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Lawrence Mullen

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, lawrence.mullen@unlv.edu

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Lawrence Mullen, Ph.D.
School of Public Policy and Leadership

Photo Assignments: An Exploration of Student Retention Rate

The practice and the need it addresses

Student Retention: The Freshman Seminar

In an attempt to increase student retention and graduation rates, many colleges and universities have some sort of freshman course, or first-year seminar that serves to introduce students to college life. The course also helps students transition from high school.

Students are taught things to help them establish and maintain a good GPA, how to study, take good notes, and more. They are also taught that getting involved with the college community through clubs, associations, student government, and other groups, is also an important part of the college experience.

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.

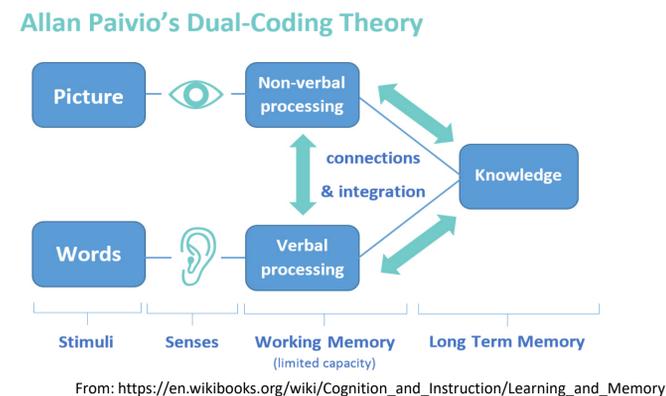
Implementation of these ideas beyond the Freshman Seminar in a variety of courses would provide additional qualitative data on retention.

Evidence this practice benefits UNLV Students

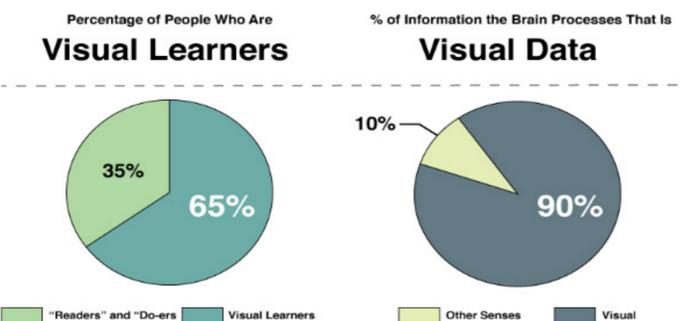
Theoretical Evidence

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?



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.



Resources and where to find them

Photographic Opportunities Around Campus

These photos were taken by students for assignments in the GSC 100 course. They are used with their permission.



Pida Plaza Involvement Event



Selfie in the Xeric Garden



Selfie Inside Barrick Museum



Greek Life Event in the Student Union



Career Day Event in Pida Plaza

Classroom Photography Resources

10 Great Ways to Use Digital Video Cameras in the Classroom. (2010). *Tech & Learning*, 31(4), 38-40.

Ewald, W. (1985). *Portraits and dreams: Photographs and stories by children of the Appalachians*. New York, Writers and Readers.

O'Hanley, H. (2017). Stepping Stones: Bringing photography to your class with limited resources. *Arts & Activities*, 162(3), 10.

Thomas, E., Place, N., & Hillyard, C. (2008). Students and Teachers Learning to See: Part 1: Using Visual Images in the College Classroom to Promote Students' Capacities and Skills. *College Teaching*, 56(1), 23-27.

How other UNLV teachers might adopt this practice

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 parts 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?
- 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?

References and Additional Resources

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