

Distance Education and the First-Year Writing Curriculum

Laura Brady

Technology ranks high among the issues that Charles Schuster asks writing program administrators to consider when they examine the role that writing programs play in recruiting and retaining students and in establishing a university's academic excellence:

Given the pressures on institutions to teach more efficiently and to distribute their learning outside the conventional classroom, how can composition participate? How can we be sure that writing instruction does not get left behind as conventional classrooms are transformed into online sites with chat rooms, virtual instructor, and electronic administration centers? (94)

If first-year writing programs participate in distance education, what are the advantages and what are the risks we need to examine at our individual institutions?

CONSIDERING CONTEXTS FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION AND FIRST-YEAR WRITING

At my institution (West Virginia University), the question of whether composition could or should participate in distance learning demanded some immediate answers when the office of the provost and its division of extended learning recently sponsored a grant competition for online learning initiatives. These "Entrepreneurial Learning Innovation" (ELI) grants aimed to innovate practices for large enrollment classes through the use of instructional technologies and to increase educational opportunities for students located at a geographical distance from the campus or who have time constraints that restrict access to courses on campus. The grants

emphasized entrepreneurial innovations because the resulting courses were expected to earn income generated by distance education registration fees.

ELI grant proposals could request up to \$45,000 from the provost's office for design and delivery of an online course sequence, as long as the requested amount was met with a dollar-for-dollar match from the department's college. The funds were largely restricted to faculty and curriculum development requests (i.e., the funds were not for the technology itself). To increase accountability and minimize the risk of this particular university investment in new learning initiatives, all projects had to start within a year of funding and, within two years, the department had to repay 25% of the total amount funded. For instance, a project with a \$50,000 budget would have to repay \$12,500 over two years. The repayment condition required applicants to consider carefully their costs and potential revenues.

When the chair and dean made clear that our two university-required English courses (which collectively serve about 6,000 students a year) were among those courses "strongly encouraged" to apply for an ELI grant, I was initially resistant. I knew that our English 101 and 102 sequence was attractive because of the ELI grant's emphasis on "large enrollment" classes, yet 15 years of experience with computer-assisted writing instruction in a variety of forms and contexts (including a completely online course) convinced me that a distance delivery method was not well suited to the general needs of the majority of our traditional eighteen- to twenty-two-year-old, campus-based writing students—at least not given the current technologies available to our particular group of students and faculty in the year 2000. I also resisted the emphasis on "entrepreneurial" initiatives, even though we're all acutely aware these days of the budget exigencies faced by higher education. Pedagogy driven primarily by profit displaces student and instructor needs and goals (Brady 348, 355-56).

Strategic resistance to the entrepreneurial side of distance education led our writing program to take a principled stance: we refused to create online writing courses to serve large numbers of traditional, campus-based students. Following Patricia Webb's logic in her essay "Writing Classes in the Virtual Age," we instead examined the specific purpose and value of putting courses online (beyond complying with a request from upper administration) and considered as well what advantages (if any) the online environment would have over a traditional bricks-and-mortar setting (2). We reached two conclusions:

1. Face-to-face instruction held more advantages than distance instruction for the traditional eighteen- to twenty-two-year-old students living within five miles of campus,

2. Distance education did suggest one way of reaching some of the nontraditional students constrained by multiple schedules and/or geographic distance.

In West Virginia, adult learners—those students who have been away from school for five years or more—represent a significant portion of the population, yet they are also a group that our university has not been very successful in recruiting and retaining. We kept this audience in mind as we considered course goals, technology options, and instructional needs.

Although this small and specific student audience directly and severely limited the “entrepreneurial” profit potential emphasized in the ELI grant title (because we would reach 64 students a year instead of hundreds or thousands), our proposal met another grant goal to increase educational opportunities for nontraditional students. We received full funding in Spring 2001 for an ELI grant entitled “Writing over Space and Time: English 101 for Adult Learners.”

