

## A Case Study of Revision Processes in Student-Authored Digital Media Scholarship

### Background and Objectives

In Fall 2008, I taught a unique section of a new class, English 239: Multimodal Composition. The goal of this class 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. A unique opportunity arose when conference organizers of the bi-annual Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Louisville asked me to invite my students to attend. The theme of the conference was “The New Work of Composing,” which is another way to reference multimodal composition. The organizers wanted my students to document the conference using multiple media and to engage in the conference proceedings through their experiences as undergraduates, who are not often present at such academic gatherings. With financial support from the College of Arts and Sciences and a teaching innovation grant from the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, I was able to pay for the students to attend the conference, where they gathered over 200 hours of digital video and untold hours of audio recordings from the events. Their major project for class was to use this footage to compose several collaborative pieces of digital scholarship to submit to the conference hosts for consideration in the first “born-digital” scholarly book in English studies, *The New Work of Composing*. This book, which I am co-editing with the conference hosts, is under consideration by the first all-digital, academic press in the humanities, Computers and Composition Digital Press (<https://ccdigitalpress.org/>).

At the end of the Fall 2008 semester, I submitted (on behalf of the students) a collaborative proposal they had written based on their three group projects. Their chapter proposal title was “Talking Back to our Teachers: Undergraduate Research in Multimodal Composition.” As submitted in the proposal, the chapter would be composed of 13 voices—the 12 undergraduates who were enrolled in the course and myself. The chapter would contain the three group projects (plus an overview that I would write), each of which speak to the perceptions of undergraduate students’ technology use as presented by the relevant scholarship in the field, by attendees at the Watson conference, and by our own campus initiatives and documentation about technology-based pedagogy. The first section, titled “The Watson Experience: An Undergraduates’ Perspective,” is presented as a video and reflects on conference attendees’ discussions of students who weren’t representative of the majority audience at the conference. In other words, this project documents what teachers say about students at a national conference when students aren’t expected to be in the audience. The second section, titled “Technology’s Impact on Teaching: Undergraduates’ Point of View on Learning from the Technologically (il)Literate” and also presented as a video, asks how pedagogy should change to accommodate the prevalence of digital technology and what kind of cooperation is necessary between students and their teachers so both parties can effectively communicate to and learn from each other. The project was undertaken with the idea that teachers don’t know anything about technology, but the students’ perceptions changed somewhat after attending the conference. The third section, titled “Is MySpace UrSpace? How Teachers Can Integrate Social Networking In and Outside of the Classroom,” is presented as a MySpace page and argues that educators should incorporate social networks into their pedagogies because they offer a different and relevant way of composing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In December 2008, at a meeting of the digital book collection’s co-editors (Dr. Debra Journet and Ryan Trauman, both of University of Louisville, and myself), we read through the 45 proposal submissions (with my abstaining from commenting on the students’ proposal), and of the 14 chapters chosen for acceptance, the Multimodal Composition students’ submission was one. This is fantastic news on the one hand, but on the other hand prompts my need for writing this undergraduate research fellowship application. The three group projects that make up this accepted digital chapter are due to the editors on July 1, 2009, but the final class projects are—in peer-review language—in a Revise and Resubmit state.

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That is, although the *written* proposal about the collaborative projects was accepted, the digital chapter itself is still in need of much revision before it is submitted.

In addition to the task of revising the three digital projects, an accompanying issue is raised: There is no published research in English studies that addresses how revisions of digital scholarship are undertaken. That is, while there is a good deal of research about how students revise their writing (see, e.g., the list of scholarship about revision in the Bedford Bibliography of Writing: <http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/bb/comp7.html>), none of this work addresses how students revise texts *other than* written ones, which means that anything multimodal is left out of the research. And none of this research extends to how scholars revise their scholarship, let alone scholarship that is digital and multimodal. There is huge potential for research here, research that could be gained through close examination of one author revising a piece of digital scholarship. In this case, **I am proposing to work with an undergraduate student from my Multimodal Composition class, to study how he revises his classmates' digital, scholarly projects for submission to the edited collection.**

### Project Methodology

My primary objective is to work with an undergraduate fellow, Matthew Wendling, over the summer as he completes the revisions on the digital book chapter. Because there is no set methodology for studying the revision process in digital scholarship, our study will be generative. In order to capture data, I have asked Matt to video-record, audio-record, and screen-capture selected times during his composition/revision process and to reflect (aloud for the recording equipment, which I will supply, and in writing, via his academic blog) on his rhetorical and aesthetic choices as he revises. He will be working alone on portions of the revision project as well as with me to get feedback on his revision status throughout the process. This combined individual and collaborative method simulates the ways both students and scholars of digital media compose and revise their texts—working alone on coordinated parts of a project, then working with teachers or editors to get additional revision feedback. Matt and I have scheduled weekly meetings during the summer where we will perform status checks and during which I will interview him (based on his daily/weekly blog posts) about his revision strategies. Once the digital chapter has been revised and submitted to the editors, Matt will use the remaining 4 weeks of the 10-week summer fellowship to collate and code (with my assistance) the digital revision-process data. From this work, we will produce an additional scholarly article documenting this revision-process case study.

