



From “Man, I’m Bored” to Man on the Street: Modifying Practical Activities to fit Theoretical Topics

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Abstract

This article details the implementation of the “Gators on the Street” lesson plan in a Sports Media Law and Ethics course to transform the teaching of defamation from a dry, lecture-heavy topic into an engaging, practical experience for students. By incorporating man-on-the-street interviews, students actively apply theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios, aligning with active learning principles and Bloom’s Taxonomy to enhance higher-order thinking skills. The approach leverages diverse learning styles—visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and reading/writing—through activities such as research, video recording, interviews, and presentations, ensuring accessibility for all students. Students conduct interviews on defamation concepts, analyze responses, and present findings, fostering critical thinking, communication, and peer learning. This method not only improved student engagement and comprehension but also increased enthusiasm for the subject matter, transforming perceptions of the course from a “necessary chore” to a highlight of the semester. The article demonstrates how integrating experiential learning and technology in journalism education can bridge the gap between theory and practice, preparing students for the complexities of media law in their future careers.

Historically, in our Sports Media Law and Ethics course, students often found themselves grappling with the dry, dense material typical of traditional lectures. The subject matter, while crucial, seemed distant and abstract, leading to disengagement and frustration. The classroom atmosphere was one of quiet resignation rather than vibrant discussion. Students frequently expressed their dissatisfaction, yearning for a more dynamic and engaging learning experience.

Recognizing this challenge, I decided to revamp the curriculum with innovative approaches to our topics of study. One example was implementing the

“Gators on the Street” lesson plan, a bold shift from the conventional lecture format for a key topic that students will need in their future careers, namely defamation. This innovative approach aimed to breathe new life into the curriculum by incorporating interactive elements and real-world applications. Students were tasked with conducting man-on-the-street interviews, allowing them to explore defamation laws in a practical and hands-on manner.

The impact of this change was immediate and profound. Students who had previously struggled to connect with the material found themselves actively

engaged and eager to participate. The lesson plan not only improved their understanding of complex legal concepts but also transformed their perception of the course. In anonymous student reviews, one student aptly put it, “You’re working with a boring topic, but you still found ways to make it somewhat interesting, keep finding ways to make it interesting for students who aren’t interested in law.”

This feedback highlighted the success of the innovative approach. By providing opportunities for visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning, the lesson plan catered to diverse learning styles, ensuring that every student could benefit from the material. The real-world applications of the law made the subject matter relevant and accessible, fostering a deeper connection with the material. As a result, student outcomes improved significantly, with higher grades and more enthusiastic participation. The course, once seen as a necessary chore, became a highlight of the semester, illustrating the power of innovative teaching methods to transform education.

The “Gators on the Street” lesson plan is a transformative educational approach designed to teach media law, specifically focusing on defamation, through interactive and engaging methods (Stevenson *et al.*, 2022). This demo requires several key components and technologies to effectively facilitate its goals. Essential resources include video recording equipment for conducting man-on-the-street-style interviews, access to legal databases for researching real-life defamation cases, and presentation tools for students to share their findings effectively. These technologies are crucial as they enable students to engage directly with the material, apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings, and develop critical communication skills through interactive learning experiences.

The plan begins with an introduction to defamation laws, providing students with a foundational understanding of key concepts and historical cases. Following this, students engage in conducting research using legal databases to prepare interview questions that aim to explore public perceptions of defamation. The core of the lesson involves conducting man-on-the-street interviews, where students capture diverse perspectives, thereby reinforcing their understanding of legal principles while honing their communication skills.

After gathering data, students analyze interview responses to identify patterns and misconceptions, synthesizing their findings into comprehensive pre-

sentations. This process not only enhances their critical thinking and analytical skills but also encourages peer learning through class discussions and debates. Technological tools, such as video recording equipment and presentation software, are integral to the lesson, making the experience more interactive and engaging. The assessment focuses on students’ abilities to research, conduct interviews, analyze data, and present insights, ensuring a deep and practical understanding of defamation laws.

The course objectives achieved through this activity align with Bloom’s Taxonomy, particularly in encouraging higher-order thinking skills such as application, analysis, and synthesis. Students are tasked with researching defamation cases, preparing interview questions, and conducting interviews, which require them to apply their knowledge of legal principles in real-world contexts. The analysis of interview responses and the preparation of presentations further promote critical thinking and synthesis, as students must evaluate information, identify misconceptions, and articulate their findings clearly. This approach not only reinforces understanding but also enhances students’ ability to communicate complex legal concepts effectively, aligning with the cognitive levels outlined in Bloom’s Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002; Ormell, 1974).

Pedagogically, the lesson plan connects to active learning theories and peer teaching methodologies. By involving students in the creation and dissemination of knowledge, it shifts the traditional lecture format to a more student-centered approach. This method enhances engagement and promotes deeper understanding through collaborative learning. The interactive nature of the lesson encourages students to take an active role in their education, fostering essential skills such as communication, teamwork, and critical analysis. Research supports the idea that active learning strategies, such as those used in this lesson plan, improve student engagement, knowledge retention, and the development of critical thinking skills (Cook & Bacot, 1993; Sohoni, 2019).

