

CTLT Teaching Development Grant Application, by Dr. Cheryl E. Ball & English 239 Team, submitted 9/29/08

ABSTRACT

A unique opportunity has arisen for the students in my English 239 (Multimodal Composition) class; they have been invited to the Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Louisville this October, where they will collect research to complete their major class projects. The students will interview conference presenters, film and audio-record sessions, and, from that data collection, produce a digital, multimedia-based book chapter for submission to the first “born-digital” scholarly book in English studies, *The New Work of Composing*. This book is set to be published by the first all-digital, academic press in the humanities, Computers and Composition Digital Press.

NARRATIVE

This is a team application for a class-sponsored, student-based project. We are asking for \$2000 in support.

1. Pedagogical Goals of the Class and the Project

The purpose of English 239: Multimodal Composition is to teach students that writing in multiple media (audio, video, text, animation, etc.) is a rhetorical process, similar to writing a paper, but involves an awareness of how each medium communicates differently while those media also converge to communicate a unified purpose in a text. The larger goals of this semester’s class coincide with the pedagogical goals of the project for which I am seeking funding. Specifically, I am seeking funding so that my students can attend the Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition—the theme of which is “The New Work of Composing,” or multimodal composition, as its commonly referred to in English studies. The conference will be held at the University of Louisville from October 15–18, 2008. At the conference, students will collect data in the form of digital assets (interviews, session recordings, etc.) so that they can complete their major projects for the class: a publishable piece of digital scholarship about multimodal composition, which they have been asked to submit to the edited digital collection coming out of the conference (which I am co-editing).

To accomplish the **goals of this class**, students will

- develop their reading and composing skills in multiple media and technologies
- experience multimodal composition as a process that includes analysis, invention, drafting, and revision across modes, media, genres of texts, and different audiences,
- use and interrogate traditional writing processes when composing in multiple media
- reflect on their processes as readers and writers while engaging with published work, peers’ writing, and their own texts,
- become more practiced at using multimodal composition as a means of investigation, scholarship, and play,
- understand that multimodal composition is both rhetorical and creative, and thus can be useful in many disciplines,
- investigate the impact of digital technologies on reading and producing multimedia texts, and
- have fun and learn by wowing each other and myself.

To accomplish the **goals of this project** (attendance at Watson and production of digital scholarship), students will:

- study the history of and current scholarly conversations in multimodal composition and how those conversations are enacted in digital scholarship in English studies,
- learn specific technologies (video cameras, sound recorders, video-editing programs, etc.) and strategies (writing processes, organizational methods for large projects, data collection, etc.) that will help them plan for and collect digital assets at the conference and complete their projects upon return from the conference,
- personalize and add to their knowledge of the field by interacting with scholars during conference sessions, social events, interviews, and online media (before and after the conference),
- reflect on the relationship between traditional academic writing and digital scholarship to decide how and when to choose particular media for a text's purpose,
- understand the peer-review and evaluation process of digital scholarship in the field (and, in the process, connect that understanding to localized versions of workshop-based peer-review in their own writing classes, and, perhaps, better understand how to deduce what teachers want in writing assignments in any field),
- become familiar with the (ever-changing) conventions of digital scholarship as they relate (or differ from) print scholarship/academic writing,
- choose a particular conversation in the field that the students want to address and complete a publishable piece of scholarship that speaks to that issue,
- work in collaborative groups, as digital media scholars do, to complete their asset-collection at the conference and their digital scholarship upon return, and
- provide peer-feedback and revise their projects for an authentic audience as part of submitting their "chapter" for the book CFP at the end of the semester.

2. Anticipated Impact on Student Learning

The impact of this timely project can already be seen from my students' in-depth discussions this semester about topics of substance to the field of multimodal composition.

In five weeks, they have

- been introduced to and complicated the notions of what multimodal composition is,
- analyzed why we discuss it in English classes (and what the repercussions are in situating multimodal composition within English departments instead of other departments that do similar work, thus learning about institutional histories and disciplinary boundaries),
- recognized that most of the scholarship about multimodal composition speaks *about* undergraduates, rather than *to* them, and none of it *includes* them [For me, this realization set the agenda for how the students could approach their major projects and supports the need for them to attend the Watson conference],
- discussed copyright issues and citation systems in relation to old vs. new media, and the importance of Fair Use in educational settings,
- evaluated sets of peer-review criteria used by online journals and presses (including the one to which we are submitting their projects) to determine what in/consistencies they contain and what conventions editorial readers expect from digital scholarship (i.e., a strong relationship between form and content), etc.

