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The Revolution is Being Televised: Pedagogy and Information Retrieval in the Liberal Arts College

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The Revolution Is Being Televised: Pedagogy and Information Retrieval in the Liberal Arts College

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ABSTRACT. In this period of rapid and ongoing technological change, teaching undergraduates sophisticated research skills demands more than the traditional library tour or instruction. It requires collaboration between faculty and librarians. The authors offer the plan they have tested and which they and their students find beneficial in filling this demand.

KEYWORDS. Research instructions, collaborative teaching, collaborative learning, faculty and librarian relations, teaching electronic resources, information retrieval and pedagogy

A new kind of text shapes the mind-set of my students, a printout which has no anchor, which can make no claim to be either a metaphor, or an original from the author's hand. Like the signals from a phantom schooner, its digital strings form arbitrary font-shapes on the screen, ghosts which appear and then vanish. Ever fewer people come to the book as a harbor of meaning. No doubt, for some it still leads to wonder and joy, puzzlement and bitter regret, but for more-I fear-its legitimacy consists in being little more than a metaphor pointing toward *information*. (Illich 118)

INTRODUCTION

We take our title for this piece on the necessary integration of pedagogy and technology from Gil Scott-Heron's 1974 song about racial oppression, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," not to co-opt or trivialize the message of Scott-Heron's lyrics, but to indicate that there is an institutional revolution underway in our profession and that it is, quite literally, being televised. We refer to the information revolution and to its impact on college- and university-level teaching. In this essay, we explore the effects of this burgeoning technology on teaching library research skills in the small liberal arts college.

Our main task, while proposing a practical model for integrating writing strategies, library research tools, and multimedia into the teaching of English literature, is to emphasize the value of collaboration between librarians and English faculty. Although we focus on English pedagogy, our

proposed scheme has wider humanities applications, since we stress process and interpersonal relationships over content. Once established, these relationships will sustain students, as technology continues its rapid metamorphoses.

To say that we, academics and non-academics alike, are in the midst of a quantitative information explosion is to say nothing new. One need only consider, for example, that labels like “information overload,” “Information Super-highway” and “Infobahn” have appeared and quickly become clichés within just the past few years. It is common to say that more information is now available to more people about more subjects than ever before. However, the far-ranging effects of this revolution on undergraduate research and pedagogy too often have been neglected.

The current upheaval is so profound a part of our professional existence and of such magnitude that we have to rethink the ways we teach, research, interact with texts, and grant tenure. We must reconfigure conventional notions of hierarchical authority, in both the Department and the classroom, if the students for whom we are responsible are to leave our liberal arts cloisters well equipped to confront the real and virtual worlds. We are responsible for helping them become informed consumers and users of information, interactive participants able to navigate the potentially bewildering array of “webs” and “nets” that will soon circumscribe and describe their world. If, as Gil Scott-Heron sings, “The revolution will be live,” so must our students be.

We accept technology’s impact as fact and suggest here some simple ways that members of the humanities faculty, librarians, and students might work collaboratively to derive more from both technology and the data it allows us to access.¹ To this end, we offer strategies for improving student writing and research and propose a library/classroom paradigm that has worked quite well for our students. We do so only after meditating upon the following:

1. restructuring the traditional research paper as a research project;
2. the productive, proactive links between librarians, faculty, and students in collaborative settings and the importance of such settings;
3. the integration and utilization of faculty, librarian and student expertise in the research process; and
4. the tension produced by the combination of the information glut and techno-anxiety-in both faculty and students.

We want, in short, to overcome student research inexperience through interpersonal collaboration and virtual immersion. Ideally, we would like to further the dialogue between humanists of all ideological stripes, and to offer some small thing that will benefit those wondering how-and if-they are to cope with the anxieties produced when their traditional liberal arts institutions find

themselves towed, keyboards first, onto the Infobahn. At Dickinson College, a relatively affluent liberal arts institution with an enrollment of around 2,000, instructors confront a common problem: our students are bright and, for the most part, eager, but they generally lack the research skills they need to marshal evidence to support a lengthy research paper. Even though there are any number of new technologies that can make their research wider-ranging, more efficient and effective, such aids are potentially confusing, even useless, to many of our students because they are unschooled in their use. The solution to this naïvete lies in improving students' information retrieval skills, and it has become abundantly clear to us that we cannot rely on their coming to us skilled. More important, perhaps, is the urgency with which we must undertake this instruction, particularly if our students are to fulfill their interactive potential.

