

Fostering Campus-Wide Dialogue and Student-Centered Learning through Film Festivals and Media Projects: Engaging Chinese Environmental Issues beyond the Asian Studies Classroom



ARTICLE

Based on a Luce Initiative on Asian Studies and the Environment Pilot-Year Project at Furman University

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses how film festivals and other media projects can be used to engage students in hands-on learning while also immersing campus communities in topics of broad concern. A Chinese Environmental Film Festival held at Furman University in 2015 is used as a case study to examine how students can develop festival programming, learning about films as well as developing skills related to multimedia communication, teamwork, and event planning. Beyond the students directly involved with planning the festival, faculty, staff and students from other classes also benefit from the activities related to the festival, which can be used to extend learning in their own courses. The interdisciplinary potential of film festivals and their adaptability to a wide variety of topics make them particularly well suited to liberal arts college settings, though they can be used effectively on larger campuses as well.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY INITIATIVES AND CAMPUS MEDIA PROJECTS

From 2011 through 2017, the Henry Luce Foundation provided grants to liberal arts colleges aimed at bringing teaching about Asia beyond courses specifically about the continent and, likewise, expanding discussion of environmental issues within courses focused on Asia. The idea that science-focused courses would be strengthened by drawing on situations facing Asian countries and communities was welcomed by many faculty participants, but finding ways to help these faculty members quickly gain expertise in an area studies field beyond their usual topical training required some creative strategizing (cf. Henry Luce Foundation 2017). At Furman University in South Carolina, a Luce Initiative on Asian Studies and the Environment (LIASE) exploratory grant (2014–15) focused specifically on China. In order to jump-start the new campus initiative, help both science faculty and area studies specialists quickly learn about environmental issues in China, and energize students whose enthusiasm could strengthen our efforts, we organized the Chinese Environmental Film Festival in February 2015. Documentaries and feature films screened at the festival would provide context for faculty traveling to, and teaching about, China. Festivals like this could also be incorporated into existing courses, complementing teaching responsibilities. Beyond the direct effects on faculty participants, initiatives like the Chinese Environmental Film Festival offer excellent opportunities for engaged learning by foregrounding dialogue and discussion and giving students key roles in festival planning and execution. Students can become involved with issues beyond the classroom, building skills

and experiences that enhance their courses' relevance. Where full-blown festivals are not feasible, course-based media-related assignments can fulfill similar objectives on a smaller scale. This article explores the rationale behind using films as a launchpad for significant learning experiences and discusses our experience implementing a festival, offering evidence-based strategies for implementing effective media pedagogy projects.

STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING AND SIGNIFICANT LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Over the past two decades, educational theorists have emphasized the importance of using active learning strategies to create “significant learning experiences” for students in college classrooms (Bean 2011; Fink 2013). According to L. Dee Fink, significant learning occurs when courses not only help students acquire foundational knowledge but also allow them to apply what they learn and integrate their knowledge with other realms beyond the classroom. On a less tangible level, significant learning involves learning more about one’s own learning process, learning more about the human dimensions involved in a topic, and honing a set of feelings, interests, and values related to the course, what Fink calls “caring” (2005). *Figure 1* presents a chart developed by Fink to encompass these six areas. Fink argues that for the most effective outcome, all six elements in the taxonomy should be integrated in a course (2005).

In a booklet published by the Associated Colleges of the South, Diane Persellin and Mary Blythe Daniels (2012) provide further support for Fink’s exhortations that learning be extended beyond a passive lecture

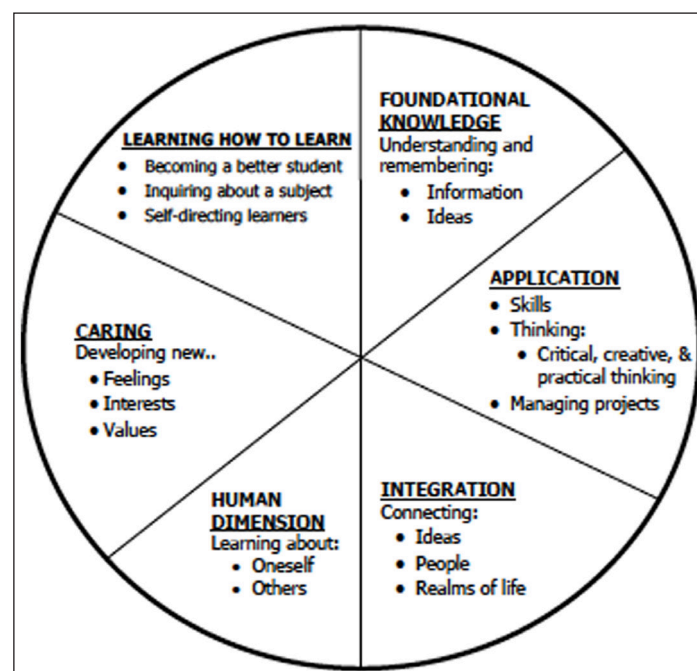


Figure 1 A Taxonomy of Significant Learning, by L. Dee Fink. (Figure from Fink 2005, 9; Figure 1).