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Perhaps the most positive and substantial learning moment related to this project so far came when I asked the students to analyze the video version of the conference CFP that one of the conference hosts had produced. It was the first multimodal text we analyzed, and the students were able to quickly gain an understanding of the genre of a call for proposals, extract from the example what worked and what didn't, and offer revision suggestions—even though not a single student in my class has ever heard of a “CFP” before that class nor had any composed a video (of any genre) before taking my class. Then, *they* asked *me* if they could revise the CFP. Since the call deadline had passed, I asked them to, instead, take the knowledge they'd gained about the rhetorical effectiveness of media in a video CFP and put it towards creating a video CFP for the book that they would be submitting to. After a quick tutorial on using Windows MovieMaker, and pointing them toward the text version of the book's CFP, they came to class the next week with video drafts that were, in my editorial opinion, far more rhetorically effective and media-appropriate than the original example. I can only imagine how rhetorically sophisticated and audience-aware their major projects will be after meeting with their audience (i.e., conference attendees), so that they can better understand who they are “talking back” to.

Overall, the two most substantial impacts on students' learning will be (1) their new understanding of the relationship of academic writing to digital media through the completion of a piece of digital scholarship, including how such scholarship is evaluated and received in the field, and (2) how they can become participants in scholarly conversations in their own field by understanding how to discover relevant disciplinary issues through research and discussion.

3. Outcomes Assessment

There are three outcomes to assess in this project/class:

- the students' final projects, for purposes of the class
- the students' final projects, for the purposes of submission and publication
- the class itself, for purposes of teaching similar projects in the future

I should start by noting—in case readers are concerned that I'm setting my students up for failure by asking them to be so-called experts in multimodal composition alongside published scholars in the field—that, speaking as the editor of the top online journal in digital writing studies, I can attest that much published digital scholarship is produced by first-time new-media authors who go through significant mentoring (with me and my staff) to submit their pieces, and most of them receive revise-and-resubmits, during which their mentorship continues. The fact that I can mentor students through the composing process directly (not virtually, and with limited time) puts them at a significant advantage compared to traditional, print scholars who submit to this book collection.

Regarding the first outcome listed above, the students' projects will be assessed for class based on current peer-review criteria for digital scholarship. (The outcomes based on their attendance and data collection at the conference will be reflected in their final projects, so I won't discuss that part of the project on its own.) In class, we analyzed four sets of peer-review criteria, which have been made available on the web, and then used those heuristics to analyze a piece of existing digital scholarship. From this conversation, we were able to

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deduce that the students' projects would be assessed (for the most part) on the following, simplified (for this application) criteria:

- a recognizable and clear argument that is timely, useful to potential readers, and addresses a particular point within current multimodal scholarship;
- a strong relationship of the form that argument takes to the content presented therein; and,
- to a lesser extent, the creativity with which the form/content is enacted.

Similar criteria will be used by my co-editors (I will excuse myself from reviewing my students' work for the book) and the press's editorial board when the students submit their final projects, thus the same standards will be used to cover their class projects *as they also function as* submissions to the book.

Finally, I will assess students learning outcomes regarding the class goals (not just the project goals) by examining other class material they produce, including "director's commentary" (i.e., voiceovers of their digital projects reflecting on their rhetorical choices of media, etc.) and other behind-the-scenes footage they will be capturing this semester, which will document their learning processes throughout the semester. Part of the end-of-semester portfolio asks them to include at least one behind-the-scenes, multimodal text that examines their own learning process in relation to the class goals.

