

Large Course Design Grant

For New Course to Fulfill the FYW Requirement

FYW Courses: ENGL 1010/1011

First-Year Writing (FYW) offers foundational courses to fulfill the General Education writing requirement; at least one course is taken by approximately 85% of UConn's incoming first-year class. (Some students opt out of the course on campus by applying their AP Language and Literature or AP Language and Composition scores; others have taken the Concurrent Enrollment [ECE] version of the course in high school). At present, approximately 3300 students enroll in FYW courses on the Storrs campus. At regional campuses, nearly 1500 students enroll; another 3500 are part of the Concurrent Enrollment program. In sum, about 8300 students across Connecticut take FYW courses annually.

Current Configuration

The FYW seminars are characterized by collaborative, student-driven inquiry. FYW courses prepare students for future academic work by asking them to use writing to enter into and contribute to active academic conversations. The instructor in a FYW seminar provides a site and offers contexts with readings (and other texts), central questions, and directed activities for the development of this ongoing work. Through cycles of composing, feedback, and reflection, students pursue projects in which they define places they might advance the class conversation. Because there is no universal model for the academic essay, these courses invite students to explore provisional projects and to practice intellectual work common to all fields, including engaging with established formulations and genres, working with and through sources, and circulating one's own writing with others engaged in related inquiries, and producing texts that warrant and invite repeated attention from their audiences.

Classroom work includes analyzing and responding to shared texts; testing ideas and their development; inventing, drafting and reviewing elements of compositions; workshopping projects; and reflecting on the processes and products of the work. The classroom modes include whole-class and small-group work as well as individual conferencing with peers and the instructor.

The new iteration of the course will build on the continuing success of FYW, maintaining our grounding in inquiry, our engagement with complexity, and our emphasis on problem-based projects and process-driven learning. The new course

will bring multimodality to further enhance the course components rather than to replace particular kinds of labor; throughout the course, students will develop new literacies, adaptable skills, and agile processes.

The Changing Nature of First-Year Writing

We are moving toward a new curricular initiative—“Writing Across Technology” (WAT)—to account for the “increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioral, and so on ... and the realities of increasing local diversity and connectedness” (Serafini & Gee p. 2).

Through WAT, we hope to “challenge views of literacy as involving primarily written language and as the master of a relatively stable and unitary set of rules and conventions for the use of this language” (Serafini & Gee p. 3). As Todd Taylor, Director of the Writing Program at UNC-Chapel Hill, suggests, “digital media are not just ‘external wrapping’ put on a ‘thought package’ to make it seem cool. This is how thinking and learning are increasingly happening in the first place: *Everywhere across the curriculum*” (“Introduction: What Do You Want to Create Today”). In fact, including digitally produced texts can be a powerful hedge against academic misconduct. As Gregory Ulmer notes,

writing a research paper involves using argumentative logic (claims and proofs) and the essay form to transform information stored in libraries into individual understanding. It is an institutional practice designed to transfer knowledge from the collective archive to each new generation of readers. This is a legitimate practice for the literate classroom, disrupted by the posting of large numbers of “readymade” papers on the internet. The long-range solution to this problem is to invent pedagogies and practices native to the internet, which will not abandon literate skills, but integrate them into the new apparatus.

The new WAT-enhanced First-Year Writing course will focus on critical engagement with and innovative composition through these multiple modes—the technologies for such writing might range from pencil or keyboard to performance and digital media. The course will also introduce students to multiple methods of inquiry, analysis, and synthesis with text mining, using and creating digital archives, “distant reading,” data visualization, and textual mapping, methods that are also deployed in “digital humanities,” an area perhaps familiar to many of our humanities colleagues. Through these multivalent approaches to *both* consuming and producing information, the program revision creates a “technology agnostic” approach that emphasizes experiential learning across multiple technologies. Still, digital technologies,

methods, and literacies will be introduced as a means of production, with attention to familiarizing students with methodologies, genres, practices, and communication across the disciplines.