The innovation of the “Gators on the Street” approach lies in its use of real-world interactions to teach a traditionally dry subject. By integrating man-on-the-street interviews, the lesson plan transforms the topic of defamation into an engaging and relatable experience. This method not only makes the subject matter more accessible but also allows students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings,

Keywords: Active Learning, Media Law Education, Defamation, Experiential Learning, Student Engagement

bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world application. The approach is supported by studies that highlight the effectiveness of participatory and interactive learning methods in enhancing student engagement and understanding.

Visual Learners benefit from the multimedia aspects of the lesson plan. The use of video recording and infographics allows these students to engage with content visually. Creating and analyzing video interviews helps them to see the practical application of defamation laws, making abstract concepts more concrete and memorable. Visual learners often excel when they can see the information presented in a graphical format, and this lesson plan provides ample opportunities for such engagement.

Auditory Learners gain from the interactive nature of conducting and listening to interviews. This process involves active listening and verbal communication, which are key strengths of auditory learners. By engaging in discussions, both during interviews and in class presentations, these students can better absorb and process information through listening and speaking, reinforcing their understanding of the material.

Kinesthetic Learners are particularly well-served by the hands-on components of the lesson. The act of conducting interviews in real-world settings allows these students to learn through hands on experience, which is crucial for their engagement and retention. This experiential learning approach helps kinesthetic learners connect with the material in a meaningful way, as they can physically interact with their environment and apply theoretical knowledge in practical scenarios.

Reading and Writing Learners also benefit from this lesson plan through the research and synthesis phases. These students can engage deeply with the material by reading case studies and legal texts, and then articulating their findings in written formats such as reports or presentations. This process allows them to process information in a way that aligns with their strengths, enhancing their comprehension and retention.

By incorporating these diverse learning styles, the “Gators on the Street” lesson plan not only makes the material more accessible but also encourages a more comprehensive understanding of media law. This inclusive approach ensures that all students, regardless of their preferred learning style, can engage with and benefit from the lesson. The integration of technology

and real-world applications further enhances the learning experience, making it more relevant and engaging compared to traditional methods. This adaptability and inclusiveness are key improvements over conventional lecture-based teaching, which often fails to address the varied needs of a diverse student population.

In conclusion, the “Gators on the Street” lesson plan represents a significant advancement in the pedagogical approach to teaching media law. By integrating interactive interviews and peer teaching, it not only enhances student engagement but also fosters a deeper understanding of complex legal concepts. This innovative methodology empowers students to navigate the complexities of media law, preparing them for future careers in journalism and related fields. The approach’s alignment with Bloom’s Taxonomy and its emphasis on active learning make it a valuable addition to contemporary educational strategies.

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Interview Guide Sheet Example:

“Gators On The Street” Style Quiz Show
See how much UF students know about defamation, libel, and slander.

First, introduce yourself and ask the person for their name and major. See if they are willing to play your short game.

Then, ask them if they know what Libel and Slander are. If they do not know or provide a wrong answer, use these definitions to inform them.

Libel is a false *written* statement that harms someone’s reputation. Slander is a false *spoken* statement that harms someone’s reputation.

Both are types of defamation, which is the broader term for false statements that damage a person’s reputation. While many courts now group libel and slander under defamation, understanding the traditional distinction helps students grasp these concepts before moving into more complex discussions about public figure status and actual malice.

Now, give them the scenarios below. After each, ask if it is libel, slander or neither. Then, provide them with the correct answer along with the explanation.

Examples:

1. A fellow student tells you, “Professor Smith was caught cheating on a research grant.” This statement is false.
 - Answer: Slander. This is a false spoken statement that could harm Professor Smith’s reputation.
2. A professor tells your class, “The university president is under investigation for financial misconduct.” This is true.
 - Answer: Neither. True statements are not defamatory. Truth is a complete defense against defamation claims.
3. A social media post stating, “The basketball team’s coach has been accused of mistreating players.” This is currently unproven.
 - Answer: Neither (with caution). Reporting that an accusation has been made is not automatically de-

famatory if it is true that the accusation was made. However, if the post implies the accusation is true and it is false, it could be libel.

4. A newspaper headline reads, “Allegations of academic fraud rock the college campus.”
 - Answer: Neither (with caution). This reports general allegations. If the article falsely implicates identifiable individuals, it could be libel.
5. A professor tells another professor privately, “The dean of the business school has been embezzling funds for years” in a closed meeting. This is a true statement.
 - Answer: Neither. True statements, even if harmful, are not defamatory.
6. A student tells their mom, “The head of the psychology department discriminates against certain students.” This is false.
 - Answer: Slander. This is a false spoken statement that could damage the department head’s reputation.
7. A headline says “University’s Chief Financial Officer Has Been Involved in a Bribery Scandal.” It was actually the Chief Information Officer, making the report incorrect.
 - Answer: Libel. This is a false written statement that could harm the CFO’s reputation. Prompt retraction can mitigate damages.
8. Someone posts in an professional group chat, “The head of the computer science department fabricated research findings.” This is false.
 - Answer: Libel. This is a false written statement that could harm the department head’s reputation.
9. A headline states, “Rumors of the theater department chair’s inappropriate behavior with students surface.”
 - Answer: Neither (with caution). Reporting on rumors can still carry legal risks if the context implies the rumors are true and they are false.
10. A student newspaper’s headline says, “The University’s Athletic Director Has Been Engaging in Illegal Recruiting Practices.” The report is unproven.
 - Answer: Libel (if false). This is a written statement that, if false and harmful, could be libel. Because the athletic director is likely a public figure, actual malice would need to be proven.