
Using the World Wide Web for Instructional Development: Writing Program Home Pages, On-Line Course Manuals, and Web-Archived Staff Listservs

Ray Zimmerman and Ellen Strenski

Compositionists are increasingly using e-mail and other Internet resources to provide students with a wide range of on-line curriculum materials as well as unprecedented opportunities for written dialogue. Listservs, for instance, have been invaluable in allowing instructors to foster communities of student writers (see Friedman et al.). Recently, some WPAs have also begun to consider the value of information technology for training not only composition students but their instructors as well. This article analyzes some of these electronic resources that WPAs can use to train and otherwise support composition instructors.¹ By presenting three specific examples from UC Irvine's Composition Program, we hope to provoke ideas and enthusiasm for similar World Wide Web (WWW) projects elsewhere. Our article will begin with these three examples and end by outlining ten distinct advantages and three distinct challenges presented by such online training materials.

Writing Program Home Pages

Personal, course, and program home pages are sprouting on the WWW like psychedelic mushrooms, offering a number of opportunities to the alert WPA. One challenge—the politics and positionality of Writing Program home pages—is explored elsewhere (Haefele and Strenski). For our present purposes, let us begin by simply asserting that a Writing Program home page can extend at least one primary function of the WPA and the WPA's office into cyberspace, that of being a source of information and advice for instructors who seek it. In this respect, web technology is reviving an old social function—the individual person of the mentor and advisor, as opposed to the duplication and distribution of de-personalized advice abstracted into print. At one time, if you wanted to know something and were unable to read or get to a library, your recourse was to visit and consult the person who might already know this information. This person may then have rummaged around in his or her belongings to extract some *aide memoire*. Today, when we find ourselves inundated with masses of undifferentiated Internet data, we are more and more likely to turn away from mindless Internet search engines and ask ourselves who already knows what we

are seeking. We can go to their home pages and follow their links, which usually represent their interests and expertise. Writing Program home pages can function, then, in the same way as the WPA in his or her office: an electronic equivalent of the WPA's presence, filing cabinet, stocked bookshelves, and professional affiliations with other WPAs and programs. Just as a teacher in the program might come to the WPA's office for guidance, he or she can now navigate through the program's home pages.

Besides the instructors teaching in the writing program, the program's home pages must accommodate a variety of other reader/viewers, such as other administrators and students. These others need their own kinds of web assistance and information, hence the proliferation of Online Writing Labs (OWLs) (Zucca 48-49). In this article, however, we particularly want to emphasize the pedagogical assistance this electronic resource can offer to teachers. Among its various hyper-links, the program home page can provide several resources specifically of interest to WPAs who train teachers. Our other two examples of such resources are 1) a web version of an amplified course Teacher's Manual, as in the following discussion of UC Irvine's WR 139 web site, and 2) a new Internet phenomenon—the web-archived, searchable listserv.

Before discussing these resources and issues, however, we note a more subtle opportunity that the growth of home pages affords writing programs: a claim on this new medium and its electronic textuality as our own disciplinary subject, rather than imagining it as the domain of departments like computer science, engineering, or media services. Adopting electronic technology as a rightful province of composition programs, however, requires a corresponding obligation to study—and ultimately teach—the design principles governing the ways in which this new kind of electronic text is written. Take, as one example, the challenge of writing effective e-mail messages. A good e-correspondent must master a unique rhetoric, style, and format—perhaps a unique genre. As Peter Sands cautions on his own home page, "Remember that a website should be seen as a living *rhetoric* rather than an artifact." Who better to understand and then teach this dynamic than compositionists?

