Title of Proposal

Reconceiving "Writing, Research, and Technology" by Introducing Multimodal Video Composition, Oral History, and Educational Outreach

Course and Curriculum Affected

Writing, Research, and Technology is one of the "Big Three" courses required for all Writing Arts majors. The course is currently being revised as a result of the creation of an introductory course, Introduction to Writing Arts. A portion of Introduction to Writing Arts now introduces students to much of what has been discussed in Writing, Research, and Technology. As a result, Writing, Research, and Technology is being updated.

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Objectives of the Proposal

This proposal is requesting 20 Flip Video Ultra Camcorders (enough for one full class) for students use in an oral history (Ritchie, 2003) video composition assignment that will introduce students to contemporary theories in and practical applications of visual rhetoric, oral history, and educational outreach. The goal of the assignment is to provide Writing Arts majors with an opportunity to further develop the critical thinking, reading, and writing skills that are necessary for a contemporary "literacy [that] today is in the midst of a techtonic shift" (Yancey, 2004). That literacy is visual and textual; it consists of being able to understand the complex, evasive relationships among texts and images—and how those relationships impact and are impacted by contemporary cultures.

In her 2004 Chair's address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Kathleen Blake Yancey (2004) observed that writing is created by students "who . . . compose words and images and create audio files on Web logs (blogs), in word processors, with video editors and Web editors and in e-mail and on presentation software and in instant messaging and on listservs and on bulletin boards—and no doubt in whatever genre will emerge in the next ten minutes" (p. 298). Writing is no longer just about using a keyboard to put words on a screen nor about using a pen to put words on paper. Writing, in our highly mediated, highly visual culture, is composing—in all the forms, media, and genres we can think of. It is the blending—or mashing-up—of images (still and moving), words, and music (Bezemer and Kress, 2008; Elbow, 2007; Haas, 2008; Ranker, 2008; Selfe, 2007; Wolff, 2008). Writing is also understanding how to use software applications—how the symbols, functions, and interfaces impact the resulting texts (Johnson-Eilola, 2005).

Images have been used to enhance meaning in written texts dating back to illuminated manuscripts and early maps (Bolter, 2001; Yancey, 2004). Bezemer and Kress (2008), in their historical study of learning materials observe that "writing is being displaced by image as the central mode for representation" (p. 166). The pervasiveness of the image in contemporary society (online and off) complements Bezemer and Kress's observations. Cell phones are creating photographers and filmmakers out of the layman. Refereed photography show's and

film festival's CFPs are soliciting work created with cell phone still and video cameras. As of 28 March 2008, 78.3 million videos had been uploaded to YouTube at a rate of 150,000 per day (Wesch, 2008). In the minute it will take the reviewers to read this paragraph, over 3,500 photos will be uploaded to Flickr (http://www.flickr.com). Computer applications and web sites are semiotic domains (Wolff, 2008), overflowing with a combination of "oral or written language, images, equations, symbols, sounds, gestures, graphs, artifacts, etc." (Gee, 2003, p. 16).

Complementing (and, in many ways, perpetuating) the ubiquity of images is the ubiquity of server storage space: "Last year, Yahoo announced that Yahoo Mail, its free webmail service, would provide unlimited storage. Just in case that wasn't totally clear, that's 'unlimited' as in 'infinite.' So the market price of online storage, at least for email, has now fallen to zero" (Anderson, 2008). So, too, for bandwidth and processing power. These technologies (and their ubiquity) are providing never-before-seen opportunities for processing, archiving, studying, and distributing oral histories. For example, the USC Shoah Foundation Institute's Visual History Archive has archived over 52,000 visual histories (http://college.usc.edu/vhi/ archiveataglance.php). The Story Corps project has recorded and archived the stories of almost 30,000 citizens from across the United States (http://www.storycorps.net/). Oral (and visual) histories, when recorded and video taped, become intertwined with the technologies that record them (Perks and Thompson, 2006). The archived histories become remediated (Bolter, 2001), searchable, and, with the power of video editing software, malleable. These characteristics are what make contemporary oral histories powerful primary documents which, like all electronic texts, have the ability to be read, studied, combined with other texts, and presented in a variety of genres and media. When oral histories are edited together with still images, text, and sound using video editing software, they become multimodal compositions (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). These kinds of texts are the future of writing inside and outside of the academy (Miller and Hammond, 2008).