MAPPING LOCAL AND DISTANCE TEACHING TERRAINS

Moving even a few sections of a first-year writing course online raises interesting questions about literacy, about presence and absence, and about the nature of instruction and authorship. In “From a Distance: Teaching Writing on Interactive Television,” Joyce Magnotto Neff asks:

1. How are students constructed as writers in [a distance] setting?
2. What mediating elements have roles in distance education?
3. What impact does distance education have on composition pedagogy? (138)

Technology and institutional ideologies always contribute to writers’ identities, but Neff demonstrates how new technologies and pedagogies can make us more conscious of these factors. She gives as an example the many mediating human and technological elements—ranging from technicians and mail carriers to cameras and transmission lines—that interrupted her notions of authority (149). These elements prompted her to find “alternative methods for the physical and oral presence” (151) that she had grown accustomed to in face-to-face teaching, to increase the emphasis she placed on writing as the main communication medium, and to consider how the physical distances between readers and writers “more closely approximated the distance in the non-school world where expert writers publish their texts for imagined (rather than known) audiences and where expert readers interpret texts without personally knowing the individuals who wrote them” (149).

Although our distance courses do not rely on interactive television, Neff's points remain relevant to our online teaching. We have had to become newly aware of the material and virtual dimensions for teaching and learning, reading, writing, and collaborating. For instance, we found that the physical distances between readers and writers approximated more than the realities of published texts. The physical distances also represented chasms of access and economics between readers and writers, students and teachers, and traditional and nontraditional students. Although distance education may help our students maintain their current class positions, we consciously resist the metaphor of distance education as bridges that students can cross "anytime, anywhere" to a better world. (This is a metaphor that circulates at our university, where one distance education program is titled "Bridging the Gap.")

Neff's points help remind our writing program that the shape of the real world—and status within that world—differs depending on where instructors and students live, both literally and metaphorically. In *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century*, Cynthia Selfe reminds us that technology cannot be viewed as a "fix for many social, political, and economic problems" (142). We continue to strive for the type of critical engagement with technological issues that Selfe calls for, but we have a long way to go. We are trying to keep our knowledge situated; we are trying to pay critical attention to issues of access for our students; we are trying to pay critical attention to the relationships among technology, literacy, education, and ideology; we are trying to put research into practice (Selfe 148-54).

Other scholars have helped us develop strategies as technology critics. For instance, Dawn Rodrigues draws attention to four "ingredients" that situate knowledge and teaching practices: the curriculum, the discipline-specific pedagogies, the students, and the available technologies. Rodrigues explains why it is important to consider the way these four ingredients interact:

In many cases, professors are asked to work with available technology, even if it is not what they feel is the optimal paradigm for their particular learning situation. Similarly, institutions across the country find themselves in situations where they are expected to offer distance education courses before having had an opportunity to consider the range of possibilities and develop a plan of their own.

At my institution, we were fortunate. We were able to define a specific student audience and consider student needs in relation to our course goals, pedagogies, and available technologies. After considering what Rodrigues calls the "campus ecology"—the number and type of interactive courses available, our technologies, and our students' needs—we decided against

real-time interactive television courses. In part, we did not have a “campus” ecology: our terrain is distinctly off campus: the roads and topography in our state can often require over two hours of travel even to reach the closest remote course site. As a result of our terrain, our previous experience with distance courses revealed that remote sites often had only one or two students—not enough to create the type of community we wanted.¹ For instance, Rodrigues describes the way she turns the camera on her local class so that “students at the remote site can see [the instructor] helping students on their writing or on their group discussion tasks” and students at the local site can get a similar view of the remote classroom. She calls this approach “mirror pedagogy.” When we practiced mirror pedagogy, our campus site typically had 20 students while the remote site typically had one person. As a result, the mirror presented a distorted image that emphasized contrasts rather than similarities and underscored just how “remote” the distance site was.