Our courses will invite students to compose multimodally, exploring linguistic, aural, visual, gestural, and spatial modes of meaning-making. Any combination of modes, in effect, makes a multimodal text, and all texts—every piece of communication that a human composes—inherently then makes use of more than one mode. *Thus, all writing is always and already multimodal.* **The WAT initiative, however, intends to consciously, critically, and creatively assign and foster multimodal composing with a deliberate, critical, and innovative use of multiple tools.** The habits of mind and academic skills that WAT will help students develop include complex problem-solving, judgment and decision-making, critical thinking, creativity and innovation, collaboration and negotiation, and cognitive flexibility. We had become accustomed to hearing how higher education need to train students for jobs that in ways that cast the academy as a job-training institute; more recently, however, we've been pleased to discover that the practices and skills of the academy are highly valued in workplaces. According to the World Economic Forum, essential skills by 2020 will include the very same skills we've listed: complex problem-solving, judgment and decision-making, critical thinking, creativity and innovation, collaboration and negotiation, and cognitive flexibility ("[Ten Skills](#)"). The workforce isn't influencing us; rather, we are influencing the workforce.

Moving to a new WAT approach that highlights the affordances (and examines the limitations) of working multimodality as well as the enhancements of multiple literacies will require new goals and outcomes that take into consideration not just traditional rhetorical principles of writing, but also careful analysis of the ways that different modes and technologies shape the message, the composer, and the audience. Jenna Pack Sheffield, a writing program administrator in Connecticut (University of New Haven) argues, for example, that "digital technologies require new literacies and that writing needs to be reconceptualized in the context of our programs" ("Beyond Tools"). She suggests instead that "writing programs and instructors ... consider, for example, curation, interactivity, non-linearity, juxtaposition or remix as integral to new media composing (or even analysis)" ("Thinking Beyond Tools"). Moreover, the use of digital technologies is not yet intuitive, and therefore many technologies are used in limited and even unproductive ways (e.g., taking verbatim notes rather than processing a lecture) while their capabilities have yet to be fully explored. Simply put, "digital literacy is not just understanding *how* a tool works but also *why* it is useful ... and *when* to use it" (NMC

“[Digital Literacy](#),” emphasis original). We want instructors and students to investigate, too, key concepts like *affordance*, *circulation*, and *remix* as they reconsider, use, test the limits of, re-engineer and redirect the technologies and their own composing practices.

Two external reviewers from the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) noted in their final report of a 2-day consultant-evaluation carried out for the FYW Program at UConn (in September 2017) that FYW students were already responding positively to some of the new, pilot WAT-inflected assignments in their courses:

Students not only think about, read, and encounter these [multimodal] genres but they produce them and assess their rhetorical implications. We heard about and also saw evidence of these innovative practices in assignments that called for podcasts, websites, and video projects. In our session with undergraduate students, some of them spoke about how multimodal writing helped them engage avidly with writing and think more about audience, purpose, and context. (Anson and Schell 4)

Emerging Course Objectives for the Course Revision

Course Objectives <i>Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:</i>	Examples of Assessments <i>The student's achievement of the learning objective will be assessed according to their performance on... THERE ARE OTHER TYPES OF PROJECTS and ASSESSMENTS (these are examples only)</i>
1. Practice composing and writing as creative acts of inquiry and discovery through written, aural, visual, and video texts.	Academic Essays Multimodal Presentations Mini podcast Essay with video component “Concept in 60” Portfolio
2. Identify yourself as a writer who can contribute to others’ knowledge and understanding through your research and the compositions you create.	Academic Essays Multimodal Presentations Mini podcast Essay with video component “Concept in 60” Portfolio

3. Develop confidence in and facility with creating works that invite repeated and substantive engagement with audiences.	Academic Essays Multimodal Presentations Mini podcast Essay with video component “Concept in 60” Portfolio
4. Recognize the situatedness of ideas, information, texts, and writers/creators of content.	Research plans/proposals Research process reviews Annotated bibliography Literature reviews
5. Analyze the context and mode or technology you are composing in (for example, video, audio, and infographics), including its affordances and limitations; respond to the situation with productive choices in approach and execution to deliver meaningful texts.	Continuous component of all inventing, arranging, drafting, revising, “publishing,” and reflecting activities.
6. Develop new methods for (digital) textual analysis, synthesis, and representation including text mining, building web-based digital archives, “distant reading,” and data visualization. See also “ Digital Literacies: Engagement, Technology, and Tools ”	[this is digital humanities methods and projects] Evidence visible in Academic Essays Multimodal Presentations Mini podcast “Concept in 60” Essay with visual/video component Portfolios
7. Discover, analyze, and engage with others’ ideas in productive ways through complex texts.	Annotation assignments, reading questions and passage-based responses in discussion forum; follow threads of an idea outside the text (researching background and use in other contexts)
8. Use others’ work in a variety of ways, including as motivation for writing, as context to your own ideas, as a frame or method for analysis, as a way of moving your ideas forward, and as exhibits for analysis and interpretation.	Incorporating the work of others in drafts and revisions of compositions for Academic Essays Multimodal Presentations Mini podcast “Concept in 60” Essay with visual/video component Portfolios

