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**Integrating Research into Teaching: Geonarrative Projects**

**in the Undergraduate Education**

Balancing teaching and research is a challenging task. Recent studies of the integration of research into teaching demonstrate that the two can not only compliment but also enhance each other. This paper has a two-fold objective: to present the results of the students’ research project “Geonarrative” conducted in collaboration between students, professor , and IT-specialists and to provide some tentative answers to the contested questions of the applicability of joint research projects for higher education, among which are: whether research-based learning is suitable for all/most students in all/most higher education institutions; how does the integration occur at the level of the individual scholar and from students perspective; and how effective are the joint research projects in active constructivist learning.

The “Geonarrative” was designed as a final project in the course “Core Russia: Communities and Identities” taught at Colgate University in Spring 2013. This project, on the one hand, helped me, as a professor, to integrate my own research on nationalism and hybrid national identities into teaching and, on the other hand, helped students to be actively engaged in research-based learning. By combining traditional methods of humanistic inquiry with geo-narrative and the analytic tools of Geo Information Systems, students were assigned to “map” various ethnic and religious minorities in the Imperial and Soviet Russia. The first stage of the project was to collect and to study the sources of the ethnic and religious communities which were subject to persecution, ethnic cleansing and displacement. The second stage introduced the concept of geo-narrative and resulted in a ten-page research paper which examined the history of a certain ethnic or religious group from the intersection of temporal and spatial dimensions. Before proceeding to the creation of Geonarrative in Google Earth, students attended the workshop organized by the digital media department, during which they mastered various Google Earth tools (placemark, path, polygon, image overlay, audio tour, etc.). The final stage of the project was to compose a contextualized cartographic narrative and upload it on Google Earth for public use. In addition to the Google Earth, students were required to use several multimedia sources: visual images, videos, and oral testimonies. During this stage of the project, students worked in close cooperation with the professor and IT-specialists who provided all kinds of intellectual and technical support. The temporal-spatial stories of ethnic/religious minority groups enabled both students and me to study the history of people of Russia not as an objectified account but as visual narrative of experiences and events based on ethnic/religious communities’ common path in space and time.