

# FOUND

the alternative mobile education\_www.found.org

**f.inding**  
**O.urselves through**  
**U.nderstanding,**  
**n.etworking, &**  
**d.istance**



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# Abs(track)t abstract

FOUND is a higher education system developed by college graduates who were dissatisfied with the current system.

The proposal is founded on the concept of **mobile learning**.

This mobility is both a figurative and literal quality of FOUND university, which consists of a travel-learning component as well as a campus based experience that focuses on dynamic learning systems enforcing synthesis and “mobility” between multiple disciplines. FOUND’s ultimate goal is to facilitate engaged learning and provide an opportunity for highly motivated students to bring their skills and passions to untraditional, unique situations where they are free to experiment and think creatively.



# Today's Education: why students are lost

The stagnation of today's university system is obvious.

A typical undergraduate course consists of lectures in a stuffy hall where students are piled desk to desk, listening to a droning lecturer who may be accompanied by a corresponding powerpoint presentation. The large lecture hall is speckled with tired, over-caffeinated students, many of them still in pajamas, many more still sitting behind glowing laptops with the pretense of electronic note-taking when really they are participating in online chat-forums or browsing the latest Facebook or Twitter news-feed.

These caffeinated, cyborgian students may later participate in a discussion with a smaller number of classmates where they then engage with the materials. Discussion sessions do tend to be more stimulating than non-participatory lectures, but most fail to escape from the oppressive classroom setting.

University students are required to submit work (usually individually) to be graded such as essays, written responses, research projects, quizzes, or exams, most of which require minimal interdisciplinary synthesis and maximal regurgitation from the lecture setting.

The problem is simple.

The above descriptions are examples of education that fail to provide a truly memorable and worthwhile experience. Most students, especially in introductory classrooms taken to fulfill breadth requirements, rapidly forget what they spent an entire semester learning because they are no longer required to retain that knowledge, but more compellingly because the information they are forced to swallow seems disconnected from the real world and from their personal lives. Students retain the knowledge in a provisional mental reservoir only as long as they have an exam to take. In as little as hours after an exam, the dam breaks and the mind is sloughed of rote memories and caches of trivial data. Papers and projects are more often than not left to last-minute all-nighters.

These are hoops and check points that students must meet rather than opportunities to engage. Studying is approached as a chore and learning itself as a passive activity totally isolated from real life. When someone says "I don't have a life," she is implying that school

has in effect replaced life and compromised it, rather than adding to or improving it. The university experience does not count. A student sits through the day's classes waiting for the end of the day so they can get back to "real life." Learning, or at least the simulation of learning, remains trapped within school walls.

Modern education does not stress applicability or synthesis. Subjects are islands of information that rarely overlap, and this symptom is manifested physically as well as theoretically. Looking at most university campuses, one sees separate buildings for each field of study, separate classrooms within these buildings, and within these classrooms and lecture halls, varying but consistent physical distance between the teacher and the student, and finally between the students themselves.

There is an inevitable sense of alienation that comes with modern education, especially when the tools are anachronistic: a dusty blackboard, clumsy, outdated computers, cheesy powerpoints, endless printed assignments with fill-in-the-blank spaces. Mired in past infrastructure and rooted in print culture, most systems have not kept up with the exponential growth in technology and other changes in twenty-first century society. Most things students learn is based on printed texts—novels, textbooks, and articles. Embracing new technology is not only beneficial, but necessary, if universities want to reach out to students and give them an education that feels real. Not only this, but there needs to be a balance between virtual stimulation and real physical experience.

Finally, if engaging with individual classes is a challenge in today's university then engaging with an entire university education is nearly impossible. There is little cohesion between different courses students take, and much less between different fields of study. The university requires that its students have a balanced education, but in order to meet this prerequisite, students are forced to take classes that they do not feel invested in. The current education system is partitioned off into different schools of education with little cross over between the fields making it difficult for students to find cohesion.

