



Welcome to the ds106 show!

Play the intro video (~5 minutes)



Hello and welcome to this special edition of the ds106 show. I am your host, Alan Levine, and teacher of ds106, an open digital storytelling course based at the University of Mary Washington. How many ds106ers fans are out there? Are you #4life?

We are coming to you from our studio on Waikiki! The ds106 show has been broadcasting live once a week via Google Hangouts as a way to bring in guests and to update everyone on what is going on each week in class. If you are not familiar with ds106, I am going to get you up to speed, and hopefull show you that there are other important models for onine education that you do not read about in the New York Times.

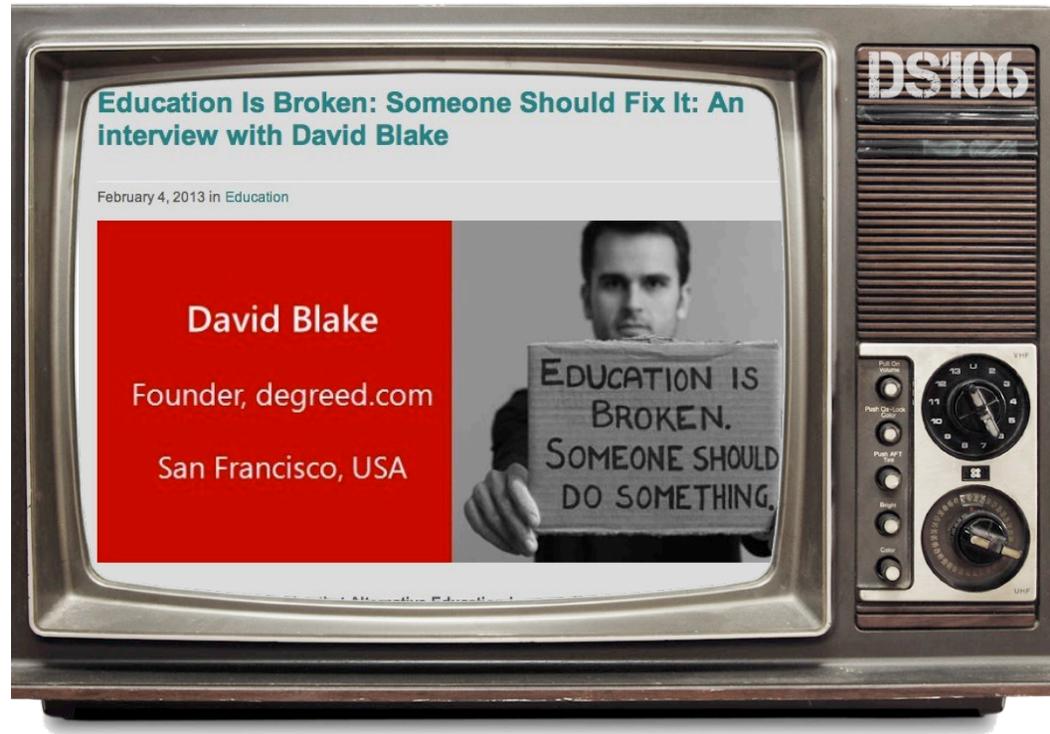
So it seems these are some challenging times for higher education, and especially new and not so new models of online learning. Veteran news anchor, Howard Beale, is here to give us some commentary. Howard?



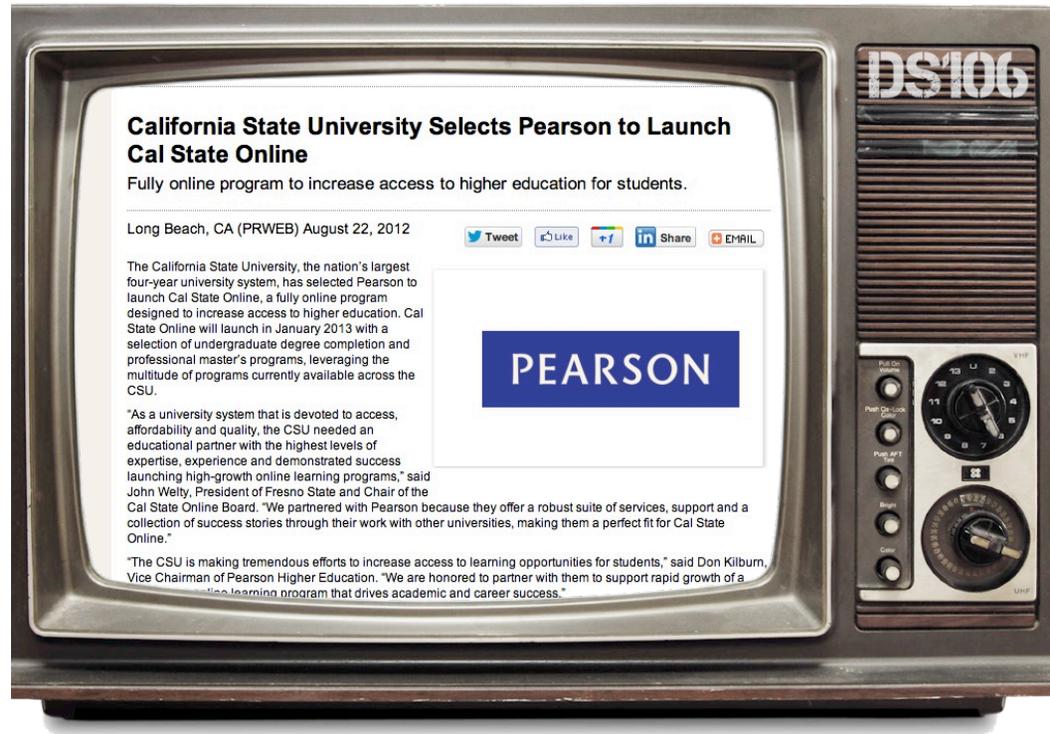
I don't have to tell you things are bad.

Everybody knows things are bad for online education.

It's a depression.



Education is broken or failed and most institutions will be made obsolete by some company with an X in its name. Student debt is out of control. Degrees will be replaced by badges.



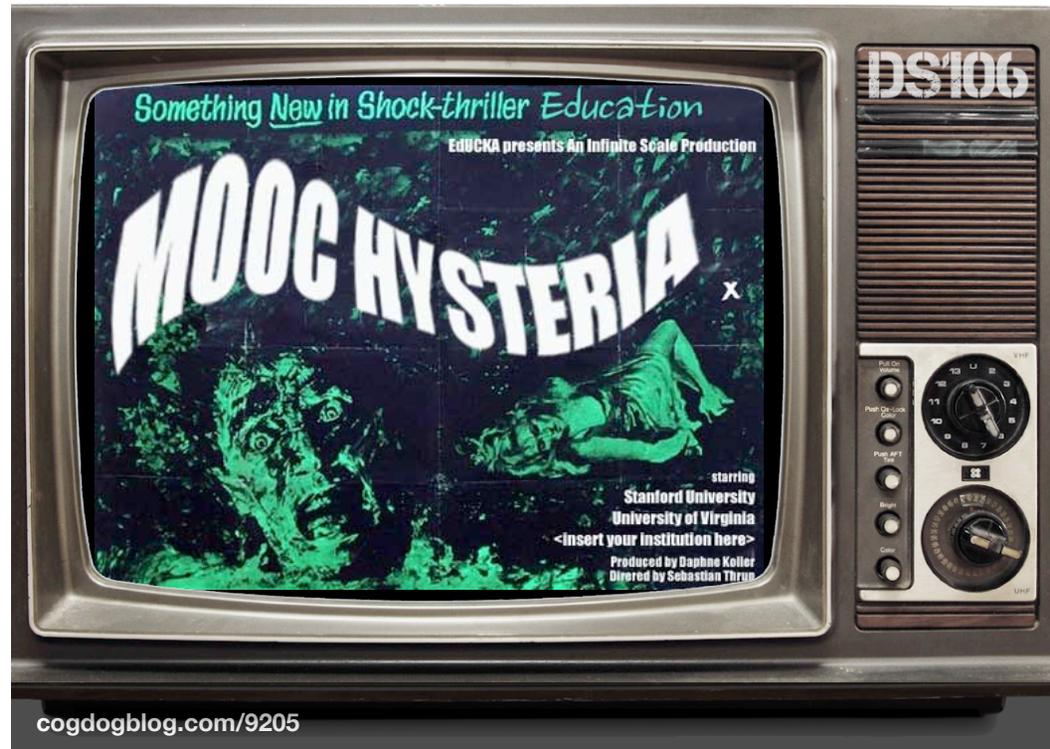
Cal State outsources online education to Pearson --pundits declare that MOOCs will make non-elite institutions irrelevant.