Innovation
There is currently a dearth of critical study and creation of electronic multimodal texts in the Writing Arts curriculum. This puts Writing Arts majors at a significant disadvantage as compared to their contemporaries in writing, rhetoric, and English departments at other institutions, such as Rutgers (New Brunswick) and The University of Texas at Austin, that have classes dedicated to creating multimodal video compositions. Our students are unfortunately falling behind the latest trends in the field. When Writing Arts majors enter their careers they will lack critical thinking, reading, and writing skills necessary for writers in contemporary society—lack the literacy that Yancey (2004) and Wolff (2008) have described. Writing, Research, and Technology—which has historically been the course where students are introduced to the latest new media theory, software, and hardware—seems an effective place to incorporate multimodal video compositions, especially since Introduction to Writing Arts has taken over introducing students to new media theory and Web 2.0 applications.

The course is also an effective place to introduce undergraduate Writing Arts students to oral history research and fieldwork research methodologies. It is the only course in the Writing Arts curriculum with "research" in the title; yet, too often research has been supplanted by the appeal of playing with new technologies. By bringing together oral history theory and practice, video technology, and visual rhetoric theory the course has an opportunity to challenge students to

consider how technologies (words, images, movies) can help us reveal the significance of the stories and histories of those whose voices are, for one reason or another, not heard.

Scalability

This proposal also addresses the continuing trend toward adding a service learning, or educational outreach component to college and university syllabi. The Writing Arts faculty member who has been most engaged with educational outreach has taken a position at another university. By adding an educational outreach component to Writing, Research, and Technology I hope to continue her important work. It will also introduce students to fieldwork research methodologies.

Adaptability

The instructional technology, educational outreach, and oral history components of this proposal are both adaptable to other faculty in the Writing Arts department and throughout the university. Gaining an understanding of visual rhetoric is important to the fields of business, advertising, public relations, art, fine arts, and education. So, too, can each of these disciplines adapt educational outreach to their own unique curricula.

Description of the Specific Innovation

The innovation is a 10 – 12 week assignment that takes advantage of the latest in video camera technologies (a Flip Video Ultra Camera) and the educational opportunities provided by service learning and oral history projects.

The Technology

The Flip Video (Figure 1) camera is designed with a specific purpose: to make video recording, editing, and uploading to the web as easy as possible. It is light, portable, and durable. It is perfect for a student to take into the field, conduct oral history interviews, and video city- and landscapes. The Ultra series cameras have 60 minutes worth of hard drive memory (2GB); the ability to record, playback, and delete video files; a built-in USB port; and bundled software installed (for a complete list of specifications, see http://www.theflip.com/products_flip_ ultra_specs.II.shtml). The videos are formatted specifically for the YouTube screen (640px x 320px).

a.   b.   c.

Figure 1. Flip Video Camera
Front view (a), back view (b), and USB extended view (c). For actual size, see Figure A1.

Using the camera is amazingly easy: press the record button to start (the red button in Figure 1b), press it again to stop, connect the unit to any computer via the USB port, wait for the software to install, edit the video, save the file, and, if one would like, one-click upload it to YouTube (or other online video site). The video quality is excellent, and the unit has outstanding battery life. The extreme usability of the unit and the software (Figure 2) makes it an ideal technology for students who are not video-savvy. The 640px x 320px image size—and resulting small file size—makes it easy to import into more advanced video editing applications (such as Final Cut Pro).
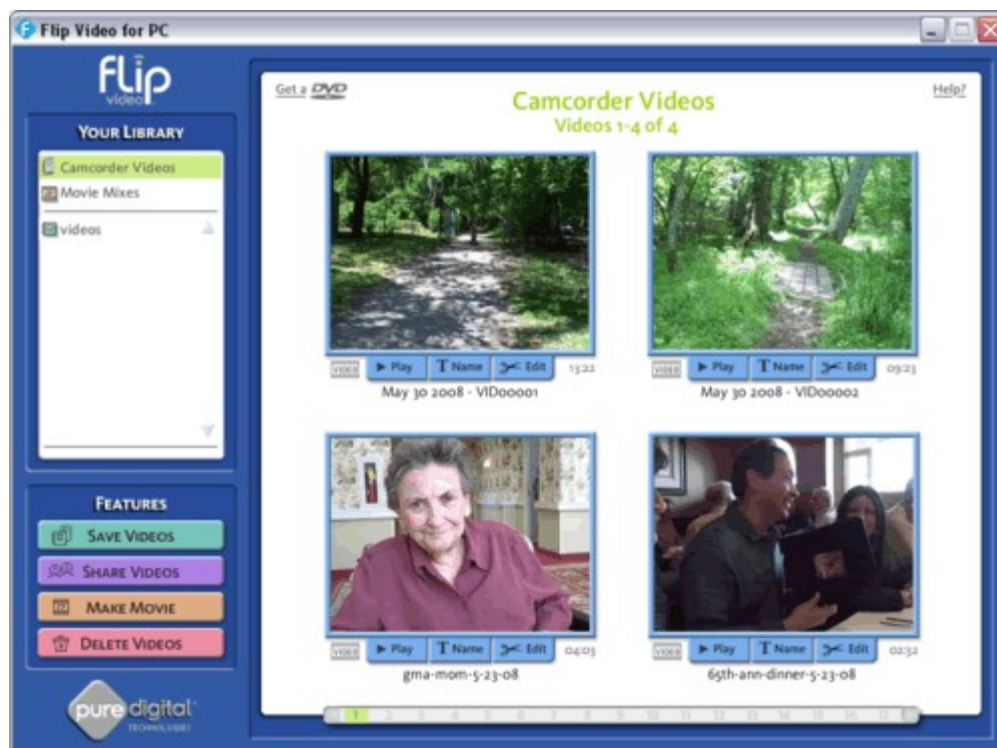

