop their informative, scholarly and critical skills to create testimonial narratives
- Enhance their research skills through finding resources and evidence to support and explain the personal narrative
- Improve their critical thinking skills through the act of situating and analyzing what they hear
- Enhance their oral and written communication skills
- Develop their digital literacy and critical engagement with technology (including editing videos, creating podcasts, using textual analysis tools, etc.)

- Develop their work ethic as moral agents
- Develop their collaborative skills through working as a team to decompose and synthesize ideas and distribute tasks.
- Develop mentorship skills so that students who are involved in the Codex summer institute will become mentors of another cohort of students, and later as class Teaching Assistants
- Develop their career-related skills of professionalism, work ethic, time management, and intercultural fluency (skills highlighted as learning outcomes of AAC&U *College Learning for the New Global Century*, https://www.aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes.

Digital Component

This project can be viewed as part of a general effort at Denison to incorporate digital pedagogy to enhance the curriculum. Therefore, the digital component is fundamental to restructure my existing course (ARAB 315.)

Culture of the Arab World (Arab 315) is a survey course that holds a fundamental approach to cover a broad spectrum of all aspects of Arab life from religion and society to social norms to communication styles. It touches on its history, geography, language, economy, and environmental challenges. The course also depicts the relation between the Arab world and the West and explores anti-Americanism and Islamic fundamentalism.

With the restructuring of the course, I plan to add two new units on Arab Americans to further develop an in-depth perspective of the relations between East and West and how Arab Americans represent a hybrid mix of the two. Using scaffolded digital tasks will make this complex topic easier to understand and the material more engaging. For example, creating timelines digitally will help students visualize the time spectrum when Arabs settled in this country and connects the places where Arab Americans originated; using archives of New York City to get pictorial material of Arab neighborhoods in relation to other communities of immigrants will help students develop a hands-on historical perspective that remains abstract in a traditional non-digital format; writing synopses of the interviews will benefit students in sharpening their writing skills and enhancing their critical thinking by deciding on important things to highlight; creating annotations of the interviews will help students understand further, through supporting research, the importance of specific times, places, or business brands mentioned; using Voyant for textual analysis will enhance students overall digital literacies and enhance their engagement with the material.

To achieve these goals, students enrolled in ARAB 315, will be required to submit scaffolded digital assignments, as follows:

- Create biographical chronological timelines, where students arrange the important events of a person's life in chronological order
- Learn filming techniques
- Edit the digital videos
- Upload the edited videos to YouTube and create a playlist for these videos and add closed captions to them.
- Add metadata to an Omeka site and link to the videos in Omeka
- Create a digital exhibit that presents the life story of the narrator, highlighting different aspects of her life

- Annotate events, place and peoples mentioned in the interviews
- Create podcasts.

Team Members

Hanada Al-Masri (Associate Professor of Arabic, Modern Languages, MENA), Cheryl Johnson (Educational Technology/Modern Languages), Debra Andreadis (Deputy Director of Denison Libraries), Denison University students: Madelaine Baker (Political Science, MENA) and Eric Branigin (International Studies, History).

Team Information/Roles

- *Hanada Al-Masri*: Hanada specializes in Arabic language pedagogy, translation, and sociolinguistics and has done extensive research in these areas and will contribute her linguistic and cultural expertise to the project. She is also an ACTFL certified Oral Proficiency Tester of Arabic and trained ACTFL AAPPL rater (Assessment of Performance towards Proficiency in Language). She is responsible for coordinating the scholarly and practical aspects of the project and oversees the transcription of the interviews. She will also train and coordinate tasks among students collaborating in the project.
- *Cheryl Johnson*: Cheryl is the instructional technologist for Modern Languages. Cheryl has a wealth of experience working in collaboration with faculty who teach a variety of languages and with a wide range of technologies. Cheryl also has knowledge and experience in creating multimedia and online resources for similar projects. Cheryl will help facilitate the online platform, programing, and design, as well as provide instruction and mentoring in these areas for faculty and students. Both Cheryl and Hanada will train students on how to collect good oral interviews, using the ACTFL criteria for Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI).
- **Debra Andreadis**: Debby is Deputy Director of Denison Libraries. She will provide guidance on the project's transferability and long-term preservation.
- **Madelaine Baker:** Maddy is a junior from England majoring in Political Science with a concentration in the Middle East and Northern African studies (MENA). She is particularly interested in using this project as a way "to delve into the changing relationships between Arab-Americans and their cultural identities." She is excited to question the impact of domestic prejudices on such identities and the influence it had on the usage of the Arabic language both in and outside of the home. Maddy's expected contribution to the project involves researching, conducting the interview, editing the videos and mentoring other students.
- **Eric Branigin**: Eric is freshman from Bloomington, Indiana, studying International Studies (major) and History (minor). He is interested in this project "because of the impact of the previous Arab-American oral history project", and his personal interest in how Arab-American experiences differ across time periods. Similar to Maddy, Eric's expected contribution to the project involves researching, conducting the interview, editing the videos and mentoring other students.