Rodrigues emphasizes that no single mode of distance education will work for all students. She stresses the need “to offer courses that meet the needs of the local curriculum, that tap the available technology, and—most importantly—courses that serve the needs of the students.” For our particular context, that meant we drew on prior televised and online teaching experiences to increase access and retention. To achieve curricular and pedagogical goals of community and collaboration, we moved away from a face-to-face model entirely. However, we also resolved to use varied activities such as email, chat rooms, bulletin boards, and Web pages to foster student participation and interaction and to supplement these online approaches with phone and print components.² Flexible access, combined with a Web-based and largely (but not completely) asynchronous approach, fit the multiple and varied schedules of students who were primarily working adults with no more than basic access to the Internet.

DEVELOPING A DESIGN

The pedagogical choice to move our course completely online was also shaped by institutional factors. In a recent issue of *Kairos* that focuses on distance education, Cristie Cowles Charles describes two prevalent models for developing distance-learning-based online writing courses. In one model, the courses are funded, developed, administered, and evaluated by distance education programs rather than by English or writing programs. In the second model, individual composition instructors add innovative methods to their traditional courses. We were able to combine these models. While our university’s distance education program provided startup funds and continues to manage student enrollment and fees, our writing program develops and administers the curriculum, directs staffing and fac-

ulty development, and assesses the course from the perspective of both students and instructors. We also retain the right to discontinue the program if we find that our distance writing courses do not meet the needs of adult learners, do not fulfill our pedagogical goals, or do not prove viable in terms of ongoing curricular or faculty development goals. In this way, we hope to maintain what Charles identifies as “the instructor’s and students’ flexibility to change or adapt the course to their own needs.”

We kept the needs of instructors as well as adult learners central as we redesigned our English 101 course in keeping with the principles that guide our program.³ And we promised only four sections of the online section of English 101 per year (each section’s enrollment capped at 16 instead of our usual cap of 22 to recognize the added time involved in such a text-based version of the course). We were aware of the obvious appeal that fees from large enrollment classes have for budget-strapped universities, but we knew we needed to start small if we were to develop a strong course that responded first to student and teacher needs. By focusing on a maximum of 64 adult learning students per year (compared to the 3,000 students per year that we serve in our traditional English 101 class), we could concentrate on how to use distance technology to meet the needs of nontraditional students. Our course development process thus embodied many of the guidelines that Todd Taylor outlines in “Ten Commandments for Computers and Composition,” such as “keep people first,” “identify and build from program principles,” “start simple,” and “invest heavily in hands-on instructor training” (231). Faculty training and development has been a distinguishing feature for our program.

ARGUING FOR A DISTANCE WRITING COORDINATOR

We have been able to invest—and reinvest—in faculty development. A university grant allowed us to hire a full-time distance writing coordinator who could design content and teaching strategies for a new medium and a very specific audience of adult learners who, we knew from past experiences, needed flexible access to the courses and to the technologies we planned to use. To keep adapting our courses to changing student and instructor needs, we are reinvesting the small revenues we have earned from student enrollment fees to continue to fund a coordinator. More significantly, our Division of Extended Learning is continuing its support by authorizing up to two years of additional funding (an extension of our initial ELI grant) to give us time to assess whether the revenues from distance course fees might eventually make the coordinator position self-funding.

When we applied for an internal grant to respond to our university’s demand for distance writing innovations, we specified that we would use most of the funds to hire a full-time faculty member. This faculty member,

we argued, could devote focused attention to designing a version of our writing courses for this small, specialized audience in a completely online medium. We successfully gained funding for a year-to-year faculty line by creating a short- and long-term plan based on projected enrollments and the small income received by distance learning fees.

In the short term (the first pilot year of the project), the faculty member hired for this position was expected to create two online courses (English 101 and English 102)—one each semester—and to test the student need for and response to these pilot courses. We stipulated that the faculty member would have summer course development time and a reduced teaching load. Although our one-year appointments typically carry a four-course load each semester, we argued successfully for two courses per semester with a single preparation (just English 101 in the fall and just English 102 in the spring). The reduced teaching load recognizes the time it takes to do course design while also adapting the material (and instructional approaches) to a new medium; the reduced enrollment to 16, not 22, recognizes the additional time it takes to respond online; the single preparation allowed the faculty member to develop one course at a time. We also used grant funds to hire a graduate teaching assistant who could provide technological assistance in the first year.

