Proposal

Submitted by
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Goal:

To convert all six sections of Expository Writing to a computer-assisted curriculum while maintaining a coherent language and culture theme. A target date for this conversion is beginning with Fall Semester 1995. This curriculum will emphasize electronic writing as a social act by increasing classroom textual, social, and cultural interactions during the writing process. It will also include electronic support of synchronous and asynchronous collaborative groups and class discussions, and an increased volume of writing from students to their peers as an immediate and responsive audience.

What will be required to make this conversion?

Contents

1 Rationale

The primary reasons for converting to computer-assisted Expository Writing in the Fall Semester of 1995 can be summarized in the following general areas:

1.1 Current Computers and Writing pedagogical approaches are moving into alignment with the Language and Culture focus of the Rensselaer Expository Writing curriculum, leading to explorations of feminist and Marxist pedagogies, decentering authority electronically, displacing gender constructs, and allowing conversations and writing topics to arise on cultural issues in such as way as to directly illustrate how language affects the specific construction of culture. Many of these issues are only beginning to be explored in this way with computers, and it is likely that more opportunities for the creative integration of these pedagogical approaches will be developed.

1.2 The technological resources and research opportunities at Rensselaer Polytechnic make the Institute a natural site for this type of approach to Expository Writing. Many other less technologically innovative universities have already implemented extensive computer-assisted versions of their first year writing programs.

1.3 The composition research focus of the Department of Language, Literature, and Communication allows for interesting opportunities to look critically and empirically at computer-assisted pedagogies in ways that many other universities are not, because in many cases other programs rushed into computerizing their sections without weighing various social and cultural effects. Most schools experimenting with computer-assisted pedagogies are not as highly focused on quality composition research, and thus have difficulty in clearly assessing the advantages and disadvantages of the technology.

1.4 A successful pilot project has already been undertaken, with archived and demonstrable results for two semesters. The instructor who ran this pilot is also capable of taking the Computer Expos Coordinator position with the responsibility of implementing this proposal.

1.5 Interesting and productive research projects have already been initiated, looking at cultural and pedagogical effects of synchronous and asynchronous electronic classroom interactions. These projects can be carefully structured and carried out with greater validity with more instructors participating. These opportunities can also serve further graduate student recruitment, since many students now applying to graduate schools are interested in pursuing this kind of research, and are often surprised that there are not more opportunities for it at Rensselaer. The titles of two ongoing projects are listed below:

The Virtual Locker Room: Gendered Democracy in Classroom Electronic Chat Space, by Christine Boese. Accepted for presentation at Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 1995.

Examining the Textual Comments of Face-to-Face and Computer-Mediated Peer Response Groups, by Lee Honeycut. Pilot study report for Professor Lee Odell.

1.6 Rensselaer students are already exposed to a variety of innovative computer-aided instruction in their math, science, and engineering courses. With the level of innovation across the Rensselaer campus and with the kind of computer support for writing classes that many mainstream universities have been offering for at least four years, Rensselaer students deserve to have their writing courses match that level of innovation and technological access. Many current students have voiced surprise at the use of computers in the pilot version of Computer Expos, assuming that writing and humanities issues are remnants of a horse and buggy era. This is a contrast to the experience of most undergraduates at state universities and community colleges, where science classes are often conducted on blackboards and writing classes are conducted with computers. Also, writing and humanities courses have greater opportunities to explore and question various uses of technology in class discussions, more so than a hands-on programming, calculus, or computer-aided design course.

2 Two Hardware-Software Options

To implement this proposal in six sections of Expository Writing, considerable hardware-software adjustments will have to be made, not the least of which are adjustments in room scheduling and electronic classroom access. More and more departments on campus are seeking to reserve computer lab space, and this proposal adds six relatively small sections to the reservation pool. This issue can be handled in several different ways, against a backdrop of two major approaches to the conversion. **Option A** assumes the approval of a substantial instructional improvement grant, sufficient to set up a dedicated collaborative writing lab of mid-range personal computers which can also function as a reservable electronic classroom. **Option A** is the ideal hardware-software solution to this proposal's conversion requirements.

Option B assumes that limited resources will be available for the conversion, yet shows that such a conversion can be accomplished and serve students and instructors well, so long as the department can reserve adequate lab space for six sections. There are also ways to minimize complex lab scheduling, if pairs of sections can be scheduled for the same time slot. This immediate and pragmatic solution will be the focus of **Option B**.