California legislators propose a New University to hand out degrees with no teachers, curriculum-- just tests. Silicon Valley VCs are calling the shots, the mainstream press eulogizes education among the dead.

Educators, do we toss out decades of research on How People Learn? Teachers, how does it feel to be made obsolete by Stanford and MIT superstar profs with their robo graders?

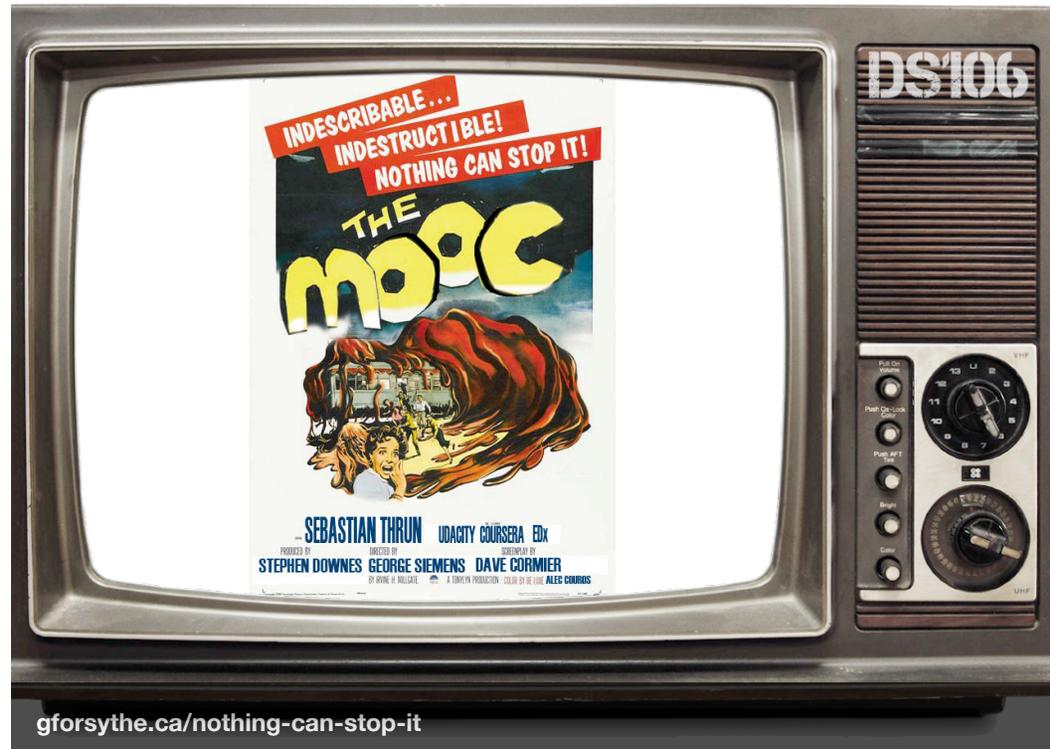
We sit watching our iPads while some New York Times journalist tells us of some tsunami that will wipe us out-- as if that's the way it's supposed to be.



cogdogblog.com/9205

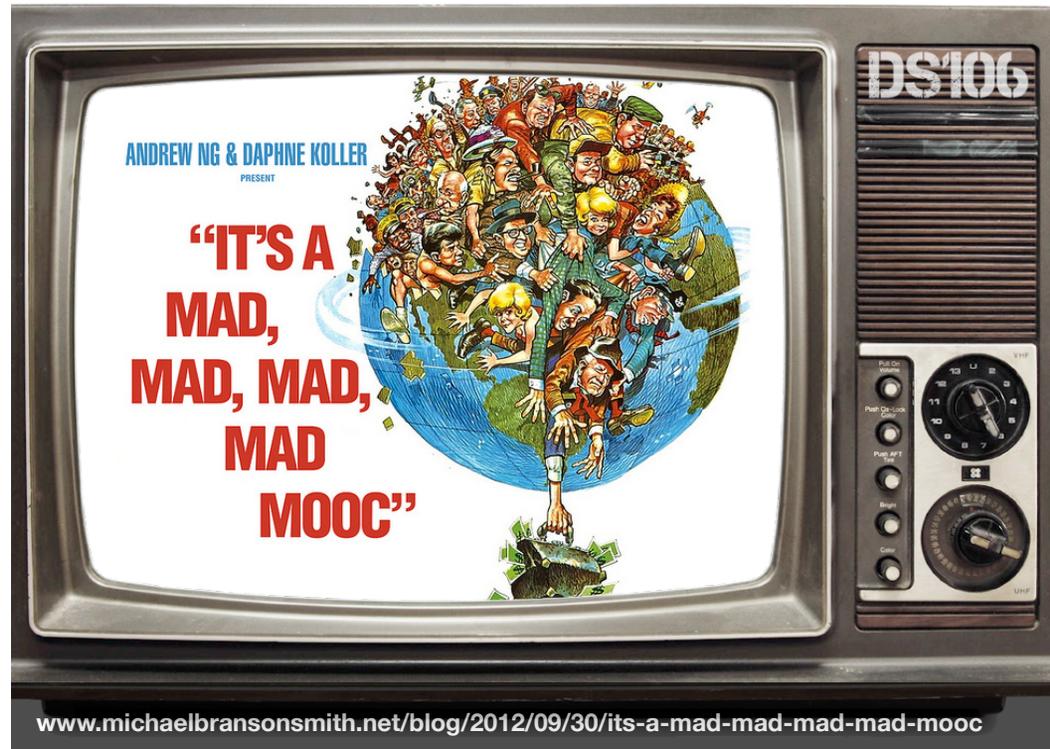
We know things are bad. Worse than bad.

They're crazy.



gforsythe.ca/nothing-can-stop-it

Maybe you think it's elsewhere that it's going crazy-- so we don't speak out anymore.



We sit in our offices as the world we're living in is getting smaller and all we say is, "Please, at least leave us alone in our faculty lounges. Let me have my netflix, and facebook, and my iphone apps and I won't say anything."



Students, as one of 160,000 in a course, do you know what that makes you?

INSIGNIFICANT!



Is this the form of learning you really want? video lectures from people who don't know you,



-- the only place to talk is sprawling discussion forums, and your achievements are based on multiple choice exams and machine graders?



