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From Alanna Frost
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Department of English
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Re: Instructional Mini-Grant Proposal 2009

Date: 30 October 2008

Project Title: Digital Media, Composition, and the Writing Center: Improving Composition Pedagogy through Multi-Media

Description

A Writing Center's ability to offer a multi-media presence on campus can serve the vastly diverse needs of its learning community. Presently, The UAHuntsville's Writing Center exists online as essentially a static information interface. On the Writing Center website, there is an appointment "book" where students' can schedule face to face consultations, an information "filing cabinet," and, notably, a "virtual center" to which students can email their texts (and a consultant can email back). But, our consultants assert that they are uncomfortable with email consultations during which they cannot ask questions or gauge the students' understanding of their suggestions—assertions that are supported by writing center scholarship. The capabilities of technologies have rapidly outpaced a static Writing Center presence because multiple technological affordances are available to mirror the face to face consultation. Given the available technologies, the UAHuntsville Writing Center needs to offer online consultations with shared text and synchronous chat capabilities in order to engage students in the dialogic, best practices for which Writing Centers were formed and, importantly, to appeal to a broader range of students. Writing center research has demonstrated the capability of online interactions to enhance the learning experience of students with diverse learning styles and of ESL students who utilize differing degrees of engagement with English.

Furthermore, expansion of our Writing Center's online presence offers capabilities for productive outreach beyond its present offerings. Currently, our classroom outreach is for advertising purposes only. At the request of instructors, consultants visit classrooms for 10 minute presentations about the logistics of a consultation and the appointment system. Although productive in attracting students, such advertising outreach does not take full advantage of the possible uses of the writing center in classrooms and for instructors who want composition pedagogy brought to their students. Before the present semester began, I received numerous requests, from instructors from a wide-range of disciplines, to conduct workshops—on the research writing process, about professional communication, and stressing plagiarism prevention. Presently, such outreach is simply too time consuming for one director. But, such requests could be facilitated with online workshops available on the writing center site as well as interactive multi-media classroom outreach which could be conducted by the graduate consultants.

Objectives of the Proposal

As part of a long term goal of expanding UAHuntsville's online Writing Center presence, I am requesting funding in order to learn about the technologies and processes necessary for the development of online and digital presentation of material. With the requested funds, I will attend the Digital Media and Composition institute held at The Ohio State University, June 4-16, 2009. According to its mission, at this workshop, I will learn about the "effective use of digital media" in the classroom. I will then be prepared to develop, with the help of graduate assistants (who I can train post institute), an online writing center to better serve the needs of the campus community in regards to outreach to classrooms, and access for distance learners and students who wish to "visit" the writing center from the space that they choose.

Impact

My immediate plan to utilize the professional development I receive at the institute is to expand the capabilities of the online writing center, in the Fall of 2009, to include shared text and synchronous chat capabilities. As well, I plan to complete two outreach presentations. The first will be a multi-media advertising presentation that the consultants can take into classrooms. The second will be a class presentation on the research writing process that would fulfill the requests from instructors I received in the Fall of 2008.

In the UAHuntsville Writing Center, peer consultants have conducted over 700 consulting sessions this semester. These sessions have included undergraduate, graduate and faculty clients from each of the colleges on our campus. As well, including the classroom visits and the few instructor workshop requests I was able to accommodate, the writing center has addressed the composing need of approximately 1100 people from the UAHuntsville community. I anticipate this number increasing, as we expand our ability to meet the needs of a broader range of students and faculty.

Assessment Plan

The success of the expansion of the online writing center will be assessed by tracking the number of users and by the use of a satisfaction survey. The success of the outreach program will similarly be assessed by tracking number of users, both in visits to the writing center and instructor requests, as well as with a satisfaction survey.

Proposed Budget:

DMAC institute tuition	\$1800.00
Funding for Graduate Assistant*	\$1000.00

*Partial summer funding for the GTA who will assist in the expansion of the online writing center @ approximately 10 hrs/week for 8 weeks.