Or consider, as another example, what is involved in designing even the text of an effective web page, let alone the graphics. Writers—following the movement of the reading eye, or of the typewriter carriage return, from left to right, and top to bottom—used to place the most privileged information appropriately at the top left corner. Today, HTML headings still begin at the left margin, a relic of print. However, important information to be displayed on and framed by a computer screen is now shifting away from such placement. With web browsers that support tables (such as like Netscape 2 and higher), important information is frequently displayed in the center of the screen. As the mouse assists the reader's eye in the processing of on-line information, and because most people are right-handed, web writers increasingly move salient information closer to the right border (as, for instance, the navigational markers for Microsoft Windows 96). Compositionists are the academicians most strategically placed to

understand, and in turn, to teach these principles so that students can learn to write effectively on-line as well as on paper.

The Writing 139 Web Site at UC Irvine

Each year, about 700 upper-division students from every discipline take Writing 139 (WR 139), a course that satisfies UC Irvine's Upper Division Writing Requirement, in classes provided by the Composition Program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature. Approximately 35 Teaching Assistants per year teach these sections of WR 139. The class is an interdisciplinary writing course requiring students to assimilate and analyze texts from the sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. WR 139 is theoretical and philosophical, raising issues about the cultural construction of knowledge in a variety of fields of inquiry and obliging graduating students to grapple with advanced critical problems of textual interpretation. Topics for reading and writing assignments in WR 139 have included chaos theory, the history and philosophy of science, psychoanalysis, cultural criticism, medicine, multiculturalism, affirmative action, legal and historical approaches to contemporary social issues, and literary paradigms of knowledge construction.

These WR 139 classes are now predominantly taught by advanced graduate student teaching assistants. In order to maintain the continuity, coherence and quality of instruction given an inevitable turn-over of staff, we have created a fastbound, photocopied training manual of 45 pages which we provide to teachers. The production cost of each paper manual averages about \$3.00. In addition to this written training manual, however, WR139 instructors and students can now access the WR 139 web site. Linked off our Composition Program home page, this WR 139 web site can be accessed through the home page or independently with its own URL <<http://www.hnet.uci.edu/Writing139/>>. Comprising about 250 separate files, hyper-links off this web site include:

- the manual
- a bibliography of frequently assigned texts annotated with instructors' comments on how to use them effectively
- sample syllabi
- sample student essays (password-protected)
- assignments from past instructors
- useful handouts on writing or other topics related to the themes of the class
- and sample peer editing sheets.

The web site also enables instructors and students to link to other related web sites throughout the Internet, thus enabling them to stay up-to-date with

current developments in fields related to the content of the class. For example, a teacher using Freud's *New Introductory Lecture on Psychoanalysis* can follow a chain of links from the on-line manual and easily find a web site specifically devoted to research on Freud's theories. Good examples of such links include, for example,

- Freudnet: The Abraham A. Brill Library of the New York Psychoanalytic Institute <<http://plaza.interport.net/nypsan/>>
- Burying Freud: The Website <http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/gpp/burying_freud.html>
- The Freud Web <http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/h...andow/HTatBrown/freud/Freud_OV.html>
- What is Psychoanalytic Therapy <<http://www.voicenet.com/~henryw/psyan.html>>

The Web-Archived Staff Listservs at UC Irvine

Most writing instructors who use e-mail subscribe to professional listservs. Listservs for our national associations, such as our own WPA-L, are well-known. Similarly, local listservs are emerging for various purposes. At UC Irvine, literally everyone (students, faculty, and staff) has an e-mail account. Building on this database and infrastructure, the campus EEE web server (Electronic Educational Environment: <<http://eee.uci.edu>>), in conjunction with the Registrar's office, now offers an automatic class listserv for any UC Irvine class with fewer than 30 students, hence for all the approximately 250 sections of composition classes taught each year by instructors, mostly graduate student teaching assistants, in the UC Irvine Composition Program. Though many of these instructors who teach sections of our five different writing courses (WR 37, WR 39A, WR 39B, WR 39C, WR 139) do not use this resource with their students yet, many are increasingly making use of it. In the meantime, we WPAs have created five separate, local staff listservs for these instructors. For example, teachers of Writing 39C belong to a listserv called <39C-STAFF@uci.edu>, while those teaching Writing 139 are subscribed to <139-STAFF@uci.edu>. All composition instructors are subscribed to one of these staff listservs, and they therefore automatically receive the listserv e-mail reflected to them, whether they participate actively in posting their own messages to the listserv or not. The WPAs who supervise these courses are the listowners. These supervisors manage the subscription process so that instructors cannot unsubscribe themselves.