2.1 Option A: An ITS administered collaborative writing laboratory and electronic classroom.

This option directly addresses the biggest problem for Computer Expos at Rensselaer: in richness there is famine. Most computer labs on campus contain high-end UNIX workstations. Most schools that are writing and implementing software which directly supports computer-assisted writing classes can only afford networked personal computers. There is no market for such software on UNIX workstations. While one Expository Writing instructor has adapted the curriculum to UNIX-based software, many simple conferencing and text annotation functions that are taken for granted and incorporated into innovative research at smaller, poorer schools are not available at Rensselaer. The only way to use these software developments and to prepare our instructors for jobs at schools which use such tools, is to design and build a networked writing lab of mid-range personal

computers, to be supported and administered by ITS in the same manner as the Macintosh lab in Sage 4511.

2.11 The Macintosh lab in Sage 4511 cannot serve the above purpose for the following reasons:

• There are not enough units in the lab.
• The room is not configured for effective teaching. Many instructors have taught in similar spaces before, but the fans, acoustics, and doughnut-shaped aisle tax an instructor's voice and energies greatly.
• The Macintosh lab is the only place on campus with scanners, graphics, sound, and memory capabilities to support multimedia work, which is time-consuming and an important draw for graduate students in Language, Literature and Communication and IEAR. To tie up such expensive machines for the minimal graphics, sound and memory needs of Expository Writing would be an ineffective use of the lab, especially when the issue of access for multimedia users is so crucial.

2.12 Hardware Requirements:

• At least **20 mid-range personal computers** would be required, allowing for a server and a demonstration machine for the instructor. Many humanities professors and graduate students have a preference for Macintosh computers, although adequate software resources are available on either Mac or IBM platforms.

• **A display device**, LCD overhead or projection display. This is not as crucial for a discussion-based writing class as a white board, since most Expos instructors do little direct lecturing. However, it is helpful for displaying difficult command sequences, infotrax demonstrations, and sentence and paragraph workshopping.

• **Half-circle or Node room configuration**. Sage 3101 is configured in concentric half-circles, with students' terminal screens facing the instructor. Students then swivel away from their machines to listen and take notes from the instructor. This setup works much better than straight aisles or one doughnut aisle. Some researchers in Computer-Supported Collaborative Work are also finding success with cluster nodes of 4-6 computers for collaborative group work. This configuration could work with writing classes, so long as students have a clear line of sight to their classmates and the instructor, because the task of the computer is to link writers socially, not isolate them. Instructor and peer feedback on writing in progress is crucial, so the room should permit movement and access for everyone.

2.13 Software Requirements:

Software considerations are inexpensive but specific.

• The room must be networked, and it should have full **Internet** and **World Wide Web access**.

• It should have a **standard, mainstream word processor**. Several of these are already licensed to the Institute and provided in other laboratories.

• **Writer's Resource Packages**. Drill and practice software packages run counter to the pedagogical approach of the Expository Writing Program. All that is really needed in this area is already being provided by John December and Lee Honeycut with the Writing Center Web Site. An on-line usage handbook should be provided

on the server for quick reference, along with the standard spell-checker, dictionary and thesaurus. Writing heuristic software is also probably not needed, as most instructors approach this aspect of the writing process on their own.

• **Connectivity Packages**. What is absolutely necessary is connective software that is specially adapted to the needs of writing classes, software such as Daedalus, which provides support for synchronous discussions with the full class participating in loggable sessions. Asynchronous communication and class bulletin boards are adequately supported by Zmail, although it is harder for students to learn on personal computers without the graphic interface of the UNIX stations.

• **Text Annotation Solutions**. Programs such as Daedalus or Norton Textra Connect provide another key advantage that has allowed them to take university writing programs by storm, and that is their use of sticky notes for textual annotation. Without such programs, instructors and peer reviewers cannot comment on texts without disrupting the text itself. This difficulty in and of itself has made Lee Honeycut's research on electronic peer reviews less compelling than it might have been if students didn't have to wrestle with the limitations of UNIX software while writing electronic peer reviews. Sticky notes tend to make the technology more transparent.

2.14 Summary

Option A provides for ambitious instructional improvement, constructing a new laboratory of personal computers that will allow instructors to focus on the social, collaborative, and cultural aspects of writing by connecting writers and writing coaches during the process, allowing for immediate feedback both electronically and face-to-face. It specifically addresses software deficiencies which currently hold the Computer Expos pilot project back. **Option A** allows for more transparent synchronous conferencing and discussion, and more transparent text annotation. As one can see later, this issue of transparency of technology is a key aspect of the goals of a redesigned syllabus.

2.2 Option B: Expository Writing on UNIX Workstations

This option offers a pragmatic and workable solution within existing resources, built on the successes of the pilot project. The best site for managing six sections of Expository Writing within **Option B** is the Sage 3101 Electronic Classroom, which has been reserved for two sections of Computer Expos for the Spring Semester of 1995. The absolute worst site for such a project (with obtrusive rather than transparent technology) is Sage 4510, which was used for the pilot in Fall 1994 while the Walker Lab was being relocated to Sage 3101.