approach. They explain the rationale for learner-centered instruction:

Learning is not necessarily determined by what a teacher “covers” in class, but also by students actively building an understanding of core concepts in their own minds. People learn most effectively when they are engaged in a meaningful and challenging activity. (Persellin and Daniels 2012, 3)

To help students construct their own understandings, many university faculty have reshaped their courses around experiential learning and community-based learning projects. Though community and civic engagement can sometimes seem like the latest buzzwords bandied about in higher education, a growing body of research emphasizes the strong learning outcomes and significant learning experiences that can result from these approaches (Kolb 2014; Wurdinger and Carlson 2010). Randy Bass (2012) goes further, advocating a disruption of standard course-centric pedagogical practices in what he calls the “post-course era.” In his vision, reshaping courses to incorporate more meaningful, experiential components is a necessary practice in an academic environment that has already moved beyond a narrow pedagogical framework.

FILM AS PEDAGOGY

Meanwhile, scholars have been steadily building a case for film viewing and discussion as a key pedagogical practice. At first glance, sitting in the dark for minutes on end may seem the direct opposite of a student-centered, active learning approach. But Henry A. Giroux (2011), bell hooks (2008), and others have argued that films can serve as the entrée into critical discussions, in a format compelling to students. In an interview with Kelvin Shawn Sealy in *Film, Politics & Education*, hooks explains, “People will, when you explain something to them just coldly, theoretically—a lot of times my students will say, well I don’t get it. But if they watch a film and I begin to break down with them to deconstruct with them what’s happening in the film, they see things completely differently, which is why film is one of the best tools for critical pedagogy” (hooks 2008, 148). Hooks continues, “Media is the pedagogy of our times.” Indeed, the use of films for teaching purposes has moved well beyond the earliest days of educational films (Orgeron, Orgeron, and Streible 2012).

Giroux notes that films possess a particular power for holding viewers’ focus; unlike television shows or other mediated experiences, “Young people inhabit a culture in which watching film demands a certain degree of attention” (2011, 689). Moreover, they can bring viewers into complex, conflicting situations without requiring

any physical relocation. This can be especially useful in the context of courses focusing on other parts of the world, when immersion would be ideal but travel is cost-prohibitive, unsafe, or impractical for other reasons. Finally, films compel reflection. As Giroux explains, “Films both shape and bear witness to the ethical and political dilemmas that animate the broader social landscape, and they often raise fundamental questions about how we can think about politics and political agency in light of such recognition” (2011, 692).

THE CHINESE ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL AT FURMAN UNIVERSITY

Film festivals are an example of how learner-centered pedagogy can draw on the power of films to offer significant promise for active learning. As core components of classes that permit intensive viewing and extensive discussion about films, festivals can also create shared viewing communities that broaden participation and enrich analyses. When coupled with assignments related to the screenings, campus festivals may also create new resources for future study and teaching.

Inspired by the Chinese Ethnographic Film Festival and Workshop organized by Maris Gillette at Haverford College, where I had screened a film in 2012 (Gillette 2014), I proposed that we hold a Chinese Environmental Film Festival at Furman. I had previously organized two campus film festivals at the University of Washington Bothell and a community film festival at the Mosuo Folk Museum in southwest China (cf. Blumenfield Kedar 2010), and knew firsthand how powerful festivals could be. Our planning began in September 2014 and culminated in a three-day festival that I directed in February 2015, with the enthusiastic support of the LIASE grant directors, Political Science and Asian Studies professor Kate Kaup and Earth and Environmental Sciences professor Wes Dripps. The festival became a key activity of the LIASE exploratory grant (see Crouse and Richey 2014).