Well I'm not going to leave you alone.

I want you to get MAD. I don't want you to protest. I don't want you to riot. I don't want you to write to your provost because I wouldn't know what to tell you to write.

I don't know what to do about the OERs and the badges and the Courserans and the crying in the streets. All I know is first you've got to get MAD.



You've got to say, "I'm a human being. God Dammit, my learning has value."



So

I want you to get up now.

I want ALL of you to get up out of your chairs.



I want you to get up right now-- and open a new browser window, launch twitter, and tweet:

"I'm as MOOCed as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!
#2013TCC"



I want you to get up right now. Get up.

Open that browser window, get to twitter, and tweet, "I'M AN INDIVIDUAL! MY LEARNING HAS VALUE! #2013TCC"



Things have got to change my friends. You've got to get MAD.



You've got to tweet, "I'm as MOOCed as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore!"



Then we'll figure out what to do about the flipped classes and the open textbooks and the grading crisis. But first get up out of your chairs, open your browser window, and tweet , "I'm as MOOCed as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore!"



Umm.. nice rant Howard, we have people riled up, but what can we do? Certainly more than mad tweeting.

If you are confused, perhaps you do not remember the 1976 movie “Network”, a story of how the TV news industry in the 1970s was corrupted by corporate interest, power, and greed. The mission of news was subverted to the bottom line of dollars and ratings.

There are rather eerie parallels with what I see happening to parts of education. Eerie.



Might there be another way to look at online learning, one that mirrors the structure and ethos of the internet itself, that is not driven by corporate gain. Is there any better model of how to connect and communicate than the fabric of the internet? It is unrivaled in history as a system of cooperation and benefit to all.

What I will share is not a cookie cutter model, not a magic product, but an ethos, a way of being-- one that may contain ideas to help us keep learning individualized and truly open. We need to take back education from the mass produced factories. We need to re-embrace a spirit of experimentation-- one that helped birth the internet, not one of solely commodification.



ds106.us

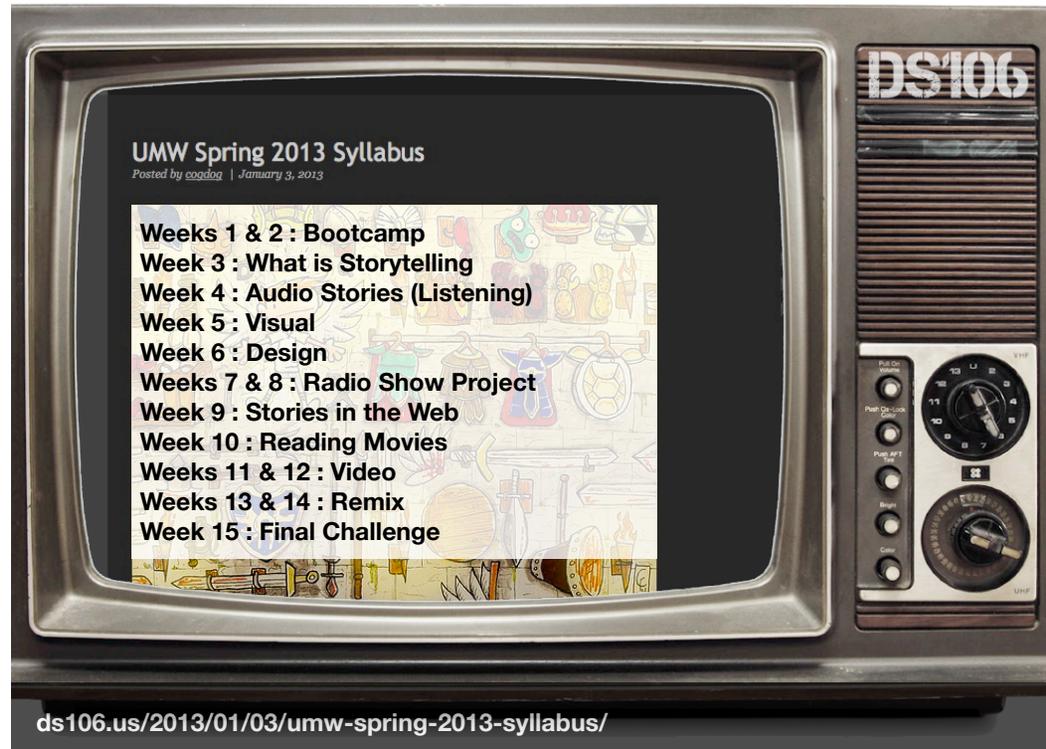
ds106 is an digital storytelling class at the University of Mary Washington, a small liberal arts college in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Jim Groom took a standard class built around textbooks and the idea of storytelling as the personal video narrative, and exploded it open as a web-based query into media, culture, and individual expression.

These days it is becoming a question as to what open even means?

I have helped brainstorm the first open class, participated in ds106 as an open participant, taught it in person last Spring, and for the 3 semester since, as a completely online class.

My class has no lectures, no quizzes, no exams, no textbook.

Our infrastructure is built on open source Wordpress platform and plugins, and a lot of love. There us no endowment funding, no gates money, no VC money. In fact, our community supported us in 2011 via a modest Kickstarter.



ds106.us/2013/01/03/umw-spring-2013-syllabus/

The class I teach at UMW is a standard 15 week semester course; I teach 25 students. Actually there is no course “ds106” is is CPSC 106, an undergraduate creative elective located in the computer science department.

This is a quick snapshot of the syllabus. Bootcamp refers to getting the technical, blogging fundamentals out of the way. The assignments involved not only creating media but also writing about the process and ideas-- on their own digital spaces. We have one group project in the middle, where teams have to produce a 30 minute radio show that we broadcast live on our own Internet radio station.

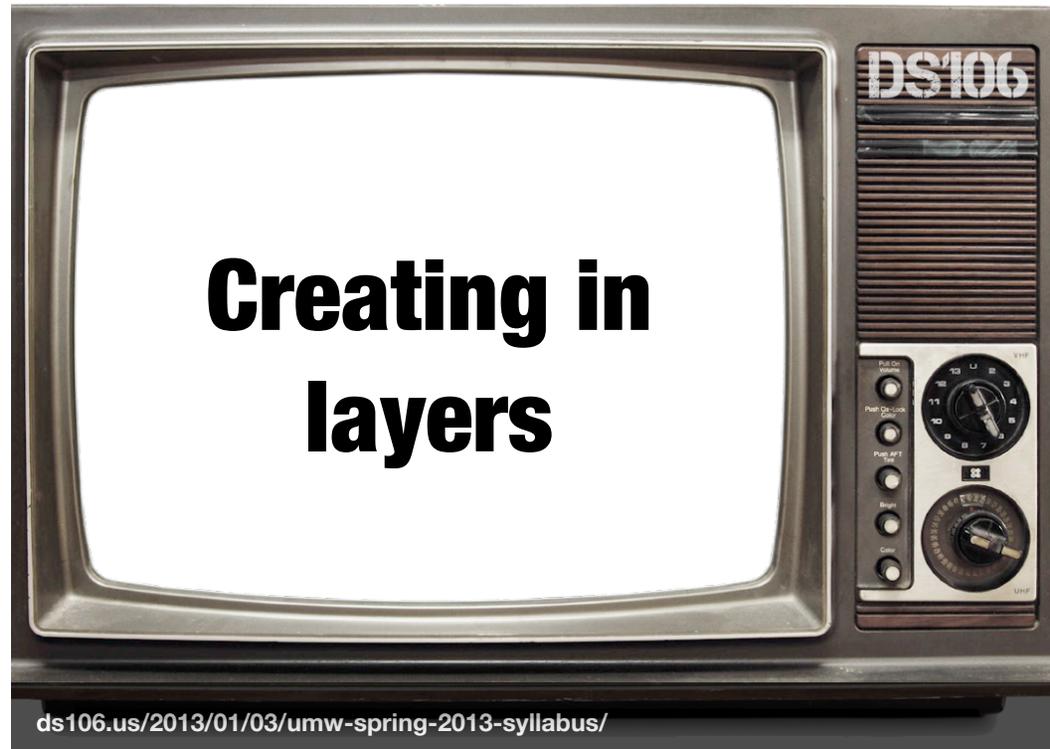
That’s right, we have a radio station as part of our open community, a place where anyone can take the mic at any time. It is far from the controlled environment I am using here.