# New Education:

## a classroom without boundaries

FOUND proposes a new form of education that seeks to break out of the stasis of modern education, which is steeped in archaic and obsolete traditions. This new education is **mobile learning**. The concept of mobility is applied to all aspects of education, emphasizing a **dynamic** approach to learning both inside and outside the classroom. While class will literally be mobile, as students will travel to place to place while studying general course material, the knowledge they will gain will be digested in a “mobile” fashion, highly interconnected between disciplines and within them.

**FOUND** = education through experience / experience reaffirms basic principles in meaningful ways / activity is more memorable than passivity

**FOUND** = “impactful” learning, not impractical

**FOUND** advocates integrating new technology and embracing modern culture rather than anchorage in archaic media

Through FOUND, students can physically follow trails used by early settlers, truly understand migration patterns of animals, appreciate cultural divisions and witness the geography they previously only saw in books and on television. As the students carve courses through the country's landscape, their memories will, in return, etch permanent paths in their minds. Countless more justifications for education through mobility wait to be discovered by the students of FOUND.

## **Mobility creates an infinite classroom.**

Education is a **multifaceted, physical and mental** experience and should not be confined to a routine or a stagnant location. Nor should it be restricted by obsolete technology and teaching styles. Modes of information delivery should be on par with current technology. FOUND strives to provide students with the most up-to-date technology and resources to enhance their learning.

Through a mobile classroom students are given that ability to **synthesize** information that is relevant to their education.

They will literally carry their learning through life's **journey** and across the nation, applying their knowledge through first hand experiences and challenges.

The key concepts of FOUND's project are based on the postmodern **dissolution of boundaries**. The mobile classroom and the mobile mind are not confined by the old archetypal barriers of education.

- 1. The FOUND classroom has no walls, may sometimes run on wheels, sometimes on foot. Mobility creates an infinite classroom.**
- 2. The teacher is no longer necessarily embodied by an expert but can be found within the individual self and within the immediate environment.**
- 3. Information sharing takes on a network form, immediately accessible through the internet and easily compared and juxtaposed against other disciplines, no longer restricted to strictly categorized archives and library stacks.**
- 4. The mobile student carries a powerful source of information in her palm, perhaps in the form of a Kindle, a laptop, an ipod, etc. These collective digital minds become aids as the individual moves the world, forming her unique mind and personality that has the advantage of an entire history of human thought.**



By taking the students out of the normal university climate and sending them on a trip around the nation where they will have the chance to visit and study intensively at university-affiliated “pods”, FOUND hopes to give its students an exciting, tangible education, a broader understanding of the world at large, and a strong sense of themselves as individuals with diverse skills and interests. The mobile and hands-on aspect of the FOUND project seeks to help students feel more like **active participants** in a world that is becoming increasingly disconnected and virtual. FOUND aims at a fine balance between providing the most up-to-date technology and resources for its students, encouraging the use of new media for access to a wide range of digital resources that otherwise would be impossible during frequent travel, and maintaining a sense of grounded-ness through a physical, instructive relationship with real American landscapes and communities.

Too much of modern education relies on secondary imagery, texts, and otherwise virtual means of learning. FOUND’s mobile learning community allows students to see the geography behind the images, meet the people behind the texts, smell, touch, feel, taste the legacy of history by physically visiting historical sites, etc., basically getting a multifaceted experience of learning that does not restrict to them to sitting at a desk or listening to lectures. While the “pods” are meant to be anchor locations for the students to stay and study intensively at for an extended period of time between travel, the pod classrooms do not necessarily conform to the traditional university lecture setting. Lessons may take place while walking through a museum or a national park, while actual classroom time will cater more toward guided discussion and information sharing rather than straight lectures. True lectures will be replaced by podcasts and broadcasts that students will be required to watch during travel time on the FOUND buses as supplements or pre-requisites to class discussions and labs in addition to traditional textbook readings.

