

Syllabus – ENGL 756/856

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Summer 2020



Background and Overview

Domain of One's own enables students to incorporate new, digital tools into their own teaching of writing and literature. Whether you are a digital native or immigrant, I invite you to join us as we collaboratively learn by exploring available Web 2.0 tools (such as blogs and wikis) and creating and managing a personal webspace on a domain belonging to you. As we learn to utilize these tools, we will become acquainted with relevant theory and methodology, develop instructional strategies and classroom applications, and think critically about how to manage a professional web presence as 21st century academics. No prior digital-teaching experience is required, but you should be comfortable exploring new software with guidance. All students will be required to register for a shared server space through Reclaim Hosting at a cost of \$30 for the year.

Rationale

This reflects the interests and needs of graduate students in English who benefit from development of "productive" digital literacy skills. This supports their coursework, scholarship, and eventual teaching skills. It also benefits the program by helping students of varied backgrounds to achieve some common levels of fluency as they look towards further coursework in the doctoral program.

For some teachers, teaching with technology has become synonymous with the ubiquitous Learning Management System (LMS) such as Blackboard or Moodle. While I myself do make use of these tools in teaching, I am concerned at the homogenization and narrowing of possibilities represented by this one-size-fits all approach. For many of us, the very "management" promises of the LMS tools represents a problem. They threaten to rob teachers of creative control over their teaching and risk providing students an impoverished experience. In addition, the "lock-in" to a particular tool not only can constrain your thinking about course authorship but it may also present real career problems if you move from one employer to another. Finally, while the adoption of a default LMS tool-set provides some stability and familiarity, it almost certainly robs some of the excitement from exploring new teaching possibilities.

You may choose to use an LMS in teaching future courses. But this course will insure that is an informed choice, and that you have the skills to blend and incorporate tools and practices that suit your students, school, subject, and pedagogy.

Students will:

- Cultivate a professional online identity for the scholar and teacher with an awareness of changing disciplinary and cultural norms;
- Develop a digital writing "workflow" using appropriate techniques (exs. Markdown, HTML, CSS) to produce and publish on the web;
- Demonstrate working knowledge of simple markup to create and publish an academic website on a hosted server, managing their own web domain;
- Identify and critically evaluate tools for digital learning;

MA-level 756 goals:

- Explore personal learning environments appropriate to the discipline and to the academic goals of an MA student; demonstrate how platforms constrain and enable communication and interaction;
- Enhance their existing digital literacies by producing a project(s) with at least two

multimodal elements: sound, images, visual design and typography, interactivity (exs. audio podcast, video, Twine game).

Doctoral-level 856 goals:

- Implement personal learning and teaching environments appropriate to the discipline, including but not limited to blogs and wikis and to academic goals including professional advancement and the job market, participation in disciplinary discourse, and contribution to the community or public sphere; demonstrating theoretical knowledge and practical application of how platforms constrain and enable communication and interaction;
- Enhance their existing digital literacies by producing a project(s) with a full range of appropriate multimodal elements: sound, images, visual design and typography, interactivity (exs. audio podcast, video, Twine game).

Concepts/Areas

1.) Identity

- Digital publishing
- Disciplinary discourses
- Social media in academia
- Publishing
- Collaboration

2.) Workflow

- Introducing HTML
- Visual design
- CSS

3.) Publishing

- Website creation
- File transfer
- Domain and subdomain management

4.) Critical Tool/Interface/Platform evaluation

- Beyond the LMS
- Personal learning environments

-Functional analysis

- Pedagogy and platforms: McLuhan, The Medium is the Message

5.) Web applications

- Installation and configuration of open-source web apps

6.) Multi-modal projects

Audio:

- Audio podcasts
- Introduction to audio recording
- Digital audio editing

Visual:

- Design and typography
- Introduction to Photoshop

Interactivity:

- Hypertext and interactive fiction
- Twine

Readings

The reading load is modest for this week-long course, though you may find yourself doing some additional research. We will draw on some scanned articles/essays/documents. You will access these through the class website. Summer 2020 Readings - see course wiki for final adjustments

Major Assignments

Participation, Reflection, and Article Presentations (20%)

I look for active, engaged participation in class through discussion, presentations, and reflective writing on your blog. Our distance learning format in Summer 2020 complicates this somewhat; more of your participation may occur through comments on classmates blogs or even chats in the Zoom room.

In this class, your participation is not only "oral" but may also mediated through the digital technology of the tools we use. For instance, you will practice using your blog by posting reflections on readings and class discussion. You will also have the opportunity to work with a partner or group, to lead discussion of a relevant informational or critical article. This will involve preparing to lead a discussion with an overview or abstract of the article, adding your own observations, and concluding with two or three discussion questions. You may sign up for these with classmates.