Because our festival required travel expenses for two filmmakers from China and several filmmakers and experts from the U.S., we needed to be diligent in our fundraising efforts. The Furman Humanities Development Fund and the David E. Shi Center for Sustainability provided significant funding support, as did the Furman University Libraries. The festival became a central component of my 2015 First Year Seminar (FYS) course, *Debunking the Myths of China*, and therefore also qualified for support from the university’s First Year Seminar Committee. Two student groups and six academic departments, majors and minors all contributed.¹ Finally, the National Council on U.S.-China Relations Public Intellectuals Program, funded by the Henry Luce and Starr Foundations, provided support for the festival. The festival could still have proceeded without this significant financial support,

but being able to bring guests to campus made it much more dynamic and engaging.

With funding secured, films were selected for the festival and filmmakers invited to participate before the semester began. The goal of the festival was to promote dialogue and discussion, so we looked for people who had made films about environmental topics in China and could travel to South Carolina for the festival. We sought films that could be acquired by the university libraries with institutional use licenses that would allow us to screen them on campus without paying separate screening fees, because this allowed us to leverage funds already allocated by the library units for media purchases.² Finally, we looked for compelling films that would engage audiences. Selected films included:

- *The Other Half* (Ying Liang, 2006, 111 min.), a narrative feature film set in a city oriented around a chemical plant and its threats (<http://icarusfilms.com/df-toh>).
- *Waking the Green Tiger* (Gary Marcuse, 2011, 78 min.), a documentary about dam construction in Yunnan Province (<https://gej.docuseek2.com/gj-033a>).
- *Beijing Besieged by Waste* (Wang Juliang, 2011, 72 min.), a documentary spotlighting Beijing's landfills and those whose livelihoods come from the landfills (<https://www.dgeneratefilms.com/catalog/BEIJING-BESIEGED-BY-WASTE> and <https://gej.docuseek2.com/gj-006a>).
- *Food and Sustainability in China: Documentary Shorts* (works in progress by Fuji Lozada, Jeff Mittelstadt, Tom DeMarzo, Antonia Giles, Xiaoyun Liu, John-Michael Murphy, Lucy Sexton, and Liz Stevens, 2014), a pair of documentaries about organic farming and food systems in the Shanghai region, produced by students of Davidson College professor Fuji Lozada (<https://issuu.com/davidsonjournal/docs/davidson-journal-winter-2015>, pp. 15-17).
- 农家乐 *Peasant Family Happiness* (Jenny Chio, 2013, 70 min.), a documentary about two villages embracing tourism in rural China (https://www.berkeleymedia.com/product/peasant_family_happiness/).
- *Badzu Village* (Tami Blumenfield, 2014, 12 min.), a documentary about a Mosuo family whose village and relationship patterns are undergoing profound transformations (see <https://www.dgeneratefilms.com/post/furman-university-hosts-chinese-environmental-film-festival-this-week>).
- *Shielding the Mountains* (Emily T. Yeh and Kunga Lama, 2010, 20 min.), a documentary about environmental ethics and activism in Tibet (<http://www.tibetsacredmountain.org/>).
- *Environmental Protection Values in Daba Rituals* (Onci Archei and Ruheng Duoji, 2014), a documentary about the relationship of animist practices and *daba* ritual specialists to environmentalist ideas in Mosuo communities (see <http://blogs.furman.edu/library-news/2015/02/22/chinese-environmental-film-festival/>).

STUDENT TEAMS: RESEARCHING FILMS AND PREPARING FOR THE CHINESE ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL

At the start of my Debunking the Myths of China FYS course, I created heterogeneous teams of four or five students who would work together on both film research and festival planning, following guidelines of effective team-based learning (Michaelsen, Knight, and Fink 2003; Sweet and Michaelsen 2012). To determine what responsibilities each team would take, I held brief meetings with each team on the second day of class and asked students to share any strengths they thought would be relevant. I learned that two students were talented actors, several were musicians, at least one was experienced in video editing, several had graphic design experience, two spoke and wrote Chinese, and two were cheerleaders. Not every talent ended up being used, but it helped us think through possibilities while communicating to students that I valued their expertise. Each team took on responsibility for an element of festival preparations: building a social media presence, creating a commercial to advertise the festival, developing other forms of publicity, or planning the catering (**Figure 2**). Each team was also assigned to a particular film, tasked with watching and analyzing it in advance, then preparing questions for filmmakers to be asked during the festival.

Planning a festival with student teams that depended on one another posed some challenges, necessitating the teams have patience. For example, the Facebook page could not be completed without the festival logo, which was still under development. The commercial written and edited by one team of students required participation from classmates on other teams, who helped film and act in the commercial. The commercial, in turn, helped the social media team better publicize the festival. Class sessions had to be flexible as well, given students' busy out-of-class schedules and their challenges in coordinating meeting times. (Needing additional time beyond the class session, one team ended up meeting at 11:00 p.m., the only time they were all available.) On one occasion, I had to abandon a planned discussion session about the book chapter students had read for the day's class so that we could film the commercial.

