Using AI to Generate Semester-long Documentary Projects

Course Subject:	Sociology of Boston
Student Level:	First-year undergraduate students
Number of Students:	20 students per class, 8 sections (150 students total)
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What Students Did

Over the course of a semester, teams of students researched and developed video documentaries on topics related to the sociology of Boston, focusing on historical periods of time and events.

Learning Goals and Purpose

The goal of this assignment is to document and examine the significance of key events that have shaped and informed the development of Boston. Students produce a short video as the culminating artifact, and structured use of ChatGPT and other generative AI tools is woven throughout the project work.

Assessment

The semester-long documentary project is the major assignment for the course, accounting for 20% of the final grade. It culminates in the production of an 8-15 minute long video. Each project has five interim progress reports with deliverables for the purpose of formative feedback:

1. Project initiation
2. Research and data collection
3. Compilation and storyboarding
4. Editing and finalization
5. Final submission and review

NOTE: The instructor works with students to identify potential topic ideas. The instructor then prompts ChatGPT to create an assignment plan, providing it with the list of interim deliverables, and edits the output with a focus on consistency and accuracy.

Faculty Reflections

Generative AI supports the development and implementation of this major assignment in two ways. First, the instructor uses GenAI as a tool to quickly develop a rich set of project topics that are personalized to student interests and course outcomes. Second, student use of GenAI is

explicitly integrated into the documentary development process, scaffolding student use of GenAI as an appropriate support in their learning process.

The Documentary Plan assignment demonstrates how ChatGPT allows instructors to be efficient in creating complex semester-long projects. ChatGPT made it possible for me to create lots of projects with great variety. I can do in minutes what would have taken me a very long time to develop without Generative AI.

Step-by-Step Instructor Directions for Generating the Case Studies NOTE: See example projects below.

Step 1	Share documentary projects documents with the class, which describe the focus and scope of each project. Each student has an opportunity to express preferences for the topics that interest them the most. The students are assigned in groups of 3-4 to a project.
Step 2	Plans are carried out (see topic exemplars below).
Step 3	Groups upload their videos to a non-public YouTube channel and the class identifies 3 that are screened during a lunchtime "film festival" at the end of the semester.
Step 4	Students use their phones to vote for the top video. Winners receive a mini Golden Globe statue.

For further reading, see reflections written by Balazs about his experience with these in-class activities

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