*“ We learn across space as we take ideas and learning resources gained in one location and apply or develop them in another. We learn across time, by revisiting knowledge that was gained earlier in a different context and more broadly through ideas that strategies gained in early years providing a framework for a lifetime of learning. We move from topic to topic, managing a range of personal learning projects, rather than following a single curriculum. We also move in and out of engagement with technology. ”*

**~Towards a Theory of Mobile Learning**

“Community of practice” is the best mode in which the situated learning can be emphasized. The significant factor of situated cognitive learning theory is learning as a purpose of the environment, action, and society in which it takes place. Situated cognition incorporates the “experiential education,” which is what F.O.U.N.D. is.

*The experiential education provides a structured approach to unstructured environments.* Its function is to provide a more purposeful and lifelong understanding that stays with the student even after the exam preparation is over. This theory promotes “knowledge through activity” (Brown et al., 1989, p.32) and demonstrates that learning takes place “through the live practice of the people in a society” (Discroll, 2004, p.158). A major example of this learning theory is the learning of foreign languages. An ideal way to acquire a foreign language is to be in a location that immerses the individual in the language. Experience provides a stronger foundation for knowledge than textbooks and terminology can give. Situated cognition asserts that the traditional learning setting of classrooms takes the learner out of the natural situated environment, while situated cognition provides more “apprentice-like” situations. Jean Lave, who is considered the author of this theory emphasizes that before the existence of universities, doctors learned to do procedures by helping other established doctors. The situated cognitive learning theory sets up the premise for FOUND’s learning scheme. Real life work experiences function as the primary learning module. This learning module combined with interactivity fosters a superior research setting and everlasting learning experience.

# FOUND Metaphor

FOUND sees the university as a mountain where one must climb to the top to get a diploma. Today's university system works like a chairlift, taking the student to the top of the mountain. It might be an easier ride because the students do not have to heave themselves to the top. The chairlift approach to learning is disengaging. Passive learning is strongly emphasized. Students of FOUND circle the mountain, taking a more natural trip to the top. By choosing FOUND's path, students interact with their education.

FOUND aims to give students the opportunity to become more personally invested in their studies, with the hope that investment will foster greater learning. The traditional university has become a mundane routine for many students. Going to class, taking meaningless notes, writing a paper an hour before class and then cramming for the exam has become the relied upon route to graduation. This chairlift approach to education tolerates a general laziness from the student body. Additionally students forget the majority of the material within hours of an exam. With FOUND-designed field trips, students participate actively in their own education. In constant motion, moving from one location to the next, the bus does not accommodate idleness. FOUND's field trips serve as the fast-pace, invigorating future that promises to breathe new life into academia.



# Technology

**FOUND commits to the use of the best technology available. Technology differentiates the FOUND experience from the experience of the traditional university. Many universities neglect to make technology an important part of the learning process. Many high school students have vast experience with a wide variety of technology and FOUND seeks to channel these talents to further students' education.**

**---WiFi:** While this might seem like an implicit part of any education, the FOUND program makes the internet available anywhere in the country. FOUND has invested in the best of 3G networks so that students never have to disconnect from their electronic worlds. The internet allows students a constant connection to the FOUND network, to their social networks, and to electronic reserves. Students can work on their assignments and projects no matter where they are in the country.

**---Kindle:** Kindles, a new technology, make it possible for students to store hundreds of books on one piece of equipment. FOUND students no longer need to spend hundreds of dollars on books every semester. Instead, they download all their required textbooks on to the Kindle. Students easily carry around their Kindle, accessing books at any time, at any place.

**---iPhone:** FOUND equips every student with an iPhone. This allows them to add any applications they need to enhance their education. It gives them the ability to check their internet accounts and update their work without having a computer on hand. The iPhone also works as a GPS device to better equip the students while they geocache and search for their next destination.

**---Adobe Suite:** FOUND trains every student to be efficient in using the Adobe Suite software. It gives students the tools to produce more than the simple essay typed in Microsoft Word. Instead of a typed paper, students can incorporate graphics with text. Students also learn how to edit photographs and film, which they can add to their portfolios. FOUND feels that students can produce more interesting and profound work if they are given the creative freedom to make what they want.