4. Improved Teaching Deliverables

The most startling (and yet obvious) deliverable of this project/class is that it brings my everyday research about digital scholarship to undergraduates in meaningful ways. From this class project, I suspect to be able to

- promote the bridge between research and teaching undergraduate classes that this university appreciates and provide examples of how teachers can cross that bridge,
- promote student production of scholarly texts, and to help other teachers (not just in English studies, since half my students aren't English majors) see how they might encourage students to take part in academic life as scholars,
- encourage incorporation of multimodal production across disciplines,
- use the projects my students produce in this class as "readings" in future undergraduate and graduate classes, upon which those students can add to the scholarly conversations, and
- encourage other teachers to involve undergraduates in local and national conferences, which will add to the students' understanding of and contributions to those field, and
- for myself (and the field, as I may wrap this into an article I'm writing on new media authoring practices by scholars), the class-learning outcomes listed in the previous section will provide a better understanding of how students produce digital texts, which will help improve my syllabi and how I teach students in the future. I can also compare students' processes to scholars in the field, to see what we can learn from each other about writing digital, academic texts.

5. Uniqueness of Project

There are at least two unique aspects to this project: (1) the book to which students are submitting, and (2) that undergraduate students are being asked to participate in a series of academic professional development events that would normally be limited to graduate students and faculty in English studies. Below I will describe why each of these situations is unique, with the former putting the latter into context, and I will conclude by discussing how my role in this project is not part of my normal and regularly expected duties.

Book

I describe the book first, not to suggest that it is more important than the students' involvement in it, but to frame why the student participation is so unique. The edited collection, *The New Work of Composing*, which I am co-editing with a faculty member and grad student from the University of Louisville, will (we hope) be the first "born-digital" academic book in the humanities. Born-digital means that a text has been produced solely using digital materials and it cannot have a print, analog counterpart. The book is set to be published by the first, all-digital academic press—Computers and Composition Digital Press (CCDP; <https://ccdigitalpress.org/>). There are other academic presses that distribute e-books, but CCDP is unique in that it is meant to primarily publish books that are composed using multiple, digital media (i.e., *not* just PDFs of print-based books). My and the students' work on this project will inherently require us to ask tough questions about the nature of writing and books themselves. No one in the humanities has published such a book yet. *The New Work of Composing* aims to be the first.

Besides the uniqueness of the book project itself, asking my students to participate in the production of this book does go beyond my normal and regular teaching responsibilities.

Student Participation

This project was an unexpected teaching–learning windfall. Two weeks before the Fall 2008 semester started, my co-editor for *The New Work of Composing* told me that the videographer she wanted to hire to film the conference and create a video retrospective of its events would not be able to attend. At the same time, I was searching for a major project idea that my students could work on since my goals for the class had become somewhat stagnant over the few years I've taught it (and similar courses at different universities). I suggested to my co-editor that my Multimodal Composition students could film the conference and create the retrospective themselves, to which she agreed. Thus, student participation in this project is a one-time event that coincides with the Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition this October. (As stated in the deliverables section, however, I believe that similar projects can be undertaken by other teachers.)

By participating in the conference and producing a set of digital texts based on the conference, which will be submitted to the book collection, students will engage in the following opportunities that would normally fall outside the scope of my class and, I believe, their undergraduate learning in general:

- (1) undergraduates rarely attend academic conferences, so attending Watson would provide them with the opportunity to participate in a community of scholars,

- (2) students would learn more about multimodal composition than what I would normally teach in that class (i.e., studying the rhetorical and aesthetic effects of composing in multiple media) by researching and studying the history and current trends in new media in English studies so that they could participate in disciplinary conversations at the conference and in their publication,
- (3) students' understanding of academic writing would be shaped by their participation in understanding how to compose and produce publishable digital scholarship from one of the top scholars/editors in the field (me ☺ - although I don't know if the students know that, or whether it's relevant to them at this point),
- (4) in light of the disciplinary conversations that students are "digital natives" who know how to read and write in multiple media (e.g., Michael Wesch's YouTube videos such as "The Machine is Us/ing Us" and, more so, "A Vision of Students Today", in which students are presented as voiceless objects of study), my students would get the chance to "talk back" to teachers about their knowledge of digital media so that teachers can learn from students,
- (5) students' final projects will be peer-reviewed by scholars in the field (a process they are studying as part of the class), who serve as a real audience for the students' writing, and
- (6) students have the (strong) possibility of publication in the field's first, born-digital book. In fact, since the submission timeline is longer than the class timeframe, these students' submission to the book will likely be used as one of the sample chapters that the editors send with the book's prospectus in early February.

