

Project Title: “Teaching Writing in a Digital Age: Technology Fellows for the University Writing Program”

Project Category: Professional Development

Principal Investigator: David Fleming, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English; Director,
University Writing Program

Other Participants and Titles: Donna LeCourt, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English
Brian Houle, Ph.D. candidate, English; Teaching Associate,
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Campus and Disciplines Involved: University of Massachusetts – Amherst;
University Writing Program (the UWP is staffed by Teaching Associates across the university,
although the majority are from the Department of English)

Total Amount of Funds Requested: \$8238.87

Concise Project Summary: This project seeks to develop a Technology Fellows Program to help graduate student Teaching Associates in the University Writing Program use new writing spaces and media more effectively in their teaching. Fellows will attend a year-long seminar on the application of instructional technologies to writing pedagogy, propose and design a specific classroom application of such technologies, implement them in a College Writing or Basic Writing course, and assess the results of their project on student learning. At the end of the project, each fellow will present the results of his/her project to the larger instructional staff and archive the materials for future use in an online database accessible to all Writing Program teachers. These projects will further help the Director assess and enhance the Writing Program’s overall ability to respond to recent changes in writing practices brought about by new technologies.

Joseph Bartolomeo, Chair, Department of English

Joel Martin, Dean, College of Humanities and Fine Arts

Charlena Seymour, Provost, University of Massachusetts-Amherst

Project Narrative

Research on writing instruction has demonstrated over the past 15 years that the use of electronic technologies both enhances students' learning experiences and offers venues for more effectively orchestrating various elements of writing pedagogy. Such research highlights the possibilities electronic technologies (wikis, discussion forums, file sharing, e-mail, and blogs) provide for supporting students' responses to each others' drafts, collaborative writing projects, and extending students' discussions of course readings and analyses. Probably most importantly, electronic technologies provide a venue for students to write in a social atmosphere where their writing is constantly read and responded to by class members as well as the teacher. Constant writing practice and realizing how an audience responds to one's attempts at communication are essential to any effective writing pedagogy.

More recently, writing research has focused on how electronic communication venues (web pages, PowerPoint, blogs, etc.) are altering our assumptions about writing by introducing new genres, opportunities for reaching public audiences, and expanding the circulation of texts beyond a single publication venue. At the forefront of such discussions are the challenges posed by new media, specifically the ways the use of visuals, audio, and video are being used in conjunction with print text. While writing teachers have much to offer students' ability to write successfully and powerfully in these new genres, there is a noticeable gap between instructors' facility with new media and digital writing and that of their students, who, according the Pew Internet and American Life Project, are increasingly (57% of teens) creating their own online content through blogs, web pages, and other media (see <http://www.pewinternet.org/index.asp>).

Given technology's potential to enhance student learning and the need to provide instruction in writing for electronic environments, this project seeks to help infuse more use of instructional technologies and instruction in new writing spaces into the College Writing (Engl 112) curriculum at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. As the only writing course required of all students at the university, College Writing seeks to prepare students for academic writing in other college courses as well as provide the groundwork for imagining the role writing can play in their future lives as part of an educated citizenry. The use of electronic technologies is clearly central to this mission, yet the application of technology to writing pedagogy—and particularly instruction in new writing genres—is currently being implemented quite unevenly.

While some sections of College Writing already make use of instructional technologies, particularly course management platforms such as WebCT and discussion technologies, infusing more technology into this course has been difficult to sustain due to the changing nature of its instructional staff. Staffed almost entirely by approximately 90 Teaching Associates (TOs), training in technology must begin anew almost every year as the staff changes by 30-40% annually. Further, since the TOs are primarily graduate students in the humanities--a population not given to technological exploration—there can be significant reluctance to explore the potential of writing technologies for student learning. This project seeks to address both the lack of technological expertise and instructors' hesitance to learn and apply new technologies by providing a venue to develop new applications of technology from the "ground up," under the presumption that technological innovation that comes from the TOs themselves will find more acceptance by other TOs as well as emerge from classroom practice rather than only theory or research.

Specifically, we propose a Technology Fellows program that would enroll six Writing Program TOs in a year-long program that would produce instructional technology applications

for the entire Writing Program staff. In the fall, these six TOs would participate in a seminar on the use of instructional technologies in the writing classroom, including attention to both how technology enhances the teaching of traditional print text and the possibilities new writing spaces offer for expanding the audiences and genres students might compose in. At the end of the fall semester, each participating TO would propose a specific project that would enhance their students' learning in College Writing. In the spring semester, these TOs, with the aid of a technology expert, would design the appropriate technological interface for their projects, implement the project in their teaching, and assess its results for their students' learning. The seminar would be led by a Director, an English faculty member with a research background in this area, and an assistant director for the Fellows Program, an advanced TO with significant software and hardware expertise.

Project Deliverable

The Technology Fellows will make their course materials (and accompanying technological designs) available for future use by including them in the Writing Program Twiki, a database of instructional resources and lessons used by all Writing Program staff. In this way, the projects designed can be used by future cohorts of TOs. Further, if the program proves successful, the Writing Program intends to seek funding to sustain it, with one Fellow from the previous year filling the role of the advanced graduate student mentor so that the knowledge-sharing and construction begun by this project can be continually built upon. In this way, the Technology Fellows program will give the Writing Program the opportunity to update and assess our use of new media and writing pedagogies consistently, enhancing the resources we make available to TOs to keep pace with changing technologies.

Dissemination of Project Results

In May, each participating Fellow would present the results of his or her project at a workshop to the rest of the Writing Program staff. Further, the TOs will be encouraged to present the results of their projects at relevant conferences (e.g. Conference on College Composition and Communication; Computers and Writing) with travel support from the Writing Program.

Project Budget

Stipends of \$500 each for 6 Technology Fellows:	\$3000.00
Faculty Director (donated time)	\$ 0.00
Assistant Director Stipend:	
(computed based on hourly GEO wages for	
3 hrs./wk in fall and 10 hrs/wk in spring)	<u>\$5238.87</u>
Total Request:	\$8238.87

Project Timetable

August, 2007:	Enroll interested graduate students in program
August-Dec. 2007:	Seminar meets for 2 hours every other week
December, 2007:	Fellows' proposals for spring projects due
Jan.-May, 2008:	Working Group meets for 2 hrs. every other week
May, 2008:	Presentation to Writing Program Staff
	Transfer of Material to Writing Program Twiki

Principal Investigator, Participants, and Qualifications

Principal Investigator: David Fleming, Ph.D. Associate Professor of English and Director, University Writing Program

Director: Donna LeCourt, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English

Assistant Director: Brian Houle, Ph.D. student in Rhetoric and Composition, Dept. of English; Instructional Technology Coordinator, University Writing Program

Qualifications: As director of the Writing Program, Professor Fleming brings a background in assessment and curriculum to the Fellows Program. Fleming has published on many areas related to the teaching of writing. Professor LeCourt, a previous director of the Writing Program, brings expertise in computers and writing to the project, having taught graduate seminars in Writing and Emerging Technologies and published essays in journals related to the topic, such as *Computers and Writing*. Brian Houle is ABD in English and has been leading much of the technology development and instruction (with LeCourt) in the Writing Program and has significant expertise in a variety of software programs, platforms, and programming languages. Further, his dissertation research examines the potential of new media for writing instruction.