ELECTRONIC TOOLS: BENEFITS

The information revolution offers undergraduates an array of electronic tools that can substantially enhance the quality of their research and attendant writing. A shortlist includes, but is by no means limited to, the following: a growing number of Internet user groups; vast databases like the *International Bibliography*, either on-line or on CD-ROM; data-bases of databases, like OCLC's *FirstSearch*; the *Oxford English Dictionary* on CD; and *Netscape* for navigating the World Wide Web.

There are, of course, any number of other electronic resources, but this list contains most of the ones we at Dickinson have used with our undergraduate English majors. We encourage them to surf across a variety of user groups, listservs and discussion lists-those ever-increasing, electronically-linked collections of computer users who gather round specific subjects. The Internet encompasses thousands of such lists on topics as narrow and conventional as Anglo-Saxon riddles or as broad and contemporary as cyberpunk or MOOs and MUDs. Students who join such lists can rub virtual shoulders with distinguished scholars or query fellow undergraduates on questions related to their specific research interests.

Consider the benefits of showing an undergraduate how to search an electronic version of the *MLA Bibliography*, of showing him or her how to examine the past thirty-three years of literary scholarship in mere seconds! *FirstSearch* now contains numerous on-line indices, various databases that allow-indeed, encourage-the sort of interdisciplinary connections so many of us now make in our own work. Even the *Oxford English Dictionary* on CD-ROM accelerates student research and not only in linguistics courses. In an instant, this electronic word-hoard reveals most uses of a particular word and offers hitherto impossibly rapid links between words and their historical contexts.

ELECTRONIC TOOLS: TEACHING

Yet, none of these sources is so user-friendly that students can master any immediately. Even student hackers tend to know less than they think they do. This environment is simply too diverse and fluid for any one researcher to encompass all it has to offer. Keeping up with and understanding the ever-shifting formats and search strategies demands familiarity with each system's idiosyncracies and an understanding of its deep structures.

Neither students nor most faculty have the inclination for such self-familiarization, nor do they usually have the time to dedicate to overcoming what can quickly become Infobahn angst. Students especially need more than a casual library acquaintance or library scavenger-hunt assignment to help them navigate their way effectively round this potentially bewildering topography. They need experienced guides, retrieval experts who understand technology's ever-changing essence.

At Dickinson we have a dynamic, effective system that links librarian-consultants with particular disciplines and/or departments. These library Liaisons work closely with faculty members to tailor strategies through which English majors, for example, can make the most of library resources.² The faculty/Liaison relationship introduces a collaborative dimension to the research process and can be enormously beneficial to the students. Library Liaisons are retrieval experts; they are not part of the student assessment process. Faculty members, on the other hand, are content experts and, as such, are responsible for judging student work. Hence, these members of the teaching team must collaborate in the assessment of the resources themselves.

And so although the Liaison and faculty members work closely in tandem, we stress their distinct roles. We do so because we are convinced that having a non-judgmental face to look for in the library is nearly as important to students as the tutoring they receive. They, like all researchers, will need help at some point, and having a non-threatening expert to consult makes them more willing to seek that help. The faculty member therefore cedes authority to the Liaison during his or her classroom presentation, acting-and interacting-more like an informed inquisitor than an authority figure.

We cannot overemphasize the value of informality and free give-and-take during the Liaison's class visit. For most students, the notion of mastering indices or even just perusing on-line sources is anything but exciting. Anything that personalizes this discussion and the application of such skills can only help. To this end, we have found it especially effective to replace the usual librarian monologue with a more freewheeling dialogue during the librarian's class presentation. He or she first explains a research concept or strategy, and the faculty member follows, interrupting either to amplify a particular point or to provide further strategic examples.