My Role

I've never directly brought my experience with composing and evaluating digital scholarship into the classroom, so this is an exciting and connective (teacher-research) experience for me. In past iterations of this class, I have assigned open-ended projects where individual students chose the genre of video they want to produce, and we work collectively toward that goal. While students have *liked* the class, I have doubted its ability to help them transfer knowledge from multimodal composition to other kinds of texts they have to produce in the university and beyond. However, this iteration of the class—in which students are producing digital scholarship for scholars in the field—seems more transferable. But it asks me to mentor an entire class of students through the rigorous, new media authoring process involved in digital scholarship. I offer a less hands-on mentorship to authors who publish in the journal I edit (*Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy*), so to implement that mentorship in more intense ways for a group of 12 authors is both highly unusual and incredibly time-consuming. But the outcomes will be so worth the effort: In a field that values underrepresented voices in its journals, including undergraduates, but still rarely includes them because undergraduates don't know how, or why, to attend conferences or publish in scholarly journals, I am able to offer these students a learning opportunity that bridges undergraduate and faculty knowledge.

In addition to the course content being outside my regular teaching plans (although I can see it becoming a regular part of them), preparing the students for attendance at the conference is not a typical endeavor for me. Although I have engaged students in client-based service learning in the past, which has required similar kinds of small-group and

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large-group organizational strategies, setting all the details for their travel to another city—figuring out how to reserve and pay for hotel rooms, getting vehicles ordered and figuring out how student drivers will pay for and get reimbursed for gas along the way, finding school-sponsored permission forms, writing many emails to find grant applications for funding, discussing with students how to read conference schedules and choose sessions to attend, organizing how their one-time shot at capturing digital assets during the conference will proceed, etc.—far surpasses my teacherly role in other service-learning projects. (Thank goodness I have conference planning experience!) So, overall, this teaching and learning opportunity is unique and outside the scope of my normal duties, but I look forward to seeing how I might repeat the endeavor locally (or virtually) in future semesters.

BUDGET

Expenses

Student travel to the Watson conference¹

ISU vehicle rentals ² :	\$600 (for 3 days, including mileage)
Gas:	\$500 (estimated, roundtrip + in-town during conference)
Hotel:	\$985 (5 rooms for students at hotel nearby to conference) ³
Registration Fees:	\$480 (\$40 each for 12 students)
Parking	\$50 (2 vehicles in UofL parking garages during conference)
<u>Per diem</u>	<u>\$816</u> (\$68/student for meals not covered)
Sub-Total	\$2951

Equipment for data collection⁴

Lavalier mics	\$125 (5 total at \$25 each for mini-DV cameras already purchased)
Mini-DV tapes	\$100 (25 1-hour tapes to capture some of the 150 sessions)
Video cameras	\$300 (2 Flip Video USB, hand-held cameras at \$150 each)
<u>1 TB harddrive</u>	<u>\$200</u> (for video back-ups)
Sub-Total	\$725

Support

Registration Fees:	\$480 (in kind; student fees waived by conference hosts)
<u>College funding:</u>	<u>\$1100</u> (financial commitment from College of Arts and Sciences)
Sub-Total	\$1580

TOTAL NEED \$2096

¹ I am a featured speaker at the conference and so all of my travel costs are being paid by the University of Louisville. I will be travelling in my own vehicle because I have to arrive earlier and stay later than the students will; however, I have older undergraduate students whom I trust to drive the others in the ISU vehicles (and who have been through van training) and am gathering the appropriate permissions for them to drive. (There's no room in the vehicles for grad students who are attending the conference to drive instead, unfortunately.)

² Despite efforts to reserve one 15-passenger van to keep costs down, there were none available for the time period we needed. (It coincides with Homecoming.) Thus, we have a minivan and a car reserved at this time, which was all Fleet Vehicles had available.

³ The Howard Johnson hotel, which was well reviewed online, is close to the conference location, has free parking, and was available for a pre-paid rate of \$55/night for double rooms. I have 10 students, out of 13, who are able to go to the conference; thus, 5 gender-specific (males/females separated) rooms, and no one has to sleep in a bed with anyone else, or on a cot.

⁴ The equipment listed is supplementary to that we already have (5 mini-DV cameras with tripods). I include additional cameras in this budget because it would certainly help make the data collection be more diverse. However, I can prioritize this list—removing the cameras and the hard-drive—if need be.