All five Composition Program staff listservs work exactly the same way as the national ones do, tapping into the easy intimacy of electronic communication, and they provide all the same benefits. Like subscribers to the national listservs, our teachers benefit from community-building via the listserv, enjoying opportunities to air common professional issues and to share reflections, advice,

and ways to get other helpful resources. Staff listservs also offer a fast, logistical means to reach all the composition staff in the program in any quarter (which may total nearly 100 instructors and administrators). For instance, the Director of the Writing Program or one of the administrators can write to the other administrators asking that a message be forwarded to all the staff listservs.

However, our local staff listservs provide additional benefits beyond those provided by national listservs. They serve an additional “quasi-pedagogical, quasi-administrative” (Strenski 247) function in the sense that, like weekly staff meetings, they are mandatory for all instructors. In this capacity, they provide two additional benefits. First, they create a town meeting type of public forum where instructors can air local issues like program policies about procedures for evaluating their teaching or about requirements for reading student drafts or papers. Second, they provide a working model of the general benefits that listservs provide to participants. They therefore give instructors a concrete sense of how to use their own automatic class listservs, how to anticipate and address problems, and how to shape their own undergraduate students’ discussion on them.

Moreover—and this is what is novel about UC Irvine’s experience—our staff listservs are archived on the WWW, using MHonArc software (the “World Wide Web Mail Merge Manager” developed at UC Irvine). Each listserv has its own URL, <<http://eee.uci.edu/w3m3/39c-staff>> for instance, where listserv messages are archived in a chronological, searchable format. Each of these web archives is password protected so that only instructional staff can access this information. Figure 1 on page 96 illustrates a typical screen.

Each hot link goes to the instructor’s or supervisor’s original message (about, for example, program policy concerning putting our *Student Guide to Writing at UC Irvine* on reserve in the Library or not) or to a possible schedule for the first class assignments, or to a handout to help students choose topics for their first essay.

Unlike the web-archived teacher’s manual for WR 139, the web-archived listserv records ongoing conversational threads that often include specific questions and answers—a running commentary on policy and expectations as well as a source of curricular materials. Unlike the WPA-written web-archived teacher’s manual, then, the web-archived staff listserv is shaped more by participants’ perceptions of their immediate needs and short-term obligations. As such, these two resources are complimentary, offering the WPA various advantages and presenting him or her with various challenges.

39a-staff Archives

Last updated: Thu Apr 24 12:48:34 97

116 messages (newest messages appear first)

Search this archive

"Subject A" In-Class Exam Prep Sheet — Thu, 24 Apr 1997 12:48:02 -0700 "Ray Bourgeois ZIMMERMAN" <RBZIMMER@uci.edu>

Rhetorical Analysis In-Class Exam Prompt — Thu, 24 Apr 1997 11:41:25 -0700 "Ray Bourgeois ZIMMERMAN" <RBZIMMER@uci.edu>

In-Class Exam Prep Sheet - Rhetorical Analysis Version — Thu, 24 Apr 1997 11:41:21 -0700 "Ray Bourgeois ZIMMERMAN" <RBZIMMER@uci.edu>

In-Class Essay Prompt - "Subject A" Version — Thu, 24 Apr 1997 10:59:11 -0700 "Ray Bourgeois ZIMMERMAN" <RBZIMMER@uci.edu>

Re: assignment #2 — Wed, 23 Apr 1997 20:27:14 -0700 "Colette Jean La Bouff" <CLABOUFF@uci.edu>

assignment #2 — Wed, 23 Apr 1997 17:14:18 -0700 "Susan E. CROSS" <secross@uci.edu>

