Summer Teaching Development Grant
College Writing I Online Master Course Project

Description

This project will involve creating a fully online, fifteen-week College Writing I Master Course to be used by the Kent State Writing Program at all eight campuses for any instructor teaching College Writing I online. Kent State University has charged all departments with providing quality online instruction and course offerings, and quality online course development requires pedagogical techniques and considerations different from face-to-face courses in order to be successful. Digital media afford online educators the opportunity to harness different technologies and new ways of being in a digital classroom that can enhance student engagement in ways similar to yet unlike face-to-face instruction. However, the pedagogical opportunities and options available for online instruction can be overwhelming, particularly for someone teaching online for the first time. This project will provide a master course complete with essay assignments, activities, readings, quizzes, instructional videos, and peer workshops for any instructor teaching College Writing I online.

College Writing I is a CORE course that almost all Kent State students must take, and, in that way, it is important that the course be approachable, rigorous, interesting, and organized, all the while adhering to overall goals and objectives. This is true of the course in general and even more so for the online version of the course, which, if not well thought-out, can be confusing or exclude the kinds of rigorous thinking and social presence that exist in face-to-face classes. Further, some instructors are asked to teach online classes without much online teaching experience, often believing that they can use the same materials that they use for face-to-face instruction. To address these issues, this project will provide a complete College Writing I Master Course that will include all assignments and materials in a thoughtful, scaffolded, planned, accessible, and organized manner. Further, this course will provide detailed instructions for teaching College Writing I online (a teacher's edition or guide, so to speak), activity options for instructors to provide variability and agency within the course, and a Pedagogical FAQ document just for instructors with questions and tips about online teaching. In this way, this project goes beyond regular course planning, by offering a complete master course as well as materials meant for the instructors only in order to help enhance their teaching and understanding of online pedagogy.

I would also like to note that master courses have been very successful within the English department. The English department currently offers online master courses for College Writing II, Technical Writing, and Business and Professional Writing. The development for those master courses was paid for by a grant under the Office of Continuing and Distance Education (OCDE). However, the OCDE has stopped funding the development of master courses, yet the demand for the master course in College Writing I is still high. Therefore, given the University's request for quality online classes, the labor-intensive nature of the development, and the English department's need for a College Writing I Master Course, I am seeking funding through the Summer Teaching Development Grant in order to create this master course.

Goals

The audience for this project is College Writing I instructors who will be teaching online as well as the students who will be taking the course. This project includes three specific goals: 1)

Meeting Learning Outcomes of College Writing I, 2) Creating course approachability regarding essay topics, and 3) Establishing social presence in an online environment.

1) **Learning Outcomes.** The goals and objectives for College Writing I are stated clearly in our Writing Program handbook. Below, I include the specific Learning Outcomes, along with examples of how those outcomes will be met in this master course included next to each criterion.

   - **Rhetorical Knowledge (e.g., major essay assignments and discussion forums)**— By the end of their Tier I writing course, students should be able to recognize the elements that inform rhetorical situations. This understanding should enable them to produce texts that
     - Have a clear purpose
     - Respond to the needs of intended audiences
     - Assume an appropriate stance
     - Adopt an appropriate voice, tone, style, and level of formality
     - Use appropriate conventions of format and structure
   - **Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing (e.g., major essay assignments, discussion forums, reader responses, and peer workshops)**—By the end of their Tier I writing course, students should be able to
     - Use reading and writing for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating
     - Analyze relationships among writer, text, and audience in various kinds of texts
     - Use various critical thinking strategies to analyze texts
   - **Knowledge of Composing Processes (e.g., peer workshops and essay revisions)**— By the end of their Tier I writing course, students should be able to
     - Understand writing as a series of recursive and interrelated steps that includes generating ideas and text, drafting, revising, and editing
     - Recognize that writing is a flexible, recursive process
     - Apply this understanding and recognition to produce successive drafts of increasing quality
   - **Collaboration (e.g., peer workshops, discussion posts, activities)**—By the end of their Tier I writing course, students should understand that the writing process is often collaborative and social. To demonstrate that understanding, students should be able to
     - Work with others to improve their own and others' texts
     - Balance the advantages of relying on others with taking responsibility for their own work
   - **Knowledge of Conventions (e.g., essay assignments)**—By the end of their Tier I writing course, students should be able to
     - Employ appropriate conventions for structure, paragraphing, mechanics, and format
     - Acknowledge the work of others when appropriate