9. Extend your ideas to new ground in the context of others' work.	Contributing your own concepts, accounts, and theories in Essays Presentation Mini podcast Essay with video component Portfolio
10. Develop methods and strategies for the conceptual, investigative, practical, and reflective work of writing.	Develop research questions and research proposals [insert some of the information literacy "thresholds" here] drafting and revising activities and workshops, and reflective vlogs
11. Determine and analyze conventions of disciplines ; decide how to address the genre expectations of a discipline's work, including how knowledge is created and how evidence is used to forward work in the discipline; includes the functional components of format, organization, document design, and citation.	<i>Through all....</i> Academic Essays Multimodal Presentations Mini podcast "Concept in 60" Essay with visual/video component Portfolios Particular attention will be paid to this for the final portfolio
12. Employ the principles of universal design to make your work accessible to the widest possible audience.	Captioning audio, tagging visuals, and providing translations (in some cases; see individual modules) and transcripts of audio-video work.
13. Ethics of Scholarship	Case studies of ethical situations (respond in writing, discuss), student conduct, and professional responsibilities. Each composition is unique and "misrepresenting mastery of skills and knowledge" violates the UConn Student Code.

Access for All

The two external reviewers also favorably noted the important work of inclusion and access that a WAT-influenced curriculum can carry out: "Also appreciated in this innovative work is attention to questions of Universal Design and making learning, writing, classrooms, and the campus accessible to all students." Working across

technologies in a classroom invites all students to contribute to the class from the outset as they move across modes of learning (aural, visual, kinesthetic, etc.), forms of languages, and through physical, cognitive and experiential differences. Teaching digital literacies serves as a means for providing access to knowledge that empowers all.

If we are able to work with students in these areas, we will also contribute to mitigating the digital divides erected based on socioeconomic status, race, gender, and national identity. In 2016, The Pew Research Center found that “the digital divide in the US is no longer just about access to technology but rather fluency using it” (Horrigan, [Digital Readiness](#)).

Reflecting on the worldwide potential for multimodal composition, Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher note that

in both global and local contexts the relationships among digital technologies, language, literacy, and an array of opportunities are complexly structured and articulated within a constellation of existing social, cultural, economic, historical, and ideological factors that constitute a cultural ecology of literacy. These ecological systems continually shape, and are shaped by people (Giddens), at a variety of levels and in arrange of ways, as they live out their daily lives in technological and cultural settings. (619)

Through WAT, the ecology of our FYW classrooms will be reshaped to account for this convergence of languages, technologies, literacies, experiences, and cultures.

What (WAT) is Happening at Peer and Aspirant Institutions ***University of North Carolina***

In May 2016, Todd Taylor, the Director of First-Year Composition at UNC-Chapel Hill partnered with the Provost to develop the Carolina Digital Literacy Initiative, with FYC courses providing the foundations for development across the curriculum and throughout students’ undergraduate careers. As Taylor argued in his development proposal for the course and infrastructure,

developing digital literacy the Carolina way requires more than showing students how to navigate the Web or exchange online messages. We must promote a literacy that helps members of the Carolina community —on campus and beyond—become not only critical consumers but also innovative producers of digital knowledge. It’s time to show again how responses to a changing technical landscape can be driven by

fundamental goals to create future leaders and to improve the lives of citizens on campus, in the region, and across the globe.

[The UNC Digital Literacies Proposal](#)

[“Adobe Creative Cloud Across the Curriculum”](#)

Clemson University

The Clemson English Department has created partnerships with the Multimedia Authority, Teaching, and Research Facility (MATRF) and the Center for Electronic and Digital Publishing, created to “develop, direct, and focus the academic publishing program in the College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities.” Jan R. Holmevik, Professor of English and Co-Director of the Center of Excellence in Next Generation Computing and Creativity at Clemson University, argues that “to fully prepare our students to become effective change-agents in the digital economy a more systematic curricular approach is necessary.” He sees “the concepts of digital literacy, creativity and invention as heuristics upon which a new 21st century educational philosophy can be molded.” (Holmevik, Invited Talk, October 2015). In his book, *Inter/Vention*, Holmevik further suggests

in today’s complex digital world, we must understand new media expressions and digital experiences not simply as more technologically advanced forms of ‘writing’ that can be understood and analyzed as “texts” but as artifacts in their own right that require a unique skill set. Just as agents seeking to express themselves in alphabetic writing need to be *literate*, ‘egents’ who seek to express themselves in digital media need to be—to use a term coined by cybertheorist Gregory Ulmer—*electrate*.