The mandate for my students is to be creative in how they take on the assignments, it need not be a literal or a word problem. One of the group radio shows as about the dysfunction that happens in group projects. That’s pretty meta.



ds106.us/2013/01/03/umw-spring-2013-syllabus/

Some things we do across the board are activities where students hone their visual, audio observational skills to see things around them, and in media, in ways they have not before. We do a photo safari that has them looking for shadows, converging lines; a design safari where they identify elements such as fonts, colors, balance, unity in things they see, learning to read a movie by noting camera work, use of foley sounds, etc.



ds106.us/2013/01/03/umw-spring-2013-syllabus/

Another facet our students do is to understand the power of working in layers of media, be it creating more complex visuals, editing audio to be more than sticking sounds end to end, but using sound effects, ambient sounds, etc, to create a full audio soundscape, and putting this all together in video.



It seems like some do not take ds106 seriously (Stephen Downes is convinced we are a cult) because it like a fun party (because it is), but fun = motivation--

the mission is to foster an explosion of creative output at the same time exploring just the question of what a digital story even is. We do not begin with a definition.



A superficially silly assignment is called “Patty Pioneers” created by our colleague, Scot Lockman, then teaching a ds106 like course in Japan on CyberHistory. He created an assignment where his students had to edit a photo of an internet pioneer, such as Alan Kay here, with fast food in their hand.

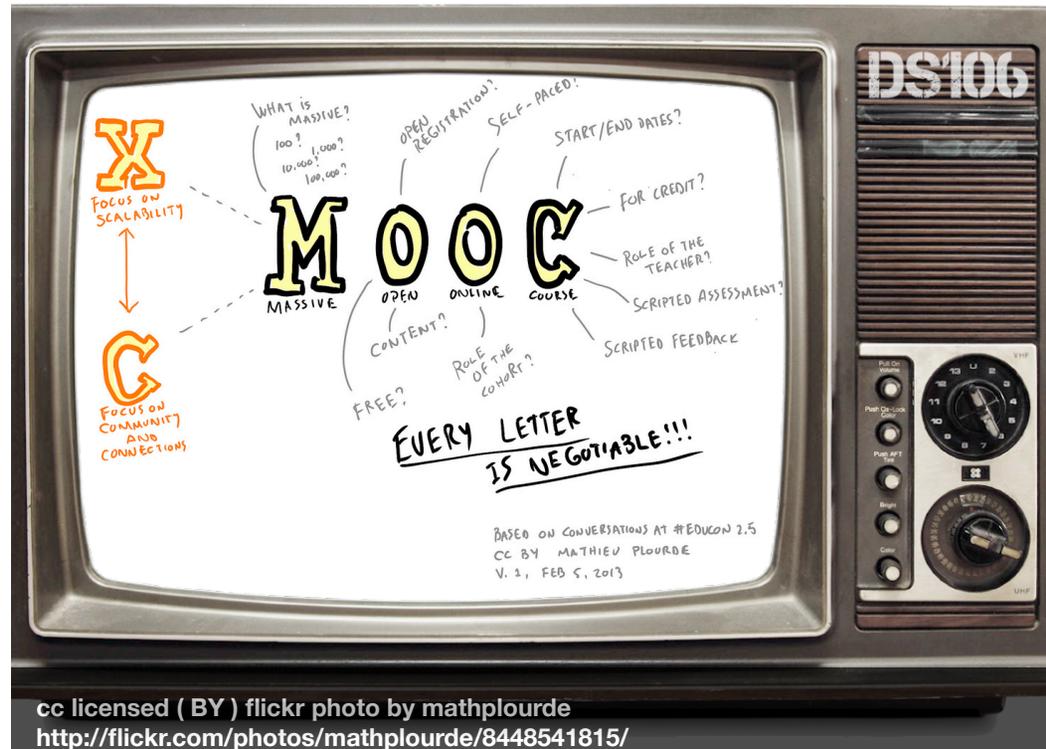
But the end goal is not the image, but the thinking that goes into it, the research into the background of the subject-- the silly creation is a gateway into understanding.

Jim Groom talks about this as the value of stupid stuff “What’s fun is once other people start contextualizing, and re-contextualizing, those stupid things you share, they often become that much less stupid... at its best web is a massive context engine, and for your understanding of it to truly transform you have to regularly contribute to it in order to watch those variety of contexts take shape.”

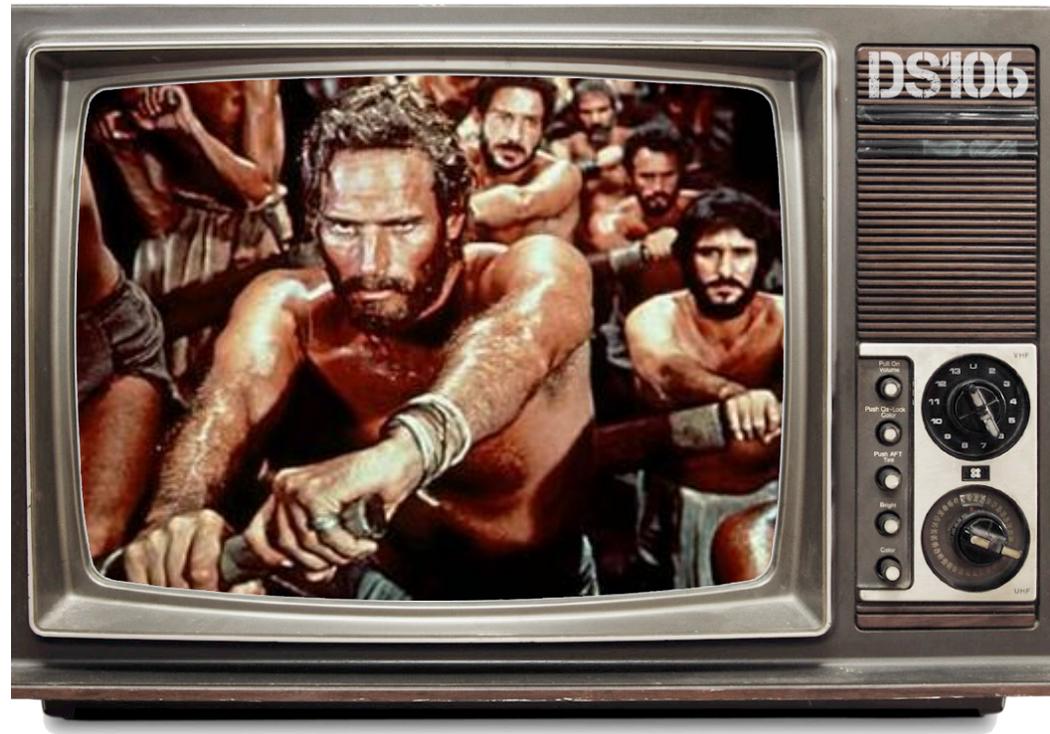


Let's talk about what the typical experience is in a MOOC.