A student on the catering team later commented on how much trust I had placed in the students by placing responsibility for essential tasks related to the film festival in their hands. While I did indeed trust the students, I also supervised their progress closely as something of a "guide on the side" (King 1993). Thus when the student on the catering team who had been directly communicating with the university catering staff abruptly left the university several weeks into the semester, I was able to quickly step in and do some damage control. Overall, though, the students exceeded my expectations with their creativity, efforts, and dedication. The tongue-in-cheek commercial they developed was effective at



Figure 2 First Year Seminar: Debunking the Myths of China students with their newly created banner. All photographs in this article courtesy of the author.

enticing other students to come to the festival.³ The students created a Twitter account for the festival (@CEFF2k15), a Facebook event page, and an Instagram account, and their heavy promotion of these through invitations and “follow” requests also generated buzz around campus.⁴ Meanwhile, university public relations staff rounded out our efforts by creating a website, retweeting social media posts, writing articles about the festival, and designing a poster.⁵ By the time the festival opened, we had effectively blanketed the campus with publicity. (See [Appendix 1](#) for a complete list of publicity efforts developed for the film festival).

All films that had formal distribution were available for checkout from the university library, and students also found *Waking the Green Tiger* streaming online in Chinese. The films that were works in progress were harder for the students to research, but they were provided with access to whatever materials I was able to obtain prior to the festival, including information about the filmmakers. Students submitted short responses to the films and potential questions to ask at the festival individually, then worked with their teammates to select five questions to ask. The assignment also involved learning more about the backgrounds and expertise of those who would be providing commentary after the films.⁶

OUTCOMES AND REACTIONS FOLLOWING THE CHINESE ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL

The broad group of supporters, students, faculty, and staff who played key roles in planning and implementing the festival, particularly the faculty and student participants involved with the LIASE grant, helped ensure the festival’s success.⁷ The group of carefully chosen visiting filmmakers and scholars, including two from Yunnan Province in China and six others from four different US

states, also created a vibrant dynamic ([Figure 3](#)). Having filmmakers from China in attendance was especially important, giving participants an opportunity to hear directly from and interact with people producing media about environmental issues.

Many post-screening conversations touched on complex topics, raising some of the fundamental questions Giroux had suggested films could (2011, 692). How might the interests of local people seeking to benefit from tourism conflict with needs of the tourists for certain standards of accommodations? What ecological impacts will these activities have? Thinking through these questions required considering anthropological viewpoints, philosophical questions, historical contexts, and economic analyses. Furthermore, many discussions addressed a key question: what are effective strategies for representing these questions and situations on film? Exploring this question helped guide students and other audience members as they responded to the films.

In its “Trending” section, the March 5, 2015 edition of Furman’s student newspaper, the *Paladin*, listed the Chinese Environmental Film Festival as an example of what liberal arts education should be, with many different types of disciplines represented. FYS student and Shi Center for Sustainability Arthur Vining Davis Foundation Fellow Kate Stevens wrote a lengthy blog post reflecting on the connections she experienced because of the festival, which allowed her to deepen her knowledge of China, her interest in documentary filmmaking, and her exploration of environmental issues:

Entire science classes, Asian Culture department heads, along with generally interested students attended the Festival, and together, learned something new about the environmental

problems in China. I think all those involved with planning, organizing, and facilitating the Festival did a wonderful job of creating an interesting learning environment where people with varying degrees of knowledge could come together and interact without feeling unprepared or misinformed. It was an educational experience that I enjoyed because it allowed me the chance to learn about environmental issues, but also see different filming and documentary techniques, which I can apply to my Fellowship at the Shi Center. (Stevens 2015)

The “interesting learning environment” where people from different backgrounds and levels of expertise could

share an experience was one of the most powerful aspects of the festival. Commenting on the atmosphere created through collective viewing, bell hooks explained, “Part of why I still love to go to the movies when it is packed with people, is to have that collective sense of mutually watching something and mutual response gauge, like when people are laughing at a particular point and be able to respond” (2008, 154). Indeed, we found that viewing the films together, hearing audience responses, and seeing what questions emerged after the screenings gave educators important, immediate feedback that could guide their post-festival teaching (Figure 4).