2.21 Hardware Requirements:

Clearly Sage 3101 is the best electronic classroom on campus because it was designed for teaching and collaborative activity. For that reason, however, it is likely to be in high demand. While other labs can be used, including the ones in VCC (big, with echoes) or CII (small and cramped), the department of Language, Literature and Communication could minimize its use of time slots in Sage 3101 and still accommodate all six sections of Expos. Since the redesigned syllabus plans for splitting class time between traditional and electronic classrooms (on a Tuesday-Thursday rotation, for instance), room spaces can be assigned to pairs of

instructors during the same time slot. One instructor would be assigned a traditional classroom for 2 PM, T-R, while another instructor would be assigned to Sage 3101 for 2 PM, T-R. These two instructors would simply alternate days in different rooms. And from the point of view of administrators who are concerned about spreading lab access across departments, LL&C would only be requesting the Sage 3101 lab for three time slots.

2.22 Software Requirements

Software is a major concern with this option as well. The UNIX workstations are powerful, and for the most part reliable. ITS has been working hard at finding a more user-friendly and adaptable word processor than Slate, but in the meantime, the Computer Expos pilot has had better luck with **Framemaker**. A basic template has been tried and it works well enough, although text annotation is intrusive. UNIX has worked well in supporting electronic filing of papers, although it does take a while for students to learn the commands, and this will also be a point of difficulty for training new instructors as well. Orientation and training will be crucial because of it. Orientations to **Zmail** and **Mosaic** are pretty simple and students grasp them right away, using both as topics for discussion in the class alias, which serves as a bulletin board.

The biggest headache is synchronous chat support. The pilot project looked into several options, from educational MOOs to ytalk to IRC, but the best results so far have come with **NCSA Collage**, which supports collaborative groups and chats fine, so long as the groups are small. When critical mass is achieved, the program tends to crash. A better solution would be to find a program which would allow the whole class to participate in a loggable electronic discussion at once, perhaps even allowing the instructor to participate as well, without her having to roam the room, monitoring equipment crashes.

One further note concerning software for instructor support: If Framemaker is used as the primary word processor for all six sections of Expos, then the Department of LL&C should consider what teaching on workstations means to graduate student instructors who sometimes have personal computers at home. Many teachers would prefer to grade papers at home, but cannot open workstation files from their home machines, except perhaps as unformatted text. Although it may take additional training to show instructors how to access the files from home, the department should look into providing an inexpensive version of Framemaker for the instructors who would be expected to grade papers in Framemaker.

2.23 Summary

Option B would utilize Sage 3101 with UNIX Workstations, with Framemaker as a primary word processor and the Writing Center Web Site as a primary writing and usage resource, in addition to printed texts. Zmail aliases will link the class asynchronously to a bulletin board space created for each section (unless instructors choose to combine their class bulletin boards for greater feedback, an experiment that has been tried at other schools. ITS limits alias groups to approximately 50 members). NCSA Collage, Diversity University MOO, and other synchronous spaces can be applied according to the temper and boldness of individual instructors. Text annotation can be handled intrusively, in separate documents, or by Zmail. If someone at ITS could modify Framemaker to handle sticky notes, it would be a significant improvement. In the meantime, there are still the paper and face-to-face feedback methods, which remain important and should never be

eliminated anyway. This proposal also recommends providing instructors with software in the same way that instructors are provided with textbooks to teach the classes.

3 Syllabus Redesign

A number of considerations for the syllabus redesign have already been addressed. The most crucial factor is the modification of time. Previously classes always met in a group discussion and study space, a traditional classroom. With the conversion, fully half of the class time would be used differently. This does not mean that key instruction is lost, or even that less material can be covered. Rather, it means a direct change of pace. Although students are writing in class, that does not mean they are spending less time working on their writing outside of class. An instructor has to make this point very clearly and set up assignments accordingly. To be sure, the semester starts more slowly, as orientations take up those first class sessions. As such, the pilot project had to reduce the amount of research that went into the final paper of the semester. These kind of adjustments are inevitable. But the benefit is derived from a closer attention to writing feedback on a weekly basis. Students get the kind of individual attention to their writing, face-to-face, that they usually only get in individual conferences.

A sample of one redesigned syllabus from the pilot project has been provided in Appendix A. This syllabus is loosely scheduled to accommodate the instructor's improvisational style, as well as to allow for the inevitable technical glitches. Another instructor could plan class sessions more formally, but as is the case in a traditional classroom, an instructor has to be alert to pacing and to the effectiveness and difficulty of the task at hand. Computers sometimes frustrate users and create a brain fog after a sustained period of good hard work. An instructor needs to be able to sense this and improvise alternative tasks to lighten up the class.