I regularly sign up for Coursera classes that I last less than a week in—where the typical format is a few hours of videos to watch, multiple choice quizzes, and being directed into discussion forums with thousands of people. When I fall behind, I fall off the cart.



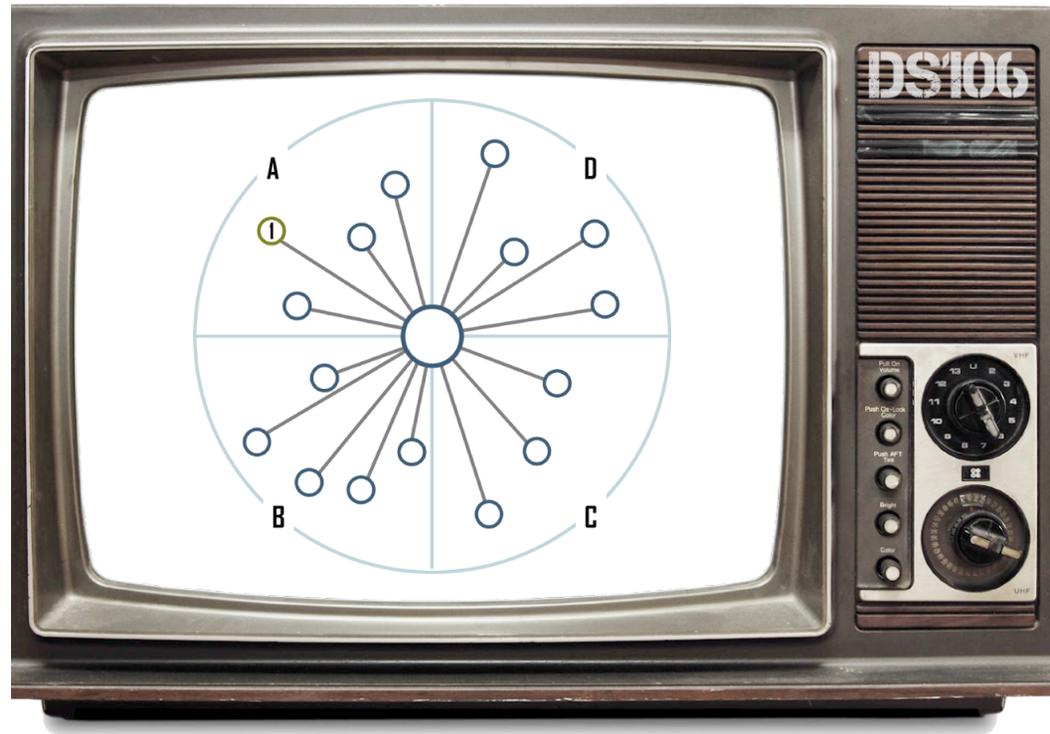
And as Matthew Plourde illustrates, every letter in MOOC is “negotiable” -- how do we even really talk about MOOCs as a singular entity? that MOOCs do this or MOOCs are that?



In most MOOCs everything is built around everybody doing the same thing at the same time, on the schedule of the provider. Everybody's experience is the same, the same assignments. I am not suggesting with this scene of Ben Hur that MOOC students are slave, but you are driven by the beat of that drum.

The class starts with a drum beat, and if you fall off, well you know what happened to that guy in the movie. And when the drumming stops at the end, this is the end of the trip.

Row together or get off the boat. All the captain cares about is the number of rowers.



The structure is a network model of a central node, the star professor, more or less a broadcast model. Massiveness is obtained by replication.



wcetblog.wordpress.com/2013/02/13/ds106/

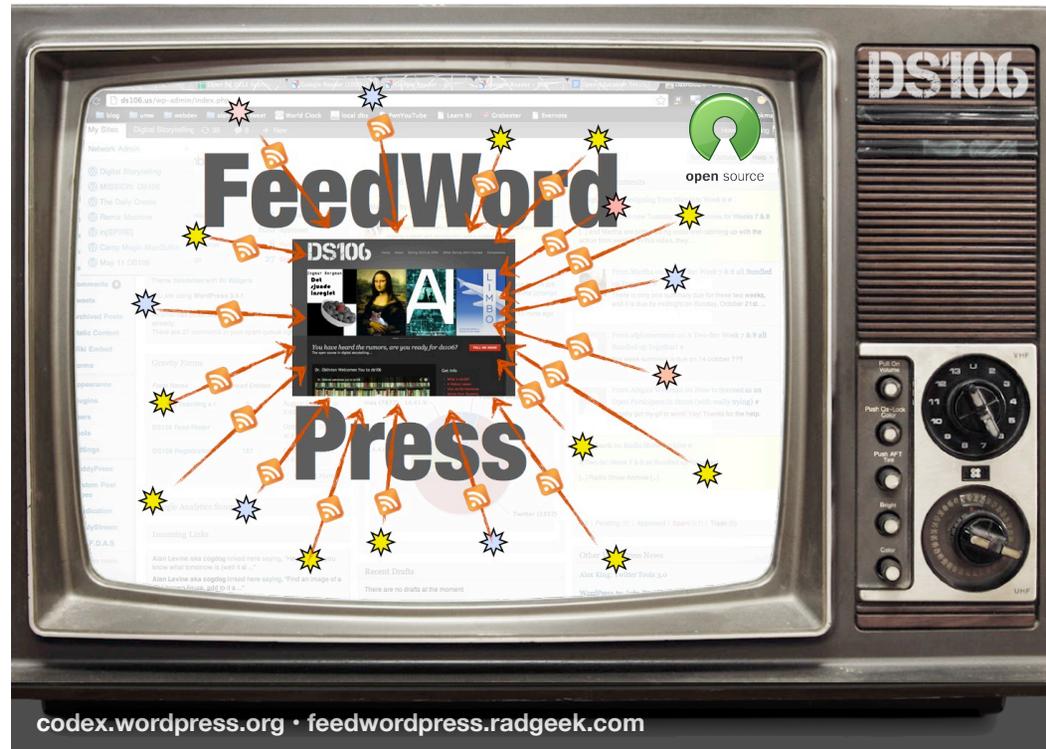
Do you know what this is? It's the internet!

There is no center to it. The very design of the network is that all points are equally connected, and that each hub passes on information to the next without question. It was a design meant to scale without being threatened by the loss of a key node.



The thing about ds106 is that it is modeled more like the internet, a connectivist network.