Figure 2. Flip Video Software Screen
From this screen users can preview multiple videos, choose to edit videos,
save videos to their computer, share videos, make a movie, or delete videos.

The Assignment
The assignment will ask students to engage, interview, and observe local community members with the goal creating a multimodal oral history video composition. The assignment itself is still in the early stages of design, but will generally include the following (over a period of 10 – 12 weeks):

- instructor will introduce students to visual rhetoric, oral history, and the processes of conducting oral histories (Perks and Thompson, 2006; Ritchie, 2003)
- students will prepare any necessary IRB documents
- students and instructor will identify and discuss issues of concern to members of the local community (for example, the 2008 presidential election, the closing of the state parks, environmental policy, and so forth)

- students and instructor will identify members of the community to contribute oral histories (the process for identifying community members has not yet been solidified, but will be a combined effort of the instructor identifying participants prior to the start of the course and students identifying a participant on their own, if necessary)
- students will prepare oral history questions with comments and input from the faculty member
- students will learn how to use the Flip Video Camera
- students will conduct oral history interviews and shoot any related footage
- students will research topics and ideas raised during the course of the interview
- students will import video into Final Cut Pro and learn how to use the application
- students will compose a story-board of the multimodal video
- students will compose the multimodal video using Final Cut Pro, mashing up the oral history video with still images, text, and sound.

Instructional Technology Support

This project may require support in the form of providing students will larger than normal server storage space (depending on the size and amount of video they take) and the class access to Final Cut Pro, which may only be available in certain classrooms and open labs (I was not able to find out how available the software is on campus). Due to their ease of use, instructional technology will not be needed to help introduce students to using the Flip Video cameras.

Plans for Evaluation and Sustaining the Innovation

Evaluation will be incorporated across two dimensions. The first will be the portfolio system the course uses to evaluate student work. In this portfolio system students engage in a semester-long reflective process in which they document their work as the work is completed, as well as a midterm and final analysis of their work. At the midterm and final students assess their own learning in terms of five strands in which they are looking to improve over the course of the semester (Collaboration; Use of Technology; Critical Thinking, Writing, and Reading; Research; Visual Rhetoric). As such, students discus in great detail the technologies they use, how they relate to course content, and their overall impressions of the course assignments.

Second, I will assess the project's success in terms of the 9 Core Values recently created and approved by the department of Writing Arts. The values statements represent the areas and skills that all Writing Arts majors should have by the time they graduate.

I have found that sustainability emerges from technology innovations when the innovation is seamlessly integrated into a curriculum that values reflection and revision over a period of time. Sustainability is not maintaining the status quo; it is revision-in-action. However, the practicalities of ubiquitous computing and technology growth necessitate an understanding that instructional technologies (like the Flip Video camera) are often displaced by the latest models (not to mention wear and tear). My hope is that the results of the project—students who have a greater understanding of visual rhetoric, video composition as a writing genre, and the value of engaging with citizens outside of the university, as well as the final video compositions themselves—will help me obtain future grants to continue this important work and encourage the

university to provide similar video technologies for other faculty to incorporate into their courses.

Budget

Description of Hardware	#	$/unit	Total $
Flip Video Ultra Series Camcorder • 60 min • 2GB of built-in memory	20	$125.00	$2500.00

Appendix

Figure A1. Flip Video Camera, actual size

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