Professional Website - (20%)

Using basic HTML markup and elementary CSS, you will develop a cluster of individual "professional pages" and post them on your personal domain. The emphasis will be on developing the skills to allow for an easy incorporation of web content into your "workflow." We will not obsess about artful design or tweak our pages with all the latest, dynamic bells and whistles; the goal will be pragmatic. Can you produce and inter-link a set of relevant, content-rich pages? Can you include legal, appropriately sourced and edited images? You may include links to other online materials you create and organize external resources of professional use. For those who have previously created such a web page, I will expect you to compose significant new content and develop a website to the next level through additional pages and more sophisticated use of CSS styling. We will also discuss the kinds of content appropriate for creating a professional web presence. (Note on old-school HTML: Professional web developers use sophisticated development tools such as Adobe Dreamweaver to edit HTML; and sites like Squarespace provide user-friendly drag and drop interfaces which may never show you real HTML. Choose these in the future if you want, but knowing basic HTML will allow you control over every web-based environment you work in. The basic elements I learned in 1993 still serve me today.)

Web App / Demo - (10%)

You will choose a digital tool cheaply or freely available on the web or through Reclaim Hosting with a teaching or research application. You will install it on your website and create mock content. In a presentation of 15 minutes, you will give an overview of the tool, demonstrate and explain (as appropriate) its basic functionality, and outline a specific teaching or scholarly/professional scenario. We will discuss whether to do this individually or in groups; if we work in groups, each member will need to develop familiarity with the tool.

Mini-Projects (30% total)

Podcast - (10%) Excellent audio is not simple to produce, but in comparison with video, it is relatively easy to incorporate acceptable audio into your digital teaching strategies. You will learn to record, edit, and mix background sound to produce a short (2-5 minute) audio podcast. The topic will be related to digital teaching. A welcome approach would be for you to explain your teaching module. There will be *some* class time reserved for working on these podcasts, but you should anticipate devoting several hours outside of class to this. You may choose to do this individually or in groups.

Twine Multi-modal Composition / Educational Game - (10%) How do you think of technology in teaching or scholarship? What is your emerging digital philosophy? How is the digital environment democratizing education? Or how does online interaction risk dehumanizing teacher-student relationships? Writing in a hypertext environment can be used for making adventure stories, interactive tutorials, or even educational games. A successful Twine mini-project makes thoughtful use of hypertextual structure or interactivity and incorporates appropriate visual design (images, typography) or other media.

Wiki - (10%)

Wiki platforms* have some overlap with Twine in that they encourage building of a network of interlinked pages. However, a fundamental difference is that Twine's are singly-authored while wikis afford ease of collaboration among many authors or editors and allow for organic growth (through history, editing levels, and discussion pages). This mini-project invites you to consider a professional scenario where a collaborative, intertextual resource would be beneficial. You will not build a full and complete wiki but should aspire to an illustrative demo. (*There are dozens, perhaps hundreds of different wiki software platforms. Wikipedia is built on Mediawiki; you could install this on your website. This

class is hosted on a Dokuwiki installation, which I find is a little simpler to setup and administer; I recommend Dokuwiki but you are free to choose!)

Final Showcase (20%)

Choose one of the mini-projects above to refine and present to the class on Friday. This should not be a "new" project but, rather, a more polished version of the mini-project you found most engaging.

Format

I have tried to be mindful of the constraints of our weekly schedule. There will not be extensive nightly reading, but I have selected some brief readings for our discussion. Similarly, you will conduct some independent reading outside of class for your presentations. I do expect you to devote a reasonable effort to completing this outside-of-class work, which may include discussion questions and technology work.

Workshop / Lab Time – As we learn how to use new teaching tools, I will provide orienting instruction. But we will devote considerable time to hands-on learning of these tools, so that we all emerge with much more comfort and ability than that with which we entered.

I anticipate there will be varied levels of prior experience. Those who are more experienced will be invited to assist in helping their peers, and to form sub-groups that develop advanced skills. The “craft” of the digital teacher involves a good deal of self-directed learning, as one “hacks” one's way towards solutions for specific problems or invents new opportunities. There will not be time for any of us to exhaust what needs to be known about any of the technologies we are exploring; so no matter your level of prior experience and aptitude, I will encourage you to go further – and to contribute what you learn back to the class. For me, graduate-level participation demands that you bring a spirit of “open-ended” learning to everything you do in the class.

Please speak with me in the Zoom room, email me, or chat via Teams whenever you experience a challenge. This course format allows for some small-group and individual 1 tutoring. You will learn best when you engage an problem and then seek some coaching to help work through it!