One teacher has suggested the following goals as general guidelines for what the redesigned syllabus should help the course to accomplish during class periods held in the electronic classroom:

• To serve as an **Over-the-Shoulder Writing Coach**, displacing the traditional teacher's role as the Sage on the Stage to become the Guide on the Side, providing quality supportive feedback during the writing process. People often overlook this role when they speak of word processors as glorified typewriters

• To allow for **fluid textual revisions and manipulations**, the traditional advantage of emphasizing process when working with word processors.

• To increase the volume of **unevaluated writing practice** for students (with a broader audience than the teacher alone) with the use of a **Class Bulletin Board** and weekly discussion topics.

• To allow for **networked text sharing** and **electronic peer review**.

• To experiment with **collaborative software** and **synchronous electronic chat discussions and conferences**.

• To introduce students to tools on the **Internet,** both for **research** and **connectivity**, considering language and culture issues in text-based virtual writing/programming spaces (**MOOs**) and exploring **Mosaic**.

4 Computer Expos Coordinator's Responsibilities

To accomplish such an ambitious conversion, an additional staff member would be needed. This teaching assistant would report to the Director of Expository Writing and would be responsible for support and training of new computer instructors and administration of the department's instructional computer space on the UNIX system. This would be a full 20 hour position, and as such this instructor could not teach one of the six sections of Expository Writing. Specific qualifications and responsibilities for this position are detailed below.

4.1 Qualifications

• Applicants for the Coordinator's position should have prior experience teaching writing courses on various levels. If at all possible, they should have been part of programs using electronic classrooms at other institutions, thus making them familiar with pedagogical issues surrounding the integration of technology and writing instruction. At Rensselaer, this means that the Coordinator would already have a Master's degree and experience either as a teaching assistant, or high school teacher, or adjunct or tenure-track college instructor.

• If such applicants are not available, then people who have been trained in the Expository Writing orientation and training plan outlined in this proposal should also be considered, if they have taught in the program at least one year.

• It is helpful but not required that the applicants have some background in Computers and Writing, either through reading or attending specific conference sessions, in order to be familiar with areas of contention and innovation in the field.

• A willingness to learn various computer systems is more important than direct experience with the systems, as many graduate students who come to Rensselaer may be from diverse backgrounds or regions of the country where access to technology is limited. These people should not be disregarded in favor of someone who was a UNIX programmer in a previous job. The person who ultimately fills this position should be a teacher first and a technical wizard second. This is VERY IMPORTANT, as this person will be teaching the teachers, making complex issues understandable, and on occasion, assisting in Expository Writing class sessions.

4.2 Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Computer Expos Coordinator can be divided into two parts: orientation, training, and support of new instructors, ongoing throughout the semester, and administration of the department's instructional computer space on the UNIX system.

4.21 Orientation, Training, and Support of New Instructors

The Computer Expos Coordinator will be responsible for the following:

• Implementation of the Orientation and Training Plan detailed in this proposal. This plan will include an introduction to the equipment, software, and methods for beginning of the semester class orientations. It will have to take place at least one week before the beginning of the Fall Semester and continue during the weekly meetings of the Expository Writing Group (either as time set aside during each meeting, or alternating weekly with the more general pedagogical support and guidance provided by the Director of Expository Writing).

• Being available to instructors on email and during set office hours for technical support and troubleshooting, as well as pedagogical advice on working with electronic texts and synchronous and asynchronous forums. This responsibility does not entail that the Coordinator know as many technical answers as an ITS consultant, but rather, that this person knows how to find answers quickly from the right people.

• Being available to instructors on an advance appointment basis to work as a Floater, or second teaching assistant in an Expository Writing classroom, at whatever level of support the instructor requires. Some instructors may want simply an observer to give feedback. Others may only need the additional presence as insurance when trying a new task, in case of a technical glitch. Others may need an active extra body to work the room and attend to students' needs, especially during the beginning of the semester when everything is new.

• In the event that an instructor is not able to fulfill her or his duties and handle the electronic classroom adequately, it is **not** the responsibility of the Coordinator to carry that instructor's course on a continual basis. If an instructor is misusing the Coordinator by requesting Floater assistance for more than two weeks in a row, the Coordinator should report the problem to the Director of Expository Writing, who will handle it.

• It is also **not** the responsibility of the Computer Expos Coordinator to set the theoretical and pedagogical foundations for Expository Writing. These issues are determined by the Director of Expository Writing with input from the Expository Writing Group. As a member of the Expository Writing Group, the Coordinator can participate in the discussions along with everyone else, perhaps offering insights from readings in Computers and Writing. If the Director of Expository Writing believes the Coordinator is influencing the pedagogical focus of Expository Writing unduly, she should meet with the Coordinator privately as soon as she is aware of the problem, to correct it.

