

INTERVIEW OF JIM GROOM

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PREAMBLE

SHELLEY: Okay. Well, then, question number one -- actually, this is question number zero. Are they pronounced MOOC, MOOC, M-O-O-C?

MR. GROOM: Nope. Excuse me, I'm sorry. Okay. Are they pronounced --

SHELLEY: No. That's okay.

MR. GROOM: Exactly, I know. I'm terrible. They're pronounced MOOC, like, hey, Mookie, where's my money? No. Hey, Sal, where's my money? Says Mookie. MOOC, M-O-O-C, MOOC.

SHELLEY: Okay. That's how I was pronouncing them, but I didn't want to embarrass; I did graduate conferences that I presented, and was saying some theorists names wrong. And, you know, during the Q&A, the very first question was more of a comment, Do you know that this is how his name is pronounced?

MR. GROOM: Yeah, I know, and they love your pain when they say that, don't they, too? You know, everything you've been talking about is great.

SHELLEY: Yes, yes. So question number one, What motivates you to teach a MOOC?

MR. GROOM: Okay. So I've got a good question for this, and it was actually caused by someone at Maricopa. So Donna Gaudet, right, when I was teaching digital storytelling, which has been known as DS106, for the first...for the second time, in the fall of 2010, Donna contacted me on Skype and was basically like, Hey, I would really like to take that class because I want to figure out how to set up my own domain and install my own WordPress and play with some of the stuff you're playing with, but I don't know how. I was like, You can play along. You know, anything you need to do, there's the tutorials, and, you know, one thing after another, she got busy and stuff, but she said, I would really love it if you open -- the next time you open that class up so anyone can take it. And I kind of took that to heart.

And then people like Tom Woodward, Alan Levine, Martha Burtis, they all got to talking, and, you know, I had that in the back of my head, and so in December 2010, knowing that folks like David Wiley, Stephen Downes, George Siemens, Dave Cormier had already done this, Gardner Campbell. I decided to give it a shot.

I was a little afraid at first, and I said this probably at Maricopa, to throw the party that no one came to. I was a little bit nervous that, like, I would do it, and everyone would be like, oh, that's great, but no.

SHELLEY: Right.

MR. GROOM: And that might happen if I do it again, but at least in the spring, for some reason, that didn't happen; and people got in, took it, and it was fun. So I mean, it was just a matter of committing to doing it. The problem was I didn't really know how I was going to do it, so that took some planning.

QUESTION 1

SHELLEY: Do you think that the course content digital storytelling better lends itself to a MOOC? Is that part of why you -- it might have happened?

MR. GROOM: The way we set up the class, I do think that digital storytelling, the way we've kind of framed the idea of the class, did work very well with the idea of the MOOC, because from the beginning, when we first started this in the spring of 2010, it was basically, listen, the idea of the class, get your own domain, get your own web host. You set up your own kind of space from which you do your work, and you share it out with other people in the class. This was a face-to-face class.

SHELLEY: Right.

MR. GROOM: But a lot of the interaction -- actually, a lion's share of the interaction happened online, and the idea of the class was for them to develop identities online through Twitter, Flickr, their blog, YouTube, et cetera, and frame those as a way to tell stories. Not your traditional digital storytelling class, like this was when me and my father first learned to go bicycle riding, and this is the slide show and the music. Not that they're not powerful, they are, but I was not interested in that. I was interested in getting in very micro stories, using Twitter as a kind of quotidian way of narrating what you're doing, blogs as a way of narrating what you're thinking, and kind of a different notion of storytelling. And so I think the idea behind it was this idea of networking and connecting. So yes, I think that worked very well with the philosophies behind the MOOC, which are connectivist and connectedness. And I think that makes sense, because I've been following these ideas and a part of them, to some degree, for the last five years, like many of us have.

So when I thought about teaching digital storytelling, I think the whole nature of the theories and the philosophies and the practice of so many people with sharing and doing this stuff together online formed the way I would teach this class.

Does that make any sense? So the class is, in many ways, a birth or a child of the moment, right?

Question 2:

Since your digital storytelling is a production course, your students produce multiple texts as part of the learning process, how do you manage assessment in your MOOC? And I'm just going to remind you the reason I'm asking this question is because the target audience for

this interview is writing instructors, so they too are in classes that are production courses.

