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New Directions

Course Reflection

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New Directions, New Teaching:

How This Class has Shaped My Teaching Philosophies

I am not what one would call a *seasoned* teacher; I have not "been around the block"

a time or two, and I do not yet have a laundry list of students who have given me a run for

their money, or a long list of those who have become near and dear to my heart. However,

as my second year as a freshman-level composition instructor draws to a close, I am very

pleased that it has come in conjunction with the course, "New Directions in the Teaching of

Writing." Through this class, I have learned some of the base foundations for composition

scholarship while strengthening my vocabulary when speaking about composition and

pedagogy. More explicitly, I have become more comfortable being on the teaching end of

digital writing and new media.

As an undergraduate, I was no stranger to multimedia projects. Once I was accepted

into the journalism major I was using multimedia at least once each semester, even if the

course wasn't specifically multimedia related. That connection, however, stopped at the

School of Communication. When I walked down Seventeenth Avenue to the English

building, I had to have my tote bag full of traditional print books, and a notebook with a pen

or pencil to take notes. My traditional argumentative and other academic papers were all in

proper MLA formatting, and the extent of the technology was the laptop and word

processor that I had to use. Why could these two disciplines not meet in the middle with the use of digital writing? Was there not a place for multimedia in the English classroom? I must say that after completing this course, I am very excited at the prospect of bridging that gap in future classes that I may teach.

During one of the first class meetings this semester we discussed the five canons of classical rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. As the class progressed, we read scholarship from Anne Wysocki who gave definition to the elusive "new media" term and dubbed it as the ability for the author to maintain consciousness of how and why they are creating something. Later, we created one of Geoffery Sirc's box projects to work in conjunction with discussing web-based writing platforms and epistemic rhetoric, which isn't just about persuasion, but also about making knowledge. As we read more scholarship and had discussions, our vocabularies expanded far past those initial five canons; we created vocabulary for web writing (when creating the WikiHow project), we looked at current vocabulary that is being challenged (such as authorship and identity in a collaborative web platform), and debated terms to use when discussing graphic design and aesthetic (such as contrast and alignment). So much of teaching includes learning and, being in a digital age, it is especially important for teachers to continue learning and building these vocabulary terms to integrate them into classrooms with confidence.

Each of the assignments this semester worked to build our new vocabulary and knowledge base in some way. The WikiHow project allowed us to practice writing for a very wide intelligence-level audience, while still being specific to those interested in our how-to article. The technology presentations gave us a firmer foundation to begin our creative multimodal projects. These multimodal projects were huge, time consuming, but

also rewarding. The process, for me, of putting together the project went through many steps and frustrations. I had to sort through many old photos while keeping them separated to be returned to their previous owners. I had to relearn how to use iMovie and grew frustrated when my computer would crash or it would take hours to upload. Through this though, a student learns and must work and problem solve. These are skills that would be important for freshmen composition students to learn, but with the digital project, they would learn so much more. They could still have traditional print text on the website, but could also become creative with the aesthetic and integrate visuals, sound, and other technologies; a truly multimodal creation.

In conjunction with these other projects, we also worked in groups for a service-learning project. In order to successfully complete the assignment, we had to work together to choose a non-profit organization that could use a product or service that we could provide while using writing skills for the community. Our group chose to do our project with Happy Trails Farm Animal Sanctuary, a group that rescues abused and neglected farm animals, gives them medical care, a place to live, and the chance at being adopted by a new family. As part of our project, we were in contact with two main people at the Sanctuary: Ilona and Annette. Ilona is the volunteer coordinator and proved to not be a good communicator; she misremembered the date of our tour appointment, and then missed our tour completely when we went on our scheduled day. The first struggle and learning curve of the project; always be prepared to contact someone else. After several weeks of poor communication, I reached out to Annette, the director and founder of the Sanctuary. She was immediately excited about the project and met with us to discuss creating three new

brochures for the organization and all of the information that was important to include in them.

We ended up each creating our own brochure for Happy Trails to help split the amount of work that needed to be done; I worked on the Farm Animal Visitation Program, Megan did the new Education Center, and Randi did a brochure on the Adoption Process. Through each of these we had to write for a very specific audience; I had to write a brochure that would appeal to those interested in an animal program at a nursing home or hospice center. To do this, I chose a bright color (yellow) that would stand out and create a sense of happiness together with a light purple that is said to be calming. I included photos of past visits to nursing homes of the animals interacting with other individuals. On the inside, I chose to include information about the benefits of people interacting with animals to show that there is a mutual gain for enrolling your group in the program. Since there is a cost to clean, transport, and have handlers for the animals, the consumer needs to know that there are benefits to spending upwards of 100 dollars on the program. It was also important to include all of the logistical information in a clear and concise way: what animals would visit, what months the program runs, what's included in the cost, and address safety concerns. Through this process, I had to narrow my focus and include what I felt was the most important information so as not to clutter the page and keep the consumer focused and interested.

Once past the content and layout, the brochures all had to be read by Annette and her other faculty to ensure that they were consistent with their branding efforts. This is where, I feel, I learned the most. I had to be humble and remember that just because I liked a design, that doesn't mean it is best for a company. Since she was essentially our boss for

the project, I had to conform to her branding details and be sure to match the proper sizing and formatting. The brochures all had to have a uniform and cohesive feel as a group, so we all utilized Google Drive to look at and compare our individual brochures against each other's to maintain a uniform aesthetic. As our final edits are made, we will be taking our copy to a print shop near Happy Trails to have 25 copies of each brochure professionally printed on the uniform glossy paper before delivering them, along with PDF versions of each template, to Annette at the Sanctuary.

A project such as this would have to be carefully implemented in a freshmen-level course mainly due to there often being Post Secondary high school students in the classes. These projects require transportation to and from the facilities, and although they are in a college class, permission slips would be needed for those students still in high school. A group service learning project could teach a class a lot about team work, communication, and very specific writing skills, but would work better at a higher level to ensure the responsibility to independently complete the work.

I feel that the best project to implement into a classroom would be the multimodal creative project, but changed to reflect a portfolio layout. I could see having the students create a webpage the first two weeks of class and stressing visual rhetoric and aesthetic, and then implementing a blog feature on the pages to stand-in for traditional writing journals, and then creating a new page for each assignment over the semester culminating into a larger project like the creative profile. Through this medium, drafts of printed text can still be submitted for peer review, but they can then be linked to the webpage and used in conjunction with visuals and other mediums to show connections between traditional

rhetoric (ethos, pathos, and logos) while combining it with Selber's multiliteracies to include the functionality of the site and critically analyzing why certain choices were made.

Overall, I have become a more confident writer for digital platforms this semester, but also have become a more confident instructor armed with more updated vocabulary and assignment assessment ideas to implement into a freshman composition classroom.