## The TREK

According to Dewey, stasis introduces death. The TREKs greatly entertain the modern nomad. Nomads rely on the element of mobility. Mobility offers the students a sense of journey. Journeying creates a sense of the self that students use to establish themselves within the ethical subjects of their actions. Through mobility, students devote attention to many particular locations. TREKs provide the capability of affecting one's identity to the point of transformation, TREKs redefine who the students are and reconfigure their perspective of where they are. The different TREKs provide an open-ended territory and give students the potential to move their studies in any direction.

TREKs function very subjectively, offering maneuverability within fields of studies. Maneuverability also creates new obstacles for students to confront, introducing a new level of complexity within learning. The added layer of involvement promotes a more stimulating education experience. Leaving a familiar territory leads to the students' displacement from the comforting norms of day-to-day existence, elevating the intensity of their studies. The uprooting caused by the TREKs requires a new form of self-organization and expands educational vocabularies. Self-organized learning requires a growth of intelligence in order to stay on track.

Not only does mobility foster intellectual growth, but it also offers an added capacity for general growth. Just as TREK destinations can be limitless, the development attained from the TREKs can be infinite. With TREKs, students never separate from the world: the environment becomes an intensive hub for metamorphosis. Self-organization also eliminates the hierarchal power structure of the traditional university, and instead offers open opportunity. Students distribute their independently gained knowledge and learning becomes a collective activity, available to anyone interested.

TREKs sustain a series of encounters that induce broadened knowledge because of the constant shift in space. The TREKs' "here-and-now" mode of learning epitomizes quality experience, which is a prerequisite for quality learning. TREKs present students with constant choices that sharpen the mind and maintain the superiority of mobile education. Mobile learning affords the sensed and perceived experiential authenticity of the here-and-now, a reality each student creates by way of their own choices. Students find their place in this world not by idly receiving information from teachers but by actively deriving their own understandings from their own experiences. Mobile learning instills students with motivation, organization, discipline and adaptation to new learning environments.



## The Bus: Further III

The bus is a central part of FOUND. Not just simply a means to an end, the bus also functions as a space where students can formulate their thoughts and gather information for their final project. While the PODs are vital to the program, the bus portion truly encourages independent and engaged learning. All students have a common goal (the completion of their portfolio), yet because of the bus-facilitated TREKs, no path will ever be the same. Because the TREKs encompass so many different events and situations, it is entirely possible that no two participants will focus on the same subject. The variety of the program naturally gives way to the variety of the students' projects, a rare occurrence in a lecture-based class.

In addition to drawing from their own experiences in FOUND, students also have Internet access at all times on the bus. More specifically, FOUND students have their own connective network. The network links all the buses to all the PODs. Students have entry to course materials and syllabi, even for the classes they are not currently enrolled in. Without the usual unnecessary limitations, students are knowledgeable of everything going on around them.

Aside from using the internet as a way to retrieve information, students also use the web to organize and broadcast their own cumulative work. The form of essays and newspapers has lost popularity against the modern blog. Blogs have become the main source for young people to find information of interest to them. FOUND aims not to fight this new trend, but to embrace it. Students of the program learn to create their own blogs in order to relay their work to each other, teachers and the public. Students can get feedback from many people instead of a single person. Because their work is available to the world and in a format the students are very comfortable with, they will naturally be more invested in their work.

With the use of geocaching, FOUND enters a territory that the vast majority of universities have left untouched. A great advantage to learning, geocaching allows students to upload and add information when necessary.

# The Portfolio



Each student maintains a record of their FOUND experiences within their personal portfolios. Portfolios culminate the students' experiences with the program. Through their portfolios, students present collections of self-selected work that represent accomplishment in many areas of discipline. Student portfolios differ greatly in content and purpose. Because the responsibility of maintenance rests in the students' hands, a portfolio could only include a student's "best pieces." However, the typical portfolio consists of a student's thoughts, photos and everything in between. The portfolios foster growth, the possibility for continuation of interests and a future reconstruction of their experiences. The portfolio illustrates the evolution of students' work through stages of design, drafting and revision. A virtual workspace also creates mobility of ideas and layout arrangement.

