



# Media Education Lab

## First Star URI RAM Academy Final report 2012

Submitted to



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## Overview

In July 2012, twenty-two students aged 14-16 from the foster care system in Rhode Island came to the University of Rhode Island (URI) and worked with staff of the Media Education Lab to deepen their media literacy and social media competencies as part of the First Star Academy.

In collaboration with the URI Division of Student Affairs and the Department of Communication Studies, we provided two credit-bearing courses on digital media focusing on social networks and videography. In the Social Networks class, students learned to use three different social networks (Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr) to communicate with each other and perform research on any subject. A significant amount of time was devoted to anti-bullying activities and responsible use of the Internet. In the Videography class, students learned to critically analyze and produce commercials and music videos; they worked collaboratively or individually to create final projects of their choosing. At the end of the program, students had created more than 30 short videos which were screened in a closing ceremony. Each student had also experienced writing an email, posting a comment, uploading a picture and conducting research on the web. Today, the students continue to communicate through a secure Facebook group.

First Star and Adoption RI collaborated with the University of Rhode Island to develop this program and a number of generous partners at the University of Rhode Island supported this project including the Harrington School of Communication and Media, the Curriculum Materials Library (CML), and Information Technology Services (ITS).

Success of the program can be seen in many different ways: the active Facebook group, the telling content of the students' videos, their critical media observations, and the students' own insightful course reflections. Participants in the program observed the profound and meaningful experience the students underwent in the three weeks.

However, this report is not a program assessment or evaluation. Instead, this report summarizes the experiences of the staff of the Media Education Lab who developed and implemented the courses. The Project Manager, Jonathan Friesem, wishes to thank Kelsey Greene, Tim Tierney, Lisa Provorova and Dr. Renee Hobbs, who participated in the design, implementation and assessment of the program. We are happy to submit the report to First Star URI Ram Academy with our summary of the project and recommendations for the future.

## Some Program Numbers

- **How long was the program?** 3 weeks between Sunday July 8th and Sunday July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012
- **What was the instructional design?** 2 courses, 18 sessions, a total of 44.5 hours of class
- **Who participated?** 22 students, 19 students entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 2 students entering 10<sup>th</sup> grade, one student entering 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 2 students left the academy prior to the end
- **Who did the teaching?** 3 course instructors and 1 research assistant who made observations for 53.5 hours
- **Who were the staff?** 12 staff members of First Star, 3 of whom were managers
- **How many librarians were involved?** 4 librarians, 1 being the director of CML
- **How many PowerPoint presentations?** 13, consisting of 250 slides
- **How much technology?** 30 computers (donated mini Dell netbooks) installed by the instructors
- **How many video cameras?** 25 donated Flip cameras for the students, 3 of which were not functioning
- **How did students work together?** There were 7 assigned groups for first 2 video projects (commercials and music videos); 7 different groups for final projects
- **How many projects?** 21 short video projects, 7 commercials, 7 music videos, 7 final projects and 26 additional materials, 22 self-reflection videos, 4 video games created by students
- **How many media texts were analyzed?** 9 commercials and 5 music videos
- **How did students use social media?** 12 active students in the Facebook secure group, 6 active staff and instructors, 72 posts as of August 2012 in the Facebook page, 36 student posts, 235 comments, 147 student comments, 223 likes, 207 student likes

## Learning Objectives and Instructional Methods

The First Star Academy aims to engage foster youth with participation in a college academic setting. In the courses we developed, we wanted develop student communication skills, self-esteem and self-expression by increasing their competencies in collaborative work with video production to develop critical analysis and civic engagement. More specifically, students were expected to gain video production skills by learning to imagine, create, produce, direct, record, and edit a video. Using key media literacy questions, students were expected to critically analyze commercials, music videos, and other media forms. The civic engagement goal was aimed at connecting the students with a supportive community through digital media by encouraging them to communicate and reflect on their social relationships using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. By fostering their self-expression, students learned to raise their voices, listen to others, and explore their personal and social identity.

**Teamwork.** A team of instructors collaborated to construct the two courses. Jonathan Friesem took a leadership role allocating lesson plans, tasks, meetings and deadlines. Kelsey Greene developed the media literacy and social networking lesson plans and reviewed all class materials. Timothy Tierney focused on video editing lessons and assistance with technological coordination. All three instructors took control of different lessons and shared classroom-

teaching time. The instructors used well-established principles of informal learning, including careful blending of play and learning; opportunities for individual and group work; respect for the process of collaboration; and a blend of structure and freedom in activities. Dr. Renee Hobbs, the founding director of the Harrington School of Communication and Media, was also available throughout the program and met regularly with the team for guidance with the lesson plans and the instructional methods.

