

Writing Board Grant

Departmental Proposal for Integrating 21st Century Literacies and Multimedia Communication

Academic Year 2012-2013

Grant Application by a Department

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Chairperson's Signature: Jason Loviglio

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Signature of the Chair indicates that the process of investigating the integration of writing into departmental course offerings will be an experience involving most, if not all, members of the department.

1. Describe the process the department will undergo to develop an initial plan for integrating more multimedia communication opportunities into departmental courses.

The Media & Communication Studies Program (MCS) is committed to teaching students the importance that communication (written, oral, and visual) plays across a range of media, genres, and cultural contexts as a key to succeeding in the communities and workplaces of the 21st century. The program emphasizes critical media literacy, intercultural communication, and new media and applied communication in order to stress the significance of media and its related digital technologies in the students' everyday lives. Since the initial development of the program, MCS has experimented with the integration of multimedia assignments into our core courses. The feedback related to these assignments from both students and faculty has been overwhelmingly positive, especially in relationship to the skills being taught, and the level of intellectual engagement required in producing digital projects. With the assistance of this grant, we would create a much more structured approach for expanding our utilization of new media technologies within our curriculum, while assessing their impact on students' critical analysis, writing, and oral communication abilities.

As MCS is relatively small with a total of four full-time faculty members, everyone will have the opportunity to participate in the larger discussion about the value of multimedia communication in our courses. For this initiative, we will identify a specific committee that might also include individuals affiliated with the New Media Studio (who have also taught

MCS courses). The MCS director has identified Donald Snyder, full-time lecturer, to chair this committee. Dr. Snyder will form the committee and help develop a plan for examining the current curriculum in order to evaluate the ways multimedia platforms have already been integrated into our courses, while identifying potential new techniques and assignments to expand its role. One of the first tasks of the committee is identifying and evaluating the range of examples already established at academic institutions around the world. In order to do this, the committee will research and connect with established organizations that have been working to integrate new technology into liberal arts education, such as the New Media Consortium, and Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory (HASTAC). The committee's main task for the year will be to develop a workshop designed to take interested faculty (from across the colleges) through the steps of designing, implementing, and assessing digital assignments for the 21st century student.

2. Please indicate those courses or aspects of the curriculum where 21st Century Literacies will be introduced or expanded, and how you will implement your plan and assess its success. The assessment should include a plan for student learning outcomes and how writing will be used to assess students' learning.

Two of our core courses, MCS 222: Introduction to Media & Communication Studies, and MCS 333: History and Theory of Mass Communication and Media Studies, have included assignments tailored to explore and experiment with 21st Century Literacies. MCS 222 has used several social media based assignments including students creating weblogs to publish and peer critique written work, collaborative wikis defining key terms, the collaborative creation of group presentations on readings using Google Docs, and online discussions utilizing BlackBoard. MCS 333 features a core assignment that requires students (working individually or in small groups) to create a three to five minute video visualizing a passage from one of the course readings. Students then write a short paper reflecting on the process, benefits, and limits of the video assignment. In this paper, students are asked to comment on how the process of creating a multimedia project affected their understanding of the course materials and the way they approach academic writing. The paper is essential as it helps the student cultivate a critical perspective concerning the emergence of new media in the formation and distribution of knowledge. Feedback from students and professors concerning this assignment has been very positive. Students in MCS 333 are also given the option of completing a digital assignment for their final project.