The result is what one of our colleagues used to call the “Dan and Connie” effect, which broadcast journalists use to break the pattern of information dissemination by altering speakers. This not only varies the tone of the “pitch” and breaks the usual monolingual monotony, but it conveys something of the joy and adventure that students’ instructors find in the research quest. Faculty who understand and enjoy the scholarly search mentor their students by example, showing them firsthand their sense of the challenge and excitement of research—something the old-style library tour can never do. We have found that our camaraderie at times even carries over and infuses the students with a sense of commonality of purpose, with a feeling that the whole painful process will be easier if they tackle it as an interactive team rather than as anxious moles.³

THE UPPER-DIVISION LITERATURE COURSE: A RESEARCH AND WRITING MODEL

In this section we offer a practical research model that links the library with the classroom, via the Liaison, and which sequences the upper-division research project.⁴ This model provides help in research skills for those students who lack them and refreshes the skills of those more experienced undergraduate researchers. It also emphasizes writing as a process, and attempts to forestall the last-minute research/writing blitz so common among college students.

The process begins around the sixth week of the semester—after the students have written a shorter, close-reading type of paper—and continues to the end of the term, about eight weeks.⁵ First, the faculty member and Liaison agree on a time when the latter can come to class to deliver a presentation on research methodologies and new database technology. Both the faculty member and the Liaison are present at this meeting, which is held in lieu of one class period. Their joint appearances and informal interaction are crucial to the establishment of an intellectual community. As we noted above, at this meeting the bounds of authority and expertise are clearly demarcated: the faculty member is the content specialist and grade arbiter; the Liaison is the non-judgmental search specialist. Throughout the term, they work together as a guidance team and at appropriate consultative levels with the students.

If students and resource persons have e-mail accounts, the exchange of advice, bibliographic “finds” and common problems is greatly facilitated. We encourage the Liaison and faculty member to provide the class with their e-mail addresses. Ideally, each student query or message should be sent simultaneously to both the Liaison and the faculty member. Responses can then be forwarded to all interested members of the class and even to resource persons in other departments or branches of the library. Such a system creates a virtual campus-wide web, strengthens the sense of community and enhances students’ research potential.

We first poll class members informally to get some idea of their levels of research expertise, so

that the level of the Liaison's presentation can be adjusted accordingly.⁶ Before the Liaison meets with the students, they are required to submit at least a general research topic, if not a proposed thesis, to the faculty member. The faculty member then groups students under various topics and distributes a handout with these groupings on it. Next to each student's name appears his/her campus mail address and phone extension. This way, students working on similar topics can get together, and the faculty member and Liaison can keep track of who is working on what, in case a useful source turns up.

After consulting with the faculty member regarding relevant bibliographies and databases for the course's topic, the Liaison chooses some of the student topics to run initial searches of print and electronic databases, such as the library's on-line catalog, *FirstSearch* and the *MLA International Bibliography* on CD-ROM, even the World Wide Web. He then prints sample screens and uses them as the basis of a handout, which he presents in a combined lecture/discussion format-the more participation, the more retention and understanding.

As the Liaison proceeds through the handout and shows a variety of printed sources, his faculty partner is free to interrupt and ask questions or to elaborate on particular points. If, for example, the faculty member knows of or owns a particularly useful research tool, its existence and utility are demonstrated. The students use the screen-print and printed-sources handout to follow along during the meeting and as a step-by-step guide when they go to the library to begin their research.⁷ The search strategies on the handout are arranged hierarchically, according to student expertise (as determined by the poll and the faculty member's knowledge of the students), and move from the most simple to the most complex. This arrangement accommodates a range of abilities, allows students to place themselves on the sophistication continuum at appropriate points and encourages them to experiment at deeper levels.

After this full-group meeting, students feel more comfortable with basic research skills and with conferring with the Liaison in the library or via e-mail. They have a friendly neutral face they recognize in the library, someone they know, at least slightly, and can trust. Once this bond is established, the faculty member is assured that the students are getting the kind of expert, efficient help they need in the library and can coordinate efforts with the Liaison to ensure the continued support of the students' efforts.