**Curriculum Planning and Revision.** Before the program began, instructors began to develop goals and objectives and developed a written curriculum plan. The instructors decided on the overall timeline together and then divided responsibilities for developing the daily curriculum. Every lesson plan was reviewed as a group and each instructor also had the opportunity to practice the lesson using the required technology (such as the Smartboard) before the program began.

The curriculum was divided into three sections with a theme for each week: advertisements, music videos, and documentaries. Each theme would be explored through discussions, screening, social networking and media production. The participants would produce collaboratively in small groups a video every week. They would also design their Facebook page and write posts about their experience to document their time in the program.

When the course began, the instructors recognized the limitations of the curriculum design, which placed a large emphasis on the three distinct videos and confined the use of social media platforms to narrow tasks. The instructors quickly discovered the curriculum needed to be dynamic in order to adequately fit the needs of students and the situational factors concerning access to technology and scheduling.

To provide highly individualized learning, instructors began to divide a single lesson into three sequential or concurring activities: students rotated through a series of three activities in one classroom period. This approach enabled us to cover more content and give more time flexibility for task completion. When one instructor would teach the class as a whole, the other two would go around helping students and ensuring all were attentive. As a result, social media was integrated into a variety of classroom activities. Instructors asked students to answer questions on an online platform rather than just responding out loud in class. This ensured widespread participation among all learners.

Lastly, the focus on documentary production was eliminated due to time constraints. Instead, the final video project encouraged students to use any format that showcased a message the students wanted to share about foster care. This decision was made because the instructors felt it was more important to focus on the content of the last video and ensure a quality production rather than teaching the students additional video skills about a new genre.

**Video Production Skills.** Every student had the opportunity to produce, direct, record (with Flip camera), and edit (with iMovie) multiple video forms. Every student was able to practice the varying skills because they were in groups of three and they created multiple videos with different roles for each. The first video production project was a commercial where the students were given 30 seconds to make an ad for one of the Academy sponsors who served as their 'client.' The second video project was a one-minute music video consisting of a song of their

choice. The students had more creative freedom with this project, but also were required to include a story within their video. The third video project was the most open with the main requirement being that it had to include a message of the students' choice about foster care. The video projects were ordered as such to gradually increase production skill, difficulty and to give students confidence to create more creative and expressive videos. For each video project, students conceptualized an idea, wrote a script, filled out a storyboard, recorded the required shots, and edited the final piece.

**Critical Analysis of Media.** Students used critical questions to analyze a variety of media texts. Students used a 'remote control' created by Renee Hobbs that has five questions listed on it:

1. Who is the author and what is the purpose?
2. What techniques attract your attention?
3. What lifestyle, values and points of view are represented?
4. How might different people interpret the message differently?
5. What is omitted?

The students analyzed many TV commercials and music videos using the 'remote controls' in small groups, individually, and as a class with an instructor. The class even had a discussion about other media forms that could be analyzed using the 'remote control' and examples such as billboards, magazines, and songs came up. As an out of class assignment, students answered a 'remote control' question about various media messages posted by the instructor on the Facebook group.

**Civic Engagement.** Students became more civically engaged throughout the program by carrying their participation onto the social media platforms and class communities created there. At the beginning of the program all students were introduced to Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr through instructor PowerPoint presentations, demonstrations, and personal account creations. Students also partook in a 'four corners' activity to discuss responsible social network behavior. After a situation such as, 'it's your friend's birthday' was presented, students would have to choose between posters stating a possible actions to take such as 'send a private message to them' or 'post on their wall.'

Social media activities were used to promote personal and social identity and were incorporated into many of the lesson plans. One of the most successful activities was an in class task where students published five posts on Tumblr that completed the sentence 'I am...' with original writing and an accompanying photo they found online. The activity allowed students to share more personal identity information about themselves with their classmates and develop stronger relationships commenting and interacting with peers using a social media platform. The task also helped them prepare for a performance activity where they read aloud their five statements on camera.