Re: NPR story on NIKE — Sun, 20 Apr 1997 21:02:06 -0700 "Benjamin Huang" <BHUIANG@uci.edu>

NPR story on NIKE — Fri, 18 Apr 1997 10:34:45 -0700 "Elizabeth Nicole Kadetsky" <EKADETSK@uci.edu>

Friends of the Library Essay Contest (fwd) — Thu, 17 Apr 1997 22:38:34 -0700 "Ray Bourgeois ZIMMERMAN" <RBZIMMER@uci.edu>

Ad Analysis - Peer Review & Evaluation Questions — Thu, 17 Apr 1997 22:38:28 -0700 "Ray Bourgeois ZIMMERMAN" <RBZIMMER@uci.edu>

Re: email listserv — Thu, 17 Apr 1997 22:38:24 -0700 "Ray Bourgeois ZIMMERMAN" <RBZIMMER@uci.edu>

email listserv — Thu, 17 Apr 1997 12:38:49 -0700 "Elizabeth Nicole Kadetsky" <EKADETSK@uci.edu>

Re: Essays #2 and 3 — Thu, 17 Apr 1997 08:26:09 -0700 ekadetsk@uci.edu (Elizabeth Kadetsky)

Re: Essays #2 and 3 — Thu, 17 Apr 1997 00:51:06 -0700 "Colette Jean La Bouff" <CLABOUFF@uci.edu>

Re: Essays #2 and 3 — Wed, 16 Apr 1997 19:37:45 -0700 "Erika Rachel Nanes" <ERNANES@uci.edu>

Figure 1.

Ten Advantages of On-line Training

1. Improves Archiving. Until very recently, useful training materials in the UC Irvine Composition Program, such as lesson plans from experienced TAs, sample student papers, and material on teaching strategies, have been available either through word of mouth in staff meetings or in manila folders of "Good Stuff" filed in drawers in the Composition Office. These paper materials tend to disintegrate over time, disappear, or become obsolete. Moreover, they impose a small but annoying inconvenience and expense on instructors who must make copies for their colleagues. Because the best materials are sometimes stolen, the WPA must keep track of an inventory and provide replacements at regular intervals. True, on-line materials can also become obsolete, but they can be easily revised and made available instantly, at no out-of-pocket expense. Furthermore, instructors' word-processed documents can be increasingly easily uploaded, even "HTML-ified."

2. Makes Materials More Open to Adaptation and Refinement. One advantage of archiving these teaching materials on the web is that teachers can download them into their own word processors, e-mail them to themselves, or forward them to their students. They can also more easily adapt and refine materials from previous instructors. This means that one instructor's rapidly conceived good idea can become a much more finely tuned pedagogical instrument. For example, the model of one instructor's sentence combining exercise based on the first three paragraphs of a Joan Didion essay can inspire another instructor to develop a similar exercise using a different reading.

3. Provides Internal Benefits - Organizational Discipline. Creating on-line training materials also requires a certain amount of organizational discipline which is, in the long run, very healthy for a writing program. Such projects systematize the "teaching lore" of individual programs, turning instructors' intuitions about what works well in the classroom into more formalized pedagogical principles. Each department has its own often unwritten axioms which can benefit from careful consideration and elaboration. Creating a program home page or a training manual which will eventually appear on the web for potential world-wide inspection requires a certain amount of philosophical scrutiny of the goals and objectives of the program, and the kinds of problems teachers typically face in teaching specific classes. This critique benefits the program internally.

4. Provides External Benefits - Sharing Accumulated Wisdom. Because of the public nature of the web, careful consideration of training materials becomes a real issue. Despite the added pressure associated with presenting such materials publicly, it's worth remembering that the benefits of this kind of organization extend far beyond one's own program. Other schools or programs, perhaps in other parts of the world, stand to gain from the accumulated wisdom of a program with on-line training materials. The Epiphany Project, a national program for faculty development in new classroom technologies, funded by the Annenberg/CPB Project, facilitates such sharing through its listserv <Epiphany-

L/>, which is web-archived at UC Irvine <<http://eee.uci.edu/w3m3/Epiphany-L/>>, and through its own web site with hyper-links to participating colleges <<http://mason.gmu.edu/~epiphany/>>.