4.22 Administration of the department's instructional computer space

In 1994 space had been made available from ITS for various departments across campus. Christine Boese, the instructor who ran the pilot project, was made administrator of this space by default, because she needed it for the pilot project. She has structured and adapted this space for two uses: 1. Instructional Support and 2. The Department's World Wide Web site. She delegated the World Wide Web duties to John December. December is coordinating the construction of various department web pages, with Lee Honeycut working on the Writing Center

Web Site, and Kevin Hunt and Philip Garfield working on the Language, Literature and Communication Department Home Page.

Additionally, Boese began supporting instructional uses of this space across the department through word of mouth. Instructors of Tech/Pro and Rhetoric and Writing have already made use of this space, as well as an independent study project on Intellectual Property. The pilot project of Computer Expos made extensive use of this space, supporting electronic paper filing, electronic peer review, archiving course handouts, and hosting synchronous electronic discussions.

With conversion to six sections of Computer Expos, the Expository Writing program has a continued interest in the consistent development and access to this space. There is no one else in the department who has the official duty of administering this space, and it would stand to reason that a position of Computer Expos Coordinator can easily fulfill these duties. Requests for access from outside of Expository Writing can be handled with minimal effort, assigning directories and permissions, while the Expository Writing program can benefit from the consistency of the structures that have already been set up.

The Computer Expos Coordinator will be responsible for the following:

• Full administration duties of the space /dept/llc on UNIX. With these duties comes the creation and removal of consistent directories according to the system already in place. This also includes setting permissions for these directories to handle the needs of various instructors. It also includes monitoring the memory usage and applying for more memory when the time comes. This may entail dividing the department's Web Site into a separate entity, depending on which part of the space usage becomes more memory intensive over time, instructional use, or web use.

• Instructional support for teachers needing space on /dept/llc. This entails helping instructors set up and administer the space they have been assigned for their own sections, showing them how to create directories, set up class user groups, and set permissions, according to their own course goals. This support also includes making the service known and available for the asking to all instructors and professors in the department, through a general memo.

4.3 Evaluation of Computer Expos Coordinator

The Computer Expos Coordinator will be evaluated in light of the above responsibilities by the Director of Expository Writing according to a five point scale: 1. Strongly Agree, 2. Agree, 3. Neutral, 4. Disagree, 5. Strongly Disagree. These responsibilities can be summarized as follows:

• The Coordinator adequately implemented the Orientation and Training Plan.

• The Coordinator was available to instructors on email and during set office hours for technical support and troubleshooting, as well as pedagogical advice on working with electronic texts and synchronous and asynchronous forums.

• The Coordinator was available to instructors on an advance appointment basis to work as a second teaching assistant in an Expository Writing classroom.

• The Coordinator promptly reported instructional problems to the Director of Expository Writing.

• The Coordinator adequately administered the department's instructional space on the UNIX system.

• The Coordinator adequately provided instructional support for teachers needing space on the UNIX system.

5 Orientation and Training Plan for New Instructors

Although more and more graduate students are entering the Ph.D. program in Rhetoric and Communication with experience teaching in electronic classrooms, no one can assume that all instructors will be able to make the transition painlessly. The goal of the Orientation and Training Plan is to make the technology user-friendly and comfortably transparent for the teachers, so that their enthusiasm and ease communicates itself at all levels to students. This is not an impossible task, as the majority of the work of Expository Writing will be done with a simple word processor, or Framemaker. Most graduate students are comfortable with the features of most word processors, particularly graduate students in Rhetoric and Communication. On the other hand, many people freeze up when brought face to face with UNIX. Given this contrast, the Orientation and Training Plan must take into account the psychological effects of different types of technology.

What follows will be a quick summary of what the plan will cover, and in what order. More detailed technical information appropriately belongs in the Orientation and Training Handout, which will be prepared if this proposal is approved.

5.1 Logistics

This orientation must begin at least a week before school starts, without cutting into orientation activities which are already scheduled from year to year. Instructors need to get their UNIX accounts and get into a lab as soon as possible, perhaps with 2-3 two hour sessions. The third session could be optional, for instructors who feel they need it for confidence.

The first two hour session would cover the general orientation handouts, the first hour dealing with software familiarity, and the second hour with pedagogical issues.

The second two-hour session would review and cover additional software, possibly with new instructors conducting parts of the review as practice for the orientations they will conduct in their own classes. Then the session would move from software review to a more practical discussion of how to conduct a class in the lab, how to float the room, how to keep the technology as transparent as possible and keep the focus on writing, language, and culture.

By the end of this second session, new instructors will have taken control of their class UNIX space, structured it according to the syllabus that they have been working on with the Director of Expository Writing, set up an archive for their syllabus and class handouts, and gained a general ease and familiarity with the software they will be using all semester.