MR. GROOM: Well, here's how I dealt with assessment: I actually made it clear from the beginning, right? We've talked about this before, you and I, about this idea of low stakes. There was going to be a series of assignments over the course of the 15 weeks. They were going to have to do X amount of those assignments. So say of the 15 assignments, they were going to have to at least do 12. And what's more, I was going to give them regular feedback on their process, through the blog, through comments.

But at three times over the course of the semester, I would meet with students and talk about their specific progress on what they're doing for a particular. So, for example, week five we all got together. I met with them individually through Skype or face-to-face, for the face-to-face class, and I talked about, okay, here's what you've done so far. Great job setting up the site. I really love the way you kind of examine these papers, or here's what you missed. And I would give them their assessment, and I would let them know kind of a rough idea of where I thought they were gradewise. And I would never grade their stuff, though, independently. I would actually talk with them and negotiate their grade along the way, because if this is an idea of production, right, I'm telling them what I like about what they're producing and what I don't like. And if you're going to pay me to be the judge of that, I'm going to give you the feedback.

But sometimes what was interesting is because the class was so open and because the class allowed for anyone, it became apparent, beyond my judgment, who liked what and what was popular amongst people and what people really got it, kind of. And so, for me, that was the best part of the opening of this class. Assessment took on a completely different nature. It took on a nature of the idea of people from the outside, your audience coming back and giving you feedback and letting you know more authentically what they liked and what they didn't. And so then it wasn't simply about what I liked and what I didn't.

Now, I still had to play the role as the instructor. I still had to grade them. And so that's why I made a commitment at three times over the course of the semester to sit down, talk about where they were with their work, give them a tentative grade, and say, "We're going to meet in another five weeks, and we're going to talk about where you are." And that's how I graded them. It wasn't that different from grading papers. It wasn't that different from grading participation. 30 to 40 percent of their grade was based on how much they commented on other people's work, if they did their assignments on time, and if they gave constructive feedback to their fellow colleagues, and if they commented on blogs outside of the course.

So for me, I was really grading and assessing on their investment in the process, on their willingly and actively going out and creating a network and creating connections. And that's where they did well or

didn't. And it was great because assessment was easy because it was completely apparent. I would go to their blog, their Twitter, and what, and I'd be like, Here's what you have done. Why haven't you done X, Y, and Z? Why haven't you been commenting on people's work? You know that's a huge part of the class. Why haven't you been feeding into Twitter the stuff that you've been doing? Why haven't you been making connections? Have you been following people outside of the class? Just kind of letting them know that the stuff you do online is very apparent. And it's apparent because if I'm not hearing about the work you're doing from other people in the class, if other people aren't kind of talk about your work, if I'm not seeing comments around your work, well, then I'm going to start thinking like, why not? What are they missing? And I think you should start thinking the same thing.

Now, there's problems with that. I don't think that's an absolute approach to everyone's work, but I do think it's an indicator, and it's an indicator we're already familiar with because we spend time on the social web regularly. So that's how I built in assessment.

SHELLEY: Right. No, and I like that, and I just want to clarify when you were saying you met with the students three times a semester, was that only your officially enrolled or was that anyone who more or less was sincerely?

MR. GROOM: Well, I only met with students who were enrolled for credit officially, but I would talk with and meet with anyone who wanted to. But I found that people who were just enrolled in the class to take it and have fun, I would have regular exchanges, whether through Twitter DM, whether through e-mail, and it wasn't dictated by the three times a semester. The three times a semester was really a way for me to cover my ass as an instructor, because, you know, you want to have places where you do assessment, and you don't want to bring students into an experimental class and then say, "You're on your own kids. I'll see you in Week 15." You really want to be able to say, "Look, this is where you're at, and I'm giving you constant feedback on the sites and on your blogs, but this is a way for me to sit down and say to you, face-to-face or through Skype, 'Look, this is what you're doing; this is what you're not doing. This is your tentative grade.'" Just because, you know, let's face it, that's a system that I'm operating with and they understand, and if I completely ignored that, then we'd all be in trouble. I mean, I have to acknowledge that.

