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Photo Assignments: An Exploration of Student Retention Rate

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Borrowing ideas from the visual learning field, this project focuses on student involvement and experiencing college life. The way visualization plays a role in enhancing student involvement and attaining university retention goals is explored.

Implementation of these ideas beyond the Freshman Seminar in a variety of courses would provide additional qualitative data on retention.

Visual learning and the way it enhances memory, emotion, and cognitive abilities is at the center of this project.

The dual-coding theory shows that supplementing verbal knowledge with visual imagery enhances memory (Paivio, 2014). If memory is the retention of knowledge, can photos, as forms of visual information, enhance student experiences, connections, and serve as indicators of retention?

Allan Paivio’s Dual-Coding Theory

Q: Why use photos for more of our educational endeavors? 
A: Because the majority of our students are visual learners and their brains are primarily processing visual data as the charts below show.

Percentage of People Who Are Visual Learners: 35%

% of Information the Brain Processes That is Visual Data: 90%

From: https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Cognition_and_Instruction/Learning_and_Memory

References and Additional Resources


From: https://nlaspina.wordpress.com/2015/03/25/video-storytelling-is-the-future-of-content-marketing/

Possible avenues for the visual measurement of retention rate:

• Do students include people in their photos and if so, does this indicate a greater possibility for retention than students who shy away from photographing other people?

• Do long shots show a distancing of the student from college life as opposed to close-up shots?

• Do selfies indicate that a student thinks of himself or herself as a part of what they are imaging, thus a part of UNLV?

• What parts of a photo reveal how students “see” themselves in relation to college.

• Do these students who shy away from photographing other people engage in college life and the events, things, and people that are a part of it. In other words, the photos “say” something about their brains are primarily processing visual data as the charts below show.

Implementation of these ideas beyond the Freshman Seminar in a variety of courses would provide additional qualitative data on retention.

The Photo Assignments and Implications for Retention

A recently taught First-Year Seminar course included several assignments that got students out of the classroom and into the university environment for events such as Homecoming, Career Fairs, Civic Engagement Events, and explorations of the campus. As part of these assignments, students were asked to take photos at the events and write about them. Because all students have a cell phone with a built in camera, these assignments were possible. If a student didn't have a cell phone with camera capabilities, alternatives were prepared, but this was never an issue.

Except for the number of photos to submit for each assignment, requirements were kept to a minimum. Students, in other words, were given maximum freedom to frame their photos, decide on content, and use their phone camera software however they wanted. The photos students submitted for these assignments were interesting not only for their style, but for what they said about the ways first-year students approach and engage college life and the events, things, and people that are a part of it. In other words, the photos “say” something about how students “see” themselves in relation to college.

Possible avenues for the visual measurement of retention rate:

• Do students include people in their photos and if so, does this indicate a greater possibility for retention than students who shy away from photographing other people?

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