ITC Faculty First Grant Application

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Project Title: Innovative Literacy Learning in First-Year Writing
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Faculty First 2005 Grant
Innovative Literacy Learning in First-Year Writing
Dr. Jenn Fishman, Assistant Professor of English

Project Abstract

Assistance is requested for ITC support for First-Year Composition (FYC) research and teaching scheduled for Fall 2005. Recently in English, especially in the fields of Rhetoric and Composition, teachers and scholars have renewed their commitment to better understanding and promoting multimodal literacies or literacy across multiple media and communication situations. As researchers work nationally to establish guidelines for best practices in this area, the FYC Program at UT is building a repertoire of successful teaching activities and assignment sequences that encourage innovative multimodal literacy learning in English 101 and 102. In conjunction with these efforts, I will be leading a group of faculty and graduate students in classroom research to pilot and evaluate new digital media course components for English 101. Specifically, we plan to work with digital media in three main ways: 1) use of Blackboard for collaborative learning activities, including real-time online writing workshops; 2) use of blog software for both journaling (self-reflective writing) and source-based argument (expository and argumentative writing); and 3) extensive instructor use of Blackboard to coordinate linked course sections, to aid in course evaluation, and to facilitate implementation of these and other future activities among FYC instructors.
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Project Narrative

I. Project Need

   A. National Context
   Recent literacy research underscores the importance of understanding and supporting
   students' hybrid or multimodal literacies (New London Group; Stroupe; Kress). Key voices in
   this conversation belong to teachers and scholars in English and especially within the fields
   of Rhetoric and Composition. Concerned historically with the cultural and material variables
   that mediate communication, rhetoricians and compositionists have, over the last 15 years,
   devoted significant attention to twinned goals: 1) recognizing how new media is changing the
   nature and practice of literacy, and 2) determining how writing instructors can best respond.

   First-year composition (FYC) has played an important role in efforts to achieve these
   aims. As a gateway to university study, as well as extracurricular and post-graduate
   opportunities, FYC engages students actively in reading, writing, and critical thinking.
   Teaching skills as well as attitudes and habits of mind, FYC has responded to the prevalence
   of new media through both research and teaching in order to define new writing pedagogies
   and curricula and to establish guidelines for best practices.

   B. Local Context
   The importance of addressing these issues has not gone unheeded by the University of
   Tennessee's First-Year Writing Program, where approximately 53 instructors teach nearly
   150 sections of FYC each semester. As our program goals state: FYC "addresses the many
different ways we use language (including the new "languages" that make up our multi-media
forms of communication)." Currently, as a program we are working to revise our curriculum
and to expand students' opportunities for multimodal literacy learning, including reading,
analyzing, and writing across a range of genres and media.

   Crucial to making effective curricular change is developing, piloting, and assessing new
course activities and assignments. The project I have designed serves this purpose by
enabling a group of 4-5 instructors to pilot an English 101 syllabus comprised of 3 new
course components, two of which focus specifically on digital media. By comparing student
learning outcomes in pilot and "control" course sections, we will be able to begin a process of identifying concretely the benefits of our innovative pedagogies. At the conclusion of this project, we hope to share our findings and our pilot syllabus with both the FYC faculty here at UT and with our colleagues at professional conferences and in professional publications. We would look forward to collaborating with ITC staff for these occasions.

I. Project Description

During the fall of 2005, I and a team of graduate students will pilot an English 101 syllabus with three discrete units. The first will focus on orality and literacy, asking students to move between oral presentations and written assignments. The second unit will invite students to blog extensively both for self-reflective writing (i.e., journaling) and for specific assignments such as evaluating sources and composing source-based essays. The third unit will ask students to shift face-to-face classroom conversations to a digital realm and to use Blackboard's online chat for writing workshops.

For every pilot section of English 101, we will teach one parallel "control" course modeled after the current curriculum. Since both courses will share terminal assignments, we will be able to compare students' writing along with their self-reports (solicited regularly throughout the semester). Our work will continue through Spring 2006 and Summer 2006, as we analyze data and disseminate findings to different professional audiences. All research will be conducted in accordance with UT Human Subjects guidelines, and our evaluation of course content will be distinct from our evaluation of individual students and grading.