In our long-term plan, we argued for ways the curriculum and the full-time faculty position could enrich our regular classroom-based writing programs, and we projected other courses that might be added if the initial courses proved successful in reaching the adult learner audience. Long-term, we argued that a full-time position would:

- manage ongoing faculty and curriculum development for our distance writing program (in collaboration with our existing faculty and curriculum development programs)
- supervise our online courses and provide training for new instructors of online courses
- act as a liaison between the department and the Division of Extended Learning
- possibly work with the Division of Extended Learning on site licenses with other schools in our state system

We established the need for a faculty member devoted to our online writing programs as distinct and separate from the existing hiring needs for our regular writing program since the online initiative represented an addition to our current plans and commitments.

We were able to fill the position of distance writing coordinator partly by good fortune, but also because we took care to design a reasonable workload with plenty of collegial and technical support, a separate budget for

the faculty member's professional development (to attend conferences and workshops, buy books, etc.), and a long-term plan that shows how we see this position fitting into our permanent program.

In terms of faculty development and the preparation of graduate students, our online programs provide a small workshop-type environment for faculty and GTAs who want to learn about distance education firsthand. Currently, one full-time faculty member and two GTAs teach distance writing courses—in addition to the full-time distance writing coordinator. The coordinator works with this small group (always in the context of the activities of the writing program as a whole) to share teaching resources and current scholarship. The community that results is a small one but growing.

In addition to collaborative networks and short- and long-term planning, the initiative of the person who currently serves as our distance writing coordinator contributed directly to our success in extending an initial one-year position into a second year and (barring a budget crisis) most likely a third. My colleague, Catherine Gouge, has worked extremely hard on the research and reporting side to give us the material we need to communicate our current project and future plans to upper-level administrators. She has, for instance, designed surveys that let us know about our students' demographic profile, their experience with and access to basic technologies, their needs in terms of writing and computing, and that help us evaluate how well the course is promoting their learning through the new online medium. She has also established an Excel database that allows her to present her information visually and statistically. At the end of each term, she provides me information that I can pass along to the chair, the deans, and the provost. We collaborate on the final presentation of the reports to be sure that we reach our upper administration audience as effectively as possible. We will need to keep building our case if we hope to create a permanent position that keeps our focus on changing student needs.

FOCUSING ON STUDENTS

To make sure that we would be able to reach our defined audience of adult learners who might otherwise find it difficult to take traditional classes, our distance writing coordinator worked closely with our extended learning division to match students to our courses. We have discovered that the non-traditional student population corresponds fairly closely to the part-time student population (those who register for nine credit hours or fewer); the part-time students on our campus tend, for the most part, to be students who are returning to school, working full-time jobs (or multiple jobs), meeting family obligations, commuting long distance, or juggling some combination of these factors. While some traditional, full-time students

challenge the fact that we now limit our distance writing course registration to part-time students, we successfully counter-argue that full-time students get priority registration for the 150 other sections of English 101 that we offer at a wide range of times and with varying degrees of technology emphasis. The completely online sections remain reserved for those students who would find it difficult or impossible to enroll in a traditional class. The access principle that informs our distance registration practices allows us to accommodate a few special cases (such as a full-time student who might have physical disabilities that render traditional classroom access difficult) while primarily serving the needs of adult learners.

A focused student audience helped us define the rhetorical situation that our instructors would face as we redesigned an existing course. In the first semester that we offered our English 101 class online, we found that:

- The average age of students was 43.5 (compared to the average age of 18 in our traditional FYC course)
- The majority (58%) could not have taken the class at all if had it not been offered online
- All of the adult learners who registered for the initial online course completed the semester (a 100% retention rate the first semester; after two years, our average retention rate has been 90% —comparable to our traditional English 101 retention rates)

Adult working students could easily navigate the Web-based course even if the computers that they would likely have access to at home, at work, or at their public libraries were older models with slow Internet connections. We did specify that students registering for the courses should be able to access a Web page and have very basic word processing and email skills. An introductory questionnaire (see Appendix) asks several questions about students' computing skills and access so that instructors can gauge needs and, when necessary, help students access and navigate the course site. We have no way of knowing how many students we might be losing who do not possess this basic level of access and skill (that's a group we're still trying to track), but we do know that our enrollment rates (16 students per section) and retention rates (90% or above) are already much better than they were when we last tried an interactive television approach.