Clemson also offers graduate-level academic programs including a Master’s in [Writing, Rhetoric, and Media](#) and a Ph.D. in Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design (RCID). The RCID is an

academic-professional degree, preparing students to conduct research and to disseminate their findings through teaching in the university and through publishing in professional and popular journals. RCID prepares students, through research, to be consultants for and to work within industry, government, and nonprofit organizations. RCID prepares students to be professionals in traditional and emerging economies.

[\(Clemson RCID Program\)](#)

The Ohio State University Digital Media Project

Composition Courses, Digital Media Project, and Digital Media and Composition Institute. OSU hosts a ten-day, hands-on institute in which the links between digital media and composition are theorized, demonstrated (and questioned, and reimagined), and enacted. The institute trains OSU graduate instructors to teach the multimodal composition sections and helps them develop projects for scholarly work. The program features a fully supported “[Digital Media Project](#),” which integrates the work of digital humanities with other interdisciplinary approaches to writing and research. The DMP mission is “to lead in the sustained re-imagining of teaching, learning, and research across a variety of areas in English studies including: rhetoric/composition/literacy, literature, film, folklore, narrative theory, critical theory, creative writing, and disability studies” ([DMP Overview](#)). The DMP is a resource for the entire English Department.

Note that several other writing and rhetoric programs, including those at University of Florida, Miami of Ohio, and University of Arizona, have recently piloted or implemented multimodal composition courses for first-year students.

[Where We Are Right Now](#)

Through our WAT initiative, we have begun to explore making multimedia composition an integral part of some sections of the course for which instructors have developed a multimodal curriculum. With an eye toward expanding from the small-scale, limited-scope experiments, we selected a new textbook for the 2017-2018 academic year that asks students to develop critical digital literacies—both through critical engagement with the digital media they *consume* and through the use of creative-critical tools for *composition/writing*. In May and June 2017, we sent several program instructors (Graduate Teaching Assistants) and the two program directors to training institutes and conferences to equip them with these sophisticated skills: the Digital Media and Composition (DMAC) Institute at The Ohio State University, the Computers and Writing Conference at the University of Findlay, Adobe’s Creative Campus Collaboration in Utah, and the AdobeMAX conference. Brenda Brueggemann and Lisa Blansett have been invited to help facilitate a workshop, “Digital Creativity and the Future of Composition,” at the primary annual conference in the field (CCCC) in March 2018. And, currently, several experienced instructors are experimenting with assignments for these new WAT-integrated courses.

We recently applied for an “Active Learning Center” grant through the Steelcase Corporation; winning this grant would mean a complete renovation of the existing space in Austin 245. In our application, we argued that redesigned FYW course will build on the proven success of FYW, maintaining our grounding in inquiry, our engagement with complexity, and our emphasis on problem-based projects and process-driven learning. Yet the redesigned course will incorporate deliberate

multimodality in both working methods and in projects produced by students. Even with an innovative curriculum, our students continue to be tied to desks and keyboards in campus classrooms. To make our course truly multimodal, we must foster classroom activities that adapt to the ways our minds and bodies work, that encourage working across modes (e.g., focused individual tasks, small-group collaboration), that offer new tools for working (from personal whiteboards to comfortable lounge seating, from spaces for BYOD to a shared display for multimedia collaborations). The processes of writing and composing are not limited to placing one word after another; rather, writing includes drafting, drawing, talking, daydreaming, sharing, erasing, reading, conferring, mapping, pacing, researching, sitting, presenting, listening, and more. Right now, some classrooms that FYW courses are scheduled into require “orchestration,” which might entail asking all students to move desks into small groups to work on a particular task in concert with others. The Active Learning Center will allow instructors to encourage more “improvisation” with flexible classroom configurations that are the most relevant to the work at hand. We need classroom space that will work with the many rhythms creative processes require, that will help students develop new literacies, learn adaptable skills, and adopt agile processes.

Grant winners will be announced at the end of March, 2018, and renovations would be completed within 6 months of that date (by early September).