Project Timeline

1. Preparation phase (July & August 2020)

- Research orientation: students will be building literature on the history of Arab Americans in the USA
- Obtaining IRB Certificate of completion (individual online training-for students).
- Preparing consent and release forms.

2. Training phase (1st week of August 2020)

- Practicing interviews: students will be trained on proper interviewing techniques and technical training (including filming and digitizing the interviews). The training is done by both Cheryl Johnson and Hanada Al-Masri.

3. Conducting interviews phase-Project A (August- December 2020)

- Conducting the three interview sessions
- Editing the videos
- Preparing the Omeka platform
- Adding data and metadata to the digital record in Omeka
- Creating a backup archive of the data and metadata

4. Incorporation into the curriculum phase (Spring 2021)

- Faculty work on restructuring the course (ARAB 315)
- Creating digital assignments.

Experience with the Digital Technology or Method Proposed

I feel comfortable with technology and I am familiar with the digital component of the project. I have attended the Digital Summer Institute (DSI) at the University of Victoria, CA in 2019 where I have taken a course on digital pedagogy. I have also conducted, along with a team of Denison students, a digital oral history collection entitled *The Arab American Community in Central Ohio: Negotiating Cultural Identities and Adapting Traditions*. The digital component of that project involved the use of Omeka and OHMS. Cheryl Johnson is our instructional technology expert and will play a vital role in assisting me and my students.

Ethical Considerations

We plan to follow the standards of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human subject research. Prior to the interviews, we will be ready with consent and release forms.

Sustainability

Regarding the sustainability of the project from a pedagogical perspective: As mentioned earlier, the proposed project consists of two projects that are dependent on each other. This will guarantee its sustainability over the next two years (2020-2021) at least. In addition, this digital record will be used in the future as the basis for a new course on translation (English into Arabic) and will be offered to serve upper-level students of Arabic.

Regarding digital sustainability: The produced digital record will be deposited at the Denison library. The project will also be hosted online using the Omeka platform, at least for the next two years and most likely much longer.

Assessment

I plan to assess the effectiveness of this project in two ways: presenting the digital pedagogy used in this project at professional conferences and getting feedback from colleagues in the Arabic profession. Proposing a round table panel in the Middle East Studies annual conference to discuss the overall effectiveness of incorporating digital components into the curriculum.

Accessibility

The Department of Modern Languages is fortunate to have a dedicated budget line for technology purchases. We have used this line already to pay for server space at Reclaim Hosting for our previous project, *The Arab American Community in Central Ohio: Negotiating Cultural Identities and Adapting Traditions.* We will use this budget for this project as well.

As for accessibility, the videos will be closed captioned to make them accessible to the hearing impaired and all images will be appropriately tagged for the visually impaired. The developers at Omeka are committed to making the product accessible: https://omeka.org/classic/docs/GettingStarted/Accessibility_Statement/

Why CODEX?

At the Codex institute we will benefit from having a focused period of time when the team will be together to work intensively on the project. We hope to benefit from the experiences of our colleagues in other institutions and to gain a basic understanding and knowledge about a variety of digital tools including editing videos, creating digital interactive maps, timeline tools, creating podcasts, using textual analysis and visualization tools, etc.