



Bridging the Gap Between First-Year Composition Instructors and Technology

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
AT EL PASO

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Research Question

Is there a disconnect between the digital technology skills in incoming first-year composition instructors and the required technology expertise needed to teach assignments in first-year composition classes?



Theoretical Framework

McVee, Bailey & Shanaham (2008)

- ❑ Teachers may want to integrate technology in the classroom, but the problem becomes the lack of preparation and training

Selber (2004)

- ❑ Today students are often more conversant with technological issues than their teachers



Significance

- ❑ Institutions that are adapting to a changing communicative landscape in the field of rhetoric and composition
- ❑ Instructors have a responsibility to prepare students in the 21st century to participate in modern communication





A study in the context of UTEP's doctoral program

Background

- ☐ UTEP's Rhetoric and Writing Studies Undergraduate Program (RWS-UP)
- ☐ Masters and doctoral students enrolled in the program are expected to teach first-year composition classes
- ☐ Participating FYC instructors are placed in cohorts based on the time they started their program of study



Background cont.

- ☐ This study considers the assignments in the RWS-1301 syllabus and the digital technologies needed to implement the assignments
- ☐ RWS-1301 is a first-year composition class required for entering students
- ☐ Most of the RWS-1301 classes are Blackboard enhanced
- ☐ The majority of the classes are taught in computer classrooms



Background cont.

Types of assignments that may call on digital technologies in RWS-1301

- ☐ E-portfolio Website/Blog
- ☐ Discourse Community Ethnography or Discourse Community Map
- ☐ Rhetorical Analysis (Website)
- ☐ Visual Argument (PSA/Brochure)
- ☐ Blackboard

Suggested digital technologies

- ☐ Blogs, Wikis, Google Docs, Prezi, PPT, Weebly/WIX, MovieMaker/iMovie and/or Blackboard



Methodology

Three surveys deployed to collect data

1. New cohort - A survey used to gauge technology fluency
2. Former cohort - A survey aimed at understanding participants' issues using technology while teaching RWS-1301
3. Program director - A survey addressing technology expertise used in FYC classes and what instructors are expected to know

Participants and Sample Questions

New Cohort (9 participants/8 questions)

- ☐ Are you familiar with the following technologies and what levels of expertise do you have with each: Blogs, Wikis, Google Docs, Prezi, PPT, Weebly/WIX, MovieMaker/iMovie or Blackboard.
- ☐ Are there any technologies above that you feel uncomfortable using currently?



Participants and Sample Questions

Former Cohort (5 participants/6 questions)

- ☐ As a first-year instructor, did you feel that you had the necessary expertise in the digital technologies the students used for their multimodal assignments?
- ☐ Did digital technologies challenges prevent you from successfully implementing the assignments in RWS-1301?
- ☐ What can the RWS-Undergraduate Program do to better prepare you to meet the demands of implementing assignments that require new technologies?



Participants and Sample Questions

RWS-UP Director (1 participant/6 questions)

- ☐ What type of digital technology knowledge do you expect incoming FYC instructors to have?
- ☐ Do you assess the technology expertise of incoming instructors and their ability to teach the multimodal assignments in the current RWS-1301 syllabus?
- ☐ What type of assistance or training is currently available to prepare students to teach multimodal projects?



Findings: New Cohort

Some technology fluency

- “I feel very confident in my ability to use the websites in a basic level.”
- “I'm very comfortable with Google Docs, and Blackboard.”
- “Yes. I am proficient in all...”

Usage of specific digital technologies

- “Blogs - personal use Google Docs - I use it to take notes in class. PPT - to create presentations for class BB - to participate class, take online classes”

Digital technologies uncomfortable using

- “Blogs, PPT, Google Docs, and BB”
- “Wikis, Google Docs, Prezi, Weebly, MovieMaker/iMovie”



Findings: **Former Cohort**

Digital technologies fluency to teach 1301 assignments

- “No, I have just the basic skills and not the expertise”
- “No, I did not have necessary expertise in the field...”

Digital technologies that presented challenges

- “Blackboard, Prezi, Weebly/WIX, MovieMaker/iMovie”

Did digital challenges prevent successful implementation

- “Somehow it did because if I knew how to use them very well, I would have been able to implement them thoroughly in the class”

How can the RWS-UP better prepare instructors to use digital technologies

- “The RWS undergraduate program should ask teaching faculty whether they need any training... A lot is assumed about the teacher here without really paying attention to their needs”



Findings: Program Director

Digital technology knowledge expected from incoming FYC instructors

- "...the ability to find, evaluate, utilize, share, and create content using information technologies and the Internet"

Assessing technology expertise of incoming instructors

- "We have not assessed the technology expertise of incoming instructors in the past. [it is] dependent upon the instructor to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses and seek out professional development opportunities to improve their abilities in the classroom"

Digital technology first-year instructors struggle with

- "blogs, website creation, and moviemaker...but they don't have to do this...they need to know what resources students have to help them with these projects.
- "In recent years, more GTAs are struggling with Blackboard...I think this may be a shift in our student population as now 50% or more of our Ph.D. students are international"

Assistance available for FYI instructors

- "Our Technology Support Center has a suite of technology resources for students, staff and faculty and a dedicated support team to help"



Discussion and Conclusion

- ❑ The incoming or new cohort showed some knowledge of digital technologies needed to help students with their assignments, and felt somewhat comfortable with digital technologies
- ❑ Data indicated that there was a disconnect between the former cohort and the digital technologies used to teach some RWS-1301 assignments
- ❑ Program director noted that there could be a gap between technology and international students but highlighted resources to learn digital technologies available for both instructors and students



Recommendations

- ❑ Make new FYC instructors aware early on of the types of assignments they will have to teach in class that require some digital technological expertise
- ❑ Require new FYC instructors to take a workshop or class that addresses digital technologies
- ❑ Further research should be conducted specifically regarding incoming international student FYC instructors who may not have the required technology expertise, and how that gap can be bridged



Closing remarks

Preparing instructors to navigate new digital technologies in the classroom allows them to teach students to effectively make new meaning and communicate rhetorically in the 21st century





Questions?