In addition to the post-film discussions with experts, with critical commentary and question-and-answer

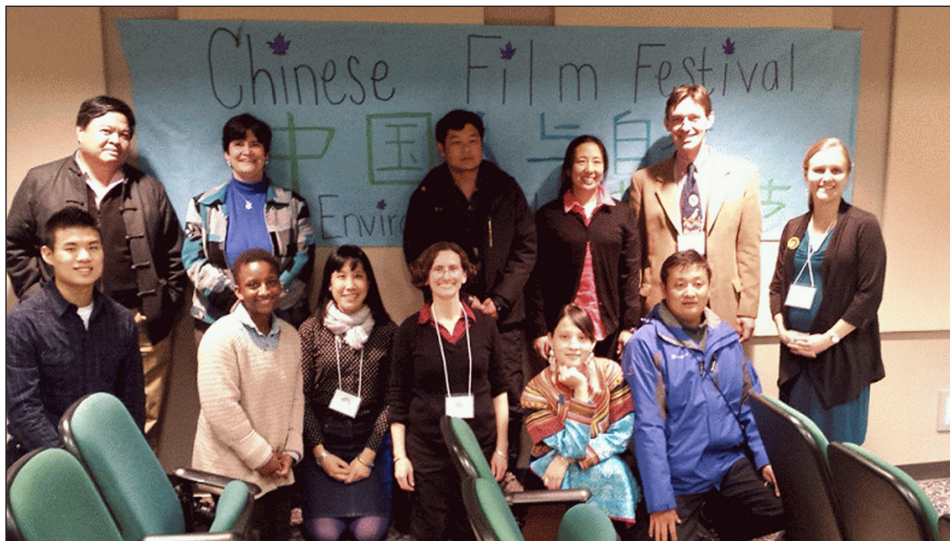


Figure 3 Filmmakers, guests, and hosts during the festival.

Back row, left to right: Eriberto “Fuji” Lozada (Davidson College), Kate Kaup (Furman), Onci Archei (Mosuo Folk Museum), Emily Yeh (University of Colorado Boulder), Darrin Magee (Hobart and William Smith Colleges), Yancey Fouché (Furman). *Front row, left to right:* Sun Lee (Furman), Antonia Giles (Davidson), Jenny Chio (Emory), Tami Blumenfield (Furman), Kaitlin Banfill (Emory), Ruheng Duoji (Mosuo Folk Museum).



Figure 4 Saturday morning festival screening.



Figure 5 Photos from Chinese Environmental Film Festival informal discussions.

sessions, receptions following most screenings helped extend conversations as well (Figure 5). Students attending screenings just to earn credit usually grabbed some snacks and headed off, but for faculty LIASE participants, Student Task Force members, and others intrigued by the films, these receptions provided important opportunities for informal interaction.

The festival was particularly meaningful for Chinese students, many of whom had voiced frustration about how little Furman students knew about their country. Ying, a Student Task Force member from Fujian, China, wrote to us, “Thanks for hosting a meaningful and inspiring Chinese film festival. It offers me lots of insights and leads me [to] think more than ever about the environmental issues in China.”⁸ One FYS student wrote in her end-of-course reflection:

Taking debunking myths of China is a really fruitful experience for me. The most important thing I learned about China from this class is China’s environmental issue, which I never thought that it could be this bad. Living in China for more than 18 years, I realized that I knew so limited about my home country, even less than some Americans do. Becoming part of the Chin[ese] Environmental Film Festival is a life-changing experience for me, and what I learned from those movies, especially from *Beijing Besieged by Waste* and *Waking the Green Tiger*, will be the reason for me to go home and start my career in China.

Other students from the FYS class expressed surprise that they were able to interact with experts and commented on how valuable they found the perspectives of the filmmakers from China. Austin, an FYS student from South Carolina who helped design the festival logo, commented

simply, “The CEFF was a big success!” Other responses from FYS students have been reported by Erikah Haavie (2015), who interviewed several students following the festival and incorporated their comments into an article on Furman’s news and events website entitled “Film Festival Explores the Realities of China’s Environmental Crisis.” Amanda, a member of the LIASE Student Task Force and a campus environmental activist, also appreciated the festival. She emailed afterward, “I’m so glad I had the opportunity to be a part of the festival! It was a really incredible experience that I think many people appreciated.”