**Self-esteem, Self Expression and Feedback.** Towards the beginning of the Academy there were many examples of the students' unwillingness to listen to each other. When answering an instructor's questions, students struggled with simple turn-taking. Many were often trying to talk all at once. They interrupted each other and even instructors and staff members. Throughout the process of instruction and practice, students learned to accept and offer feedback to support their

own learning and that of their peers. Using the ‘sandwich’ method, instructors taught students how to give constructive, positive feedback. After viewing their peers’ videos, students practiced such feedback by saying something they liked about the piece followed by one thing to improve, then one more positive thing. There was a class screening after each video production activity where students gave constructive criticism in the sandwich method. At the end of the program at the closing ceremony, instructors were delighted to see that students intuitively gave ‘sandwich’ feedback without any prompting. The enthusiastic feedback from peers helped students gain recognition for their accomplishments. During the Q&A process of the screening, the students expressed the value of self-expression through their depictions and conversations around critical issues of foster care.

**Academic Evaluation.** All lesson objectives were measured using several different means. The finished videos and online messages served as products that could be directly critiqued by the instructors. As part of the college educational setting, students were also required to take a quiz midway through the course and a final exam at the end of the program. Instructors used an innovative combination of assessment tools that made use of traditional and online learning models. For example, students watched a music video of their choice and answered five questions, sending their answers with a link to their video in a private Facebook message to the instructor. In the final exam, students individually responded to multiple-choice questions. Then, working in pairs, students answered two reflective questions on camera. Finally, groups of three students analyzed a commercial and collaboratively answered five media literacy questions in a Google document. Using the listed means in addition to class and online participation, the instructors determined objective achievement and final grades through a written report card, which they shared with the students.

## Student Collaboration and Social Change

We wanted to carefully observe and analyze how students learn to collaborate and work together during the course. Prior to the program, research assistant Elizaveta Provorova gathered background information from the research literature concerning the psychological and emotional stresses of children and adolescents in foster care; this information was used during the planning process to determine the main challenges the instructors might face. During several meetings the team discussed skills foster children might need and how they could improve such skills. Foster children growing in unstable environments often have trust issues which leads to difficulty with communication and collaboration. As they often move from school to school, students in foster care may not know how to develop and maintain meaningful relationships. Therefore, special attention was paid to the issue of social change by enhancing these important skills.

Collaboration is one crucial skill that is necessary for the students to play an active role in their community. Acquiring collaboration skills is a long and challenging process for all adolescents, not only for children in foster care. Successful work in a group is possible when all participants are able to articulate their opinions while listening to each other and respecting their peers’ opinions. Activities in the Academy were designed to help the students understand the value of compromise. With that in mind, the team of instructors put effort into creating activities that would help the students master communication and collaboration skills. Elizaveta Provorova decided to pay special attention to the dynamics of group work. She observed and documented

such skills as listening to partners in a group; expressing personal opinions; and giving feedback in a constructive way.

**Assigned Group vs. Free-Choice Group.** The instructors were highly sensitive to the group dynamics that emerged in each student team. For the first two video projects the instructors selected individuals to participate in groups, ensuring a balance of genders and including different types of learners in each group. Such involvement helped structure the interaction between the students and sped up the process of video production. During the second week of the course, the instructors discussed the option of letting students choose whom they wanted to work with. Some students were unhappy with their group placement and others expressed a strong desire to work on their own. Such frustrations can be associated with the fact that these adolescents have not had enough positive experiences working in groups. For example, one of the students stated till the very last day that she hated working with others and was resentful about the instructors' decision to make her collaborate. It must be noted, however, that in the end of the Academy she confessed that she liked working together with some people (as long as the outcome was what she expected).

Some other students were also resistant to the idea of working with peers they did not choose, so after the first two projects the instructors decided to let the class divide into groups according to their preferences. It is important to note that several assigned groups were successful working together. For example, when students were producing ads, one group was so excited about the project that they needed little guidance from the instructors. They were the first ones to finish storyboard and shooting. Other groups were able to overcome communication problems that occasionally arose during the video production process. Students would argue (and even occasionally storm out of the room). In the end, they always returned and finished projects on time. Despite the challenges, all students have the potential to collaborate with their peers.

The decision to let the class divide into new groups for the last project led to interesting results. Although some students were able to work together in new groups and achieve great results, others were incapacitated by the amount of freedom they were granted. Some groups fell apart, and four students ended up working independently (under the supervision of an instructor) to create computer games. Other groups were extremely successful and, despite some arguments, were able to produce coherent and effective videos. This led us to wonder about the affordances and limitations of self-selected groups, a topic that is not well documented in the media education literature. However, it is difficult to assess how the freedom of choice influenced the outcomes of collaboration because too many variables were changed for this last assignment. The students were asked to choose a topic and a format for the video. Moreover, they did not have to present their storyboards to the instructors and peers, although they did that for the first two projects.