The online teaching approach took advantage of the range of synchronous and asynchronous technologies provided on WebCT (the Web-based instructional platform available at our school): integrated email, chat rooms, bulletin boards, access tracking, etc. So that neither teachers nor students would have to rely on just this one platform, our distance writing coordinator had additional ways of contacting students through other email accounts and a class listserv. Other media that supplement the email and Web-based interfaces include:

- a video series on writing (English Composition: Writing for an Audience, a Higher Education Instructional Television series (HEITV) produced by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and available weekly on the local PBS station for students within the state or via tape for out-of-state students)
- a local and toll-free phone line
- A print textbook (most recently McMahon and Funk's *Here's How to Write Well*, 2nd ed.)
- printed papers submitted and returned via regular mail

These supplements to email and the Web allowed for some flexibility. For instance, one student—who missed a direct, personal connection with a teacher—would often phone her instructor during regular office hours to ask questions or touch base; another student used the phone to get advice only when he had trouble meeting a deadline (and was surprised to find that the teacher he had assumed was male was, in fact, female); yet another student used the phone to report trouble accessing the course Web page (alerting the instructor to the fact that the WebCT server had gone down, which allowed her to create a back-up plan). Likewise, some students liked the video series that interviewed a wide range of writers about their craft because it made the text-based materials come alive; others saw it covering much the same ground as the textbook, which they preferred.

EVALUATING THE ONLINE VERSION OF ENGLISH 101

Assessment results from the initial English 101 online sections indicate that the project is successfully meeting the needs of adult learners. The vast majority of students reported that they learned a great deal about writing effectively and that they would like to take another writing class online now that they feel more comfortable with the involved technologies. Even though almost half of the students who participated in the pilot sections expressed concern about Web-based instruction when the term began, 100% of those same students were pleased with the Web-based delivery method at the end of the semester. The success was further underscored by a 100% retention rate—a marked change from our previous experiences with distance writing courses. The success is due to a combination of factors that include a better sense of our audience and a better course design, but credit largely goes to our distance writing coordinator, Catherine Gouge, who developed student surveys; gathered, analyzed, and reported the results; and created, taught, and refined the pilot version of our distance FYC course.⁴

While students have responded positively to our distance first-year writing course, I don't mean to suggest that the same template would work for everyone. Instead, I return to the point that Rodrigues, Taylor, Walker and

others all make: course design needs to respond to the specific rhetorical context of your institution, program principles, and student population. In the past, our distance writing courses were not terribly successful. In some instances the courses were limited by an imposed technology that did not match our specific learning situation (like the failed attempt to use interactive television). In other cases we relied too heavily on the efforts of a single instructor (like our previous attempts at online courses), and the design could not adapt easily to the changing needs of new students and new instructors (see Rodrigues and Charles). It was only when we began to think programmatically about the role of distance education for our first-year writing program that we realized how important it would be to designate a full-time position to help us design course content, develop teaching approaches, and work with new instructors.

In retrospect, the idea of a designated position for distance writing seems obvious: redesigning content and teaching approach for a new student population is demanding work. As Teddi Fishman puts it, “the task of the DE professional becomes not only to teach, but also to ascertain and employ media in such a way that their strengths support the attainment of pedagogical goals.” Drawing on recent work in *The American Journal of Distance Education*, Fishman identifies key interactions in distance education: (1) between learner and subject matter, (2) between learner and instructor, (3) between learner and other learners, (4) between learner and technology. We created a full-time renewable position to focus on these multiple interactions and instructional challenges. If our university had not been able or willing to support a position that could focus exclusively on distance writing challenges, creating a distance writing program would have proven to be much more difficult—if not impossible.