Not every student loved the experience. *The Other Half*, a lengthy and somewhat experimental narrative feature, generated significant confusion and disenchantment—it was probably not the best choice for the opening-night film, despite its critical acclaim (cf. Brody, n.d.). Many students in the audience, attending to obtain credit toward Furman’s Cultural Life Program (students must attend thirty-two of these campus events before they graduate, or four each semester) or to receive extra credit for their science courses, had little familiarity with China, and something that “starts out as a work of cool, wry modernism but soon turns into a fierce and harrowing cry of political rage” (Brody, n.d.) was more intense than many had anticipated. Finding a better way to prepare these attendees, or choosing films that would provide more context for screenings likely to attract large audiences, would have been ideal. Then again, the jarring aspects of films like *The Other Half* may well have jolted attendees out of any preconceived ideas about China they held prior to the screening. Overall, most students left the screenings intrigued, if a little confused or overwhelmed at times, and faculty and staff responded enthusiastically. (For more details on the range of reactions, see [Appendix 2: Responses to Post-Film Questionnaire for *Beijing Besieged by Waste*](#).)

DEVELOPING MEANINGFUL ASSIGNMENTS THAT BUILD FILM-RELATED RESOURCES: FIVE APPROACHES

The Chinese Environmental Film Festival was an exciting opportunity for films to become springboards for additional learning. Beyond an entire film festival, how else can courses include assignments that engage students and help them share what they have learned with an audience beyond their teacher and classmates? The assignments discussed below offer other ways that students can reflect on viewings or communicate research on specific films to broader audiences, often using creative means to express their ideas. These assignments aim to integrate the six dimensions proposed by Fink (2005) to result in significant learning, with an emphasis on applying foundational knowledge and integrating different aspects of learning (see [Figure 6](#)).

VIEWING AND RESPONSE JOURNALS

Films resonate in very different ways with viewers, based on their own unique backgrounds and experiences. I have found the most effective way to tease out student responses that display this personal engagement is through a viewing journal. Writing responses forces students to engage in some reflection and prepares them for more robust discussions with their classmates following viewings. Creating a journal entry also helps students prepare to present their responses in class, something that is particularly helpful for students

learning English or students who find contributing spontaneously to class discussion a challenging task.

Journal entries need not be composed as typewritten digital documents. Students could hand-write their entries and submit them as bound notebooks. They could draw, create a comic, or share their thoughts in some other graphic format. Or they could share their response in a Facebook group created for smaller-group class discussions (cf. Blumenfield 2014). Whatever format is chosen, students should prepare a reflective essay commenting on their entries and their relation to other course content before submitting their completed journals. This offers an important way to synthesize the disparate journal entries and also gives students an opportunity to compare their overall responses with classmates.

YOUTUBE “FAN VIDEOS” AND VIDEO COMMENTARIES

Creating “fan videos” is another way for students to share their reactions in a format that allows a broad audience to engage with their ideas. Creating and posting a short YouTube video commentary about one film can be an effective activity for student pairs.⁹ Students could write scripts for their commentary and offer feedback to one another before using a webcam or camera to film their short video. Posting students’ videos to a shared YouTube channel would facilitate easy access to various student commentaries on films and amplify the videos’ reach. Fair use policies normally permit the incorporation of materials into education-related projects, but navigating