**Listening to Peers, Articulating Opinions and Resolving Conflict.** In working with each other, students were challenged in demonstrating listening skills to their partners and articulating their own opinions in a group. It can be assumed that students' skills to collaborate will be significantly enhanced as soon as they master these two competencies. One of the students was often frustrated, as he did not feel his colleagues' support. He was not aware of the fact that he was talking very quietly and not clearly enough. He had trouble articulating his ideas. This led to his initial problems collaborating with his partners, which were later resolved.



In the beginning of the Academy there were some instances of bullying. During the first class when students were introducing themselves, they laughed at what others were saying. In the Facebook group some students were writing messages to each other and gossiping about their peers. In particular, one of the students was picked on by a group of boys who called him gay. Instructors addressed this issue directly in coordination with support staff.

Despite all these challenges, after the successful first video production and responsible social networking activity, it became clear that students would be able to acquire collaboration skills. They showed growing ability and willingness to work with others by supporting peers and helping instructors. During one activity when students needed to film each other in pairs, one pair of students was not happy working with each other. In this difficult situation, another student helped the others in the pair to record each other, thus taking on facilitator responsibilities. On many occasions students expressed support for each other and they were patient and understanding. They especially acted this way towards a handicapped student. Everybody showed great respect for her and willingness to help her. Even though there were some instances of bullying during the academy, on the night of the screening students became one big family. They offered many kind words to each other and showed kindness and compassion.

Teaching students to work together proved to be both challenging and rewarding. Despite all the challenges that students had to overcome learning to collaborate with each other, and despite the fact that many still need to come a long way before they can effectively work in a team, a lot has been achieved. Even students who were the most hostile towards the idea of collaboration learned about benefits of listening to each other and giving constructive feedback to peers in a group.

**The Facebook Group.** In the beginning of the Social Networks class, the instructors created a Facebook group for the students to communicate during and after the Academy. The objective of this group was to maintain the feeling of group cohesiveness and belonging. It was our understanding that some foster parents did not encourage children's use of Facebook. However, these parents were told how important it is for the students to stay in touch with each other after the Academy. Although the students liked the idea of having a secret Facebook group, not all of them enjoyed participating in it from the very beginning. Some were annoyed when others sent them multiple messages through this group. As a result, several students left the group.

However, when the Academy was over, the group proved to be an important resource. The way the students are now using it is one of the indications of the social change that happened as a result of the Academy. The students learned how to behave responsibly on Facebook and how to use social networks for meaningful communication.

## 4. Administration and Organization

In this section, we describe how the team interacted with First Star staff and partners at the University of Rhode Island. We describe the space, timing, and coordination issues we experienced.

**Overview of the Leadership Team and Planning Timetable.** The Media Education Lab was asked to submit a proposal for the First Star URI Academy on April 23, 2012. The negotiation of schedule and budget took a month until the approval on May 31st. The final approval and coordination between the partners took place on June 18 at Davis Hall. First Star and the Harrington School of Communication and Media co-sponsored the course budget including the salary for instructors, staff, and research assistant, as well as costs of classroom and learning materials. Dr. Lynne Derbyshire, Chair of Communication Studies, was in charge of the academic requirements and approved the syllabi of the two media courses.

Dr. Renee Hobbs led the team of instructors to create a detailed and engaging curriculum during the month of July. Matthew Buchanan, director of First Star URI Academy briefed the instructors on the background information regarding emotional state and behavioral challenges of foster youth. Mona Niedbala, head of the Curriculum Materials Library provided the space for the course and access to more Flip cameras and computers. Dana Neugent of Information Technology Services planned with the lab the video documentation of the the two courses.

The instructional team was assembled by Jonathan Friesem, the manager of the Media Education Lab manager and a PhD student in the School of Education. The co-instructor Kelsey Greene joined the Media Education Lab team after graduating from Ithaca College in Documentary Studies & Production last year. Timothy Tierney, Computer Science student, was recruited as an intern instructor and technology coordinator. Elizaveta Provorova, a PhD student in Mass Media and Communication program at Temple University was asked to join as a research assistant. The team was assembled in the first week of June and met ten times throughout the month to create the curriculum for the two courses. The lesson plans were introduced during the July 18<sup>th</sup> meeting. The PowerPoint presentations of the entire 18 lessons were ready by July 6<sup>th</sup>.