I would like to say in some way, I don't want to worry about it, but that would be disingenuous because you have to worry about it.

Question 3:

Question Number 3, what gave you the idea to do the Submit-an-Assignment aspect of the course? How did that portion of the MOOC develop? Were you happy with the results? Why or why not?

MR. GROOM: Yeah, I would love to.

SHELLEY: Basically, can you just talk about that Submit-an-Assignment element?

MR. GROOM: I think it was one of the coolest elements of the class, and I do think it worked well, and I'll talk about why. The idea came well before the class even started from Tom Woodward. Tom Woodward, on a comment -- I had been giving assignments - so here's how it started. I had been giving assignments for my first DS106, and over the course of the semester, there was, like, 12 or 15 assignments, and I wrote them all, like, do this assignment and do this. And Tom Woodward, you know, who is a pretty harsh critic, which I like, was like, Wouldn't it be better than you just giving them one assignment, that they come up with a series of assignments and submit them and they do what they want? And I was like, Well, yeah, that probably would be better, because I can only - you know, I have nine assignments. If you have 30 students or even 200 students, you could have significantly more.

So I actually came up with the idea, but I wasn't smart enough to program it. So I started talking with Martha Burtis, who works here with me at the Division of Teaching and Learning Technologies at UMW, and she said, "You know what, I think I know how I can do it." So she came up with this great hack that allowed, through Google forms, people to submit their assignments, and the forms were set up in such a way that we could pull them into the blog, and make them an actual repository of assignments. What happened then was really cool.

SHELLEY: Nice.

MR. GROOM: We did this about December 10th, 2010. The class started January 10th, 2011. So about a month between. We actually said, you know, "The assignment repository is open, anyone put in whatever they want." Well, folks like Tom Woodward, Tim Owens, started submitting visual and design assignments out the yin yang and awesome ones: animated GIFs, here's the four the icon challenge. And people started doing them, and they started doing a lot of them. And so by the time class started, so a month before class, we had, like, 200 posts of animated GIFs and tutorials of how to do them. And the students who walked into the class on January 10th were looking around like, what's going on in here? Like, the class has started. And I thought there was this really good vibe surrounding that. And what happened is Martha figured out a way so that they could -- anyone could pick an assignment, right? So say you're doing an animated GIF, so you go to the assignment repository, and there's now over 160 assignments there that anyone can use. And you go there and you say, "I want to do this assignment," so you tag it, the specific tags it actually shows you on that assignment, and what happens is your post pulls into the main blog, and under that assignment it shows you all the people who have

done that assignment. So what you see is every example of that assignment.

SHELLEY: Nice.

MR. GROOM: And to me, I'm just thinking pedagogically in terms of design and sharing, that is so powerful, and it's even more powerful to realize, as an instructor, that if you even dream up great nine assignments -- and we know how hard it is to dream up good assignments, and I want to take pride like my assignments were great -- my assignments weren't great compared to a lot of what was put in there, but the class was better because of it.

And I actually had a lot less kind of anxiety about, oh, you know, why didn't you do my assignment? I actually said, "If you don't like these assignments, that's fine. As a student, you have every opportunity to create your own and do it." And so that was completely liberating. And to me, it's not talked about with DS106. A lot of other things are talked about. But for me, that is such a radical approach to the whole open online classroom. I loved it. I really did love it. I'm sorry about the phone.

SHELLEY: No, that's okay.

What I also like about it is not only the philosophy of open, but also the philosophy of access to learning styles and learning preferences by giving students choices of how they're going to demonstrate that they've learned something. That's really powerful.

MR. GROOM: I mean, I do think that choice was built in. And for Tom Woodward, when he first came up with the idea, he was like, let them decide what assignments they were going to do, and his understanding was that the work would be better because of it. And I frankly tend to agree with him after the fact.

SHELLEY: Absolutely, because not only are they more invested in the assignment, but then they're more excited about sharing it, getting the feedback, all of that. Absolutely.

MR. GROOM: And I just couldn't -- you know, you start to realize, as a one person trying to teach a class like digital storytelling, when I think about how I taught it before the open class and after, it's like the after -- the students who took it in the open benefited greatly from variety, from a process of doing so many more assignments and having so much more access to those assignments. It was amazing.

