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Abstract: In spring 2018, two honors colleges—Indiana State University (ISU) and University of Wisconsin-Stout (UW-Stout)—came together to create a cross-institutional collaboration blurring the boundaries between campuses. This project connected first-year honors students with the core curriculum of two geographically separated honors colleges. Building on their studies of Classical mythology, ISU honors students in Classical Cultures of Greece and Rome reviewed, advised, and critiqued screenplays composed by UW-Stout students in Honors English, leading to the production of short films presented at ISU's *Spring Classics Fest* and UW-Stout's

4:51 Short Film Festival and Exhibition. Drawing on our NCHC 2018 panel presentation in Boston, this illustrated paper highlights the value of cross-institutional collaborations for honors students, teachers, and programs. The collaborative process advanced skills in critical reading, analysis, and writing; engaged students and teachers in the scholarship of teaching and learning; and contributed to curricular innovation. Examples of assignments, interim results, and student-created short films are featured along with students' assessments of the value of crossing campus boundaries.

Keywords: cross-institutional collaboration, Classical mythology, literary analysis, student-created short films, teaching and learning

In spring 2018, two honors colleges—at Indiana State University (ISU) and University of Wisconsin-Stout (UW-Stout)—came together to create a cross-institutional collaboration blurring the boundaries between campuses. This project connected first-year honors students in a coordinated core curriculum of two geographically separated honors colleges. Building upon their studies of Classical mythology, ISU honors students in GH 101 Classical Cultures of Greece and Rome reviewed, advised, and critiqued screenplays composed by UW-Stout students in ENGL 113 Honors English. This coordinated project led to the production of short films that premiered at ISU's *Spring Classics Fest* and were submitted for competition at UW-Stout's *4:51 Short Film Festival and Exhibition*. Both events took place on 6 April 2018. Drawing on our 2018 NCHC panel presentation in Boston, we highlight here

Crossing Boundaries: Indiana State University & University of Wisconsin-Stout (Google Maps)

the value of cross-institutional collaborations for honors students, teachers, and programs. The collaborative process advanced skills in critical reading, critical writing, and literary analysis; engaged students and teachers in the scholarship of teaching and learning; and contributed to curricular innovation. Examples of assignments, interim results, and student-created short films, along with students' assessments of the value of crossing campus boundaries, indicate the success of this kind of collaboration.

The first-year UW-Stout students took the lead. The students divided into six teams with approximately five students per team: Team Arachne & Athena; Team Cyclops & Odysseus; Team Icarus; Team Medusa; Team Prometheus; and Team Pygmalion & Galatea. Each team selected and studied an episode from the mythology of ancient Greece and Rome to adapt into a modern short film (4 minutes 51 seconds or less). The primary reference text was Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*: *Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*, a compilation of summaries of important Classical myths. Hamilton translates each story for modern readers, drawing details from ancient sources. The students created a plot diagram illustrating their understanding of Hamilton's translation; they participated in a short oral presentation; they shared their plot summary with the entire class; and they were evaluated on their overall comprehension of course readings.

Next, the UW-Stout students created a plot diagram illustrating their intention for their short film adaptation, their purpose being to tell a story about the current relevance of Classical mythology to an audience of university students interested in learning about Classical mythology. The film adaptation assignment consisted of three phases:

Phase #1: Team Update in Preparation for Rough Cut

PowerPoint Presentation (5–7 minutes):

- The Classical myth

- Team members and roles

- Plot diagram: beginning, middle, and end (Consider: Is there a *recognition* and *reversal*?)