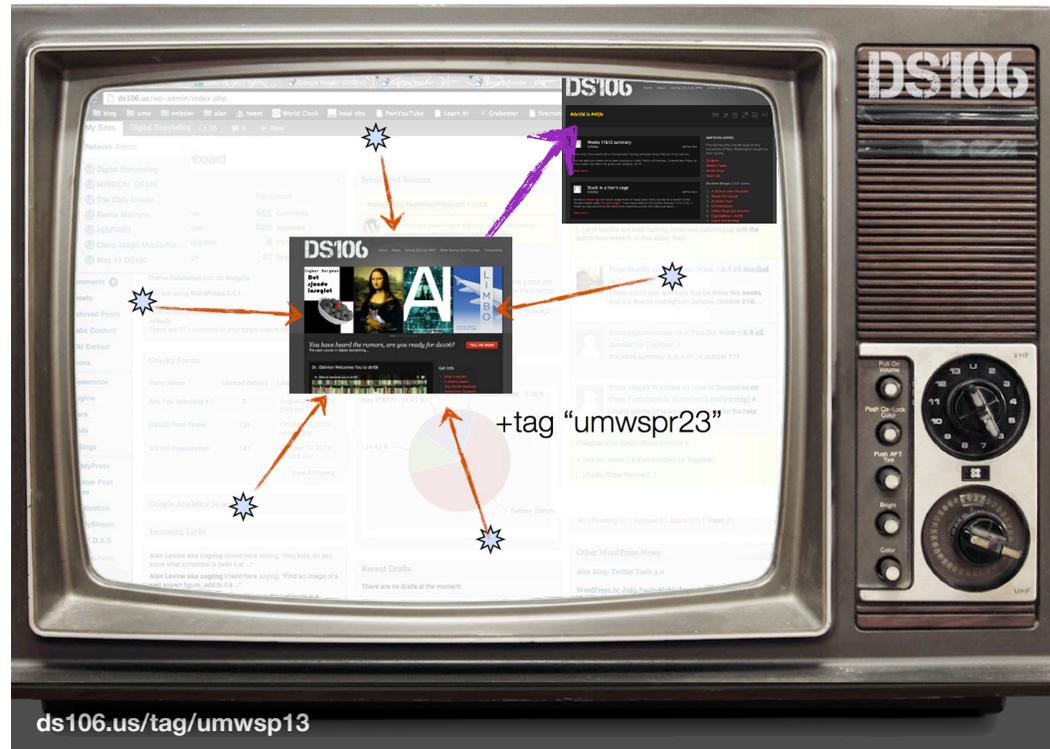
The vehicle is what we call the “syndication bus” meaning that everyone’s experience happens in their own digital space, which we aggregate in one place, but the course remains distributed.



The backbone of ds106 is the FeedWordpress plugin for Wordpress, which turns the central course into an aggregation hub.

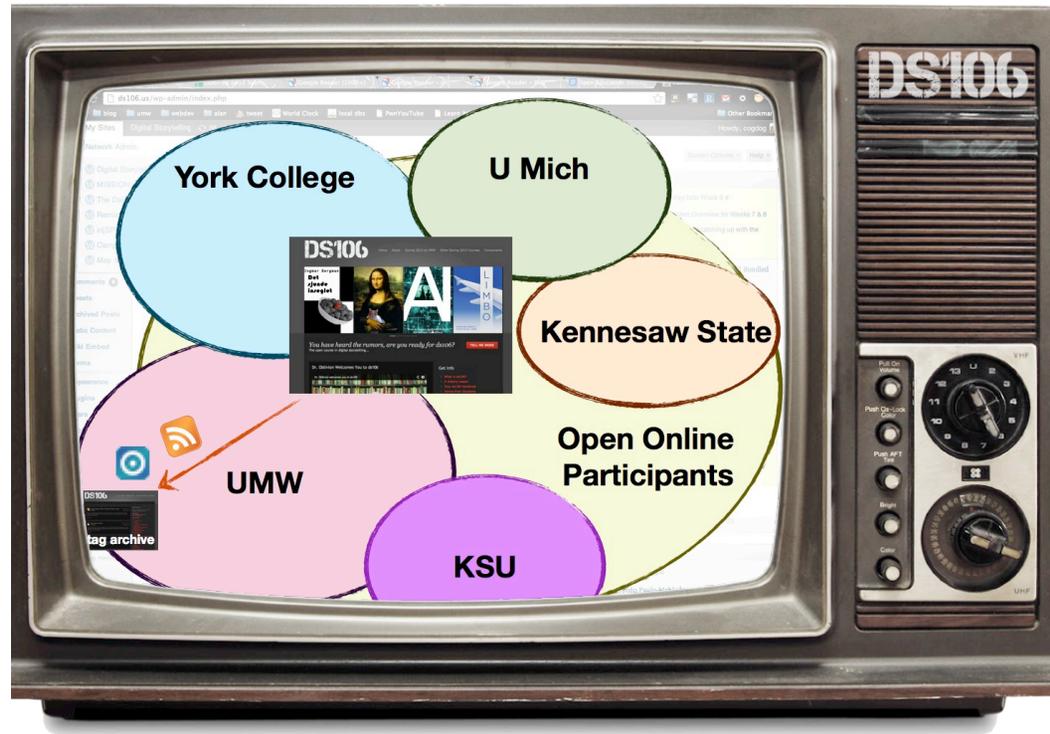
Each star represents one individual participant's own blog or digital space, and whatever content they publish related to ds106 is fed via an RSS feed. C

urrently, our site subscribes to over 700 sites. The blue stars may be my students, but we have other people who are part of a larger community of participants.



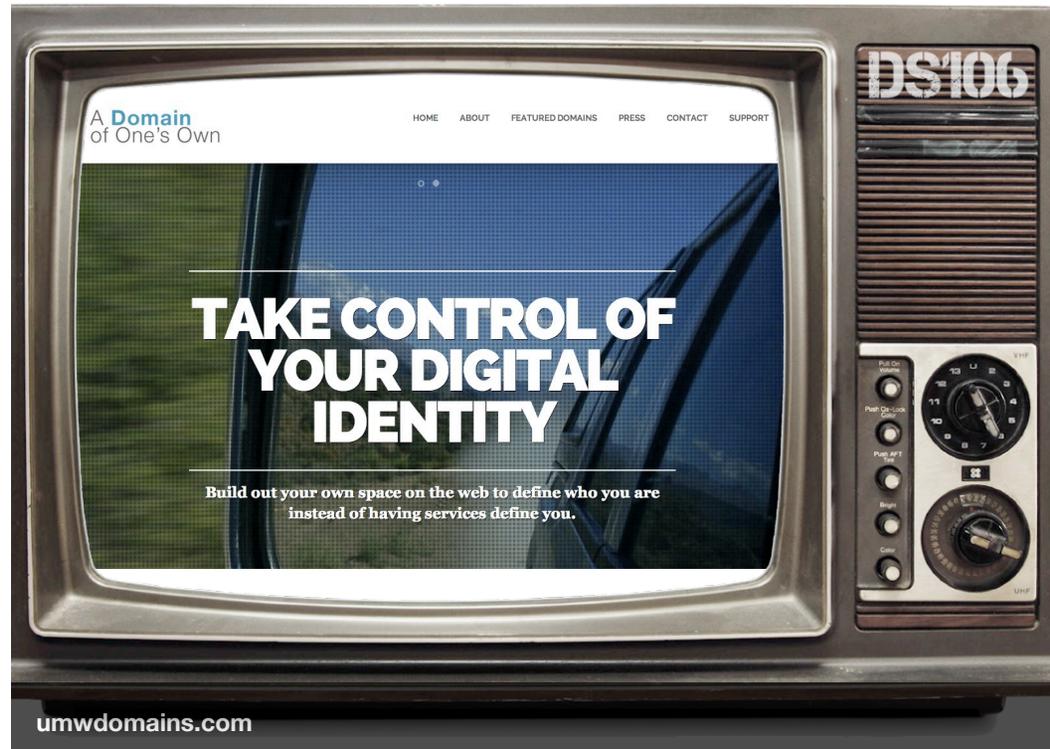
ds106.us/tag/umwsp13

We add group identifier tags to all incoming posts, so I am able to generate a view of just the posts from students in my section or just posts from open online participants.