5. Permits Instantaneous Feedback. A web site typically includes the e-mail address of the web supervisor or even an on-line comment form to enable readers to offer comments and feedback about possible problems. Producing well-organized training materials is, in itself, a valuable contribution to a writing program, but making them available on the web thus allows instantaneous feedback so the training materials can continue to evolve.

6. Enhances Research Through Hyper-Links. Writing courses often involve research, and instructors may therefore want to bring in material from other web sites. Creating links from our own training manual to other related manuals, or from our program site to other programs' web sites, for example, allows instructors to quickly expand an idea for their own classes and to identify additional material that might be useful to their own students. For example, one Teaching Assistant at UC Irvine who taught Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* directed her students to follow a chain of links as part of their research project on the novel. Another instructor linked her home page for her basic writing students to the web site for Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," an assigned reading in her course. (That site is <<http://www.en.utexas.edu/~daniel/amlit/wallpaper/wallpaper.html/>>). Students found the graphics, particularly the yellow wallpaper background, to be a useful supplement to the text itself.

7. Supports Graduate Student Creativity. At UC Irvine, some of the most exciting initiatives in using the Internet for pedagogical purposes have been taken by graduate students. In the case of Writing 139, the paper version of the training manual was written by a program administrator in conjunction with a graduate Ph.D. candidate in English (Kathleen Keating) who created the web site. Some of our graduate students at UC Irvine are routinely creating web sites for their lower and upper division writing classes, as well as for literature classes <<http://eee.uci.edu/classes/>>. Given this context, it seems appropriate to make training materials available to them on the web.

8. Promotes Professional Development for our Teachers. Furthermore, graduate students involved in creating online teaching and training materials can begin to receive professional recognition from off-campus to enhance their professional development. Given the brutal job market in the humanities at this time, online projects can help graduate students demonstrate their creativity and expertise in an easily accessible and public way. For example, they can provide the addresses of their home pages on their *curriculum vitae*, providing hyper-links to web versions of their vitae, teaching portfolios, and writing samples.

9. Provides Editorial Experience for Teachers. Many of our composition TAs are "publishing" their students' work on the web, sometimes replete with photographs of these students to illustrate essential concepts of audience and tone. Managing such publication provides a very useful practical apprenticeship for our fledgling scholars. Acknowledging intellectual property and negotiating

borders of propriety is a thought-provoking experience for instructors, students, and campus administrators alike.

10. Represents a Potential Source of Funding. Finally, a word about funding. UC Irvine, like many other campuses, offers grants each year to promote projects involving electronic enhancements to writing and critical thinking classes. Information technology and electronic communication are apparently becoming priority areas for educational development on other campuses, too. The *glam* associated with technology can be exploited to fund ongoing writing program projects to update curricula. Thoughtful training materials, easily accessible from home and available to other institutions, can only enhance the quality of our writing programs as well as the image of our institutions.

Three Challenges

1. The Mysteries of Home Page Construction. Of course, it isn't easy to create training materials, nor is it simple to master the mysteries of web site construction. For now, we may have to rely on savvy graduate students or techies in other departments to set up our web sites. This is not, in itself, a bad thing. Graduate and undergraduate students appear to have taken the lead in exploiting web technology for their own uses, while faculty trained in the days of typewriters and word-processors are only beginning to make use of home pages and on-line *c.v.*'s and teaching portfolios. Depending on the technical know-how of other departments for initial training may also prove useful in the long run, enabling us to develop a broader sense of the possibilities of these technologies. Nonetheless, it is somewhat daunting for the average WPA to imagine mastering the technical skills necessary to construct a presentable web page. It will not be too long, however, before web technology will be advanced enough that anyone who can use a word-processor or publishing software will be able to construct his or her own web site. Not only are many HTML editors available for free, but programs exist to translate word-processed documents directly into HTML. For example, a UC Irvine graduate student in Comparative Literature, Eric D. Friedman, has developed an automatic "HTML-ifier" available to anyone with web access. This program will find a word-processed document saved in Rich Text Format (RTF) on any instructor's personal computer, instantly convert it to HTML, and (at UC Irvine) will then upload it to the instructor's web site, all in about 30 seconds. This program, available to anyone, can be found at <http://eee.uci.edu/toolbox/rtf2html.html>.