We have integrated these 21st Century Literacies assignments into our core curriculum for several reasons. Most of our students fall in the age range of the "digital millennial." They were born with access to networked computer technologies and grew up using them in their family, social, and educational lives. These assignments not only require them to actively explore the capabilities of using media technology for learning, but also force them to engage with the ways these technologies have helped shape their experiences. Additionally, these assignments help advance students' writing skills. The peer sharing associated with the weblog assignments (as opposed to only having the professor read their papers) places an added level of responsibility over the students to produce work

they won't be embarrassed to have their classmates read. The weblog also allows for continuous editing, which permits the professor to provide credit to students who correct grammatical and writing errors. We also feel it is important to examine the role that digital word processing and editing programs, such as Microsoft Word, have had on writing. Requiring students to experiment with collaborative writing environments (Microsoft Office's Track Changes, Google Docs), encourages them to understand writing as a process that requires continuous editing and revision, both in form and content. Finally, while the Internet has helped enhance the value and importance of visual culture, advanced writing skills remain essential. In part, writing for digital environments demands even more precision, as the medium requires short and precise prose. The 21st Century Literacies assignments will reflect and encourage the forms of writing required for future success in fields related to Media and Communication Studies.

With assistance from the Writing Board's "Integrating 21st Century Literacies and Multimedia Communication" grant we would explore additional ways of expanding digital literacy skills in our core courses. The goal is to identify lessons and assignments that will help students to reach several of the key learning objectives at the center of MCS 222 and 333 including:

- Students will enhance their critical awareness of the relationships between media, communication and everyday life.
- Students will evaluate the role of media institutions and communicational practices in making and reconfiguring local, national, and global communities
- Students will sharpen their critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills through reading, writing, discussions, and group activities
- Students will develop technical competencies and critical perspectives in new media production
- Students will engage in theoretically informed analyses of social phenomenon related to media and communication

The initial plan would be for the committee to identify and propose one new digital literacy assignment for each of these courses. Like other multi-modal assignments piloted in MCS 333, this assignment would include a written reaction paper that reflects upon the process of creating the digital project. A member of the committee would then work in partnership with the professor teaching the course in the Spring 2013 semester to integrate the assignment into the classroom. After the completion of the assignment, the committee would utilize direct and indirect assessments in order to review the project's success. The committee would then analyze a random sample of the projects based on a rubric designed to assess form, content, and student engagement. The committee would also administer a short survey to the students asking them to assess the value of the assignment in relation to a selection of the learning objectives listed above. From these assessments the committee will identify the assignment's strengths and weaknesses, along with possible adjustments to be implemented in future semesters.

The committee would also be involved in the development of two new courses being introduced into our curriculum. Over the past year, MCS has devoted significant time to exploring proposed changes to our core curriculum. In part, this move was in response to our 2010 internal program assessment where students declared a great desire for increased opportunities to learn digital production skills. In response to this, along with several other goals we hoped to improve upon, the director launched a curriculum committee to think about the future of MCS. The committee initiated the development of several new courses in the program. We are planning on introducing these courses over the next three semesters. In order to address the students' interest in digital production skills, two of these courses were directly developed with 21st century literacies in mind. MCS 101 is a four-credit lecture/lab course that introduces students to the issues surrounding digital literacy while exposing them to elementary digital media production programs and techniques. Of specific note is that the class will meet four times a week. Three of those times will be in a large lecture hall, while the fourth will be divided among three smaller sections held in Apple computing teaching labs. In the lab section we will experiment with assignments that will give students the tools to produce a variety of media messages, and require them to apply the theories and concepts learned in the lecture to analyses of social phenomenon.

Where MCS 101 will provide students with a general introduction to media literacy, MCS 355: Social Media: Networking and Mobility (under review by the UGC) is designed to strengthen the connection between 21st century literacies and effective expository writing. MCS 355 will be submitted to the Writing Board as a Writing Intensive (WI) course. The course theme of social media, however, requires an expansion to the traditional definition of writing. Throughout the semester class time will be dedicated to discussing issues surrounding, the meaning, value, and power of writing in our increasingly digital and public society. How has our adoption and use of various new media challenged the way we understand writing and literacy? How is writing a term paper similar and different to writing a blog post, a tweet, a photo-essay, a Wikipedia entry, or a digital narrative? How have software programs, such as Microsoft Word, affected the writing and editing process? How might we use these programs to develop better writing and editing skills? One of the primary goals for this course is for the student to engage with the changing nature of writing when creating content for multimedia platforms. With the emergence of multimodal publication environments such as Wikipedia and Blogger, we can now think about writing beyond the limits of texts composed primarily of words. How does writing change when we are producing documents that integrate words, images, video, and sound?