SHELLEY: Well, and not only the variety of choice of what they did, but the variety of looking at both their official classmates and unofficial classmates work in different assignments giving feedback to that, getting feedback from people who did something else, really just robust learning opportunities there.

MR. GROOM: Yeah, and the open part of that, and what might be kind of blurring questions, but the open part of that, what you're saying, like, you know, this feedback and this back and forth is, one of the ways that the class was we had a face-to-face class here at Mary Washington that I taught; a face-to-face class of 25 students that Martha Burtis taught; an online class of 25 students that I taught, they were asynchronous, online; and then another, like, 200 or 300 people in the Ether who were taking the course. And what was cool is you didn't know who was who. They all started to meld, and the feedback -- you know, students would post their first post, and they would get, like, 15 comments. Try and do that in a class, like, when you start blogging and a student posts and then 15 comments of like, "Welcome, that was great," or "We loved it," or whatever comments, and it's, like, they're hooked. You know, like that's it, their blog-hooked. You don't have to do anything else. 15 comments.

I started getting pissed at them. Like, I spent five, six years blogging, and I never get 15 comments. You do one little post about, "Hi, I started my blog," and you got 15 comments. Like, who the hell are you?

SHELLEY: And what I love about that as well is that one thing that comes up in, I think, distance-learning theories is that transactional distance and the time to respond, and that took so much pressure off of you as the instructor, not only by making this open, not only did you open up assignments and get more real-world response, but you are not the one responsible for responding on the spot. I mean, if you dropped off the radar for two or three days, there is still a chance that they were going to get 10 to 15 comments.

MR. GROOM: In fact, it still happens, and I was often the last commenter. I would come in and I would see how much smarter everyone else is, and the only thing you've got to worry about with that is, like, you start to realize, wait, I really am expendable. And that's great. I mean, like, you start to realize it, and I think it's a good moment to have and start honing in on, okay, that's what -- anyone can do that, but what am I good at?

And I think what I got lucky at is I had a network of people that wanted to do it and wanted to play. And then you start realizing, oh, that stupid thing called Twitter that everyone said you should stay away from, well, maybe that's been one of the most valuable tools I've been developing, along with blogging and all of this other stuff. So that when I do something like this and people come along and get excited about it, a lot of people benefit, including me. But I have to believe that other people got stuff out of it too. Like, it wasn't really purely like, let's do this for my gain.

It was a way that the network itself started coming together and form -- not just a class, not just an opportunity, but a community of sorts, I want to believe; and a community that kept on kind of giving, and it wasn't one where you were locked in. It wasn't a family, you

know. It's not like here you are; don't, you know, betray the family. It was something you could come in, you could do your thing, you could share what you want, and then you could go. And it has to be porous, and there can't be too many rules.

SHELLEY: Well, I mean, just the fact that you now have your DS106 for life--

MR. GROOM: For life, it is for life,
Shelley, I'm telling you.

SHELLEY: -- I think says that.

MR. GROOM: For life.

Question 4.

SHELLEY: Humm. So the first half is how were different technologies critical to facilitating and managing DS106? But then also how did you deal with issues of access training and support for those technologies?

MR. GROOM: Okay. So we did - luckily we've been working on a model for syndication and aggregation at Mary Washington for years. I mean, we've been working on it since 2007. So we had a lot of practice coming in as a group at University Instructional Technologists, our DTLT group, had a ton of experience. So what we did is we built an aggregating hub of students' blogs, and what we allowed them to do is just drop off their URL in the side bar, and that would automatically go into something called "Feed WordPress," which would then reproduce their posts. Now, the thing was, do they want to -- do they already have an existing blog? They're only going to want to bring some posts in. So what we do is we filtered that feed by tag, so only certain tags were pulling in. That worked for Blogger; it worked for WordPress.

SHELLEY: Right.

MR. GROOM: And that was a little bit of work on my end, because I had to go through and make sure everything was filtering and tagged properly. So I did that and that was some work. But in terms of students signing up, we used a WordPress site with BuddyPress. We had them sign up and put in all of their social media stuff, and then add their blog, and that blog went right into the syndication engine. And then we were up and running.