The curriculum was structured to meet the program's goals and objectives using a variety of instructional methods. Moreover, the curriculum was finalized taking into consideration the coordination and needs of the different partners. Classes were scheduled to fit the First Star URI Academy timetable as well as the CML opening hours. The documentation of the project was scheduled to record different activities according to the curriculum plan in order to provide variety of materials for the three short videos to be produced. By the end of June, First Star supplied 30 computers to the lab in order for us to customize them for the course demands. As mentioned in the first section, the curriculum plan was structured and designed in order to introduce gradually to the students the art of video production and a responsible use of social networks.

**Space Issues.** The program was held in different parts of the college campus. The first session on Sunday July 8<sup>th</sup> took place at the Chi-Phi fraternity house where the students stayed for the whole month of the Academy. Since students had just arrived to the campus, we met them at the fraternity. The session went well considering the fact that there was no technology involved, as we had first planned. The following three weeks our courses were held at the CML (where we used the smart boards) and on Sunday mornings, where we worked at Swan Hall (with a data projector). While the CML space was comfortable and accommodating, at Swan Hall the air conditioning did not work and access to the building needed a pre-approval from the University facility manager. On one occasion (Friday July 20<sup>th</sup>), we decided to have the class at Chi-Phi living room since the students were running late. However, without access to technology and an appropriate classroom, the activity was much less effective.

**Coordination Issues.** The dynamic nature of the program made scheduling and coordination between the different partners rather challenging. On different occasions the students would come late because the previous activity was prolonged or an unscheduled visit was made by sponsors or guest speakers. The documenting crew would come early to set up the equipment while the CML librarians set up their smart boards, computers, power cords, tables and chairs according to instructional strategy. Many times the late arrival of students forced the instructional team to change their instructional plan. Sometimes this meant that the CML staff had to reorganize the room. Furthermore, on three occasions, the CML librarians worked overtime since the lesson finished after the library closing time.

**Communication between Media Education Lab and First Star.** In the first two weeks of the program, the instructors and First Star staff tried to find the best way to communicate. Texting was found to be the best way to contact one another. Most of the text messages were about schedule updates and the technology (i.e., whether the students needed to bring the computers and the Flip cameras). During the entire program, there were no scheduled meetings between the Media Education Lab and First Star staff. As a result, the coordination and debriefing was done during class time, mainly through informal communication between Mathew Buchanan, Francesca Merwin and Jonathan Friesem. The dynamic nature of the Academy kept everybody alert to changes. These short debriefing and planning sessions during the class breaks were highly effective for solving burning issues such as behavioral problems, equipment problems and personal issues.

However, the communication about the schedule and staff responsibilities was less effective. The Media Education Lab team shared with First Star the course schedules in the June 18<sup>th</sup> meeting. During the Academy the instructors learned that the courses' schedule was not accurate. It led to the idea that First Star would share the schedule of the whole Academy's schedule through a Google document. In the last week of the Academy the whole schedule was shared, which made the communication and timetable much easier to coordinate.

**Staff issues** The Media Education Lab instructors were helped by 9 First Star staff members, who were in charge of the students' conduct, discipline and behavioral or emotional problems. The instructors met Matthew Buchanan and Erick Betancourt once before the Academy started. During the Academy the staff and the instructors met only during classes.

As a result, there was substantial miscommunication as a result of unclear expectations about the role of the staff in the classroom. Staff members frequently did not demonstrate respectful,

college-like classroom behavior. Many were disengaged and acted as if the classroom time was a “break” for them. For example, one of the staff members was asked on two different occasions to remove his earphones because he was modeling disrespectful conduct in class. Each session, the instructors had to force staff members to sit near the students and help them concentrate and be involved. In 4 of the 18 classes the staff was let out for a break while Matthew Buchanan or Erick Betancourt stayed to keep an eye on the students. The most efficient role the staff members played was during video production where they were assigned in advance to groups of three students. Clearer expectations about the role of staff members as teaching assistants and role models would have addressed this situation.

**Screening Night.** The highlight of the course was the screening of the students’ videos on Sunday July 29<sup>th</sup>. The logistics of the evening were planned ahead of time to minimize any problems. The students’ videos were edited several days before. The documenting crew had provided a short music video. The CML librarians ordered a gift book for every student. First Star invited the sponsors, families and a guest speaker: Harrison Grigsby, an artist and educator, who helped create a great atmosphere for the whole evening with his inspirational speech. Although the air conditioning was weak and the lights did not go off completely for the screening of the videos, the planning and coordination between the different partners created an unforgettable event.