2. Web Maintenance. Once the web site is set up, it has to be maintained and updated. This represents a new and challenging responsibility for already busy WPAs and their beleaguered budgets. Once we have uploaded potentially vast amounts of material to our web site, we are then responsible for keeping track of it and updating it as older material becomes obsolete. Essentially, this is

the same problem we face when dealing with a cluttered and over-stuffed filing cabinet. One solution for this problem is to have teachers begin to submit their materials (sample essays, handouts, syllabi, etc.) on disk, or electronically by e-mail. Rather than hand-editing materials, the WPA will be able to edit, delete, and replace files as we already do on our word processors.

3. Access to Computers. Not all instructors have computers, let alone computers capable of accessing the world wide web. These systems are both expensive and, even when they are accessible through on-campus computer labs, are often challenging for the uninitiated. Any new technology requires an investment of time and energy to master it, time and energy our over-extended teachers may not easily be able to spare. During the transitional period in which we move from photocopying handouts and hand-distributing bulletins to posting them on our web sites, we can expect a certain amount of disruption and resistance. We may find, for example, that some of our instructors resist using on-line materials out of distrust, impatience, technophobia, or inability to easily access the WWW. As Strenski et al. (1995) point out, however, "any new technology invariably causes disruption, . . . and . . . the same resistance emerged about revision and requiring students to hand in drafts of papers when computers first began to supersede typewriters" (253). Of course, the web does tend to become more attractive and useful (perhaps even "addictive") the more one explores it. A well-designed training web site with valuable teacher-generated materials and exciting links can be the beginning of a "beautiful relationship" between teachers and the web. Furthermore, our teachers will need to become familiar with information technology in order to keep up with the obvious societal and educational trend in the direction of electronic media. In requiring some proficiency with on-line pedagogical materials, we are actually assisting in our teachers' professional development.

In each case, WPAs can view these challenges as stumbling blocks or stepping stones. Whichever attitude we take, for better or for worse (and, in our view, it is for the better), this seems to be the direction in which composition is moving. Our argument is that compositionists have a remarkable opportunity to take advantage of technologies which seem naturally suited to our needs as administrators and teachers. After an initial period of adjustment in which campuses and departments make newer, high-powered, web-ready computers more easily available to students and faculty alike, we will soon find ourselves either struggling to keep up with our students or advancing our discipline through creative explorations of information technology.

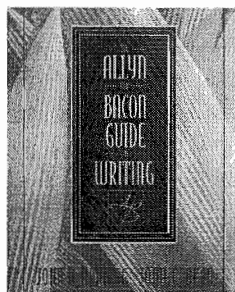
Note

1. For a recent primer on computer technologies and writing programs, see Todd Taylor's "Computers in the Composition Curriculum: An Update." *WPA* 20.1/2 (fall/winter 1996): 7-18. [Ed.]

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The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing



John D. Ramage, Arizona State University
John C. Bean, Seattle University

The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing takes composition instruction in a new direction. Based on a problem-solving approach, this all-in one rhetoric/reader/ research guide /handbook incorporates proven strategies to help students become effective writers. With a flexible sequence of comprehensive writing assignments, numerous examples of student and professional writing, a unique chapter on computers and writing, and thorough guides to research and editing, this new text reflects the authors more than 50 combined years of experience as teachers, writers, and researchers.



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