- Storyboard: beginning, middle, and end (9–12 frames total)

- Screenplay: presentation of a portion of the completed screenplay, with the entire screenplay submitted to an online dropbox

- List of camera angles described in conjunction with each frame of the storyboard

Phase #2: Cross-Institutional Collaborations with Classical Cultures Honors Students at Indiana State University

- Screenplay submitted to ISU (via email), with feedback received based on Aristotle's basic elements from the *Poetics*

- Reflection

- Revision based on feedback and reflection

Phase #3: Submit Film Adaptation

- ISU's *Spring Classics Fest*

- UW-Stout's *4:51 Short Film Festival and Exhibition*

The first step for ISU students was to learn as much as possible about the myths chosen by their UW-Stout colleagues. Building on their fundamental studies of Classical mythology, they began by reading and summarizing the myths as retold by Hamilton, focusing on the essentials. ISU students had discussed and learned from earlier study of the Classical gods that in every telling of a Classical Greek or Roman myth some details never change, and some may change. They were also learning that what changes often depends on the artist's audience and overall purpose. Using Hamilton's book as a foundation for both classes was an inexpensive way of giving students a reliable retelling of these myths based on works by Classical authors. ISU students were quizzed on the material and required to compose summaries of myths to demonstrate their comprehension of the course readings.

The next step for ISU students was review of the UW-Stout students' screenplays, keeping in mind that Hamilton herself was an artist and had her own purpose in retelling each myth. Students supplemented their readings in Hamilton with library and online resources in order to develop a solid understanding of the myths as told and re-told over time.

Following this review, ISU students studied an overview of Aristotle's six parts of poetry, based on his *Poetics*: plot, character, thought, diction, song, and setting. Isolating these key elements provided a tool for analyzing specific details in literary works of many kinds, especially those that tell a story as all of the UW-Stout films were meant to do. This focus on particulars increased the students' analytical skills.

ISU students then developed an evaluation rubric that condensed most of Aristotle's basic elements into two main categories. Here is their summary, evaluation, and assessment tool:

Plot:

1. Accuracy to myth—follows traditional details of the myth and ancient source variations

2. Originality—is based on an actual Greek/Roman myth

3. Modern adaptation—is reasonable, in keeping with the film, and explained

4. Pace of the story

5. Plot development—build-up to the climax; abrupt ending?

6. Attention-grabbing

7. Creativity

8. Repetitive language and pronunciation

9. Setting (distracting? beneficial?)

Character:

10. Characters—appropriately displayed in relation to the myth (dress, costume, dialogue, actions)

11. Credibility—emotional expression; appropriate action

12. Story—told through characters or through narrator

ISU students used this form to evaluate each screenplay. In order to best accommodate the number of scripts requiring review, the ISU class divided into three teams. Each team reviewed two of the UW-Stout teams' proposed films and provided feedback in the form of a score of 1–10 for each of the twelve points with explanatory comments.

The critical feedback provided by ISU students helped UW-Stout students gauge their effectiveness in communicating their artistic intent. Some cases were challenging. For example, Team Medusa presented a screenplay that deviated dramatically from Hamilton's version of the myth. Their intention was to illustrate Medusa's backstory, helping modern viewers see her early trauma, psychological complexity, and character arc, including an awakening to her powers. Almost all of this was lost in translation. The ISU students struggled to find positive comments for the first criteria, "Accuracy to myth—follows traditional details of the myth and ancient source variations." The completed feedback form was sent to Team Medusa, and the team members were surprised by the responses.

Although the students from Team Medusa were initially bemused, after discussion and reflection they began to understand how the comments were founded in fact. The following excerpts from a final reflection essay written by one member of Team Medusa highlight the value of the collaboration process, including lessons learned about communication challenges:

Looking back on the making of the Medusa video for the *4:51 Film Festival*, the experience was an important one. During class, we studied Greek mythology, adapted these stories to create a modern short film, worked in groups, and collaborated with honor students from Indiana State University. The challenges we faced were vast, but by working together, we were able to create a beautiful and enthralling film that represented the Greek past, while channeling a modern refinement.

To begin the project, we chose a Greek myth. After deliberation, we decided on Medusa because we were surprised about her backstory. The origin story of Medusa is powerful yet misunderstood. Contrary to popular belief, Medusa's monstrous nature is not based on her own faults. Her transformation to a serpentine woman is rooted in misogyny, jealousy, and humiliation. She is a victim of sexual violence and misconceptions. These harmful complications have persisted through history and remain prevalent in modern society. Through her transformation, Medusa loses her innocence but gains a newfound strength—empowerment, strong enough to turn humans to stone with a single glance. Because of this project, we were able to learn this information about a famous "villain" who is actually misunderstood. From this backstory, we developed a film adaption with a presentation for the class and a screenplay to organize our film. These components helped us throughout the process and let my group stay on track to our goal.