Although the POD assigns smaller, more specific assignments, the overarching assignment of FOUND is a portfolio. Students update, edit and share their portfolios in an online blog-like atmosphere. In many ways, a portfolio functions as a work in progress, with constant personal additions and commenter suggestions. The online portfolio offers the ability to store and display all of the students' work, including rough drafts and random bursts of insight. A portfolio shows students' growth over time. With all their work in one space, online portfolios grant students the ability to easily monitor their own progress as well as the projects of their peers. Online engagement results in a higher quality product because the author knows their portfolio must be worthwhile for others to read or view. Also, because students may use their portfolios from FOUND later in life. Consequently, there exists a greater incentive to put forth a well-built body of work.

An exemplary portfolio presents a broad overview of the FOUND experience while also focusing on a chosen subject at a more intense level. FOUND portfolios demand order, creativity and critical thinking. Accepted components of portfolios include, but are not limited to: personal statements, photo journals, personal journals, academic journals, videos, and completed POD assignments. Students must update their portfolios daily as well as comment on other students' pages regularly.

# PODS

The FOUND pods, placed in carefully chosen locations across the nation, will allow the students to study at a site specifically tailored to a single subject theme, such as American history, literature, or evolutionary science. All pods will cater to some general education requirements of an undergraduate degree, and will emphasize knowledge synthesis and inter-disciplinary perspectives over specificity and containment. While on the bus, students will take part in outings that will engage them and take them to interesting sites across the nation. The whole trip will very carefully incorporate new technology so that the students stay up to date and connected to each other and the program in a way that current universities do not require of their students.



# Pod Description

Pods will be centered around a university, but all classes will not take place inside the stereotypical lecture hall. Instead, students will get hands on experience to better connect with the subjects they are studying. Students will take three or four courses at a time, two of which will be required, a third will be left up to the student, picked based on his academic interests. Instead of exams and essays, students will work on a final project that synthesizes and integrates different pods into a cohesive final product. Students will learn important research techniques and new media technology in a collaborative effort with other students and staff members to complete their project.

# Pod Justification

Studies indicate that students learn more and learn better when they engage with their material. FOUND is an investor in this type of learning. In order to facilitate learning through experience and engagement pods will create a participatory culture. According to Jenkins et al, “a participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices.”

- Students will be able to express their academic interests by completing general requirements but in a manner that they can still focus on their interests.
- Students will be encouraged to collaborate with each other. “Members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another,” which makes learning more impactful.

# Affinity Spaces

**“Affinity spaces offer powerful opportunities for learning, Gee argues, because they are sustained by common endeavors that bridge differences in age, class, race, gender, and educational level, and because people can participate in various ways according to their skills and interests” (Jenkins).**

There are several forms of participatory culture that the pods will try to create. One being affiliations that are “memberships, formal and informal, in online communities centered around various forms of media.” Affiliations will be achieved within individual pods through the establishment of FOUND online forums and communities that will help students achieve a more cohesive education. Another form of participatory culture is expressions where students produce new creative forms collaborative problem solving “working together in teams, formal and informal, to complete tasks and develop new knowledge,” circulations “shaping the flow of media (such as podcasting, blogging.)”

## **Benefits:**

- Opportunities for peer-to-peer learning
  - A changed attitude toward intellectual property
  - The diversification of cultural expression
  - The development of skills valued in the modern workplace
- A more empowered conception of citizenship

# Navigating the Postmodern Database

Lev Manovich designates the database as the computer age's dominant form of cultural expression. An overwhelming excess of data is certainly a symptom of the current age. While the power of new technology has the advantage of immediate and constant access to information, it does not necessarily come with filters and guides that sift through and separate the relevant from the irrelevant, the objective from the fictitious. FOUND seeks to give students the ability to find their way and make sense of the daunting sea of information.