For summer 2018, several instructors and the ECE coordinator will attend DMAC with funding from ECE and CETL. These instructors will develop their own projects while also helping us build our own future summer institute. The summer institute will be developed to help our campus constituents craft projects and curriculum first, but we hope to expand it into an “East Coast DMAC” with its own focus on and approaches to scholarly work as well as curriculum development. We are currently accepting applications for the OSU DMAC professional development opportunity from graduate students.

Currently, we are working with CETL instructional designer to design the basic learning objectives of a course that we can eventually scale to meet the needs of the many thousands of students (8300) and instructors. The design process includes a series of focus group meetings (beginning late February; led by Instructional Designer David Des Armier) to solicit ideas from a wide range of English Department graduate instructors, as well as full-time and adjunct faculty. For those who cannot attend the first set of focus group meetings, a full survey (with the same baseline questions asked of the focus groups) will be made available to all who wish to contribute their ideas to the development process. During the summer and fall of 2018, several graduate students (selected through an application process) will continue the course development process working with the FYW WPAs and the CETL instructional designer. By the end of summer, we hope to have ready some model student projects assignments that instructors can integrate into their own 1010/1011 courses. We will continue this “drop-in unit” experimentation in spring with a focus on fine-tuning

individual components, access, and feasibility even while we continue to develop whole, focused, and fully integrated courses that move through various modes of writing. By fall, 2019, we will pilot the first whole WAT-infused courses and collect data from instructors and students. GEOC will review the course proposal during the fall, while spring 2019 will be set aside to analyze all data from the full pilots and revising the course to fit demonstrated needs and all University requirements.

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Appendices

2016-2107 Entry-Level Student Enrollment Totals
3,313 Storrs (325 more students than in AY 15-16)

1,448 regional campuses

3,538 Early College Experience (ECE High School Dual Enrollment)

8,299 TOTAL Entry-Level STUDENTS from previous year (2016-2017)

What Some of the Numbers Tell Us (at UConn, Storrs)*:

A small sample of students who started in Fall 2016 (surveyed June, 2017) that:

- They all own laptops
- More than 90% have internet access on the phones they carry with them
- Sixty percent also had access to a tablet (iPad, etc.)

They *consume* digital content

- Read and interact with others' published online content—50%
- Listen to podcasts or other audio (talk-and-text based)—80%
- Use digital archives—65%

They *produce* digital content**

- Blog, vlog, or create podcasts—40%
- Create and upload audio, video, other visual files—63%
- Use Adobe Creative Cloud apps to produce content—70%

*NB: In fall 2018, CETL will help us distribute a revised “technology access” questionnaire to all students across all campuses. The revised survey will also broach such questions as how often students have access to technology and the periods of time they are able to use those devices given other constraints.

**Seventy percent of those surveyed used Adobe products during their first year (AY 2016-17) to produce digital content.

Aligning the Course with the University's Values

A significant contribution that a WAT-infused First-Year Writing Program can make is in carrying out UConn's 2014 “Creating Our Future” vision and its four Core Values: Innovation, Leadership, Global Engagement, Diversity.

From an entry-level General Education Requirement course (English 1010 or 1011), UConn students enrolled in a WAT course would be engaged in the *innovation* of acquiring sophisticated (not just functional) digital literacy and becoming skilled at multimodal composing. Writing Across Technology would creatively and critically

facilitate the “discovery and communication of breakthrough and foundational ideas” while also engaging students in “translation and collaboration across disciplines and communities.”

Writing Across Technology provides students the technological and communication skills and tools to take on *leadership* roles to address “the [ever-changing and complex] challenges of the 21st century” to serve “the state, the nation and the world.” WAT courses will engage students in creative projects that will require them to be flexible and adaptable in their communications for different situations, needs, and audiences.

Likewise, Writing Across Technology prepares students for *global engagement* that is crucial to 21st-Century communication and addressing the “transnational nature of the challenges and opportunities we face.” WAT would do this by recognizing that composing in a range of media promotes effective communication.

WAT would include consideration of how *diversity* is critical to the use of technology as students consider access, audiences, and different modes of communication for their writing. WAT would allow and invite students to consider how responsible use of technology is fundamental to “fostering a welcoming environment in which all individuals can achieve their fullest potential and in which open and respectful communication is facilitated.”

Digital Literacy Competency Contribution from FYW (Draft) (“[Engagement, Technology and Tools](#)”)