The optional third session can serve a dual purpose for the department. This session could be planned and run by the new instructors working together to divide up responsibilities. It could be held on a free Saturday afternoon before school starts and advertised to all new students in the department, graduate and undergraduate, as a general computer orientation. This would give interested instructors a chance to practice before they meet their actual classes. And it would be good public relations for the department, as part of the welcome to new students.

5.2 Orientation and Training Handout

As mentioned above, psychological concerns will be a key factor in pacing the orientation to minimize unnecessary intimidation by the technology. A tutorial handout will cover the following software issues:

Session 1

• **Sign on-Sign off**, **Zmail**, **Mosaic**, **Infotrax**. Emphasis: User-friendly intro. Tasks: Send mail. Visit the Writing Center Web Site. Mail a research citation to yourself.
• **Word Processor/Framemaker**. Emphasis: Simple word processing. Tasks: Make an Expos Template. Set formats. Send the Coordinator a memo to a UNIX directory.
• Free-for-All **Collage Chat**. Emphasis: Something light. Tasks: Play with the program. Log the chat. Paste it into a Framemaker document. Take turns adding comments to the document, annotating the text.
• BREAK
• Return to discuss pedagogical issues.

Session 2

• **Zmail/Framemaker.** Emphasis: Review. Tasks: Create mail folders. Import syllabus as text file into Frame. Change formats.
• **UNIX directories**. Emphasis: Class administration. Tasks: Create and remove directories. Copying Frame documents from the previous session. Create user groups. Set permissions. Create an archive file.
• **Internet surfing**. Emphasis: Some easy/some hard. Tasks: ftp and how to do it from home. Gopher, archie, finger and whois. Telnet to MediaMoo for fun.
• BREAK
• Return to discuss pedagogical issues.

Session 3

• To be planned by participants.

5.3 Beyond the Initial Orientation

It would be naive to think that the above orientation and training sessions would be complete enough to leave instructors to their own designs for the rest of the semester. The orientation should give instructors enough confidence to begin their courses, although all will require a floater from time to time. The orientation and training handout will also serve as a template for Expos Orientation handouts, archived as electronic texts so the instructors can modify them to their own

purposes. But it is inevitable that details will be forgotten, and review will be necessary throughout the semester. Only through constant use and repetition will arcane commands be remembered.

Topics to be discussed during the semester include pedagogical issues raised by the technology, as well as how-to tips and instructions. These issues will come up in the context of the weekly Expos meetings, depending on how the Director of Expository Writing chooses to allot time, alternating weeks, or splitting the session in two. Discussions can also take place on the Expos alias, on email.

6 Summary

To convert all six sections of Expository Writing to a computer-assisted curriculum by Fall Semester 1995 will require a commitment from the Department of Language, Literature and Communication and the Expository Writing Program to make a substantial change in the program.

• It could involve the funding and construction of a collaborative writing laboratory, sufficient to bring a different angle to the composition research already being done in the department. If such a lab were constructed, it could possibly connect with a site for the Design Conference Room, an NSF-funded project under Dr. Cheryl Geisler and Dr. Ed Rogers. That project emphasizes collaborative engineering design work, but employs Macintosh computers in nodes of 6 machines each.

• It would require the funding of an additional 20 hour teaching assistant. Although a second section is being added to the existing pilot project in Spring Semester 1995 with no increase in funding, it would be impossible to convert all six sections of Expository Writing to a computer-assisted curriculum without an investment in the training and support of instructors and in the administration of the endeavor.

• It would require a change in the way sections are scheduled for Expository Writing, with a modification of room assignments to allow for split time between the traditional and electronic classroom. The split time arrangement allows student writers to make the best of both worlds, face-to-face and electronic.

• Finally, it would require a change in the orientation scheduling to accommodate a more intensive period of training for these specific instructors. However, there is a potential benefit to the department with this change, as these instructors can provide a general computer orientation to new students in LL&C. As is currently the case, new students in the department often flounder for a while until someone finds them and directs them to their UNIX accounts and ITS short courses. But the ITS short courses seldom focus on the low key computer needs of writers. A general computer orientation would serve a public relations function as part of the welcome extended to new students in the department.

Appendix A

EXPOSITORY WRITING 43-1110-01: LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

SPRING 1995 Tues.-Thurs. 5 to 6:20 PM
Tuesdays Troy 202 Thursdays Sage 3101
INSTRUCTOR: Chris Boese boesec@rpi.edu
PHONE: 276-8787 OR 276-6467 (Sage 4702 Mailbox)
OFFICE: 2510-2616 Sage Basement
OFFICE HOURS: 4 to 5pm Tues. and Thurs., and by appt.