- Use a standard documentation format as needed
- Control syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- **Composing in Digital Environments (i.e., this class holistically)**—Developments in digital technology are expanding our understanding of "writing." To the extent that technology is available and appropriate, by the end of their Tier I writing course students should be able to
  - Understand the possibilities of digital media/technologies for composing and publishing texts
  - Use digital environments to support writing tasks such as drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, and sharing texts

2) Essay Topic Approachability. In order to create a College Writing I Master Course that includes all of the above elements and meets each of the Learning Objectives, this master course will include textbook readings and activities from the handbook adopted by the Kent Writing Program Committee and an online, open-source textbook found at www.collegewriting.org that address and apply writing concepts and conventions (e.g., drafting, revising, editing, audience, etc.). The course will also include major essays that demonstrate understanding and mastery of writing conventions and peer workshops to ensure collaboration and to reinforce the practice of writing as a process. College Writing I is a difficult course to teach, given the varying levels of student preparedness and ability. Further, teaching a CORE composition course creates issues of interest, investment, and knowledge regarding essay topics. For example, some College Writing classes might include essay topics related to politics or football, which might not resonate with all students. Addressing this, one goal of this course is to create a College Writing I experience that is approachable to all students. Beyond meeting Quality Matters requirements to ensure the course is accessible to differently abled students, this course will include a music theme in order to allow students to write essays that are focused around a similar topic yet different enough to accommodate various interests related to style, genre, and musical preferences. The main pedagogical purpose in using a music theme is to create opportunities for students to write about a topic that is ubiquitous and with which nearly every has an interest or investment in some way. While not all students are athletic or enjoy playing or watching sports, nearly every student listens to music and has a favorite band, artist, or genre. The way this course will be fashioned will not assume or require that students have any musical background or ability—only that students listen to some sort of music.

3) Social Presence. In an online environment, social presence is difficult to achieve, especially in an asynchronous classroom. Social presence is the sense of community that is easier to achieve in traditional classroom settings where students can more easily talk to one another and gauge people's nonverbal communication signs (e.g., smiling, nodding, looking confused). This College Writing I Master Course will address this issue by incorporating group work such as peer workshops where students will read two to three peer essays during each Unit, providing extensive, thoughtful feedback regarding the content of each essay (as well as editing marks, included separately in a document with Track Changes). At the beginning of the course, students will also upload a bio and picture and participate in a discussion forum that updates the class about their interests, hobbies, and any current events (e.g., inviting the class to a local theater production or concert).

This project will enhance teaching excellence by providing an organized College Writing I Master Course for any online instructor who might be new to online teaching or who might want to reconsider or revamp current pedagogical techniques for teaching College Writing I. In order to track teaching excellence and student learning, instructors who use the master course will be asked to require their students to write a Reflective Essay at the end of the semester regarding their learning experience. This essay will be shared with the Writing Program. Additionally, the instructors will be asked to share their Student Surveys of Instruction (SSI) in order to compare that data with the data from other instructors who successfully teach College Writing online. In collecting SSIs, we will also be able to track instructors' progress from semester to semester. And, if any instructor has taught College Writing I online prior to using the master course, we will be able to compare his or her SSIs from both College Writing I classes, including the students' qualitative comments.

Impact

Addressing the University's request for more quality distance learning offerings in all departments, this College Writing I Master Course will be a complete, departmentally reviewed course that can be used by any instructor teaching College Writing I online at any of the eight Kent State campuses and will be distributed by the Distance Learning Coordinator at the Kent campus. Currently, there are 17 online College Writing I classes offered each academic year (6 in the Fall, 5 in the Spring, and 6 in the Summer), with the majority of online classes having 25 students per class. In that way, the number of students affected could be 425 each academic year. However, the impact moves beyond this class and beyond academia in that writing, like music, is ubiquitous and if students are offered a complete, cohesive, rigorous, and interesting College Writing I experience, they will be more likely to understand and apply successful writing conventions (e.g., revising, editing, collaboration, etc.) beyond this one class.