Now, the problem often was, at least from my students, was getting ready with the domain and the web hosting, like right away they were like, "I don't know how to do this." So what I did is we came up with a series of tutorials, and we said, "Follow these tutorials. If you have a problem, let us know." And we did that right away with the online and the face-to-face.

And most of the times, they worked it out. They helped each other. People came up with tutorials. We had this community where right away, because there were so many people who had already been in the class and had done this stuff and there were so many people who knew how to set up a web host, it wasn't just me, that within seconds people got answers.

And so when I said, "Look, as a student, it's your obligation that if you're having problems and issues, you need to communicate that on Twitter, through e-mail, or on the blog. Wherever it is, you've got to communicate that. And someone will respond, I promise."

And it happened.

So technically, we dealt with it by saying, A, we've already had experience; we can do it. Martha came up with a whole bunch of other technical stuff besides the assignment submissions. She came up with the ability for us to ghost comments on that aggregator blog, so you could see how many comments were on the original post, which was beautiful. And then we had a way to pull the comments into the side bar, so you could see all the comments that were recently made around the whole community. And then we came up with the idea of "Here's the tutorials. Any questions you need, any problems you have, let us know." I was still the instructor, I would support anyone, but it happened that I wasn't overwhelmed.

So how does that happen? I was overwhelmed more by the idea of the MOOC than the actual reality of the MOOC, which is interesting. You know, and the whole question of this, as we're saying, the idea of MOOC, right, implies massive. Now, I'm not certain that DS106 was ever massive. I think it might have had massive impacts on people. I think it had really interesting innovations come out of it, but it was never thousands of people.

You know, massive, when I think of massive, I think of, like, you know, that new MOOC for - at Stanford for article official intelligence has, like, 120,000 registrants. That's -- for me, that's massive. Like, I wouldn't even know what to do with that. Like that, to me, is another scale. And you would need some sort of system. I can't imagine what. But for me, 200, 300, which is, for many, massive; for me, that seemed a lot more doable.

Now, Downes and Siemens, I think, have taught classes that were, like, 2,000, at least signups. And they have one right now, change EDU, that MOOC, I think that's going to be as many. So that's a different scale, I think. I mean, maybe not that different, but if I think about what I had to do to check 300 feeds, if I had to do that for 2,000 feeds. I would need people to help. So that's something actually I would have to work on for that part of it.

SHELLEY: Right. Well, one thing, I think in terms of technology and support that your class differs from those other classes that might be more massive, is that the different technologies are part of the content of your course, digital storytelling, that there's some expectation. And so, whereas, in other courses, I imagine that probably any techno glitches are resolved rather quickly, and then it's very kind of repetitive in what people do, be your digital storytelling usually implies, at least I think in a creative way, is that they're going to use different technologies to tell stories in different ways. And that means every time they do that --

MR. GROOM: That's right.

SHELLEY: -- oh, here.

MR. GROOM: Yeah. And that's really how it went down the line.

SHELLEY: Go have fun, learn it, play.

MR. GROOM: Hey, this is a new technology, it's your obligation to learn it, go. And I would help them, and I would give them some feedback and stuff, but it wasn't the idea of like, hey, I'm going to sit here and spend the class showing you. Part of the class was actually learning how to learn about it.

SHELLEY: Right.

MR. GROOM: Learning how to share about it. Figuring out where the resources were online, all of this stuff. So the class was good like that, because once again, it was very intelligently designed in that I didn't have as much work, because people thought like, oh, all of these people, that much more work.

But I actually liked it because at the end it was far more intimate than it might have been if it was any bigger, and there was a lot of people we could help and work with, and the community started to take shape that you were starting to see -- you weren't focusing on, how do I do this? You were focusing on, that's awesome, how did they do this? And then you would go to that person and say, "Hey, that was great. What did you do?"

And then you see the models. You see people who had it. You had all of these people who were experienced, who didn't take the class, but were just playing along online, and then you have this rich community of people who are doing cool stuff that you can actually get encouraged to do and know that you'll have help to do it.