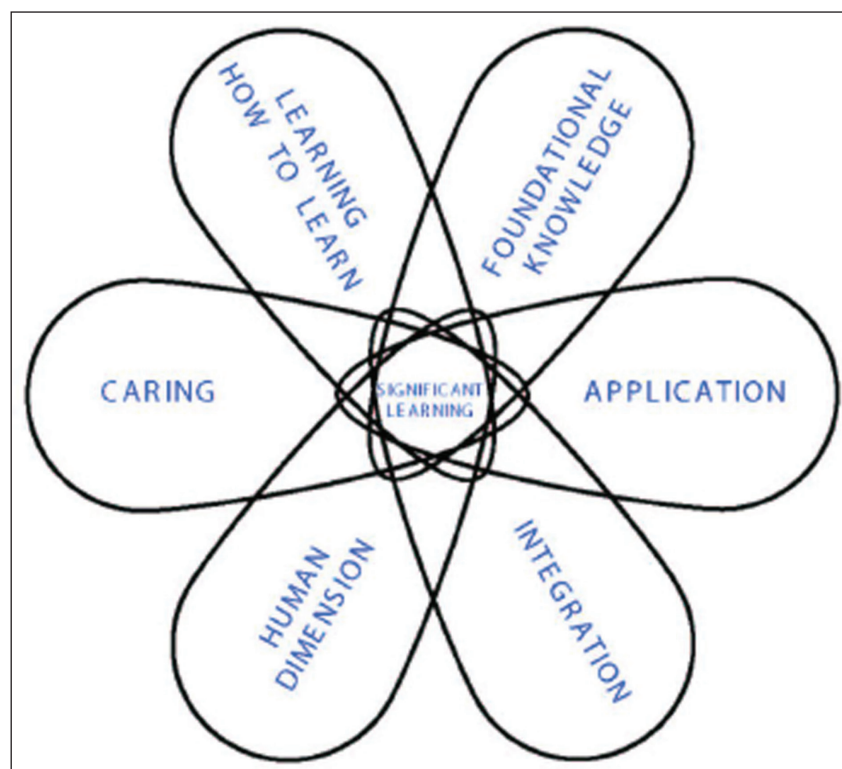


Figure 6 Interactive Nature of Significant Learning, by L. Dee Fink (Fink 2005, 10).

through copyright regulations could also provide an important learning experience related to academic integrity and the ethics of information-sharing.

CHINESE FILM COMMENTARY WEBSITE OR BLOG

Since tracking down Chinese documentaries, particularly those without US or international distribution, can be difficult, students could help create a blog or website with information about films. A blog similar to the WordPress blog developed by students in the Debunking the Myths of China course (located at <http://blogs.furman.edu/chinamyths>) could be used as a model. Student commentary on and links related to Chinese independent documentaries and films could be paired with existing resources. Screenshots from the films can offer viewers who cannot access the films some limited visual perspective as well.

WIKIPEDIA OR IMDB ENTRIES

Editing Wikipedia pages or Internet Movie Database (IMDb, <http://www.imdb.com/>) entries is another way students could build practical skills—and classes could discuss information literacy—while helping provide more information about films. Students could create or edit wiki pages related to a particular film or director. If an individual meets the Wikipedia guidelines for inclusion, referred to as “notability,” a new page could be created (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Notability>).¹⁰ For example, Wang Jiuliang, the director of *Beijing Besieged by Waste and Plastic China*, could be the subject of a new page. If the person does not meet Wikipedia notability guidelines, then other Wiki options could be pursued.

IMDb content related to Chinese independent film is also relatively sparse. Students could add information about filmmakers’ works and also provide ratings for films. For this or for Wikipedia, the research students conduct in the process of updating, filling in, or creating entries would be an effective way to apply knowledge through inquiry-based learning activities.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Could students work to develop Facebook groups devoted to films, create a Twitter hashtag for a particular documentary, or start WeChat groups about a media work they found intriguing? Could students make TikTok videos with their thoughts about Chinese films or create BuzzFeed-style quizzes or lists? As technology platforms develop and rise in popularity, encouraging students to integrate research they do with formats they and others find attractive may be worth exploring. Privacy issues and university aversion to allowing instructors to influence social media content could preclude required use of these options, but offering them as possibilities may be a good way to help students engage others on platforms they use already.¹¹ Hopefully this would help

students see what they have learned in a course as more broadly relevant.

CONCLUSION

Film festivals are meaningful ways to involve students in their learning and, in the case of a full-scale public film festival, generate excitement across the college or university. Organizing a film festival is a major undertaking that requires broad collaborations and networks of support, but the process of building these connections can also become an important learning experience. And smaller-scale viewing and film research experiences that do not go beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom can also serve as platforms for discussion that expand available resources.

In *Teaching with Your Mouth Shut*, Finkel writes, “When a student writes an essay that will be read by only one person, and when that one person is his teacher, and when the teacher’s main reason for reading the paper is to judge the quality of the writing, the student is engaging in a triply unnatural act” (2000, 82; emphasis in original). Students who help create materials that contribute to further critical commentary on media works and add to information about them can participate in conversations with audiences that extend well beyond their classrooms. These assignments thus fulfill Finkel’s exhortations that we give students opportunities to write for a general audience (81), in the hopes that more meaningful learning experiences will result. Furthermore, unlike the standard academic essay, these assignments offer authentic opportunities for writing, developing and expressing ideas. Encouraging students to contribute to a lasting legacy of materials that can be utilized by future students can result in very positive course outcomes. Collectively, projects like the one we carried out at Furman may serve as some small bridge to deeper understanding on campuses that are slowly growing less homogenous. They may also encourage others around campus, not only those from Asian and environmental studies programs, to draw on the enormous benefits of film-based pedagogy (Sealy 2008).