COURSE MATERIALS:

Rereading America. Gary Colombo et al, 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford Books, 1992.
A Pocket Style Manual. Hacker, Diana. 1st. ed. Boston: Bedford Books, 1993.
Additional readings on reserve in Folsom Library
A good college-level dictionary
A reading journal notebook

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Welcome to Expository Writing. I am looking forward to working with you individually on your writing and to helping you push the limits of your minds. In this course we will explore the integration of language and culture within the context of **critical, creative, and collaborative thinking and writing**. My goals for the course are

- To give students a sense of challenge, intellectual progression and sophistication in their thinking, writing, and group work.
- To range across contemporary issues in language and cultures and to consider those issues in depth as well as with an eye to various disciplinary approaches.
- To expose students to good and bad real world writing models, and to work at collaboratively enunciating the features which distinguish certain types of writing as better than others for a particular context and audience.

This course will give you valuable perspectives and abilities for your work in your primary field. It can also take you a long way as an aware, fully functioning member of the human race. I believe critical and creative thinking is the best antidote to cultural and media forces which encourage unthinking acceptance of authority and passive consumption of cultural myths. The text I have chosen, **Rereading America**, considers many of these myths, using essays as models for class discussions, independent thinking, and effective writing.

Which is to say this course will help you write thought-provoking papers while probing your understanding of how language is used in the cultures around you. But beyond useful forms of standard writing, I want to take on a bigger issue--*how we think* in different cultures. I want our class to question *everything*, including those useful forms of standard writing. I plan to shift the learning to the class as we hatch ideas collaboratively. I used to give a tentative reading schedule so students could see where we were going, but now I plan our time differently. I want to make the class an active participant in the direction of our readings and the content of our writing. Class discussion and participation will be essential, and part of your grade.

Another element of this particular class is its setting in the electronic classroom. Although I have taught in several different electronic classrooms, I am always trying new things, and this lends an experimental aspect to our class. I would like to invite you to join me in the experiment, looking at how electronic tools help and hinder the writing process. Some

assignments will proceed in a more traditional fashion, while others will integrate the equipment in our classroom. The most important goal for me as far as the computers are concerned is that they do not obstruct human interactions, but rather, that they become a transparent tool for accessing ideas, and thinking and writing about them.

This course involves daily writing practice, from writing in journals to sending email to the class bulletin board to writing in the computer lab. Students are encouraged to bring in samples of writing they find anywhere, from the wonderful to the horrendous. Please do. And don't shut down your creative side! Most importantly, please do not try to calculate your papers around what you think a teacher would want to read. I may surprise you. More than likely, if you write about what is truly interesting to you, it will be interesting to me also.

COURSE POLICIES

Graded Papers

You will write **four major papers** for this course for **70 percent** of your final grade. Specific requirements for each project will be discussed in class. You will receive credit for rough drafts and for your written comments on classmates' rough drafts, but you will have plenty of time to revise these papers before the final draft grade is given. You may then revise the essays again for optional credit. Optional revisions are due on the last regular class day of the semester. The assignments correspond to course subject units as follows:

Unit 1: Introduction to Language and Culture (Chap. 1 Colombo)
Assignment 1: Imitation Essay, George Orwell or Toni Cade Bambera
•First draft
•Peer review
•Final draft **14%**

Unit 2: Exploring Cultural Myths and Assumptions (Chap. 6 Colombo)
Assignment 2: New York Times / Date of Birth Report
•Informal Presentation
•First draft
•Peer review
•Final draft **17.5%**

Unit 3: Language in the Media and Professions (Chap 7 Colombo)
Assignment 3: Analysis and Evaluation of language in your field
•Analysis exercise
•First draft
•Peer review
•Final draft **17.5%**

Unit 4: Argumentation, Persuasion, and Cultural Relativism
Assignment 2: Open Topic Persuasive Essay **(Readings by Class Choice)**
•Topic proposal and electronic debate
•Individual conference
•First draft
•Peer review
•Final draft **21%**

Participation, Attendance, Reading Quizzes, and Journals

In addition to the above work, you will also be responsible for more flexible homework and participation. This work is not assigned a letter grade until it is looked at cumulatively at the end of the semester. Extra credit options will also be available throughout the semester, but they can only affect what I call your **Participation Grade**, for **30 percent** of your final grade, or approximately 15-30 total points. To subjectively give this grade, I keep point tallies in four different areas:

Participation
Although this area appears subjective, I understand that members of a community chose to participate in different ways, just as people have different speaking and discussion styles. Participation is gauged by levels of *engagement* in a topic or discussion, not by the number of times you raise your hand. I really don't try to rate participation as much as I understand it as I come to know you, in class discussions, informal presentations, over-the-shoulder computer conferences as you write, and more formal conferences in my office. Part of my philosophy of shifting learning to students involves turning the floor over to students in informally-styled presentations of material. I want you to be active, not passive, learners.

