



**University of Michigan
Provost's Teaching
Innovation Prize**

2015 WINNER



LISA C. YOUNG
Lecturer IV
Department of Anthropology
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts
lcyoung@umich.edu

Dr. Young would like to thank the Museum of Anthropological Archaeology and her collaborator Susan Secakuku.

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Re-Connecting Hopi Seeds: Creating Virtual Dialogues With a Source Community

Innovation Description

Students in the fall 2014 Museum Anthropology course (ANTHRARC 497) enjoyed a unique learning opportunity that thoughtfully integrated physical and virtual research. Specifically, student teams created a digital archive of a U-M museum botanical collection gathered from the Hopi reservation in 1935 and then interviewed (via videoconferencing) contemporary Hopi farmers. Blogging about their progress helped students share their experiences, while also documenting and reflecting on the project.

With support from the LSA Language Resource Center and Instructional Support Services for the planning and execution of the course, students were able to do far more than just read about the challenging questions of representation, ownership, and authority that have been raised by museums' radical shift toward collaboration with source communities. During live dialogues, students learned directly from Hopi tribal members (a degree of access made possible by Dr. Young's longstanding collaborations with community members). Seeing the faces of Hopi farmers, cultural representatives, and schoolkids deeply changed the ways that the U-M students understood the importance of the museum collection of dried corn, beans, squash and gourds for Hopi people. Overall, students became much more aware of the complex role that museums play in collecting and exhibiting objects from other cultures.

<https://ummuseumanthro.wordpress.com/>
<http://ummaahopiplants.omeka.net/>

Student Comments

"We all felt more invested in the project after making that human connection that is so often lost amongst objects and labels."

"Informed by the voices of the Hopi community, each plant in our archive has transformed from 'just another bean' into something much more—a child of the Hopi community."

"We gained an understanding of how museums and native communities negotiate matters of knowledge and power."

"We were able to interview and discuss the seeds and farming traditions with Hopi farmers through the use of a webcam."

"The classroom transformed into a lab, a meeting, and a welcoming place allowing students to engage with and discuss the difficult history regarding Native American anthropological work and display."

[The course] "allowed me to experience the work of an anthropologist while also teaching me the importance of natives' voice and inspiring me to rethink the museum's place in the world."

Examples of Teaching Innovation



Student teams collected information from the museum records and original field notes to create a digital archive.



Hearing that many of the crops are still cultivated by Hopi farmers made the objects seem less static or locked in history.



A Hopi community member suggested organizing the digital archive by the location where the plants were collected rather than plant type.