REFLECTIONS ON THE FESTIVAL AS A LIASE PROJECT

The campus-wide film festival was an excellent supplement to a summer faculty workshop held nine months before the festival and good preparation for a LIASE-funded trip to China held the following summer. The process of preparing the festival and working together to carry it out brought the LIASE faculty group and the LIASE student fellows closer together. It allowed us to engage with Chinese partners who would interact with us and share their expertise again during the summer trip (*Figure 7*). Through their different



Figure 7 Furman University LIASE participants, accompanied by Yunnan Minzu University faculty and students, at Lugu Lake, June 2015. Ruheng Duoji (back row, far right), one of the filmmakers who traveled to the United States for the festival, guided the group on a tour of the lake region. Duoji had shared the lake's creation story with the group just before the photograph was taken.

contributions to the festival, including organizing events and responding to classroom assignments, students were fully immersed in course content and pedagogy. Along with the other initiatives, the festival also demonstrated that Furman was well prepared to carry out a full-scale implementation grant, which the Luce Foundation awarded the following year (cf. Marcum 2018). By jumpstarting campus conversations linking Asian studies and environmental issues, the festival boosted visibility of the Chinese environmental initiative in natural science departments and exposed a broad range of people to Chinese environmental topics. As for the students, while some thought planning a film festival during an academic course was a wacky idea, others remembered it as a highlight of their time at Furman.

NOTES

- 1 Academic units included Asian Studies, Modern Languages & Literatures, Biology, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Anthropology, and Film Studies. Student groups including the Bartram Society and the Environmental Action Group offered substantial support as well.
- 2 For example, I asked the library to purchase *The Other Half* (<http://licarusfilms.com/df-toh>). The institutional rate of \$295 included public performance rights.
- 3 The commercial did provoke concern from other faculty, who felt the tongue-in-cheek tone inappropriate given the seriousness of the festival topic. I brought this concern to the students, and it inspired a thoughtful discussion. However, the commercial had been inspired by an earlier class assignment. That first assignment of the course had been a reflective essay requiring students to interview people around the university, asking, "What do you know about China, and from where does your knowledge

- about China come?" Many people responded with extremely stereotyped remarks or confessed they knew very little; the commercial played with those responses. Also, we did not want the festival to be a somber occasion where we mourned China's problems, but rather a broader look at many facets of China's environment. Thus while I appreciate their concerns, I stand behind the commercial as an effective way to bring students to the festival, where the substantive discussions with expert commentary after carefully selected films would take place.
- 4 620 people were invited through the official Facebook page; 74 responded that they would attend, and 19 responded that they might attend, generating a respectable 15% response rate.
 - 5 Erikah Haavie developed a [press release](#) issued by Marketing and Public Relations and also wrote an article in the university publication *Furman Edge*.
 - 6 For details about experts providing commentary and filmmaker participants, see the festival schedule: <http://blogs.furman.edu/library-news/2015/02/22/chinese-environmental-film-festival/>.
 - 7 Chief among them were the official Chinese Environmental Film Festival planning committee members listed above. The other faculty participants in the LIASE exploratory grant also made significant contributions, helping host the visiting filmmakers, providing expert commentary after films, moderating post-film discussions, and encouraging or requiring their students to attend film sessions. The LIASE Student Task Force, coordinated by Dennis Haney and Yancey Fouché, also helped enormously with the festival. Members of the task force took turns filming festival discussions, translating for visiting filmmakers, and generally welcoming the filmmakers and guests. Several students took turns filming; one interviewed filmmakers for her senior thesis; and two others attended nearly every session and helped interpret between English and Chinese. Another student helped train the student videographers and spent hours editing footage after the film festival. Beyond Furman, Jenny Chio, then at Emory University, worked closely with me on festival planning, stepping in to provide commentary when a late change created a gap in the program, and coordinating logistics by hosting and transporting the Chinese filmmakers from Emory University in Atlanta to Furman in South Carolina. Emory doctoral student Kaitlin Banfill also helped enormously, providing interpretation for the Chinese visitors throughout the festival and during the workshop discussions afterward.

- 8 All quotations from student feedback and commentary are given verbatim.
- 9 Fan videos span numerous genres, including the setting of selected screenshots set to music and mini-videos using lists and commentary. For an example of the latter variety, see “Top 10 Bruce Lee Moments” by WatchMojo.com (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Se1y2R5QRKU>).
- 10 Guidelines are available here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Notability_\(people\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Notability_(people)).
- 11 For a discussion of privacy issues involved with classroom use of social media, see Blumenfield 2014.

ADDITIONAL FILES

The additional files for this article can be found as follows

- **Appendix 1.** Publicizing the Chinese Environmental Film Festival. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/ane.305.s1>
- **Appendix 2.** Responses to Post-Film Questionnaire for Beijing Besieged by Waste. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/ane.305.s2>

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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