Attendance
The only area that counts strictly in the negative, as in, *more than three unexcused absences will lower your grade*. Read that again. **Each absence after three is tallied and subtracted from your Participation Grade point total.**

Reading Quizzes
Throughout the semester we will be reading essays from *Rereading America* and other materials I will place on reserve. The day after each reading assignment we will start class with journal writing and a short quiz which will spin off into discussion. The quizzes will not be terribly difficult, *if* you have done the reading. Each quiz counts as one point in your Participation Grade total. The number of quiz points will depend on how many formal reading assignments we can squeeze in the semester. Figure on about 7-8 quizzes.

Journal and Electronic Bulletin Board
Because we are in an electronic classroom, we will be making two types of journal entries, one utterly private and handwritten, and one publicly posted to the Class Bulletin Board. We will be writing in one or the other almost all the time. I believe it is important that you have a place to begin an internal dialogue with yourself, to have a place where you can write exactly what you think without fear of what others (including the teacher) might say. This is how you discover your voice. To that end we will keep the private, handwritten, reading-response journals. Any small notebook will do. I will bring examples to class.

But there is another type of journal, where ideas are shared less formally, where arguments are tried out, where you can experiment with different writing styles. We will keep this journal on the computer, and you will file entries with me and other classmates electronically. These journal entries will be required following reading assignments and discussions, and they will also be assigned more randomly, as issues and questions arise. My only request is that they be **well-thought out** and **at least five paragraphs or two computer screens long**. Each entry assigned will count as one point in the Participation Grade total. Figure on about one entry a week. For new users of email, we will be using a group alias for postings, and we will show you how to do it on Zmail.

The Bulletin Board space is yours to use as you please. Although I will not give additional credit for each posting beyond the minimum, I do want to encourage electronic discussions. I believe that this type of informal dialogue will help your writing improve.

I want to specifically request that you keep flaming to a minimum and treat all classmates with the honor and respect all human beings deserve. I will be just another list member, posting along with you. You may also email me privately at any time during the semester.

OTHER POLICIES

Homework

All homework is due at the beginning of the hour. If a final draft of a paper is late, it is lowered one full grade. My grading scale converts letter grades to the following numerical equivalents: A 4.0, A- 3.65, B+ 3.35, B 3.0, B- 2.65, C+ 2.35, C 2.0, C- 1.65, D+ 1.35, D 1.0, D- .65, F 0.

Plagiarism

Academic honesty is not just a good idea, it is the law at Rensselaer. If you submit another person's work as your own you will receive a failing grade for the assignment and possibly the course. You may ask someone to read and comment on your work, but you are not allowed to have anyone else write your assignments for you. I will show you proper citation and use of source material. Please see the Rensselaer Handbook for further information about plagiarism.

The Writing Center and Gender-fair Language

If you need additional help with your writing, see the tutors at the Writing Center, Sage 4508. The staff can help you identify and correct problems with organization, grammar, or other aspects of your writing. I will also refer you to the Writing Center if I notice any serious problems with grammar or clarity. Because the way we write and speak influences the way we think, you are required to use gender-fair language in this course. To help in your writing, the essay "Writing with Gender-Fair Language: The Generic He/Man Problem" is available in the Writing Center.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

Note: Please stay on top of class activities, since this is only a rough guide of what we will be doing and when. I like to make adjustments as student needs and interests (or computer glitches) dictate. There are no specific reading assignments on this schedule because the class will be selecting reading assignments in different chapters of *Rereading America* by vote. Other reserve materials will be assigned depending on the interests of the class.

Week 1--	Grading criteria, Journal writing, Writing Process In-Class Diagnostic Essay.
Week 2--	Introduction to Language and Culture. Chapter 1 Colombo. Computer Lab Orientation,
Week 3--	Orwell/Bambera Imitation discussion. Computer Work Day
Week 4--	First Draft of Paper 1 Due. Paper Peer Review. Library/Database Orientation.
Week 5--	Chapter 6 Colombo. Exploring Cultural Myths. Final Draft of Paper 1 Due. MOO.
Week 6--	Midterm Break. New York Times/Date of Birth Reports.
Week 7--	Finish Date of Birth Reports. Computer Work Day
Week 8--	Chapter 7 Colombo. First Draft of Paper 2 Due. Electronic Peer Review.
Week 9	Spring Break
Week 10--	Myths of Advertising and Media. Final Draft of Paper 2 Due. Mosaic
Week 11--	Language in the Professions. Analysis Exercise. Computer Work Day.
Week 12	First Draft of Paper 3 Due. Paper Peer Review. Electronic Discussion of Readings.
Week 13	Final Draft of Paper 3 Due. Persuasion and Argument. Electronic Debates.
Week 14	Individual Conferences. Topic Proposals Due. First Draft of Paper 4 Due.
Week 15	Peer Review. Class Culture Text. Computer Work Day.
Week 16	Final Draft of Paper 4 Due. Optional Revisions Due.