I mean, Cheryl Colan, who is from the Arizona system out there at Maricopa, I mean, what she was helping my students with, with Photoshop over the summer, with Summer of Oblivion, was amazing, and it's stuff I couldn't give them. So that was a really cool kind of

moment where you have other instructors in there helping your students. I mean, you can't beat it. It was just great.

SHELLEY: Well, I loved your comment of basically, you know, I make them responsible, you know, tell them it's their obligation to ask for help. For a while now I've tried to get my students to do the mantra

"YouTube is your friend. When you get stuck before you call me, check YouTube." And I think that's part of it; it's about making them responsible for knowing where to look for help, knowing where to ask for help, building that network.

MR. GROOM: I mean, and when they get that -- I mean, I think for so often education has been defined, to some degree, by this is the place where you'll get that, because we have the limited resources that you need to answer that question. And it's almost like disingenuous for us to sit here -- like, me to sit here and be, like, yeah, she should have asked me, because I'm the only one who could answer your very complicated question about how you use Audacity to record audio. I mean, are you kidding me? I mean, there's thousands of tutorials. Your job is to find a good one, and when you find it and you figure out what to do, you share it with the rest of the class. And it's that idea that, like, your obligation here isn't to, like, you know, demonstrate to me how much, you know, you can depend on me for something. You should demonstrate to me how much you can use the web intelligently to share information and also to help others with it. Right? Like, and that's the idea.

Like, the class, so much of the class depended upon sharing a community. You know, I mean, more so than, you know, punctuation and grammar and all of that stuff that I'm not good at anyway. It would be kind of silly for me to pretend to grade them on it. I tried to model the class on the things that I was good at and could help them with.

QUESTION 5

SHELLEY: What are two or three aspects of your digital storytelling MOOC you are still revising? You know, the next time you teach it --

MR. GROOM: I would love to talk about that.

SHELLEY: -- what do you want to continue tinkering with?

MR. GROOM: I mean, there's a constant. Like, I taught it completely different from spring, when I first went open, until summer, and I talked with you at Maricopa about that process. That was the whole Cronenberg Videodrome.

So I mean, to talk about what I did a little bit, or what we did, because that's when the video became big, is we actually taught the

online synchronous students, said, just, hey, every week, here's your e-mail, this is what you need to do, get it done.

And then I was kind of like, well, we're going to go completely online for the summer, it's going to be five weeks, and I don't have it to just be e-mails. Like, here's what you do, put it on your blog, and send it to me. So the idea was to actually teach the class as a character in a story that we were all here at DTLT creating.

So that's when come in Dr. Oblivion. Dr. Oblivion is a character I kind of came up with. I shaved my head --

SHELLEY: Right.

MR. GROOM: -- I cut off my beard, and I just looked like this weird character, and I started droning on for an hour and a half about digital technologies and social media and avatars. You know, by the end of the third day, the students must have been like, God, what is going on? Because it was a live feed. They could Skype in and talk to me. They could chat room. It was kind of on Justin.tv. And then the idea was Dr. Oblivion goes missing, and Jim Groom, who is actually me, but I was Dr. Oblivion, comes in and plays the TA. And I talk about how Dr. Oblivion went missing, and I'm here because I'm the TA, and I'm going to take you through the rest of the class.

So I take them through the next two weeks, but then I go missing, and the person who taught the class before, Martha Burtis, is called in because everyone is missing and she's trying to keep the class going, and then she teaches it for a week.

But then turns out something's wrong with her, and it seems that she's taken the class up to the mountains for the summer camp. And it was cool because we could actually do our stories based around these ideas, and she actually went crazy. She was pissed that she wasn't asked to be the TA versus Jim Groom. So she had actually kidnapped both Jim Groom and Dr. Oblivion, had them up in a camp at the camp of Oblivion -- it was called Summer of Oblivion Camp -- and she was torturing them. But then she was got onto by the police, they get liberated, and Dr. Oblivion and Jim Groom reunite for the final week, where they talk about what they learned.

And so the class itself became this unbelievably cool emergent alternative reality that the students started to play with. Because one of the things that happened about Week 3 or 4 is Jim Groom went crazy with the students. He was interviewing Bianca Oblivion, who was John Oblivion -- who was Dr. Oblivion's daughter, and John Oblivion, who was Dr. Oblivion's nephew, and these were all students who took on these roles.