While the current age may suffer from the loss of grand narrative, and as we see this for example in the apathetic attitudes of many modern university students toward history and their grudging participation in history classes (aside from actual history majors), as well as the neglect of individual disciplines to reach out to the bigger picture or place itself within the context of broader histories. Information is abundant but disconnected. A student may be inundated with multitudes of data but no way of relating these units of data in a sensible manner to her own unique experience even within their chosen field of study.

Freshman and sophomore students especially, as they work through general education requirements at a typical university may struggle to see how their individual classes relate to each other, if at all. Very often, they may fail to excel in areas apart from specific interests because of the conviction that these other classes are useless or irrelevant. FOUND's philosophy emphasizes a holistic approach to education and proposes a curriculum that allows for maximal interchange between disciplines. A science student taking a mandatory history class may be at a loss to explain why it is relevant to her education or life as a whole, but may engage more in lesson plans if allowed to approach the information with an individualized perspective, such as research on the scientific progress during the time period studied and how it was affected by the political climate.

A sampling of a few classes at the humanities pod located at Charleston illustrates the FOUND principle of information synthesis and interdisciplinary dialog:

**The Chemistry of Art** – This class will focus on the science behind art, how do the different properties of paints, leads, and ink affect the surfaces on which they're used? How is a photo made and how can somebody use science to make their art better? In collaboration with the College of Charleston.

**The Body as a Template** – This class will focus on art from a biological perspective, looking at the ways artists in times past have used the body as a template for their art and even as the canvas. How does a body constitute art at all? In collaboration with the College of Charleston.

**Writing Art** – This class will take art from a literary and historical perspective. How have authors and researchers represented art? How has this changed across time? Can ekphrasis really count as a form of visual art? This class will take place at locations all over downtown Charleston and visit museums to see if this beautiful city can inspire you.

Finally, FOUND students are required to complete a final documentary project that spans the entire academic year and across all subjects taken during their FOUND route. They will be actively analyzing and linking the material and data from different classes and pods to suit their specific project topics, which will correspond to their unique individual interests, thus ensuring personal investment throughout the entire FOUND experience.

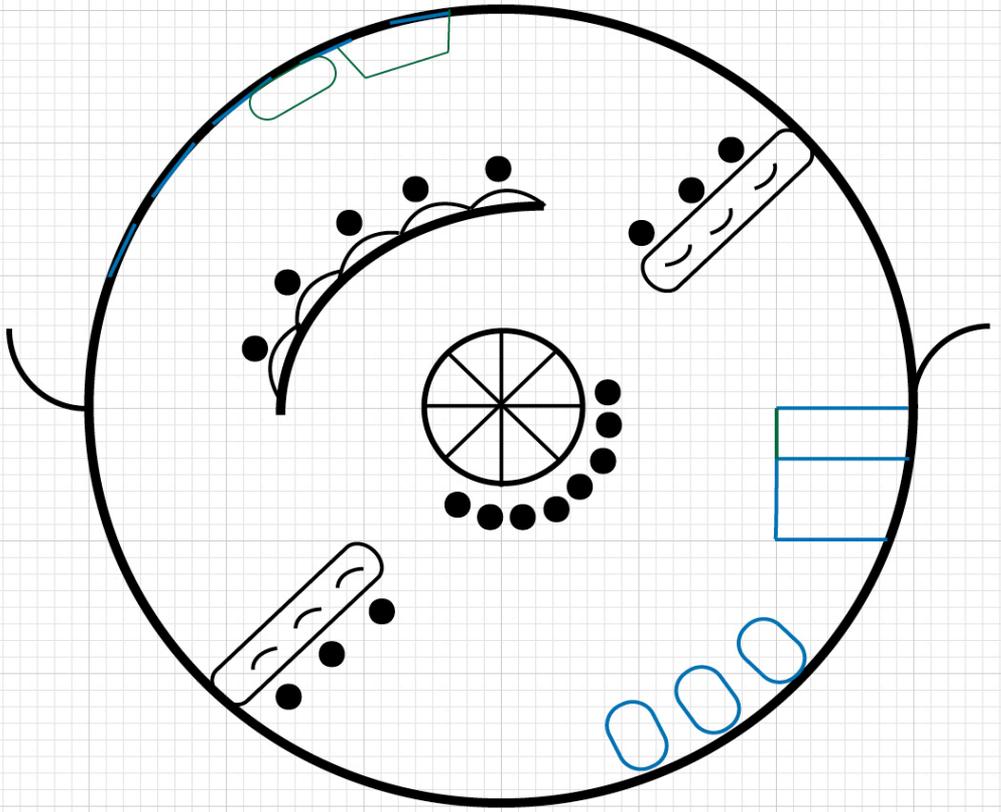
**With an open mind and a focus on synthesis,  
the FOUND student will never be lost.**