There is actually no single ds106 course. There is the UMW course, and we have colleagues at other institutions teaching similar, but not the same classes, who use our resources, assignments, and syndication model for their own courses. And then we have this broad group of open online participants, who pick and choose the parts of the classes they want to do.

This is a radically different model than the garden variety MOOC, which attempts to provide the same carbon copy experience to all participants. Our loose networked overlapping structure more resembles the underlying fabric of the web itself and gives people to choose their level of participation.



umwdomains.com

Our UMW students are all charged with getting their own internet domain, web hosting, and running their own version of Wordpress, the idea that Gardner Campbell advanced as a “personal cyberinfrastructure”-- students become their own sys admins. They thus own their own digital space (it is not the institutions), they can take it with them. In years past, it generally it took them 3 weeks to all get fully set up.

Through a radical innovative program sponsored by UMW, this year, all of mystudents are given for free their own domain and web hosting, the Domain of One’s Own project. Next year, all incoming freshman will be given this, and it is their digital space to use as they need for their stay at UMW. It turns the eportfolio concept inside out. Students can create multiple blogs as well as install other web based systems.

And in the last 2 semesters this has been around, I have had three quarters of my class set up with their domain and blogging in only 2 days, and all the class was ready in a week. It completely accelerates the class so they are focussing on writing and creating.

My current group of students by far came in the most ready with a sense of what it takes to write in an online space, this a natural outgrowth of UMW having had a wordpress multiblog system in place for 5 years.



Just to give you an idea how our students make these spaces their own, I will show a few current student sites.

Kristen combines her interests in coffee and dogs with her social activism. Each one of her weekly reflections ends with an image of a cup of coffee, a dog, and a paragraph about a social cause that was in the news.

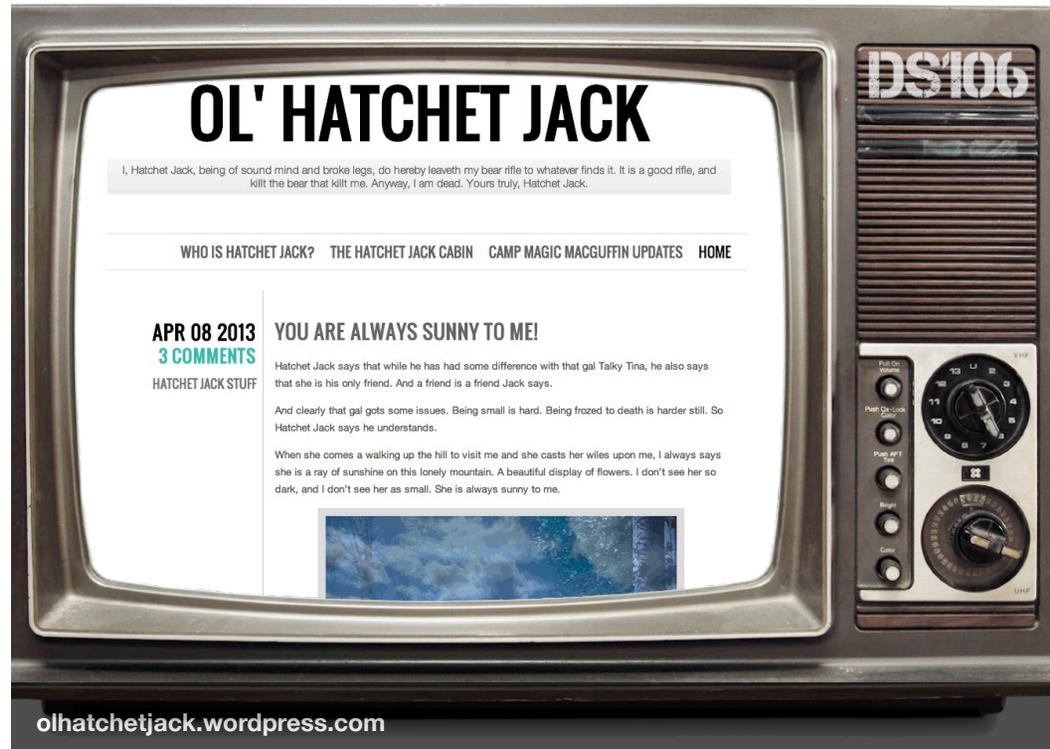


ds106.confessionsofafuturedisneyprincess.com

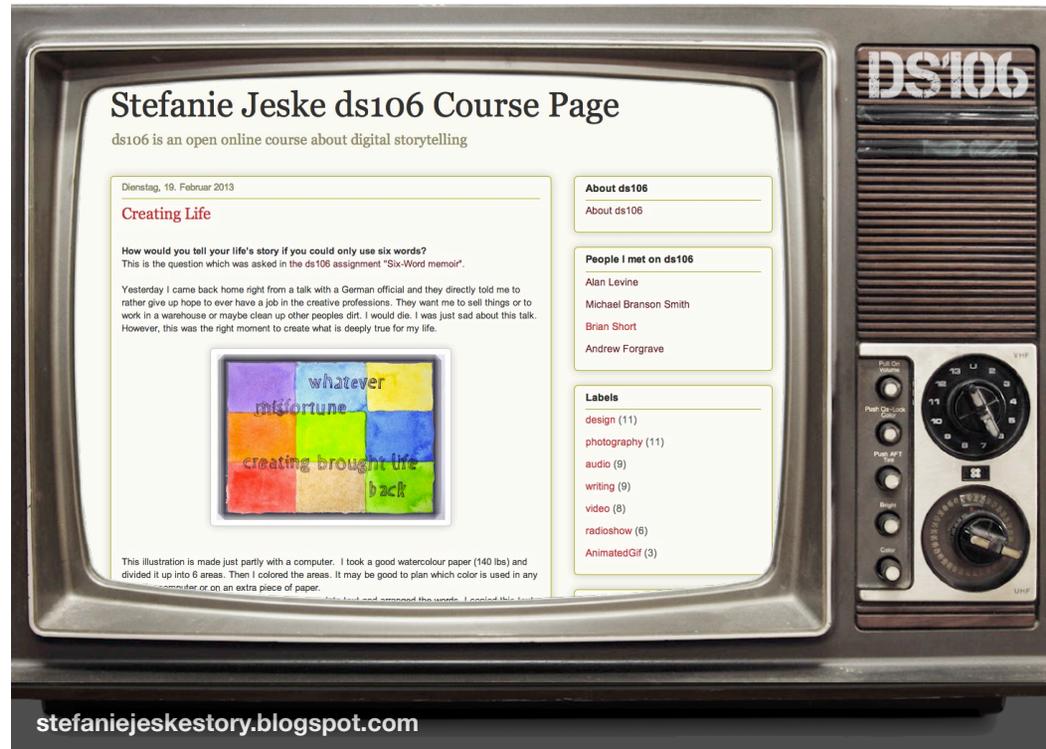
Karissa's site is playful, rather tongue in cheek since she is a math major. She brings math into her assignments often, such as a mashup song about Calculus.



Students change the look and theme of their blog, but I found it interesting that Jazmin's domain and her original blog title was "Confused Easily" but with her growing tech confidence, she changed the name to "Simplicity is the Best Policy".