THINKING PROGRAMMATICALLY

Thinking programmatically about distance writing and first-year composition, our overall goal was to create teaching and learning conditions necessary for quality education. In terms of teaching conditions, we reduced the standard teaching load to two courses per semester and reduced the class size from 22 to 16. We also created faculty development workshops and materials for future distance writing instructors. In terms of course content, we continued to emphasize the same goals we had adapted from the “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition.” Following the WPA model, our outcomes describe the theoretical, productive, and practical knowledges that students should achieve by the end of first-year composition, and we use the WPA categories: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; processes; and knowledge of conventions. While the goals remained the same, we tried to tailor reading and writing

activities to our adult-learner audience. When our distance writing coordinator summed up the primary instructional goals in a year-end report to me, she explained that the Web-based courses:

1. diversified the content and technologies (Web, email, video, phone, printed texts) to appeal to differences in student learning styles
2. built into the course design opportunities for students to receive frequent and meaningful feedback (from both the instructor and their peers) to encourage learning and retention, and to develop community
3. provided simple technological support to all students, especially those who are less familiar with email, chatrooms, and other Web-based tools
4. created a Web-based discourse community that is supportive, professional, and engaging (Gouge 2002)

Our new distance writing coordinator also considered the available technologies and the students' needs and reached the following conclusions:

- informal writing and discussion are important parts of our first-year composition course; in the online course, a series of 15 email prompts encourages individual informal writing and active participation
- a portfolio approach emphasizes the processes of writing, response, reflection, and revision. In the online course, the portfolio centers on three essay assignments (instead of the four we typically require in a traditional class) to allow for extra response time in the completely text-based exchanges online or via regular mail; the online portfolio also allows students to include self-selected pieces of email and Web-based writing
- peer response groups provide an immediate and varied audience for student writing; they demonstrate why it's important for writers to read and explore different voices and approaches. Online, students respond to other student work on the full-class bulletin board and in small group chat rooms (set up for three or four students)
- instructor conferences take the form of email, chatroom discussions, phone calls, and even regular office hours in case a student occasionally wants to meet in person (Gouge, "Instructor's Guide")

In addition to considering how to meet common program principles and course goals in a new medium, our distance writing coordinator also

worked hard to create a set of conventions to structure the online instruction; she wanted students to know what type of work to expect from week to week—much the way that traditional classroom instruction falls into a certain rhythm. Each week, the students came to expect five types of activities: reading, writing, watching, discussing, and sending.

The distance course that currently responds to the needs of our non-traditional students is intensely text-based: every online exchange depends on writing and reading. As Patricia Webb points out, students in an online course coauthor the content in significant ways; their participation is active, and they often have more control over the direction that a discussion will take than they might in a classroom where a teacher can more immediately control the focus. Webb sums up the difference this way: instead of the instructor being situated as the expert, “students + experts + [instructor] + text = the content of the course” (7-8). This new way of thinking about course content is one of the ways in which our distance writing courses contribute programmatically to the way we teach writing: the design and content of the distance courses help us examine the way we think about issues of course authorship and the collaborations we enter into with our students.

ASSESSING RISKS

To return to the point where I began this essay, it is clear that profit-based competition in the areas of distance education and distributed learning are putting new pressures on campuses to take their own online initiatives. As writing program administrators, we need to examine continuously our reasons for and against creating online courses, stay true to our principles, and know what’s at stake. For instance, if your writing program pursues distance education, will you need to sacrifice faculty or funding for other initiatives? In addition to the partnerships that you will need to develop across the university, are there any alliances or positions that might be compromised? Will distance education serve your students and faculty—or are there other approaches better suited to your institution’s student needs and faculty talents? If your institution is willing to support grants for early test cases, what happens in one, two, or three years?