In summary, the program administration suffered a bit from the novelty of beginning a new collaboration. Since it was the first year of the First Star URI Academy, the main challenge for the different partners was learning to work together. The nature of the one-month Academy needed a specific kind of management, which was successfully showcased at the screening night. The Media Education Lab instructors dealt with many administrative and organizational challenges apart from the teaching responsibilities. All in all, the results of the collaboration with the First Star staff was much more than simply helping the students to familiarize the academic environment. The successful collaboration led to a positive experience of the students and a great feeling of fulfillment from the instructors.

## 6. Technology

Both the Social Network and Videography courses demand many technological components in both the instructional delivery and student learning processes. The instructors were teaching at the CML (Curriculum Materials Library) space, which has Smartboards, Mac desktop computers and laptops as well as Flip cameras. The availability of the technology with the assistance of the CML staff was crucial for the success of two courses. All the technology challenges were overcome thanks to the CML equipment and staff who was able to assist when needed.

The staff of the Media Education Lab was not involved in the decision-making regarding the type of technology given to students who participated in the program. However, during the preparation for the academy in June, the instructors tested Dell Inspiration netbooks and Flip microHD video cameras and finalized their settings before giving them to the students to use in class.

Unfortunately, the netbook computers were incompatible with the Flip video cameras, making most video editing tasks impossible on this equipment. The computers were built for simple web browsing and reading email while running only half of the Windows 7 OS (Windows 7 starter package). The Flip cameras did not offer specific options for recording formats, and the camera file size output was large because it recorded in HD format only. The computers lacked essential memory to do even basic editing with standard definition video.

**Video editing.** Most video editing packages required more CPU power and/or memory than the given Dell computers could provide. It was also difficult to find a way to get the video footage from the Flip cameras compressed so it could be edited. Timothy Tierney did find a few programs that were free to download onto the netbooks that could function as viable editing software. One was called “Avidemux,” a simple video editor that was not only capable of editing the video format found in FlipShare, but could also give students the ability to tweak settings to create a more elaborate post-production. The problem however, was that video importing and exporting was excruciatingly long and could take several minutes to save a seven second clip. There were other editing programs that had potential to work with the netbooks but many of them cost a premium fee. In the end, the software the instructors were going to use was the pre-installed video editor. All the netbooks came pre-installed with Windows live Moviemaker, a simple video editor made to work with the built-in camera on the netbook displays. Unfortunately, unexpected problems arose even in this program.

Getting the video compressed was simple. Built into the Flip Share software that is required to download footage from the Flip cameras is an option to share videos in certain formats. One of the formats is an online option, which compressed the video to half of standard definition, exactly what Windows Live Moviemaker can handle. There was still one big issue though. The computers were only meant for very basic online use, and the video editing software could only do so much. The students had to create commercials, music videos, and final video projects that were limited to the basic split, transition, filter and text blocks. The process to shoot, load, convert, save, load, edit, load, and then export would have taken too much time to process with the Dell netbooks for the students to work with. The large amount of time would also have led to increased frustration on behalf of both the students and instructors. The small netbooks simply lacked the horsepower to do the job.

We also struggled with the issue of music downloading. Besides the copyright issues that were discussed in class, the technical process limited the time and the efficiency of the editing process. All seven groups were downloading music from YouTube at the same time, which created a lot of traffic resulting in slow downloading. In addition, the downloading process from YouTube demanded an installation of an app into Mozilla’s Firefox browser. In some cases, the instructors needed to download the music by themselves in order to finish the editing within the times limits.

**Classroom use.** As a result of technological challenges, eventually the instructors came to the decision to use the CML’s Macintosh computers with iMovie to edit and share video without compression or extended loading periods. This proved to be much more efficient for the students to handle as the computers were able to process the video quickly and they could add more professional quality to their productions by being able to output video in high definition. Another bonus to using the Macs in the CML were their ability to download the videos from the

Flip cameras without opening Flip Share, making the video post-production process more efficient.

**Social networking.** Students were able to use their Dell netbooks for social networking, which was major topic within the program. These small computers were capable of handling Internet use. The instructors taught the students how to use e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. Facebook was the first social network the students signed up for. From the very beginning, we observed that students had a wide range of digital literacy competencies. For example, many of the students who already had a Facebook account had no trouble logging in while students new to the website were often baffled. One issue was a security option to attach a phone number to receive a text message with a password to log in. Students who unknowingly clicked the security option could not log in once the option was selected, which forced them to input a phone number that could receive a text message. Most students didn't have a cell phone and could not log in without it, so they were forced to create another account with access through their Dell netbooks.