Following the Liaison's class visit, the students confer individually with the faculty member to discuss their 250-word research prospectus and bibliographic plans. Two weeks following this conference, students submit a bibliography of 15-20 items (10 of which must be annotated and evaluated for utility and relevance) along with a tentative thesis. The bibliography is graded and returned during the next class meeting, and the prospectus is submitted the following week. This

includes a more focused thesis statement, gives the primary text(s) to be examined and the major secondary sources to be incorporated, and outlines the study's critical methodology. The faculty member grades the proposal and returns it during the next class meeting.

The students are encouraged to get as much external help with their writing as possible, and in this course are required to meet with a Writing Center consultant to review their first draft (12-15 pgs.), which is submitted in class five weeks into the process and turned over to the Writing Center by the faculty member. The students are then responsible for making one-hour appointments with the consultants, with whom the faculty member meets early in the term by way of preparing them for their consultative role.

In addition to meeting with a Writing Center consultant, each student is assigned a peer tutor from the class-ideally, someone working on a similar topic-with whom he or she exchanges papers. Each author is given a set of guidelines and questions for evaluating a peer's work, and a day of class time is set aside for writers to meet with their peer editors and the faculty member.⁸ The peer editor's responses are submitted for evaluation at the end of the term as part of the final project package, which includes the annotated bibliography, the prospectus and first draft.

By the end of this lengthy sequence, students almost unanimously tell us that they are more comfortable with researching new electronic resources, with writing, with evaluating their own and others' writing, and they come to understand that writing is a never-ending process. Their confidence is strengthened and they feel well-prepared to tackle their senior seminar projects. This is a year-long course, at the end of which they produce a manuscript of between 7,500 and 12,500 words-clearly not a task that students can undertake a week before the due date. Too often in the past, faculty have assumed that undergraduates learned research skills by some mysterious process of osmosis. This is no doubt largely because of their own expertise, which they take for granted. They often, therefore, consigned teaching undergraduates the requisite research skills to the bottom rung on their ladder of pedagogical priorities. Perhaps the world of printed indices and card catalogs enabled this perception. After all, how hard was it to sit down with the drawer and cover all of a major research library's holdings on a particular topic or author? It might have taken forever, but one could go it alone and achieve a sense of satisfaction for a job well, if tediously, done.

This is growing less and less plausible, even possible. In this era of rapid technological change, acquainting oneself with even a fraction of what is available (thanks mostly to the feverish drive to publish or lose tenure) demands enormous sophistication. While the knowledge students seek has, and must have, priority over the methods of its retrieval, those who remain technologically unschooled will fall behind the electronically literate, not only in their English coursework, but in the work of life. We

can, we must, prepare them for the world we send them off to engage. We members of the academy, librarians, faculty and students, must work together to ensure that this happens. It is our collective responsibility to help our students prepare themselves for the revolution that is *now* being televised.

NOTES

1. Many of our ideas and suggestions come from conversations had in May 1994 at the Central Pennsylvania Consortium's (CPC) Foundation for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) Conference, held at Dickinson College, and from a gathering held at Yale University: "Beyond Gutenberg: Hypertext and the Future of the Humanities." The teaching strategies and paradigms offered come from successful and not-so-successful experiences we and our colleagues have had at Dickinson College, particularly those resulting from the recently reworked English major.
2. The traditional print-based library is rapidly expanding its domain, thanks to electronic technologies. Because it is now able to reach round the globe instantly and to incorporate virtual data from a bewildering array of sources, we suggest regarding the campus library, not as a space containing static, shelved information, but as an entryway to an ever-expanding informational hyperspace.
3. We have also found that the "Dan and Steve Show" becomes the target of some good-natured (we think and hope) joking. This is actually something of an asset and can be played upon to set a more relaxed tone for initial and subsequent meetings between students, Liaison and faculty member.
4. See Appendix A, "Submission Schedule," for a sample submission chronology. This and Steve McKinzie's handout (Appendix B) are from the first semester of Dan Terkla's year-long senior seminar, "Mapping the (Medieval) Text: The Aesthetics of Imaginal Space."
5. This first essay can form the basis for the longer study, or the students may choose to work on something completely different.
6. Most students are familiar with the rudimentary functions of Dickinson's on-line cataloguing systems, Catalyst or Sirsi. Such basic familiarity is assumed here for the sake of argument and simplicity, although we both do remedial information-retrieval instruction as well.
7. See Appendix B for a sample of one of Steve McKinzie's printed-sources handouts.
8. Invaluable for the philosophy and practice of peer editing is Tori Haring-Smith's *Writing Together: Collaborative Writing in the Classroom* (New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1994).