Both of these courses align perfectly with the mission detailed in the Writing Board Grant. The following specific learning objectives were selected to highlight how our curriculum reflects a critical engagement with central components of 21st century literacies:

- Students will engage with changing meaning, value, and power of writing in our increasingly digital and public society through both discussion and practice

- Students will understand the political economy of the media industries that produce newspapers, advertisements, games, films and other entertainments along with the media platforms and apparatuses like mobile phones, tablets, and PCs.
- Students will understand several of the legal and ethical debates surrounding the production, consumption, and distribution of information and intellectual property through digital networks.
- Students will understand and work competently with the reference and archival materials and tools of the AOK Library, as well as web resources like the Library of Congress website, Google Scholar, and Creative Commons.
- Students will become critically aware of the relationships between social media (networking and mobility) and social, cultural, political, and economic institutions.
- Students will become acquainted with basic new media writing and production skills, and apply those skills to course assignments.
- Students will interrogate their own relationship with social media, examining the role that these technologies have had in shaping their lives.

As one of the primary goals of both MCS 101 and MCS 355 is the exploration of the role of new media technologies in the educational process, we will be developing direct and indirect assessment plans to uncover which strategies, lessons, and assignments prove successful and which ones fall short of our desired outcomes. This will involve requiring students to write reaction papers detailing the process and value of several digital literacy assignments along with the use of both informal and formal response surveys. The MCS Program believes expanding the use of 21st century literacies and multimedia communication in our curriculum is essential to our core mission of preparing students for success in a global society that is becoming increasingly digital and interactive. The proposed plan establishes a solid guide for properly evaluating our success in reaching this goal.

3. When will you be able to report to the Writing Board that your plan has been enacted and assessed? That is, what is your timeline including periodic benchmarks.

The program director would form the committee prior to start of the Fall 2012 semester, when an initial meeting would take place. We currently have faculty meeting scheduled on the third Friday of every month during the semester. The 21st Century Literacies and Multimedia Communication Committee would meet the week prior, enabling the committee chair to present a report at the general faculty meeting. The committee would also closely monitor at least one of the pilot lab sections for MCS 101 in order to observe and implement new strategies, along with gathering valuable feedback from students. From this initial plan, the committee will begin examining ways to incorporate some of the ideas and successes from 101 into the other discussed courses (MCS 222, 333, and 355) for the Spring 2013 semester. In the Spring 2013 semester, the committee would work directly with the professors for MCS 222 and MCS 333 in order to introduce at least one new learning strategy into each course. This is also the semester the program will launch MCS 355 as a writing intensive course dedicated to examining the relationships between writing, communication, digital literacies, and social media. The committee would continue

to meet in order to further assess the value of these new strategies and to develop a report to be presented to the Writing Board near the end of the Spring 2013 semester. The committee will also organize and hold a workshop in the Spring 2013 semester offering a step-by-step guide for faculty interested in adopting 21st century literacies and multimedia communication assignments into their courses. This workshop will be open to faculty across the colleges, and could possibly include other individuals, departments, and programs awarded Writing Board grants.

The support of the Writing Board would be extremely valuable, especially in terms of our ability to explore new digital production, editing, and publishing software, and to host a workshop for the campus focused on our experiences designing, implementing, and assessing digital assignments. I have included information about the blogging assignment in MCS 222, the video assignment in MCS 333, and the proposed syllabi for MCS 101 and MCS 355 as supporting documents. MCS is extremely well positioned to examine the relationship between writing and the emergence of 21st century literacies and multimedia communication. MCS is a rapidly growing major with a curriculum at the intersection of traditional humanities and 21st century/digital literacies. Our students are eager to bridge the gap between a traditional liberal arts education and the digital world that is reshaping employment, citizenship, and global relations. We are very eager to begin working on these issues and appreciate your consideration of our proposal.