**Facebook Distraction.** Although students were often on-task while using their computers in the class, adolescents were challenged to stay focused on academic work when they had easy access to the Internet and to social networks in the classroom. Many students became distracted by Facebook messages from other users. Some students were being teased online during class, which did cause a few outbursts of emotion that interrupted class. Students who were not paying attention or were distracting other students were warned not to use the Facebook messenger, but with one easy click they could hide their chat windows, making it frustrating to maintain student attention during computer activities.

**Twitter.** Twitter was another social network that the students worked with. Many of the students were unfamiliar with Twitter and most did not have an account; many of them did not understand the interface as well as Facebook in the beginning of the course. During the class session, the students' experience tweeting and the results were shown on the Smartboard. They learned to use @ connect # hashtag and retweet another students' tweets. Twitter was used in the course to teach using short answers and to search for information via alternative resources.

**Tumblr.** Tumblr is a microblog website made to be customized by the user. Instead of personal accounts, Tumblr focuses on specific interests like cars or music instead of personal lifestyle like Facebook and Twitter. The site allows users to create text, audio, video, image, quotes, or links within a post. Users can also message each other, follow, and host several blogs at the same time. Some of the students in the class had an issue finding buttons and features, causing the layout to fail to load completely, leaving out other features the users should have access to. Moreover, uploading pictures was challenging for some students. Eventually after several lessons working with Tumblr, almost all students were successful in uploading pictures. Tumblr was used in the course to demonstrate using attached pictures the differences and diversity between students' answers. The instructors created a special Tumblr account following all the students. The account was opened via the Smartboard and all the students could see their answers and their friends' answers. Apart from one student who had an account, Tumblr was a new networking tool that was integrated successfully into the class.

**Access issues.** Wide differences in access were noteworthy in how students used e-mail. Some students frequently forgot or lost their passwords for their email and social media accounts. Since social networks require a valid email address, we required students to use Gmail, Google's version of e-mail, as the essential starting point. Though it was not the main focus for most of the lessons, many students were able to access their e-mail accounts without a problem sending or receiving messages. Some students did not remember account information for their social network and did not use Gmail for their accounts, or had forgotten their Gmail account as well and had to re-create their accounts at the beginning of every lesson. The instructors recorded the students' account information in an Excel spreadsheet once account information loss became a constant issue. Students who used Gmail to create accounts were able to recover their passwords and usernames for all the social networks they used. Students were also able to join in private groups only those in the Academy had access to.

**Connectivity.** There were a few details that made social networks a bit tricky to use. Firstly, all students needed access to the Internet. At URI, the Wi-Fi ports are abundant and fast around campus, but in a single classroom with 22 students, the connection starts to lag and all online processes start to take longer for everyone using it. Secondly, all students had access to the Internet, which became a distraction for some during class. A few times, students were not working on the assignments and instead were downloading other programs from the internet, which made their Dell netbooks run slower. Overall, the program was a success, and technical issues were handled appropriately. Students were quick to learn how the basic editing process worked and were able to complete all their projects within the time they were given.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on our experience, we offer these recommendations for the future. Concerning the learning outcomes and objectives of the program:

- Discuss Academy goals and overarching educational objectives with course instructors prior to yearly curriculum development
- Create a meeting of all course instructors within the Academy to expand collaboration opportunities
- Incorporate social networking conversations and activities more throughout the program
- Have class instruction broken into three concurring lessons more often
- Create a clear grading rubric prior for all assignments prior to the start of the program

Regarding the quality of student collaboration and social development, we recommend:

- Create more activities that would teach the students about various collaboration strategies
- Have discussions with the students about the value of collaboration
- Have role-playing activities that would teach the students about the importance of positive feedback
- Develop assignments that would involve using the secret Facebook group
- Have similar activities first in assigned and then in free-choice groups in order to better measure social change

Here are recommendations for the administration and organization of the program:

- Have an initial meeting with all the partners to clarify responsibilities and expectations
- Create a platform for suggestions and remarks during the Academy
- Have a shared schedule with all the partners
- Create a scheduled weekly meeting of staff and instructors
- The Media Education Lab should have a course and technology coordinator who is not an instructor

Below are a few recommendations to improve the use of digital media and technology in the program:

- Computers need at least a full 4GB of Ram installed to edit the videos
- Guest account access needs to be set on the computer ahead of time
- Safe broadband Internet access should be available for student use
- Students should be challenged to explore more new websites and enhance their research skills
- Students need the opportunity to work with advanced video editing software, which will give them more control in video editing.