Activities and Timeline for Summer Grant Completion

Week 1: Complete Syllabus, Course Calendar, and Instructor-Only Documents
- Syllabus, handbook integration and activities, Online Teaching FAQ, instructor documents, course calendar (Units 1-4), welcome page, "Start Here" information, course organization overview video

Week 2: Complete Assignments and Activities for Unit 1
- Major essay assignment #1, introduction posts, discussion forum, quizzes, reading assignments and materials, instructor-only documents related to Unit 1

Week 3: Complete Assignments and Activities for Unit 2
- Major essay assignment #2, discussion forum, quizzes, reading assignments and materials, instructor-only documents related to Unit 2

Week 4: Complete Assignments and Activities for Unit 3
- Major essay assignment #3, discussion forum, quizzes, reading assignments and materials, instructor-only documents related to Unit 3

Week 5: Complete Assignments and Activities for Unit 4

- Major essay assignment #4, discussion forum, quizzes, reading assignments and materials, instructor-only documents related to Unit 4

Communication Plan

I have discussed this proposal with the Writing Program Administrator, Margaret Shaw, and the Distance Learning Coordinator, Beverly Neiderman as well as the Kent Stark English Department Coordinator, Mary Rooks. These individuals as well as the English department support this proposal. The following shows a general timeline for disseminating this project:

Summer 2015: Start and complete College Writing I Master Course Project

Fall 2015: Pilot the finished College Writing I Master Course in my own online College Writing I classes in order to ensure ease of use and no minor mistakes

September 2015: Go before Writing Program Committee for College Writing I Master Course approval, allowing time for revisions, if needed.

October or November 2015: File appropriate paperwork so that the master course is available for other instructors to access and use

January 2016: College Writing I Master Course available for use and data collection beings. Ongoing maintenance will be discussed with the Distance Learning Coordinator.

While creating this master course, I will be in continual communication with the Beverly Neiderman and Margaret Shaw. Additionally, I will communicate my progress with Mary Rooks on the Kent Stark campus. I am already adept at creating online courses and at using Blackboard, but if I have any questions, I will be working with Katie Baer, the Educational Technology Designer for Kent Stark. Given that I will have pre- and –post SSI data and interviews from the instructors and teachers, I will be able to provide publishable results from this project. I will also be able to present those results at the UTC conference.

Evaluation Plan

- **Student Reflective Essays:** Along with the final essay assignment in Unit 4, students will be required to complete a Reflective Essay, which will discuss their final project, their progress in the class, and the class overall. This essay will be less directed and more open than the follow-up Student Interview email (discussed next). The Reflective Essays will be read and coded according to themes relevant to the evaluation of the course, relying on methods of content analysis and grounded theory to develop coding categories.

- **Student Interviews:** Students who take College Writing I with an instructor using the master course, will be sent an email asking for their feedback. This email will be sent during finals week with a reminder email sent one week later. Their participation will be voluntary but encouraged. Specific questions include:
    1) Have you taken an online class before? If yes, how would you describe that experience?

2) How would you describe your experience taking College Writing I?
3) What were your expectations for this class at the beginning of the semester? Did your experience in College Writing I meet your expectations? How or how not?
4) What did you enjoy about this class?
5) What would you suggest changing about this class?
6) Did you feel like you were able to meet and work with other students in the class, even though this class was fully online? If yes, how? If no, what could be changed to achieve this?
7) Do you have any other comments or feedback that you would like to add?

- **Instructor Interviews:** Additionally, instructors who use the master course will be interviewed (either face-to-face or via email) in order to ascertain their perceived effectiveness of the course. They will be asked to reflect and provide feedback and specific suggestions for improving the master course for future semesters. Specific questions include:
    1) Was this your first time teaching online?
    2) What were your expectations for online teaching? Did this course meet or change your expectations for online teaching? How or how not?
    3) Why did you choose to use the master course?
    4) What worked well for you regarding using this master course?
    5) What improvements would you suggest in order to make this course better?
    6) What other comments would you like to include?

- **SSI Comparison:** As mentioned previously, all instructors who use the master course will submit their semesters' SSIs in order to compare that data to other instructors' data who have taught using the master course. Further, we will be able to compare instructors' SSI data over time, once they begin and continue to use the master course. Initially, the only data available will be that from the pilot, but I am confident that my SSI data will be above average and successful, as all of my SSI data from online teaching have been thus far.

Data will be used in order to revise and improve the master course for future classes. The Writing Program Committee also must approve this course and the instructors who teach it, which is another way to evaluate its success. The overall maintenance of the course, once it is created, will fall to the Distance Learning Coordinator. However, once the pilot has been completed, maintenance should be minimal.

Professional Background