And what happened was he was like, I don't -- you guys aren't listening to me. I've been doing all of this work while your uncle or father went missing. You don't respect me. You're banished. You're

not allowed to be a part of the class anymore. And the students freaked. They were like, "You're banishing us? We're going to start our own class." So they started DS107. And they had this sect going on.

So the class had been split up into two different movements: the students who defended and believed in Jim Groom and his methods and those who wanted Dr. Oblivion back. And I just was fascinated, because none of this was planned. And then we had an alternative Dr. Oblivion played by Todd Conway, the Dr. Oblivion of Swaffham (phonetic), who actually was this old man who I was talking about with this Dr. Oblivion, and he was Brian Oblivion, so it was an identity thing. And then someone had sent someone to go kill him. It just got crazy.

There were missing persons posters posted for real in the physical real world of New York City, "Where is Dr. Oblivion?" It was really just a wild thing.

So what would I do different if I were to teach it again, and it looks like I am going to teach it again in the spring, is I would really then start to think about how this narrative -- how the class itself does not need to be a class. It can be a narrative from the very beginning that starts.

And that's something that Michael Branson Smith and I, who is up at CUNY, are working on right now with Cheryl Colan, because I'm not teaching this class at Mary Washington, but they're going to teach something like it either at Scottsdale or at York College in CUNY. So I was hoping that we could actually orchestrate that so that we still have the DS106 kind of idea happening at these different classes.

And there's no reason why anyone who wants to do something like this at any place couldn't use that community to get the feedback, to get the people excited about it. You know, that, to me, is the point. It is like, this doesn't need to be about a class at a school. You know, it could be really something happening anywhere at any time. And the class gives you the structure that I know I need and sometimes other people need to do it, to actually get off their ass and do it. You know?

So what would I do different? I would do that different. I would clean up the site for once in my life. I would actually probably fine tune the syllabus and the assessment parts of it, because there are some things that I would need to -- I've run into, you know, thorns along the way with students who, when I say this is what needs to be done and it doesn't get done, they fight me on it. So I think I'd make some things more apparent that I want.

But in terms of, like, the nuts and bolts of the class, like the assignments, the way in which we engage, the different spaces in which we engage, I like it. I think the main page, DS106.us, needs to be

redesigned to really get at some of that idea. The repository needs to be updated. But those are technical things.

The class itself can always change, but right now I'm happy with it. The change will happen en route, right? When you start your class, that's when the change will happen. Someone will say, "Oh, wait. I have this great idea," and then the class will just transform, like Grant Potter did with DS106 Radio, which really transformed the spring semester of DS106.

The video and that live video transformed the summer version of the class. So it was really interesting.

QUESTION 6

SHELLEY: What are a couple tips or tricks you might offer to another instructor wanting to design and deliver a MOOC writing or production?

MR. GROOM: Sure.

SHELLEY: I'm getting back to that idea of where students need to produce stuff in a course. So if someone else wanted to do this, what would be your words of wisdom?

MR. GROOM: Here's what I would -- I mean, a couple of big things. I mean, the MOOC, be careful of it. And here's what I mean, not that you couldn't do it, because anyone can do it. But just be careful of the allure in the MOOC that, you know, you have to have thousands of people, or even hundreds.

You know, sometimes three or four people from the outside who play along is enough. And if you think about DS106, there were a very -- there were a handful of people who played along regularly that made that class. It wasn't all 100 or 200. So don't delude yourself about the numbers and don't get hung up on numbers. They're useless.

The other thing is, it's going to benefit you if you have a network already. If you have a network of people who you can bring in, that's really a powerful thing. And the more you build that network and the more you bring those people in, the better off it will be.

I can't stress enough how much you have to not make it like a class. If you come at it like, here's my class, take it, you know, your students will take it because they have to get credit, but people online won't take it, and they'll apologize to you, and they'll tell you why, and that's fine, but no one wants to hear why, right? You don't want to hear, particularly as an instructor.

So here's my advice to you, if you get through the part of not worrying about numbers, because I don't care how fun it is, you're not going to get a ton of people. That has a lot more to do with popularity than anything else, I'm sorry to say. Then you deal with the whole idea of, hey, you know, I'm not too worried about sticking

with the traditional idea of the class; I want to make it fun. That's when I think you can start inviting people in and reimagining it.