With the help of honors students from Indiana State University, we had our screenplays reviewed. Their critiques let us have an objective view and change our film to have a more understandable video. With the review, we were scored, and we didn't expect the results. But because of this, we found out that through long-distance collaboration, you have to be descriptive because information can be lost in translation.

Maddie Kayser, a member of Team Medusa who presented at NCHC in 2018, shared her formal reflection on the collaboration. Note, in particular, her description in the third paragraph regarding "hard constructive feedback" and the value of working with a team as well as with honors students from another campus:

Reflection

The process of studying Greek mythology, creating a short myth-inspired film, and collaborating with honors students from Indiana State University has helped me grow intellectually as a student, let me experience different views of other students, and gave me the opportunity to make and understand film more.

This experience has given me the opportunity to grow intellectually. Through this process I researched different Greek myths and found out more about the myth of Medusa. It opened my mind up to the different perspectives to the story. I also learned more about other Greek myths from listening to the class groups present. This gave me and other students the chance to bounce off of each other's ideas, and learn from giving and receiving feedback on our films. We learned about how to adapt these myths and this gave us the chance to become creative with our ideas.

During this process I was able to send in my script and modern adaptation to the other honors students from Indiana State University. I believe this was a very interesting and a good experience. I was able to see their perspective on my plans for my group's film. They gave us hard constructive feedback, which allowed us to see our film differently. We took this information and understood that by making it a silent film, we had to create a director's cut to explain the film more in depth. This opportunity also gave me even more motivation to make my film to the best of its potential because I had these students waiting to see the film.

The assignment of the 4:51 film adaptation gave me the chance to understand film more. I really enjoyed this because I was already very interested in producing films, but by doing this assignment I learned more about how to prepare for a film. I also learned how to make a script, and lay out my shots. It opened my eyes to the different ways we could portray a story. I found through this experience that I

appreciate film more. The power of a video could change a person and make them feel things they could have never felt from anything else. I also appreciate film producers more, because of the time, effort, and creativity they put into their work. We as a group had to retake shots and extend our time so we could get the perfect shot we needed for our film. This hands-on experience of making a film made me learn so much more than I would have if I just researched the topic.

In conclusion, the process of studying Greek mythology, creating a short myth-inspired film, and collaborating with honors students, helped me grow as a student intellectually, and was an opportunity that I will now forever remember and have with me. It opened me up to the idea of making other films, and appreciating critical feedback. I have enjoyed this journey in my education and all the bumps in the road that came with.

ISU honors students, Aubrey Balcerak and Catherine Smith, presenting *Medusa* at ISU's *Spring Classics Fest*, 6 April 2018

Dylan Pass, UW-Stout honors student, member of Team Cyclops & Odysseus, and panelist at NCHC, described in his formal reflection the value of collaboration. Reflecting on the process of creating *Vlog Ep.1: Journey Home*, Pass wrote:

My favorite part about the entire project was the connection with Indiana State University.

This was because we could hear feedback that we didn't think of. Some things we agreed with and other things we had to try to see

their side because that is what they believed. My favorite comment was when they said, "It sounds like you all are coming back from a kegger." This was commented because we sound very relaxed and the tone of voice isn't serious at times even when people were dying. But the majority of the time we defended ourselves because it is a vlog, so it has to be relaxed. Our goal was to be relaxed and go towards it being funny because I was in a group with 5 guys and being serious was not an option. They also reacted to that and said we structured the play nicely to cover the whole plot, but still make it original.

According to Pass, "When you hear other opinions, it forces you to think differently, especially if it is from a class that is far away. They were being honest and that makes you look at different perspectives and opinions." Overall, he considered the project a success "because of the effort of my group and the group at Indiana State University."