Appendix A

Submission Schedule

Prof. Terkla
ENGL 403-01

Fall 1994
M, 2-4:30

Exploratory Essay

♦♦ Final draft submission (6-8 pgs.) 19 September (in class)

Research Project

♦♦ Steve McKinzie, The Electronic Library
Research in the 90's 19 September

♦♦ Prospectus/Bibliography Conferences 21-23 September (TBA)

♦♦ Annotated Bibliography 3 October (in class)
(20-25 items, at least 15 annotated)

♦♦ Prospectus (250-400 words) 10 October (in class)

♦♦ Initial draft (20+ pgs.) to Peer Editors 18 November (TBA)

♦♦ Drafts returned with peer-editing forms 21 November (in class)

♦♦♦ Copy of peer-editing forms for me

♦♦ Writing Center conferences 28 November- 5 December

Project submission

Portfolio must include:

♦♦♦ Prospectus, with my comments

♦♦♦ Annotated bibliography, with my comments

♦♦♦ Initial drafts, with peer editors' and Consultant's comments

♦♦♦ Revised draft (20-25 pgs.)

Appendix B

Professor Dan Terkla
English 403
Fall 1994

Steve McKinzie
Library Liaison
x1619

Mapping the (Medieval) Text: The Aesthetics of Imaginal Space*

DICTIONARIES/QUICK REFERENCE

Ref 929.6/B875p

Dictionary of Medieval Knighthood and Chivalry: People, Places, and Events/ Bradford B. Broughton; illustrations by Megan Broughton Blumbergs. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.

Ref 909.07/qD554

Dictionary of the Middle Ages/ Joseph R. Strayer, editor in chief. New York: Scribner, 1982-89.

Ref 909.07/M627

The Middle Ages: A Concise Encyclopaedia/ general editor, H.R. Loyn. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989.

CRITICISM AND BIOGRAPHY

Ref 809.03/qL776

Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800. Detroit: Gale Research, 1984-92.

Ref 809/qN714 (Lacks vols..22-23)

Nineteenth-century Literature Criticism/ Laurie Lanzen Harris, editor. Detroit: Gale Research, 1981-1993.

Ref 809.092/qD5542

Dictionary of Literary Biography. Detroit: Gale Research, 1978-94.

BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND MAJOR INDICES

Ref 809.93/AM689 (Index Tables 6A-6B)

Modern Language Association of America

MLA International Bibliography of Books and Articles on the Modern Languages and Literatures. New York, 1963-92.

Ref 809/Y3 (Latest 10 years Ref; previous in storage)

The Year's Work in Modern Language Studies. London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1930-90.

> The *MLA International Bibliography* is also available on *FirstSearch*, an electronic server that contains it and other bibliographic databases and allows for more sophisticated searching.

> *FirstSearch* has a number of other valuable indices that you may need to

utilize for this course: *The Art Index*, *Arts and Humanities Index*, and *Social Sciences Index*. Also, for more contemporary information about hypertext or multimedia resources, you may wish to consult: *Library Literature*, *Newspaper Abstracts* and the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*

INTERNET RESOURCES

>> LIBS. This internet program available through the vax provides access to the catalogs of libraries around the world. At the VAX prompt (\$), type:
libs <return>

» Dartmouth Dante Project. Explore the Project and other literary resources through the Library of Congress Marvel gopher. At the VAX prompt (\$), type: telnet marvel.loc.gov

>> Netscape. Downstairs in the Library's MAC computer Lab.

* All items on this handout are available in Spahr Library. Use them to get started; augment with electronic sources, as per Steve McKinzie's handout of screen prints.