### Fellow's Selection and Project Responsibilities

Matthew Wendling enrolled in my Fall 2008 Multimodal Composition course and quickly became one of the most productive members of class, deciding to pursue this area of study in more depth so that he could eventually get a job that would combine his talent for multimedia with his minor in Writing and his major interest in journalism. Because the course can be taken twice, he enrolled again in Spring 2009, in which (due to differing course content and his initiative) he has quickly expanded his theoretical, technical, and practical expertise in multimodal composition. Because he is the only student to have taken this course multiple times—thus having a solid foundation in which he would need only minimal oversight on the day-to-day work of the revision project—and because he is the only student who *wanted* to work on revising the chapter to ready it for publication, I have asked him to be the undergraduate research fellow on this project. Matt is a capable, interested student researcher who can think inside the box of traditional scholarship while also thinking outside the box with regards to digital media scholarship.

His responsibilities are two-fold:

- *Revising the digital chapter*—This part of the research project entails pulling together everything that he's gathered in two semesters of coursework (readings, digital assets, technological skills, etc.) and reconceiving of the current (revise-and-resubmit) versions of his classmates' projects under

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my supervision. The technical aspects of the three projects include a 10-minute video, a 7-minute video, and a MySpace page that includes four 3-minute videos, 25 still images with captions, and a blog. Those three projects currently stand alone. Matt will be responsible for

- assessing the current projects in relation to digital media peer-review criteria that we've discussed in class,
- outlining a revised storyboard for each project (which I will review and adapt, as needed),
- performing and incorporating additional research as necessary,
- completing the revisions of the three projects (which, in most cases, means a wholesale reorganization, re-recording of voiceover tracks, or other technical adaptations of the current versions), and
- coordinating his revision/redesigns with one of my graduate students, Jonathan Myers, who has written (and will be revising over the summer, based on Matt's revisions) an overview that introduces and ties the three projects together into a coherent whole.

This part of the research project will encapsulate the first six weeks of the 10-week summer fellowship, to be completed by July 1, 2009, when the digital chapter is due to the editors.

- *Studying his own revision strategies*—This part of the research project entails Matthew filming himself while he is revising the digital chapter, as well as audio-recording his thoughts about revision strategies (which may happen away from his computer or other stationary setting), and blogging in “status reports” about his revision strategies on an as-needed basis. Capturing his revision strategies during the first six weeks of the research project will produce generative data that, in the last four weeks of the project, Matt will
  - Review by watching and logging the video, audio files, and blog posts,
  - Code the digital files based on research into written revision strategies and creating new heuristics that the data will generate based on his new media revision strategies
  - Write a preliminary report (on his blog) on his findings

I will be guiding Matt through the logging, coding, and findings report. We hope to continue writing up the results and discussion of this project during the fall semester to submit it for publication at a peer-reviewed journal interested in the scholarship of teaching and learning and/or writing studies. In addition to being listed as a top-three author on the students' digital chapter, Matt will be able to count another publication to his credit based on the revision study, which will serve him well as he applies to graduate schools next fall.

### Faculty Member's Experience Involving Undergraduates in Research

In addition to introducing the undergraduates in my Fall 2008 Multimodal Composition class to scholarly conferences and digital scholarly research and publications, I have worked with two then-undergraduates at a previous institution to co-author a chapter for a book collection that is under final review with Utah State University Press. That chapter is called “(Multimodal, Multimedia, Multigenre) Composition: Narratives on Teaching and Learning with New Media.” Research in English studies often takes different forms than research in the sciences and social sciences, with much of it being qualitative (ethnographic, case studies, etc.) and community-project oriented. For instance, in Fall 2007, I collaborated with students in a previous iteration of Multimodal Composition (Eng 289.22: Multimedia Writing Workshop) to showcase their video projects locally at the Normal Theater. I have also worked with students in most of my technical writing classes at this and my previous institution on service-learning projects, which have included research and production of community-wide projects such as a new literary magazine (which has since gone national), a redesign initiative on another literary magazine, as well as research and production of multiple websites for local, community, regional, and national organizations. Whenever funding is possible, I try to bring undergraduates to conferences with me, and I hope to expand this option to encourage them to present as well.