Stills from the short film created by Team Cyclops & Odysseus.
Dylan Pass, in the foreground of the first still, filming and narrating
Vlog Ep.1: Journey Home

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The ISU honors students also found the collaboration valuable and enlightening. Catherine Smith, a future teacher, noted the importance of building better skills in close reading, critical writing, and literary analysis. She also observed that she learned valuable lessons about the importance of effective collaboration, evaluation, and assessment. Smith stated in her formal reflection:

> Interacting with the honors students from University of Wisconsin-Stout has also given me insight to the benefits of collaboration with other colleagues, even those whom you are not familiar with. We have never met these students nor do we know anything about them yet we are still able to help one another succeed in our work. Critiquing the myth-inspired screenplays was also an opportunity that helped me better understand Aristotle's *Poetics* versus simply memorizing them for an exam. Looking at specific screenplays and critiquing them showed me that it is important to look at deeper aspects of writing than simply whether it was overall interesting or not.

> Studying Greek mythology has revealed the importance of looking beyond just the required text in my courses. For example, when studying about Prometheus, it was interesting to look up different stories about him from other authors to coincide with Hamilton's version of his story. It was also interesting to piece together different aspects of his life and character to come up with a story of our own about him. This, along with the discussion of each of the myths we read, helped me take more interest in the readings. Because we had to discuss the myths in class, I was also more eager to read the readings so that I was able to participate in the conversation with my classmates. Overall, in studying these Greek myths, I have come to understand these stories far more than I ever did when hearing about them in high school English courses. Although I could retain small details or the names of the gods, it was not until reading them in this course that I became truly familiar with the storyline or importance of the gods to the Greeks.

> Collaborating with students from the University of Wisconsin-Stout has been a unique experience that I have not had in any other college course so far at Indiana State. It is very encouraging to know that the critiques we have submitted really are helping other students in their work instead of being simple busy work that so many other courses

require. It was also interesting to learn about the students through their films even without knowing anything about them outside of the course. This experience has really shown me that collaboration can be such a positive thing for students. As a future teacher, I hope this idea to be something that I take back to my classroom one day. It has been a one of a kind experience that has let us learn from other honors students while also learning about the details of the course.

Andrew Williamson was part of the ISU team that sent Team Cyclops & Odysseus the comment about the "kegger." According to Williamson, the project gave students an opportunity to work together and develop tools to meet challenging situations:

> These were pretty different films and styles, for sure, so grading them on the same scales doesn't really seem logical. But, using Aristotle's six parts of poetry gave us a good general layout that we as a class could all use to gather ideas of what needed to be in the films to hold true to the myth but allow a modern take on it.

Putting Aristotle's ideas into practice also helped students learn a variety of lessons. Another ISU student who worked with Smith and the team reviewing *Medusa* and another film reflected on the process, noting some unexpected benefits.
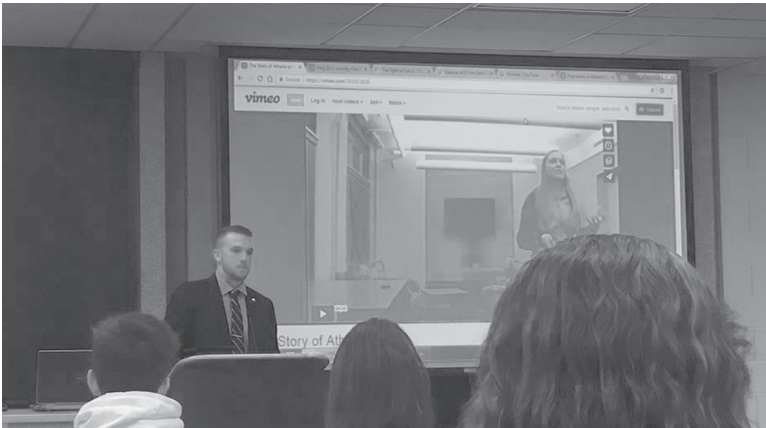
> Along with making the grading scale came learning how to give constructive criticism. Although this may seem easy, I found it to actually be quite difficult. In the beginning, I found myself being too nice on the grading and soon realized that I was being too lenient. Although this may make the students feel good, I realized that I was not going to help them with their films doing this.