# POD assignments

POD assignments and projects are specific to each individual POD. As stated before, every POD will have an academic theme; therefore POD assignments and projects are to follow this theme. The required work that a FOUND student completes for each course at a POD is called a POD assignment. The final piece of work that the student produces by the end of a POD experience is called the POD project.

In general the POD assignments are course specific. The assignments vary greatly from course to course, but include background research, concept checks, writing papers, journaling, and activity responses. The POD assignments require the FOUND students to engage and synthesize the material taught in each course, even if the course does not follow with the students' primary interest. The assignments also function as a way for Professors to evaluate each student on the work completed for that particular course.

Every student will work on a final POD project that correlates with the POD theme, but also focuses more closely to his or her own interests. Here students are given the opportunity to engage with the material in a very personal way. The students learn how each POD subject can apply to their desired studies. They can then focus their talents on creating a project that reflects the theme of the POD, their own interests, and their own aptitude toward certain media. For both the POD assignments and the POD project, students are encouraged to use a wide variety of media. While doing research students can use the internet, libraries, online databases, and networking to enlist the help of other, more knowledgeable students. The final form of the assignment or project can come in written work, video, presentation, photos, journals, or a combination of any of these. Students are able to decide which way is best for them to convey the material they have learned.



# Life After FOUND

Upon completion of the FOUND program, students have multiple options when confronted with the question of: what's next? FOUND is an accredited university program and all students who finish the program earn an associate of general studies degree (AGS). With an AGS, students have the option of a guaranteed transfer to any of the more than twenty university systems that FOUND affiliates with. This gives the students the opportunity to go back to any POD of their choice and continue studying with the professors and materials that the student found most engaging during their time in the FOUND program. However, this is not the students' only option after FOUND. Because of the dynamic and revolutionary education that FOUND offers, many former students have been able to find jobs in their desired field immediately after completing the program.

# Concerns

Much writing about twenty-first century literacies seems to assume that communicating through visual, digital, or audiovisual media will displace reading and writing. “Before students can engage with the new participatory culture, they must be able to read and write. Just as the emergence of written language changed oral traditions and the emergence of printed texts changed our relationship to written language, the emergence of new digital modes of expression changes our relationship to printed text” (Jenkins). Because students participating in the FOUND project will be encouraged to learn new media technologies such as digital imaging, filming, and video montage or documentary making, they may not be getting as much traditional composition experience as they would at a typical university. It may be for their best interest to include mandatory written proposals and papers to go along with these tasks, including one for the final project.

Students will not be competitively evaluated through the traditional four point grading system, and the obvious concern here is that they will be less motivated to do their actual assignments and work. However, we feel that the nature of the FOUND project will be more likely to create an environment that creates enthusiasm for learning that does not exist in regular lecture halls. Since students will still be evaluated and held to a standard that will determine whether they pass or fail a class, we feel that there is enough incentive to keep them actively engaged in class material.

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