

Teaching Appreciation of Place: Freshmen and FYS131

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Northern Arizona University attracts a diverse body of students, from an approximate 47% first generation, Native American and Hispanic populations, and many students from environmentally different areas such as Phoenix, Tucson and Southern California; few are directly from Flagstaff proper. Freshmen face new challenges in thought, place and experience during their freshman year and connection to their new “home place” can help in adjustment to academic life. First Year Seminar 131 is a course designed to meet the needs of freshmen becoming comfortable in a new place during their first semester while challenging them to critically think, analyze and learn new skills that are transferable.

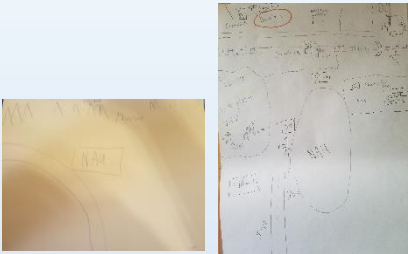
FYS 131 is a field based course that introduces themes that students explore and build on throughout the course. Over one third of the semester involves being in the field at various sites in Flagstaff. Students reviewed maps, completed fieldwork and documented their visitation of the places, emphasizing what was important to them. They used this information to create story maps based on place and class themes that have impacted them.

Themes:

- Sense of Place* (art, murals as expression, architecture, placelessness)
- Culture/Subculture/Diversity* (Basque, Hispanic, African-American, Native American, student-resident, socioeconomic, food scene, Flagstaff culture)
- Area Context and Character* (historic, recent change, Smart Growth, socioeconomics and demographics)
- Livability and Mobility* (resources, Flagstaff Urban Trail System (FUTS), bike paths, Mountain Line mass transit trip planning and use)

Field Trip Locations:

- Downtown including Heritage Square- murals, food mapping architecture and scale (1)
- Southside- African American, Basque and Hispanic heritage, student-town conflicts, murals, food mapping (2)
- La Plaza Vieja- Hispanic heritage, NAU and student influence, murals and cultural signage (3)
- Sawmill at Aspen Place- Smart Growth, placelessness, walkability, student influence (4)
- 4TH Street- Hispanic and Native American cultural indicators, murals, mass transit and trip planning, economic incubators and food systems, walkability lack (5)
- FUTS trails – Walkability, bikability and navigating Flagstaff (6)



Students created a pre map and an end of semester map of Flagstaff. Every student improved tremendously, being able to find all the field locations, transportation routes and landmarks that were significant in the areas the class visited.

When asked if they had used the information outside of class, students wrote that they shared the information or used it personally. (The first two field trips, to Downtown and Southside, were strategically placed before family weekend at the university.)

Information used outside class	
Tell friends	10
Tell family	12
Use personally	12

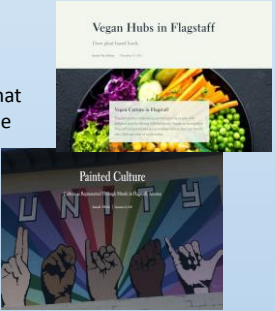
Students related their end of semester ability to notice and understand the following in the future as they explore other places:

21 respondents	Yes	No	Unsure
Architecture, art, scale	20	1	
Livability	19		2
Mobility (walkability, bikability, mass transit)	20		1
Area character and diversity	18		3
Sense of place or placelessness	17	1	3

Mobility made a great impact on students, teaching them how to navigate Flagstaff, options that were available and how to use them, and the ability and confidence not to get lost. Students without cars learned other transportation avenues which several students appreciated.

Skill set	Most important
Mobility: navigation, map reading, trip planning and mass transit app use, FUTS, bikes	15
Basic Fieldwork: documenting, analysis	3
Technical and Oral: story maps, stop talks, oral presentation	3

Students created and publically posted story maps of their experiences and aspects related to the course themes that had meaning to them as individuals. The story maps were then used in class presentations and discussions.



Connection and appreciation of Place?

When asked if they felt more connected to Flagstaff and more appreciative of what was here, all students agreed.
“The field trips and field work that I was exposed to helped me to connect with Flagstaff...I didn’t know all the opportunities that it offered me as far as exploring.”
“A particular place that we went to as a class that I was strongly connected to other than downtown was Southside. I didn’t feel out of place or nervous like I anticipated that I would, but instead felt welcomed and at home for some reason.”