> As I had never tried to critique a film before, I soon learned how challenging it can be. By the end, we had not only made friends with the students of Wisconsin, but also with the group we graded with. I learned how important it is to be able to critique other people nicely, and realized that this can help me later down the road as I begin to take leadership roles in the workforce.

All involved felt connected with the broader academic community. Classes did not meet simultaneously (ISU met on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and UW-Stout met on Tuesday and Thursday). However, students

were able to communicate through email messages, attachments, and video links. Williamson reflected: "I think working with students from a different school made it seem like a bigger and more important project than just something we had to do in class. It was something that was meaningful and was actually going to produce something we could see and watch."

On 6 April 2018, the student-created short films premiered at ISU's *Spring Classics Fest*, with ISU students providing a one-minute introduction to each film. The ISU Honors College posted photographs of the film premier on Facebook, and the honors students from UW-Stout tracked these updates.
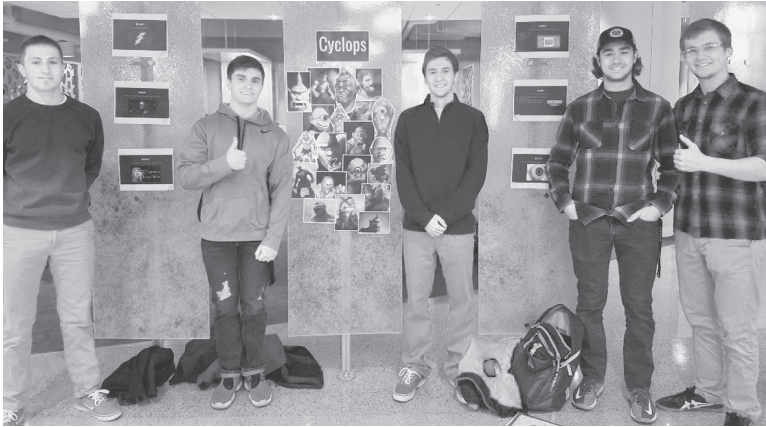

ISU honors student Andrew Williamson presenting at ISU's *Spring Classics Fest*

Dr. Greg Bierly, Dean of the ISU Honors College (foreground), watching the presentations at ISU'S *Spring Classics Fest*

A few hours later, on the same day and in another state hundreds of miles from Terre Haute, Indiana, UW-Stout honors students created an exhibition on the relevance of Classical mythology in modern times, and their films were included in the *4:51 Short Film Festival and Exhibition*.

Team Cyclops & Odysseus at the UW-Stout *4:51 Short Film Festival & Exhibition*, 6 April 2018

In November 2018, two students from ISU and two students from UW-Stout joined their teachers in Boston for a panel presentation on this cross-institutional collaboration at the NCHC conference. The panel was split with ISU on one side of the room and UW-Stout on the other side of the room.

Pictured left to right: Catherine Smith, Marilyn Bisch, Andrew Williamson, Maddie Kayser, Joan Navarre, and Dylan Pass at NCHC, 10 November 2018

Within minutes, boundaries vanished, friendships flourished, and six people from two separate universities came together to describe a collaboration that honed critical reading, writing, and thinking skills and encouraged interdisciplinary explorations.

This cross-institutional collaboration made it possible for students to overcome both physical and intellectual boundaries. Honors students and teachers engaged in systematic scholarly inquiry, advanced the practice of teaching and learning, and contributed to curricular innovation in the core honors curriculum.

Stills from the short film created by Team Medusa, starring Maddie Kayser as the eponymous protagonist

While all project goals could have been accomplished through a collaboration between two honors courses at the same university, what set this project apart was its cross-institutional nature. Honors students at both universities frequently commented on the unique nature of working with

students they did not and could not personally know, challenging them to develop new ways to provide honest evaluation and constructive feedback that was critical, useful, and respectful of multiple, unfamiliar perspectives. To replicate this project, one needs to find an honors colleague from another university with a shared collaborative vision. The collaboration need not follow our model of short films and shared evaluation. Opportunities are countless to recreate this kind of collaboration between two campuses and two courses with an emphasis on the honors core curriculum.

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