One of the associate deans at my university posed a particularly useful question that helped our program assess our risks in a very practical way. She asked: “What happens if the whole project fails? Does anyone get hurt?” Our writing program decided that we were willing to risk failure because we found positive results that could redeem the risk. We had:

- planned carefully and realistically in terms of the purpose, the audience, and the size of our online offerings to be sure that we

could meet our goals, and along the way found a new understanding of student and university needs

- kept the scale of the initial offerings small enough to be sure that no students would be hurt (i.e., we knew we could accommodate any already enrolled students if we decided to discontinue our distance writing programs)
- protected the person in the year-to-year faculty line as much as possible with yearly assessments and analyses of the real and projected enrollments, created a position with a reduced teaching load and a development budget that would enable our colleague to pursue publication and other professional development in case we are not able to convert the line into a permanent position, and—most importantly—we made sure she knew the risks
- established the faculty line devoted to our online writing programs as distinct and separate from other hiring needs for our regular writing program so that we were not compromising existing plans
- anticipated ways that we could use what we learn about student needs and instructional technologies in our traditional, classroom-based writing programs
- communicated our needs, our goals, and our expectations as clearly as possible with our immediate colleagues, our college, the division of extended learning, and the office of the provost.

We don't expect to fail, but in any new endeavor, we have to be willing to take that risk or our programs will stagnate. At the moment, we think we've developed a simple yet well-designed online curriculum that meets the needs of the adult learners that we are trying to reach. We also think our online course designs may prove useful to programs at other institutions in our state. We'll know more each year. And if we fail, we'll have learned quite a lot about the politics of institutional collaboration, about managing change, and about teaching with new technologies—all of which will help our writing program respond to other changes that are facing higher education.

NOTES

¹ Just to clarify: the interactive television versions that linked remote sites with a campus-based writing or literature class reflect our department's earlier (1995-1999) experiments with distance education methods; these televised courses were not part of the ELI grant.

² My colleague, Catherine Gouge, designed and taught the pilot versions of our online English 101 class. I want to acknowledge her valuable work developing our distance writing program and her help supplying information and feedback on this essay.

³ Our first-year writing goals are based on the “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition.”

⁴ For more specific information about our distance writing course content or student responses, please contact Catherine.Gouge@mail.wvu.edu

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APPENDIX

DISTANCE ENGLISH 101 STUDENT SURVEY

(Designed by Catherine Gouge, Fall 2001, West Virginia University)

This questionnaire is designed to help your English 101 professor better understand the individual needs and backgrounds of each student registered for English 101. I appreciate you taking the time to provide thoughtful answers to the questions below.

About you:

1. Name:
2. Current email address:
3. Age:
4. Location:
5. Current job:
6. Number of hours each week you devote to your job:
7. Desired profession:
8. Have you taken any other college-level courses? If so, how many?
9. Major (or anticipated major):
10. Is there anything else you would like me to know about you?
11. Please provide at least THREE times when you are likely to be available for a real time chatroom discussion (NOTE: Two will be required over the course of the semester):
Tuesday: 7am-10am 10am-1pm 1pm-4pm 4pm-7pm 7pm-10pm
Wed.: 7am-10am 10am-1pm 1pm-4pm 4pm-7pm 7pm-10pm

About your computing skills and access:

12. Will you be using a computer that you own for this course?
13. Do you know its processing speed? If so, what is it?
14. Do you know how much RAM your computer has? If so, how much?
15. Do you know how much free memory you have available on your hard drive?
16. Do you know how to purge your cache (short-term Internet memory)?

17. Do you know your modem speed? If so, what is it?
18. If the computer you plan to use as your primary computer for the class is unavailable for whatever reason, what computer will you use (friend's or relative's, public library, local school campus)? (Note "I don't know" is an acceptable answer; however, if that is your answer, you should look into finding a back-up computer option as soon as possible.)
19. Of the following list below, please tell me which skills you are able to perform:

Basic Skills

- Enter a URL
- Point and Click
- Locate a Web browser and go online
- Use scroll bars
- Use the back button
- Recognize the visual cues indicating a link
- Recognize a homepage
- Type and enter text in chat area
- Use email
- Print

Intermediate Skills

- Conduct an Internet search
- "Save As"
- Cut and paste
- Send email attachments
- Open email attachments
- Download data from the Web

Advanced Skills

- Create a Web page
- Create working links
- Copy and paste HTML code
- Write HTML code
- Upload data to the Web