I am requesting assistance with tasks scheduled only for Summer and Fall 2005. Specifically, I seek support to develop activities and assignments using blog software (either via Blackboard or public programs) and Blackboard's collaboration features, especially the virtual classroom and chat function. In addition, I would like help learning to use Blackboard to manage multiple course sections and to archive and manipulate student data, including surveys. My project would also benefit from additional support, namely funds designated for the purchase of specific equipment. Our greatest wish is for at least one laptop computer, which would be used for teaching demonstrations and to store project related information (i.e., downloads of student writing and project-related software). In addition, each instructor will need a digital (voice) recorder to use for 15-minute diagnostic interviews with each student (23 students per course; 2 courses per instructor). Lastly, we would benefit greatly from the purchase of transcription software (or funding to pay for the services of a transcriber).

III. Project Schedule

A. Phase one: Initial Planning

At the outset of my collaboration with ITC, I would like to focus on identifying appropriate resources, designing effective user interfaces, revising proposed classroom activities, and identifying categories for evaluating pedagogical effectiveness. My priorities for this stage will be 1) to establish a feasible timeline for developing and testing individual course components throughout the summer; 2) to design a Blackboard template for course management and data collection, storage, and manipulation (including handling of student surveys); and 3) to select blog (and possibly other) software.
**B. Phase Two: Development**
Throughout the summer, both Stacey Pigg, a GTA in English and the lead Research Assistant for this project, and I will work with ITC to design and test each digital media component of the course. Our goal will be to work with the digital media enough to test and revise the details of day-to-day class activities and major assignments. NB: Especially for the purposes of blog testing, other members of our research group will be available online and/or in person.

**C. Phase Three: Implementation**
We will use the August FYC workshops to introduce the research team to the Blackboard site and to familiarize everyone with final course syllabi and procedures. Throughout the semester, we will meet regularly as a group, and the schedule below indicates when we anticipate wanting to meet with someone from ITC. A more extensive syllabus is available upon request.

**IV. Statement of Institutional Support (sent under separate cover)**

Appendix: Schedule for Fall 2005 Research meetings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week (Dates)</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week -1 (8/15-19)</td>
<td>Writing workshops*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 1 (8/22-26)</td>
<td>9/22 Research meeting—getting started (120 minutes)<em>&lt;br&gt;9/24 First day of MWF teaching&lt;br&gt;9/26 Research meeting—troubleshooting digital recording (30 min.)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2 (8/29-9/2)</td>
<td>9/2 Research meeting—working with digital voice data (75 minutes)*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3 (9/5-9)</td>
<td>9/9 Research meeting—sample research journal entries due (75 minutes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 4 (9/12-16)</td>
<td>9/16 Research meeting (75 minutes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 5 (9/19-23)</td>
<td>9/23 Research meeting—blogging prep (75 minutes)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6 (9/26-30)</td>
<td>9/30 Research meeting—blog troubleshooting (75 minutes)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7 (10/3-7)</td>
<td>No research meeting this week—researcher journals due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8 (10/10-14)</td>
<td>10/14 Research meeting (75 minutes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 9 (10/17-21)</td>
<td>10/21 Research meeting (75 minutes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 10 (10/24-28)</td>
<td>10/28 Research meeting—online chat prep (75 minutes)*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 11 (10/31-11/4)</td>
<td>11/4 Research meeting—online chat troubleshooting (75 minutes)*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 12 (11/7-11)</td>
<td>11/9 Research meeting (75 minutes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 13 (11/14-18)</td>
<td>11/18 Research meeting online (75 minutes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 14 (11/21-25)</td>
<td>No research meeting this week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 15 (11/28-12/2)</td>
<td>11/29 Research meeting—devise rubric (120 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 16 (12/5-9)</td>
<td>12/5 Final ITC meeting (75 minutes)*&lt;br&gt;12/6 Final Fall research meeting (120 minutes)</td>
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* Indicates meetings that would include ITC involvement for at least part of meeting time