## Summary

By teaching two courses in Social Networks and Videography to participating students at the First Star Academy of the University of Rhode Island, we demonstrated the successful collaboration of different partners in the service of youth development. The foster youth, who came to familiarize with the academic setting, improved social skills, self-esteem, self-expression and trust in order to learn, collaborate and experience a meaningful form of communication and media studies education in the university.

Though many challenges were raised during the three weeks of the program, most of them were overcome thanks to the teamwork and contribution of the partners. We did not have access to the learning goals of the national program before we began the program. Fortunately, Dr. Renee Hobbs and Dr. Lynne Derbyshire assured academic standards by overseeing the curriculum development process. In a later discussion with Dr. Kathleen Reardon, the First Star's Director of Foster Youth Education and Director of the Curriculum Committee, we discovered the importance of having mutual goals and objectives.

The management of the two courses required the instructors to coordinate with many partners with different goals and demands. The main goal of empowering students kept the team focused on the best way to collaborate. Since the project was new to all the partners involved it took two weeks to start working efficiently. The coordination among the fifteen staff members working simultaneously in the library, administration and management was meaningful and successful for all the partners. All of them express their willingness to keep collaborating in the First Star URI Ram Academy during the upcoming years.



Technology became an enormous problem mainly because of the laptop computers' limited memory that made it difficult to edit videos and work on social networking. The solution came thanks to the help of the CML. The students edited on Mac computers capable of editing the videos and in many cases the CML computers replaced the students' laptops for the session. This solution was the best answer to the technological challenges. Nonetheless it devalued the generous gift because the students saw that their computers were too slow and weak to handle basic functions.

The students experienced social change and collaboration on the deepest level during the three week program. Their openness to share and get constructive criticism as well as talking in front of an audience at the screening night showcased the major shift in their self-expression and self-esteem. The moving personal videos touched each one in the audience. The students' appreciation of their team members and companioned feedback revealed the social change they underwent from a resentful team member questioning the possibility of collaboration to a proud video maker who acknowledges his or her team members.

We hope that the effect of the program will be nurtured by a longitudinal course sequence that will not only familiarize the foster students with a preparation for college life but will be a life changing experience for a better future and opportunities in society.

## About the Media Education Lab Team

The Media Education Lab at the University of Rhode Island advances media literacy education through research and community service. We have extensive experience developing and implementing educational programs with children and young people across the ages of 6 – 25. Our most recent program, Powerful Voices for Kids, was offered to 85 children aged 6 – 14 in an urban Philadelphia elementary school during the summer of 2010.

The founder, **Dr. Renee Hobbs**, is one of the nation's leading authorities on media literacy education. Through community and global service and as a researcher, teacher, advocate and media professional, Hobbs has worked to advance the quality of digital and media literacy education in the United States and around the world. Dr. Hobbs currently serves as the Founding Director of the new Harrington School of Communication and Media at URI.

The leading instructor, **Jonathan Friesem**, has fifteen years of experience in professional and educational media production with diverse youth. He created many media production curricula and work in conflict management as well as enhancing learning skill through media production in a different educational system. Jonathan is a PhD student at the URI/RIC Doctoral program in Education and works as the manager of the Media Education Lab.

The co-instructor, **Kelsey Greene**, recently received a BA in Documentary Studies & Production from Ithaca College. She has worked on media curriculum development with organizations such as Green Living Project and Project Look Sharp. Last year she worked at the Squeaky Wheel Buffalo Media Resources, Buffalo, NY as a media production instructor and program developer. She is currently working with the Media Education Lab as a web content manager and assistant instructor in media literacy for the First Star URI Academy.

The research assistant, **Elizaveta Provorova**, is a PhD student at Temple University, Philadelphia. Elizaveta is studying in Mass Media and Communication program and her research interests include the impact of media representations on public understanding of sensitive issues, and the role of the language in culture and in globalization. Elizaveta came to the United States from Russia where she studied for eight years in St. Petersburg State University for MA and PhD degrees, majoring in cultural studies. In the summer 2012 she is joined the team of the First Star URI Ram Academy Media Class in the capacity of main researcher.

The intern-instructor and technology coordinator, **Timothy T. Tierney** is a Computer Science major at the University of Rhode Island. He is currently learning how to create a 3d animation. During URI's basketball season, he is also a cameraman and matrix operator for the Ryan Center Tech Services. His future goals are to create videogames and sail across the Atlantic Ocean.