And how I would reimagine it and what I learned from the Summer of Oblivion, which was great, is depending on the kind of class you're taking -- if you're doing a production class, I think it's all the more right for this -- build the theme around the class and let the theme play out. More than that, let your students produce it. If it's about production, let their work work towards the idea of producing the class. You're all in it together.

And Gardner Campbell once came up with this metaphor, and I guess it's from something else, I don't know what, but this idea of building the plane as it's flying. Like, the idea of that, you truly are not predefined, "Oh, this is where the class needs to go, and

I'm just going to kind of pretend like they're all orchestrating it, but I know where it needs to go," but fully say, "I don't know where it's going to go. I have a few things I think I need to cover, like those objectives we talked about, like these are the things I really want you to deal with and be fluent in." But other than that, this class can go wherever it wants, it needs to be fun, and we all need to define or come up with a theme, or if the instructor is comfortable, come up with a theme that they know the students are going to enjoy, and go with it.

So for example, how do we do this? Well, I have an example right now. Michael Branson Smith and I are working on an idea for DS106 at York. I haven't called him in a week, because I've been so busy, so I have to deal with that, and Michael, I'm sorry. But the idea is smart.

The idea is he's teaching his class in York College; hopefully Cheryl will be teaching it in Scottsdale; I'll be teaching it in the spring there, but I'll be pretending to teach it here. And the idea is, we each have, like, a news video station at our schools, and we report, with the help of the students, what's happening. The theme being there's an actual disaster, right? There's some sort of apocalypse that's happening in all of these different places in the country, and our job is to report what's happening locally to the rest of the world.

SHELLEY: I love it.

MR. GROOM: So what we're doing now is everybody now can define their narrative, get an audience that will play off the narrative, and then have other broadcasting spaces, like in Fredericksburg or in Arizona that can triangulate the story and build on each other's stories, depending upon it.

So what we're going to do is we're going to use the media itself to pretend like we're media and have the students writing it, writing the stories, coming up with, "Okay. What happens today?" This one I want

you to focus on visual, design, and infographic, whatever. Come up with an infographic of how the Brooklyn Bridge was destroyed by, you know, an unwarranted meteorite, whatever you do. But you come up with it. And it's like, that's what the class is.

The class isn't, like, here's an infographic. The class is, here's the situation; you have an hour to come up with an infographic about how the Brooklyn Bridge was destroyed, and it's going on live TV for Virginia and Arizona and whoever else is on the Internet to see it. Go, go. That's it.

SHELLEY: Right.

MR. GROOM: If you do that, not only will your students love it, but everyone on the Internet will start picking up on it. And like, that's your class. It's a lab. It's a production site. If it's about producing, you give them tips, you frame what they need to think about for it, but then you say, you know what, there's no better instructor than experience. Go. And that's what I would do. I would say go, go, go. Let's play with this, particularly if it's production.

Now, there's different ways to approach different classes. And I can't speak to a whole bunch of disciplines; although, I think this stuff could work in there -- in really unique ways, but for the production idea, like writing, media, digital storytelling, I think this stuff's a lay-up. And I think it's fun even when they know they have an audience built in, because then it's the pressure. They know they've got to impress someone.

And you know what, let's face it, this is a moment now where if they do something really awesome and someone clicks on that link, 300,000 views later, a million views later, they could be, in many ways -- how would you say it? I mean, what would be -- what do we do? They could be not reinforced, but what happens when you show a student -- why am I losing this word? Not authorized -- you know what I mean? Like, they could be --

SHELLEY: Validated?

MR. GROOM: Exactly. Validated in a way as I, as a professor, as one person, could never do. And that's what's crazy about this moment, right? It's just crazy about how many people are out there. That's crazy about how many people think about this medium in terms of fun and entertainment.

And so many people would pooh-pooh that, particularly in higher Ed, but I don't think it's a good idea. I mean, I think, no, there's some things that need to be more serious, sure, but having fun with it, treating it like a story, and kind of playing on that, I think, you know, that's something we haven't done enough of in higher Ed, rather than too much of.