Our open participants often play with the idea of identity. Todd Conaway is an instructional technologist at Yavapai College here in Arizona, and each semester he makes an entire new blog and twitter account that frames his creative work. In the movie about mountain main Jeremiah Johnson– he discovers a frozen dead man in the snow with the name “Hatchet Jack” written in a note. Todd becomes this person in his interactions. How you turn a minor dead character into a persona is a creative act in itself.



Stefanie Jeske has done all the assignments I have given my students, but she is not enrolled in my class. She lives in Germany and dreams of being a visual artist. This was a design assignment called Six Word Memoir, based in the Hemingway 6 word story, in this assignment one creates a visual to go along with a six word story to describe their life.

“Yesterday I came back home right from a talk with a German official and they directly told me to rather give up hope to ever have a job in the creative professions. They want me to sell things or to work in a warehouse or maybe clean up other people's dirt. I would die. I was just sad about this talk. However, this was the right moment to create what is deeply true for my life. “



ds106.us/handbook

Another component of my course is that we do not dictate what software students should use.

They are invited to use anything they own, and we provide a comprehensive list of web-based, and open source options for graphics, audio, and video tools.

And thus, I am happy for the most part not to be teaching the mechanics of software, but fostering the “Let’s figure it out” mindset, and more importantly, “Let’s figure it out together”.



We run no discussion forums in ds106– the community in ds106 happens openly in twitter in the #ds106 hash tag– it is where people share, ask questions, and bond over the common pursuit of creativity.



assignments.ds106.us

The assignment bank is another critical component to ds106, and is a truly open resource available to you. Rather than specifying all assignments for, say audio that all students have to do (e.g. the replication model), we may have one common one, but then students are able to choose the ones they wish to do from our collection of over 500 contributed assignments.

These are ones our students and participants have contributed to ds106, a site brilliantly conceived by Martha Burtis in 2011. So our community builds our content. And in my class, students are required to contribute 2 new assignments during the semester.

Now let me talk a bit about the approach I use for this kind of work. Students come conditioned with what I call a learned “assignment mindset” – what do I have to do to meet the terms of the assignment. In my class, the media piece is not the goal. It is a vehicle.

While not a rubric per se, the criteria for my students is that they have to write about the idea behind the media piece, why did they choose it? What is the inspiration? What is the story behind the story?

And they also need to write about the production, more than the software used, what techniques did they use? What media did they create and what did they download? Sources must be cited by link. I am looking in their blog writeups for more than the DVD, I am interested in all of the extras on the disc.



So if we explore, say Design Assignments, there are over 100 available—we can sort by name, date created, which ones have been done the most, etc.



assignments.ds106.us/assignments/one-story-four-icons/

As an example, one of the most popular ones is the One Story / Four Icon design assignment created by Tom Woodward. The task here is to reduce a movie, book to 4 symbols, an exercise in symbolism and minimal design, and unlike Tom's original example, we suggest not giving away the answer. We can see here that it has been done almost 120 times; and our users crowdsource the difficulty rating- this one is worth 2 stars.

So when I teach design, I may have my students do say 10 stars worth of design assignments.



assignments.ds106.us/assignments/one-story-four-icons/

Each assignment has a series of tags– for someone who is one of the blogs ds106 subscribes to, all they need to do is include these tags in their blog post, and it will show up here as an example. We also have people write tutorials, which have their own tags, and if there were any for this assignment, they would appear on the right.



remix.ds106.us

And we take the concept of remix into a whole new space with The ds106 Remix Machine. This site randomly chooses one of the assignments from the assignment bank and combines with a random remix card, which changes up an aspect of how the assignment should be done. For example...



remix.ds106.us

The Mashedup Children's Book asks you to design a book cover for a well known children's book with a figure from popular culture, so the example here mixes "Where's Waldo" character with the "Oh the Places You Will Go". But in this remix, it is played with the the "Go Emo" card which makes the assignment to introduce an anguished character in black garb.

We also encourage students to use the media from the examples that were done for the original assignments, and link back to them when they write up their works.

How might you go about doing this? Some of the combinations do not work, so you can go back and create new ones – With 508 assignments and 28 remix cards, you can see there are many, many combinations at work here (we do the math for you, that is 14224 possible combinations).



We believe that small regular acts of creativity are good for keeping the inspiration going, as well as to have people try things they might not normally attempt.

We modeled the ds106 Daily Create after the photo challenge site, the Daily Shoot, that was popular a few years ago. Each day we publish a small creative challenge that is either photography, drawing, audio, video, and recently added, writing. They are meant as something that can be done in less than 15 minutes. The things they create are posted to social media sites (flickr for visuals, SoundCloud for audio, and YouTube for video) each with a special tag so we can aggregate them back on our site.

No one is ever graded on what they do, the idea is to practice your own creative interpretation of the challenge. Since January 2011, we have published almost 500 Daily Create activities, and the entire archive is open to you to use.



tdc.ds106.us/tdc464

So as an example, this is today's daily create, a written challenge to make a limerick poem about their shoes.

Who wants to try?



ds106.us/history

The summer online sessions of ds106 have been opportunities to experiment with the form of a class-- as itself a performance, a narrative.

In 2011, Jim Groom modeled a character after Dr Oblivion, from the movie Video Drone, where he started by dry lecturing for the first few days. He did not tell his family he was shaving his head, and they started to worry about him. But did he close the class like that Georgia Tech MOOC? No, everything that happens is part of the narrative-- Dr Oblivion went missing, and the class was taken over by the power hungryTA, Jim Groom. The students and open participants became part of what was an evolving narrative, which included student revolts, virtual abductions, and some other dark plot turns, all played out in the media assignments students completed.

In 2012, I co-taught the summer class with Martha Burtis, crafted as a virtual summer camp experience. It was meant to be a happy, peaceful alternative to the darkness of the Summer of Oblivion, a place we called Camp Magic Macguffin, complete with rainbows and unicorns. But something sinister was operating behind the scenes, and again, the students took up the narratives and the mysteries of Shed Number 4.

Crazy right? But how more can you experiment with the course than turning it into a participatory narrative? How better to teach storytelling than to be part of one?



ds106.us/handbook/success-the-ds106-way/quick-start/

So I hope you have enjoyed this episode and gotten a taste of how different ds106 is from all those silly MOOCs. But sitting in a keynote is not enough, you have to do more. I don't want you to get mad, I want you to get creative, and share it with others.

Here is your challenge.

Are you up to it? Do I have to call Howard back in here?



set up a ds106 blog

1. Even if you have a blog, create a new blog for some ds106 experimentation, use one of the free hosted ones such as Blogger, Wordpress.com, tumblr, heck, even drupal. Open participants can use any blogging platform, as long as it has an RSS feed.



register it at ds106.us/signup

Sign your blog up to be part of ds106. It's easy. Oh, and you will need a twitter account. Visit ds106.us for our Quick Start guide that will help you get going, set up flickr, soundcloud accounts



Try doing maybe one daily create per week. Try things you may think you are not good at- for me it is drawing. But I've learned to draw on my iPad by.. trying to do it.



Explore the assignment bank. Try the random button. The assignments out of the box may not apply to a subject you teach, but there are always ways to bend and change them. Look at examples of previous work. Add comments to student blogs. Follow the #ds106 hash tag on twitter.

And make an animated GIF!



starting may 13! ds106.us

And get ready for the next summer ds106 as a performance... the signpost up ahead reads... THE DS106 ZONE.



Thanks for tuning into the show, let's exit with the music of Kevin McLeod and the Incompetech Orchestra

Play the exit music (golly.mp3)